

Spiderman, Sam Raimi 2002. Screenplay by David Koepp.

41 INT ARENA NIGHT

41 *

-- we see a costumed AMATEUR WRESTLER, CONTESTANT #1, SLAM into the floor of a wrestling ring in the middle of a small, hot, dusty arena. The crowd goes wild as BONE SAW MCGRAW, six feet nine if he's an inch, three hundred pounds of pure muscle, climbs to the top turnbuckle. He leaps and delivers a crushing flying elbow to his opponent's chest.

Peter grimaces.

A42 INT. ARENA HALLWAY - NIGHT

A42 *

A line of colorfully dressed wrestlers. A spunky CHECK-IN LADY sits behind a table taking information. A wrestler, clad in Robin-Hoodesque garb, stands before her.

CHECK-IN LADY

Down the hall to the ramp... and lose the hat.

"Robin Hood" removes his hat, gives the lady a dirty look.

CHECK-IN LADY (cont'd)

Yeah, yeah, nice tights tough guy. Next.

Peter Parker steps forward. She gives him the once over.

CHECK-IN LADY (cont'd)

There's no feather-weight division here small fry. Next.

PETER

No, no, I know.

CHECK-IN LADY

Okay... you understand the NYWL is not responsible for any injuries you may...

(looking him over)

... and probably will sustain while participating in said event and that you are, at sub 150 pounds, indeed participating under your own free will.

PETER

Yes.

CHECK-IN LADY

Down the hall and up the ramp. May God be with you.

A42 CONTINUED:

A42

Peter turns exits. A male wrestler dressed as "Xena", steps up.

CHECK-IN LADY (CONT'D)

(taking it in)
Let's go princess.

B42 INT. ARENA - NIGHT

B42

Bonesaw pulverizes a new victim, CONTESTANT #2. He hurls him into the ropes, sending him careening back to the middle of the ring. Bonesaw grabs him, chucks him into the stands.

The crowd goes nuts. Bonesaw ROARS with rage. A HECKLER rises in his seat.

HECKLER

Hey Bonesaw! You big fake! You suck!

Bonesaw's eyes zero on the Heckler. He balls up his fists, GROWLS, leaps from the ring.

Bonesaw pushes his way through the crowd. The Heckler's eyes go wide as Bonesaw bears down on him, grabs him by the throat, pops him one.

Bonesaw grabs his folding chair, starts to make his way back to the ring, mumbling as he goes.

BONESAW

Fake my ass.

Bonesaw drags the chair toward the ring, finds CONTESTANT #2 trying to crawl away. CONTESTANT #2 looks up just as Bonesaw rears back, WHACKS him across the face with the chair.

That's it for #2. He's out. The crowd howls.

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

"Are you ready for more?"

The crowd *demands* more.

Bonesaw climbs back into the ring, sits on a stool in his corner. His bikini clad ring maidens, THE BONETTES, are quick to sponge him off, give him water, massage him.

RING ANNOUNCER (cont'd)

(louder)
"I said, are we ready for more?!"

CROWD

MORE, MORE, MORE!!!!

Bonesaw's had enough pampering, rises, flexes, whips the crowd into a frenzy. *

BONESAW *

Bonesaw's ready! *

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.) *

Will the next victim please enter the ring at this time! If he can withstand just three minutes in the cage with Bone Saw McGraw... *

Two pendulously-breasted CARD GIRLS strut around the ring with a banner reading "3:00 for \$3,000". *

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D) *

...the sum of three thousand dollars will be paid to... *

We find the RING ANNOUNCER standing behind a curtain on a ramp leading to the ring. He covers his microphone with his hand, turns to someone off screen. *

RING ANNOUNCER (CONT'D) *

The Human Spider? That's it? That's the best you got? *

SPIDER-MAN (O.S.) *

Yeah. *

The Ring Announcer huffs. *

RING ANNOUNCER *

Nah, you gotta jazz it up a little. *

(back into microphone) *

...the sum of three thousand dollars will be paid to... *

The curtain opens, spotlights search through the crowd, swing to the top of the ramp where we find Spider-Man partially hidden by a black scrim. *

RING ANNOUNCER (CONT'D) *

...the terrifying...the deadly!...THE AMAZING!!... *

The scrim starts to rise. *

RING ANNOUNCER (CONT'D) *

...SPIDER-MAN!!! *

The scrim is gone, revealing Spider-Man, clad in a baggy, homemade costume made from old sweatpants, sweatshirts and a Balaclava.

SPIDER-MAN
(to Ring Announcer)
That's "The Human Spider."

RING ANNOUNCER
Get out there dipstick.

A PA gives Spider-Man a shove. He takes in the arena, the crowd for the first time. He's frozen, paralyzed by the spectacle before him.

Spider-Man cautiously makes his way toward the ring. The Bonettes wait like hungry wolves on the ramp. They mercilessly heckle him as he goes, feel his muscles, taunt him, egg on the crowd to do the same.

A gurney with CONTEST #2, groaning in agony, wheels by.

CONTESTANT #2
I can't feel my legs...I can't feel my legs...

Spider-Man watches them wheel him away, cautiously continues. He crawls into the ring, looks around. All of a sudden--

CROWD
CAGE! CAGE! CAGE!

Spider-Man scans the crowd. Cage?

WIDE SHOT

A flat structure with metal bars drops from the ceiling. Its sides fold in, form a cage which sets down on the ring.

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Will the guards please lock the cage doors!

CLANG!! Stage Hands wrap huge metal chains around the corners of the cage, lock in the combatants.

SPIDER-MAN
Hey, wait a minute...

Spider-Man tests the cage.

SPIDER-MAN (CONT'D)
This thing's locked.

BONESAW (O.S.)

Freak show!

Spider-Man turns around, sees Bonesaw standing center ring.

BONESAW (CONT'D)

You're going nowhere! I've got you for three minutes...three minutes of playtime with Bonesaw.

Spider-Man flattens himself against the bars.

SPIDER-MAN

What am I doing here?

Bonesaw rushes Spider-Man, lunges at him. Spider-Man leaps out of frame. Bonesaw crashes into the cage wall, bounces off, crumples to the ground. He looks up, sees Spider-Man clinging to the top of the cage.

The Heckler, bloody faced and back in his chair, is shocked.

Bonesaw gets up, looks at Spider-Man.

BONESAW

What do you think you're doing?

SPIDER-MAN

Staying away from you for three minutes.

Bonesaw's furious, leaps--

--but so does Spider-Man, across the cage, somersaulting to the opposite side. He clings there, drops to the ground.

CROWD

Yeahhhhhh!!! Go Spider-Man!!!!

Go Spider-Man? He looks around, scans the cheering crowd. Turns back in time to see Bonesaw about to grab him. He leaps--

--does a one-handed hand stand on Bonesaw's head. He grins, confidence growing, fast.

SPIDER-MAN

Not a bad costume, what is that, Spandex? I used Lycra for mine and it itches like crazy.

Bonesaw swats him down, grabs his leg.

BONESAW

I got you now insect!

Bonesaw thrashes him about, pitches him against the cage.
Spider-Man falls to the ground.

SPIDER-MAN

Owww.

Bonesaw drags him out of frame.

SPIDER-MAN (CONT'D)

You know, technically it's arachnid.

A shadow falls upon Spider-Man. He looks up, sees Bonesaw flying at him, prostrate, with a flying elbow. Spider-Man's eyes go wide. He flips his feet up, just in time to place them on Bonesaw's chest, kicking him into the cage.

Bonesaw slumps