

Directors and DVD Commentary: The Specifics of Intention

Midway through the commentary track to the DVD of *Fitzcarraldo*, Werner Herzog reveals that the Amazonian Indians offered to kill his star Klaus Kinski.¹ Herzog jokingly adds that he wanted to kill the actor himself while working on an earlier movie with Kinski, whose manic tirades were famous in the industry, and that he briefly considered the present offer.² This is an amusing and memorable anecdote, told with great brio by Herzog. However, it adds another layer to the film itself, as Herzog, moving from raconteur to director, explains how he took artistic advantage of the situation. The smoldering hostility registered on the faces of the Indians as they surround Fitzcarraldo and his remaining crew during a meal on the ship provides a powerful expression—perhaps a culmination—of the menace with which Herzog tried to imbue his film. The anecdote also reveals the complications in Herzog's stated project of recording the faces of the Peruvian Indians, whom he well knew would be changed forever by the incursion of other cultures and modernity. To render a reality and to create an artistic object are not so easily separable.

Herzog's story about the trials of working with Klaus Kinski is but one example of the kind of information that emerges in discussions of film on digital video discs (DVDs). Such an anecdote, drawn from a printed book, would be suggestive, but in this particular form, as part of the commentary track to the scene that it describes, it has an unusual immediacy. It becomes another text, intimately related to the film, complicating the experience of the film, but nevertheless not quite the film. With

it come considerations barely discernible in the film, more abstract, but just as compelling, as Herzog reorients the viewer's relation to the material.

Such moments will soon be much more common in the study and appreciation of film, as the DVD medium permeates the market. Boasting the same high visual and sound quality as laser discs, but more practical, DVDs are rapidly becoming a household staple. Recent statistics show that between 16% and 25% of U.S. homes have a DVD player, and as of August 28, 2001, DVD sales in the United States had jumped to \$127.7 million, more than double the previous year's \$58.8 million.³ The advantages of the format—durability, compactness, cost—have driven the switch from videotape to digital media, but with the new format have come other opportunities. The storage capacity of the DVD (an astonishing 8.5 gigabytes achieved by a remarkable combination of compression and the addition of a second layer of data)⁴ allows for much more than a copy of the film, and a host of supplementary materials now accompanies each title. The medium, as in other cases of technological transformation, may well be the message. However, what we wish to address here is the way this new medium allows for certain new messages and new approaches not only in the formal study of film but in the experience of film more generally.

The first DVDs, introduced in March 1997, contained just the film and subtitled versions in French or Spanish. Current special edition DVDs brim with supplementary materials. The two-disc set of *The Fight Club* contains four

audio commentary tracks, three theatrical trailers, twelve American TV spots, seven deleted/alternate scenes, a behind-the-scenes featurette, fourteen segments on production and video effects with alternate video and audio tracks, storyboards, the film's press kit, the transcript of an interview with Edward Norton, and cast and crew bios—and this is just a partial list. The time required for taking in these materials far exceeds the viewing time of the film.

Some of this supplementary material is simply recycled, such as electronic press kits, trailers from theatrical release, or deleted scenes. Other features are specifically commissioned for the DVD release. The production and packaging of these extra features have become an industry in itself. Larger studios such as Paramount and DreamWorks have been producing documentary-style behind-the-scenes features during the shooting of a film for at least three years.⁵ Other supplementary material is created by smaller, independent film companies after the film is shot and edited. Once a film is “locked” or given its final edit, such companies make requests for deleted scenes. Their staffs then convene to determine further packaging details, which can vary widely from creative re-editing of materials to imaginative extensions of the film. For the *Gladiator* DVD film editor Pietro Scalia produced a montage from footage excluded from the final cut. In the case of David Fincher's thriller *Se7en*, Mike Mulvihill, vice-president of content development at New Line Home Entertainment, explains that the company decided to “make the disc as if it had been created by serial killer John Doe himself.”⁶ Other companies produce more overtly critical and scholarly supplementary materials. Procedures differ considerably at independent companies such as Anchor Bay and the Criterion collection, which produce DVDs of older as well as recent films. Criterion collection's producers, who aim to produce an anthology, spend months researching a film and checking archives worldwide for additional materials. Most interesting for students of film, however, is the production of a commentary track, an audio track that runs the length of the film. Typically the director, writer, or sundry crew members assemble to record the commentary track, but some editions of DVDs—often re-releases of older films—provide critical and scholarly analysis.⁷

It would be easy to dismiss much of this supplementary material as superfluous, as second-rate entertainment, or simply as redundant promotional materials. Somewhat obscured in this rush of additional material and the marketing hype that surrounds it, however, is the transformative nature of this change in format. One index of this change is the bibliographic terminology newly appropriated for DVDs, which present themselves as “special editions” or “anthologies,” and that generally divide the film not into “scenes” but into “chapters.” Films, even as they have increasingly taken the place of books in culture, have routinely adopted, somewhat anxiously, the trappings of literature and the book, and the application of this vocabulary to DVDs extends this familiar practice. But these bibliographic terms are worth pondering in another sense as well, one in which the applicability of such a description should be carefully considered. DVDs are no longer simply copies of films, like videotapes; they have been physically changed by the process of digitization. There is an obvious sense in which this is so. Digitization affords the opportunity of cleaning up scratches and blots in the visual track as well as sonic imperfections. The color is routinely enhanced as well, especially in the case of digitization of older prints. All this comes, however, with some loss of data during compression.⁸ Hence, in the most rudimentary, physical sense, the DVD version is a reconstruction. Even more transformative, however, is the new relation between film and audience offered by the DVD. The effect of the film is now, at least potentially, intensely mediated by “supplementary materials,” which include extensive commentary by directors and writers, the reminiscence of actors, the technical remarks of cameramen and set designers, and the critical remarks of scholars. The DVD edition is essentially a reorientation of the film, often carried out by a variety of agents, and subject to a wide variety of choices made by the eventual viewers. Consciously or not, the DVD constitutes a new edition, and it should be seen in these terms.

The dichotomy between entertainment and critical apparatus is evident to the participants themselves. DVD producers, at least publicly, are unanimous in claiming that the extra features are intended to enhance viewers' appreciation

and understanding of a film. As Jay Douglas, vice-president of Anchor Bay Entertainment, observes, the special features “open up contact” with the talent behind a film, enabling viewers to “hear the enthusiasm of the directors” and to learn “the story of how the film got made.”⁹ Yet Tim Allen, who has edited many commentary tracks, reports that directors routinely quip, “Who is going to listen to this except a bunch of film students?”¹⁰ In his commentary to *Out of Sight* Steven Soderbergh seems even more doubtful about the audience, wondering aloud “Do people actually listen to this stuff?”¹¹ While the sales figures for DVDs show that purchasers extend far beyond the world of film buffs, determining the audience for the extra materials is not easy. According to a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, viewers are just as likely to claim that they are “disappointed” if a disc contains no bonus materials as to admit they watch them “very rarely.”¹² In the face of uncertainty about the audience for these materials, many studios are simply piling on the extras. The result, as Guido Henkel, editor of *DVD Review* wryly observes, can resemble “a landfill in which everything is dumped in without any sort of vision, simply to create selling points on the back of the packaging.”¹³

One might note the precarious nature of the anthologizing venture. It emerges as a kind of fold in the film market, a space created by technological innovation and the ambiguities of an emerging market. What drives the market for DVDs, clearly, is improved image and sound quality, both immediately and over repeated viewings, as well as economies of manufacture and distribution.¹⁴ Increased capacity, in excess of what is necessary to present the film itself, is a secondary benefit of digitization, not the goal that drove development of the medium. In itself, the opportunity provided by such an increase is a spare one. It affords space for certain materials, but it cannot, in itself, provide a rationale for creating them. One expects market demand to do that. But in this case, as the comments of various producers and performers suggest, there is no clearly articulated demand. Consumers expect these “bonus” features, although it is not clear that the absence of such features would cause them not to buy digitized versions of a film, and larger studios, almost defensively, provide them.¹⁵ This structures the product,

and the volume of mass market DVDs, chock full of supplementary materials, reinforces this particular format. This structure enables the production of more serious or scholarly supplementary materials.

As is often the case in the history of criticism and art in the last 200 years, the space for this kind of cultural life is found on the margins of technological advance and the market. At its best, commentary by directors and screen writers can afford a glimpse of the care and deliberation behind the production of movies: how details are carefully weighed for significance, how patterns of meaning are built up and maintained, and how the editing process shapes meaning out of conflicting visions. It also shows the limits of intention, that is, the ways in which contingency and chance in shooting a film can become part of meaning. For those unaccustomed to thinking in terms of the deliberate processes of construction, selection, and concentration crucial to art, these commentaries, delivered by authoritative figures such as directors, writers, and set designers, can be a valuable, pragmatic introduction to the study and enjoyment of film.¹⁶

A complete study of the DVD as a form for film would require a more extensive review of the history of the transmission of film than is possible here; one in which different kinds of projection, different kinds of reconstruction, and the videotape format would only be the most obvious—and perhaps not the most important—topics. That study would surely demonstrate a point made eloquently and forcefully by D. F. McKenzie in *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*: “not only is any recorded text bound to be deformed by the processes of its transmission, but even the form it does have is shown to be less an embodiment of past meaning than a pretext for present meaning.”¹⁷ In the remainder of this essay, we would like to examine one facet of the DVD’s reorientation of film, the new prominence it gives to questions of intention, both directorial and cinematographical, and to speculate on the curious fitness of this recrudescence for the present moment.¹⁸

Intention is as vexed a concept in film studies as it has been in the study of literary texts. Nevertheless, in both fields the last twenty to thirty years have seen a decided retreat from authorial or directorial intention toward analysis

of interpretive conventions. Meaning is not inherent to a text, but something a community of readers or viewers, acting in loose accord with various interpretive protocols, agree to infer. More recent scholarly turns to history, while applying specific historical contexts, have at the same time conceded that these very contexts are multiple, if not endless. Such reflexivity, which brings with it a plurality of meanings, is the hallmark of poststructuralist interpretation. Directorial commentary tracks have a peculiar salience at such a moment. While directors, like authors, are not always the most accurate or reliable commentators on their own work, many directors provide a consistent set of protocols for their films and display a self-consciousness at least as well-developed as that of most critics.

In addition to providing a splendid enhancement of Bertrand Tavernier's 1988 *Coup de Torchon*, the Criterion Collection's 2001 edition of the film offers a series of interviews with the director that incorporates and comments upon specific scenes.¹⁹ In his adaptation to film of Jim Thompson's novel *Pop. 1280*,²⁰ Tavernier lucidly sets out some of his intentions in abstract terms as well as in terms of the minute particularities of production. He speaks compellingly of the relation of *Coup de Torchon* to the genre of French film noir ("a film noir which refuses the conventions of the film noir") as well as his reliance on the steady cam (and complete avoidance of tracking shots) in order to create a thematically central "slight feeling of unbalance" and instability. His commentary on specific scenes insistently links his intention to formal features. For instance, his remarks on a scene in which the protagonist, a seemingly dimwitted policeman (Philippe Noiret), discusses his difficulties with the local priest, clearly set out the means by which the film makes its critique of the French presence in Africa. As the priest puts the last touches on the task of replacing a termite-infested cross, carefully hammering nails through Christ's feet, his advice ("all in good time, each thing in turn, and one thing after the other") combines with the rich irony of his action to show at once the stupid, redundant, and complicit posture of the clergy. In discussing (in fact, defending) a troubling scene in which the sheriff murders a black man who has witnessed another of his murders, Tavernier not

only outlines his intentions but links them to Thompson's aims in *Pop. 1280*.²¹ Tavernier's intentions in the film are sharply delimited and clearly articulated throughout the commentary.

Much less pointed are the intentions that emerge in Alexander Payne's commentary to *Election*.²² Payne's discussion of the film presupposes a different notion of intention, one far more open in application. A comparison to Tavernier is revealing. Payne notes, for instance, the persistence of certain visual cues in the film—Jim McAllister's (Matthew Broderick) repeated frustration as he walks through circular enclosures, the appearance of garbage trucks behind the main action—which function less as determinate objective correlatives than indications of atmosphere. The circles traced by the protagonist culminate in his return, at the end of the film, to something of his original, frustrated position, and the garbage motif slyly prefigures McAllister's ultimate demise, when the ballot he has stolen to change the outcome of the school election is found in the trash can near his desk by a janitor he had earlier annoyed by carelessly littering. Payne's intentions are more suggestive, that a kind of rubbish persists in our lives, our attempts to beautify them notwithstanding, and that something of a trashy dark nemesis stalks McAllister in his pathetic attempts to transcend his mundane life. Intention, for these two directors, means quite different things.

These two ways of talking about intention are far different from that of Paul Verhoeven, whose commentary to the restored director's cut of *RoboCop* promulgates an entirely different set of interpretive protocols.²³ Verhoeven's analysis of various images requires a much more energetic viewer, one thoroughly versed in what often goes without saying in a culture.²⁴ For instance, the commentary on the introduction of the ED 209—a policing robot built for what one of the executives terms "urban pacification"—at a corporate meeting, connects the ED 209 with Vietnam, first by the term "urban pacification" itself, then by the shape of the robot—which recalls a Bell Huey helicopter—and finally by the name of the presiding scientist, McNamara. Robert McNamara was Secretary of Defense (1961–1981) under presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Edward Neumeier, one of the film's co-writers, describes the scene as

“the American attitude in Vietnam brought to an urban situation” and notes that he was reading *The Best and the Brightest* as he conceived it. David Halberstram’s *The Best and the Brightest* is an account of governmental hubris in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Through such commentary, what appears to be an extreme parody takes on a more discursive form. We perceive an argument, a method, beneath the apparent mayhem and madness. In fact, the speed and ubiquity of such allusions to contemporary events and culture make even humorous commentary seem more plausible. Neumeier’s comments on a part of a scene in which Emile, a member of the murderous gang that tortures and murders Murphy (the policeman who later becomes RoboCop), watches television through a store window, links Emile’s actions to contemporary debates on the effect of television on criminality. As Emile, surrounded by rampaging gangs along the street, rises to throw his half-finished bottle of whiskey through the glass, the debate is rehearsed and satirized. Neumeier may well be joking here—the comment is very funny in context—but the structure of the parodic reading is really no different from the more serious reading of parody encouraged at other moments in the commentary. The movie is flooded with such lightning references—linking the decline in the quality of manufactures to the military-industrial complex; translating the warrior ethos of corporate boardrooms to an execution of a rival co-worker, a ghastly accidental murder of an employee during the demonstration of the ED 209, and a climactic shootout between RoboCop and a particularly villainous executive; and repeatedly conflating persons with products.

The discussions of intention that emerge in these three commentaries are notable for their avoidance of abstraction. In each case, the director lays out a set of consistent and coherent protocols for working through his film, but in each case intention is invoked only in terms of specific situations. These accounts of intent are more pragmatic than those in most critical discussions—less rigid, more descriptive of certain choices made within specific contexts, and perhaps more thoughtful about how an audience might actually perceive a given sequence and the objects that make it up. In a sense, it is not so much that each director talks about intention

itself than that the commentary track provides us with an opportunity to follow the director’s application of such a concept to his work. Payne, one might note, is not nearly so purposeful in his selection of objects and in his recollection of past films as Tavernier. Tavernier is more likely to articulate more fully the context for some of his ideas than Verhoeven, who expects the reader to bring more of a contemporary sense of history and popular culture to his suggestive images.²⁵ Payne’s material, being less complicated than that of Tavernier and less time-bound than that of Verhoeven, is more likely to reach a larger audience. We can, through these commentaries, begin to think of intention as denoting a wide variety of practices, and to see that there are several kinds of intention. One might, over time, develop an effective typology of interpretive protocols.

Other commentary tracks complicate this picture of intention in productive ways. Tracks with multiple commentators often prompt a consideration of instances in which intention becomes collaborative—sometimes happily, as in the *RoboCop* commentary track, and sometimes with a residue of conflict. *The Limey* features an animated debate between director Steven Soderbergh and the screenwriter Lem Dobbs over the eventual shape of the film.²⁶ Their two competing visions of the material as conceived and shot are resolved only, and then not fully, by the editing process. Dobbs, at times showing some exasperation, laments the excision of material that would have made the film a meditation on the spirit of the 1960s—long sequences that would not only have developed the characters more fully, but would have articulated something about the legacy of this era. Clearly the film was planned around such ideas, as the casting of such diverse 1960s icons as Peter Fonda, Barry Newman, and Terence Stamp suggests. In critical terms, the dispute between Soderbergh and Dobbs could be described as rival plottings of the same story, that is, a question of narration. Certainly Soderbergh’s ultimate decision in the editing process, that a film incorporating the 1960s material would be less successful than one cast more in the mode of a stylish thriller, supports such a reading. But some vestiges of the suppressed intentions persist in the film. When Terry Valentine (Peter Fonda) muses expansively about the

essence of the 1960s (“when you were there though, you knew the language, you knew your way around”) and then severely delimits the era (“it wasn’t that either, it was just 1966 and early 1967, that’s all it was”), the effect in terms of the final cut is whimsical, a kind of quirky break in the action. The immediate context of the speech, which he delivers while picking his teeth as his very young mistress listens in the bathtub, becomes prominent, as does her amused response. The exchange between Dobbs and Soderbergh asks that we distinguish dominant, suppressed, and residual intentions, that we perform an act of recovery that is less critical than historical or archaeological.

Such discussions need not have the tension Dobbs and Soderbergh display. The supplementary materials to the DVD of *American Beauty* include a pleasant exchange between director Sam Mendes and cinematographer Conrad L. Hall that illuminates a complicated play of intention and chance in the production of the film.²⁷ The conversation is efficiently realized throughout by the use of storyboards and frames from the movie. The mood is justifiably congratulatory and amiable, but as the conversation develops, a certain gap emerges between the stated intentions of each party. Hall often deflates the very intention that Mendes praises in Hall’s realization of the storyboards, offering purely visual pleasure or expedience as motivation for what Mendes infers as thematic. For example, commenting on an early scene in which Lester (Kevin Spacey) meets with the outside consultant who has been called in to downsize the workforce, Mendes praises Hall’s improvement on the storyboard: “Conrad’s added something so beautiful to the shot . . . the way the light hits Lester . . . it pulls him down away from the wall.” Mendes eloquently sketches the effect here, that of isolating and diminishing Lester, which dominates the first sequences of the film. Mendes also notes one decided departure from the storyboard: “he’s also done something very crucial, you’ve cut his feet off at the bottom of the frame.” This angle effectively diminishes Lester both by cropping him and pushing him down the frame, making him even less authoritative in the face of Brad, the consultant, who is consistently shot from below. Hall confesses, however, that his intentions lay elsewhere: “I needed that lamp up there, above the

picture . . . that’s why his feet are cut off.” Here decisions about the set, lighting, and camera angle appear overdetermined, and the process of decision seemingly a felicitous conjunction of purposes (which Mendes terms “happy accidents”) that need never intersect and, happily, never become cross. In this case, intention appears fully determinate, as each speaker clearly articulates the effect he desired, yet strangely anamorphic, as these effects are arrived at independently.

The commentary tracks to *American Beauty* and to *The Limey*, unlike those to *Coup de Torchon*, *Election*, and *RoboCop*, do more than provide a set of coherent interpretive protocols. They provide a vivid picture of the complications that collaboration inevitably imposes upon the application of the concept of intention. The problems do not, however, disrupt or preclude the discussion of intention so much as require, at least for critics and scholars, a self-consciousness about the discursive use of the term. Other commentary tracks, however, do explore such contradictions and inconsistencies. Nevertheless, they pose these questions in pragmatic rather than theoretical terms, as a special kind of discourse on intention.

In his commentary to *Dead Ringers*, David Cronenberg provides a most consistent and well-delimited discussion of intention, meticulously setting out not only his specific intentions, but the means by which he sought to communicate them.²⁸ One considerable challenge in filming the movie was to find a way of showing the psychological deterioration of the protagonists (identical twin gynecologists Beverly and Elliot Mantle, played by Jeremy Irons in a virtuosic display of craft). Cronenberg’s solution is a version of what T. S. Eliot famously termed the “objective correlative,” that is, “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that *particular* emotion.”²⁹ Cronenberg, through a series of shots, very deliberately emphasizes a “set of objects” in the film, the twins’ strikingly modern apartment and offices, and he painstakingly follows the degradation of these environments through the film. The cold, “bruised” color of the rooms, the austerity of the modernist furniture, and the precise ordering of the objects, all become readable signs of the twins’ state of mind and their gradual deterioration. Cronenberg sets out a kind of grammar for

the film, authorizing a coherent and deliberate approach to reading the psychology of his characters. For example, just as the twins' rationalist bias is challenged by the warmer, emotional Claire Niveau (Geneviève Bujold), so does her apartment present a far more complex play of textures, colors, and curved lines. Hence as Beverly falls in love with Claire we have more than a simple love story; we are also aware of this attachment as the eruption of Beverly's emotional life, a movement from an ordered, objective viewpoint to the messier world of subjectivity and affect. (The pattern is made emphatic by Claire's occupation as an actress, which clashes with the scientific work done by the twins.) Cronenberg's analysis of the famous operating room sequences has the same lucidity. Invested in his gown with his hands folded calmly, dressed in a magnificent (if unreal) red, wielding instruments that look hieractic, his mask and glasses suggesting a cool removal from the visceral task at hand, Beverly is a modern high priest, presiding over the mysteries of creation as he brings fertility to his female patients. "You have to find physical representations of inner states of mind to convey what is going on inside your characters," Cronenberg explains.

Most evocative, however, are the tools designed by Beverly, the famous "Mantle Retractor" he builds while a medical student and the frightening set of "Instruments for Operating on Mutant Women" he designs and commissions later. These objects, examined in sequence, encapsulate the film's main themes. As Cronenberg explains, the first of these inventions expresses the twins' deepest desire, to analyze and to master nature: "I felt that I needed a physical symbol of the twins' efforts to deal with reality by their own version of creativity, by their own attempt to create something that could modify the human body and control it." The "Mantle Retractor" earns the twins professional accolade and prestige, which the "gold-plated" trophy they receive embodies; the latter tools bespeak "a man whose rationality is failing but in its failing is producing these strange kind[s] of works of art, horrific works of art." On one level, this sequence, like the gradual deterioration of the apartment, seems to reveal Beverly's disorientation and madness clearly. Cronenberg's commentary paradoxically invests the irrationality of this sequence with an airtight, Cartesian logic. The

objects speak clearly and compellingly of Beverly's descent into a pitiable madness, one that fulfills all the tragic depths of Aristotle's famous formulation of "fear and pity." Yet, on another level, this sequence of objects, which embody the thematic core of the film, is disrupted by the director's commentary. Cronenberg opens the discussion of these objects by revealing that, while working as an artist in France years before the film was conceived, he had created, in cast aluminum, an "Instrument for Operating on Mutants." Hence the well-delimited sequence of the film, with its clear implications and intentions, is extended by an autobiographical revelation. The audio commentary track, with its insistent immediacy, distends the precise formulations of a formal reading of the film to include the imprecision, silences, and ambiguities of an autobiographical approach. Viewed in these terms, Cronenberg's opening words on the commentary track take on much greater implication: "This is gonna be maybe a lot more traumatic for me than for you, reliving the film." As we have seen in the instance of Herzog's commentary on *Fitzcarraldo*, the commentary track allows Cronenberg to create another, and perhaps a more complicated, text, one that even as it resolutely pursues a formal reading of *Dead Ringers*, unsettles that reading with an equally powerful, if sketchier, autobiographical one. Cronenberg's audio commentary retraces and transposes the movie's central conflict, as formal analysis (cold, detached, technical) is opposed yet again to the ambiguities, subjectivities, and perhaps ineffabilities, of affect.

The question of intention might again be pursued in a critical reading of Bill Condon's incisive commentary to *Gods and Monsters*.³⁰ Condon's remarks suggest great deliberation and care on the part of this director. His analysis of the opening sequence examines different kinds of intention, from deliberate and planned to the "happy accidents" of Mendes. Condon begins by sketching the relation that structures the thematics of the entire film: that the story of Clay the gardener (Brendan Fraser) and James Whale, director of *Frankenstein* (Ian McKellan), will roughly recapitulate the Frankenstein story, Clay taking the part of the monster, and Whale the godlike scientist. Condon trenchantly analyzes the presentation of Clay as he begins his day: a series of shots of parts of Fraser's body is both suggestive of Clay's incomplete or

fragmented character as well as the homage to the assembly of the monster from body parts. His analysis of the next sequence, in which Clay drives uphill toward Whale's house, begins the commentary track's meditation on the tension between intention and meaning. Condon notes that some viewers saw Clay's uphill drive in terms of the "Gods" of the title, as a kind of ascent. "People start to see things that you never really intended," notes Condon. However, Condon does not discard this kind of meaning, as his comments on a scene in which Whale and Clay go to a reception for the globe-trotting Princess Margaret at George Cukor's mansion demonstrate. This scene, the most lavish of the film, is full of allusions. Condon notes that a pair of swans, which dominate a few frames, form a reference to Hollywood's penchant for wide-screen films in the era, to Vincent Minnelli-like productions: "that's what I had in mind," he muses. Yet Condon informs the viewer that McKellan understood the swans in terms of the Princess's visit; in Britain swans are protected animals owned by the Queen. Condon seems to acquiesce, "that was another nice little meaning to that." Most interesting here is the clarity with which Condon separates different types of signification. Some interpretations are planned, executed, and intended; some are accidental, incorporated, and intended; others are simply attached after (or in the case of McKellan's remark, alongside) the fact. Ultimately the tension between more and less open interpretive protocols is wound into the movie itself, when the characters of *Gods and Monsters* watch Whale's *Frankenstein* at the same time at two locales. Clay, a former girlfriend (Lolita Davidovich), and a bartender watch at a bar; Whale and his housekeeper Hannah (Lynn Redgrave) watch at home. Here we see an audience with a variety of reactions: Clay, intrigued by his relation with Whale, responds to the monster and begins to see a poetry in the movie; his former girlfriend, who exudes a kind of up-to-date cool, derides what she can only see as the old-fashioned techniques of the film; Whale recalls the touches he put in and the pleasures of being on the set; and Hannah, watching through the eyes of a child, is pleasantly frightened. Hence the commentary and film work together to examine some of the intricate problematics of interpretation.

This selection—by no means an exhaustive one—of commentary tracks amply demonstrates the pervasive recourse to intention when directors explain or analyze film. The means of recovering or ascertaining intention may vary, intention may involve accident or seem curiously after the fact, and intentions may be multiple, but, just as there are no atheists in foxholes, there seems to be no doubt about the utility of intentionality among the producers of film. Each director wields the term with a canny sense of its potential for analysis and criticism as well as a sharply defined awareness of its limitations, as Condon's precise contrast of "intention" and "meaning" or Cronenberg's reluctance to pursue the intention implicit in his autobiographical reminiscences show clearly. Viewed solely in these terms, the evidence from DVD commentaries by directors seems simply to support conventional and pluralistic notions of intention employed by critics and scholars of film, who have typically had recourse in their analyses to commentary by directors and others involved in production. DVD commentaries would thus seem to offer more evidence of the same kind—richer, perhaps, but no more conclusive or compelling.

To view DVD commentary in this way, however, is to mistake the particular virtues of this form. By its very nature, the DVD commentary track enforces a heightened attention to intricacies of intention as it plays out over the course of the film. Directorial comment returns again and again to questions of intention that are local and technical, and the discussion has an unusual immediacy and density. Intention in these tracks is not used in the abstract and broadly thematic sense in which it is invoked in other forms, such as interviews, *manifesti*, or more general statements by directors. Rather, what emerges in this form is the intentional practice carried out by a particular director from scene to scene, what we might call the specifics of intention. The informal and at times desultory quality of the commentary allows us to see how each director uses the concept, not so much how he might wish to use it, and it allows us, if we wish, to address other moments in the film in terms of the particular use of intention practiced by its director.

Taken altogether, commentary tracks exemplify a practice urged by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*: "to bring back words

from their metaphysical to their everyday use.”³¹ These discussions treat intention as a particularly useful kind of language game, one that organizes the production and experience of film, but which is capable of transformation as interpreters adopt different roles in the game, such as director, writer, cinematographer, critic, or fan. Their commentary sketches what Wittgenstein calls the “original home” in which the language game of intention abides. Commentary tracks create another text, one overrun with intentions, and one that, as it maps coherent and recoverable intention according to consistent and seemingly authoritative protocols, may bring the pragmatics of intention into renewed prominence.

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2. Werner Herzog, commentary, *Fitzcarraldo*, DVD. Directed by Werner Herzog 1982 (Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2001).

3. For recent sales figures on DVDs, see Martin Peers, “For Now, at Least, DVD Sales Are Soaring as Prices Drop,” published in the *Wall Street Journal*, September 11, 2001, sec. B, p. 4. On sales figures and the decision of some Hollywood studios to resist making certain films available on DVD, see Michael Speier and Scott Hettrick, “DVD Disc Jockeying: Hollywood Hoards High-Tech Treasures,” published in *Variety*, September 3–9, 2001, pp. 1 and 56.

4. Matt Lake, “Cram Sessions: The Evolution of an Even Deeper Disc,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2002, sec. D, p. 7.

5. For example, Peter Jackson, director of *The Lord of the Rings*, handpicked DVD producer David Prior to shoot a featurette on the making of the film.

6. Mike Mulvihill in an email communication, September 14, 2001. This presentation is pervasive: even the menu of features resembles John Doe’s notebooks. This in itself constitutes an interesting reorientation of the film away from leads Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman. Their relation as partners and their ultimate torment, around which the film is arguably built, give way to a focus on the world of the crazed maniac who builds his seven murders around the seven deadly sins.

7. Not all directors are articulate: some seem to have little understanding of the commentary track as medium; at times the remarks have no relation to the scenes themselves. Mediocre commentary tracks abound in which directors and other discussants do little aside from rambling aimlessly, recounting anecdotes, effusively lauding everyone involved in the film, or pointing out the obvious. Comments from actors can be even more unfocused, producing a vagueness that has prompted one DVD producer, who would prefer to remain anonymous, to designate their participation on commentary tracks as a “serious DVD misdemeanor.”

8. See “Cram Sessions” for a brief discussion of compression. Some parts of a film compress well, some require adjustment of audio quality.

9. Jay Douglas in a telephone communication, September 10, 2001.

10. Tim Allen in a telephone communication, September 17, 2001.

11. Steven Soderbergh, commentary, *Out of Sight*, DVD. Directed by Steven Soderbergh (Universal Pictures, 1998).

12. Peers, “For Now, at Least, DVD Sales are Soaring,” sec. B, p. 4.

13. Guido Henkel in an email communication, September 14, 2001.

14. The introduction of the DVD format has been a windfall for movie rental chains, which take advantage of the much lower price of the DVD and its durability, yet charge the same fee for DVD and video rentals. See “Disc Jockeying,” the *Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2002, sec. A, p. 1.

15. See “For Now, at Least, DVD Sales Are Soaring as Prices Drop.”

16. Although this study focuses on directorial commentary, film scholars have also made commentary tracks. The Criterion Collection, a company known for the high quality of their editions, frequently invites film scholars to do commentary tracks, especially for older films. Several scholars have managed to fit their remarks exceptionally well to this demanding and novel format. Laura Mulvey provides a dense commentary for the Criterion edition of Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (The Criterion Collection, 1999). Combining her own work on the “look” or “gaze” of the camera with much historical and sociological detail, her visual essay bristles with erudition and sharp insight. While Mulvey follows her thesis through the film, noting the precision with which Powell and his writer Leo Marks examine the roles of camera and subject and ultimately providing a detailed close reading of the film, she also manages to incorporate suggestive remarks on class and on the work of

Powell more generally. David Bordwell, in another Criterion edition, discusses Eisenstein's use of montage, music, and imagery in *Alexander Nevsky* (Commentary, *Eisenstein the Sound Years [Ivan the Terrible, parts 1 & 2 and Alexander Nevsky]*, DVD. Directed by Serges Eisenstein [The Criterion Collection, 2001]). His essay serves as a brief for the value of Eisenstein's formal experiments, even as they serve the ends of blatant propaganda. Finally, Yuri Tsivian's elliptical but engaging commentary on Dziga Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera* (Image Entertainment, 1999) cleverly demonstrates how Vertov's hostility toward fiction films informs and animates his work. The utility of this material for the classroom is obvious. Apart from their purely descriptive or informative value, such essays as those of Mulvey, Bordwell, and Tsivian provide clear examples of how one might discuss film, and their insights are readily applicable to other films.

17. D. F. McKenzie, "The Book as Expressive Form," in *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts: The Panizzi Lectures 1985* (London: British Library, 1986), p. 33. "Deform" is a strong word, and, although the history of the book clearly supports McKenzie's use of it, we prefer to use "reorient."

18. It is worth noting that some laser discs were produced with supplementary materials. Because this format did not achieve the penetration that DVDs have, they do not affect the present argument. On different views of authorship in film, see the various essays in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

19. Bertrand Tavernier, commentary, *Coup de Torchon*, DVD. Directed by Bertrand Tavernier, 1981 (The Criterion Collection, 2001).

20. Jim Thompson, *Pop. 1280* (Berkeley, CA: Creative Arts, 1984).

21. In an email communication, October 13, 2001, Bertrand Tavernier further adds: "I wanted to say a few things, to speak of Jim Thompson, of the metaphysical and political implications avoided by the American directors who have adapted his books."

22. Aaron Payne, commentary, *Election*, DVD. Directed by Aaron Payne (Paramount, 1999).

23. Paul Verhoeven, commentary, *RoboCop*, restored director's cut DVD. Directed by Paul Verhoeven, 1987 (The Criterion Collection, 1998).

24. The *RoboCop* commentary track features three speakers—the director Verhoeven, one of the co-writers Ed Neumeier, and executive producer Jon Davison. As they appear to agree, we treat their intentions as identical.

25. Of course there is an irony here in the fact that Tavernier's literary bias is built partly around the recuperation of pulp fiction like *Pop. 1280*.

26. Lem Dobbs and Steven Soderbergh, commentary, *The Limey*, DVD. Directed by Steven Soderbergh, 1999 (Artisan Home Entertainment, 2000).

27. Conrad L. Hall and Sam Mendes, commentary, *American Beauty*, DVD. Directed by Sam Mendes, 1999 (DreamWorks, 2000).

28. David Cronenberg, commentary, *Dead Ringers*, DVD. Directed by David Cronenberg, 1988 (Anchor Bay Entertainment and The Criterion Collection, 1998).

29. T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," *Athenaeum*, September 26, 1919, as reprinted in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1932, rpt. 1964).

30. Bill Condon, commentary, *Gods and Monsters*, DVD. Directed by Bill Condon, 1998 (Lions Gate Films, 1998).

31. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: MacMillan, 1968), p. 48.

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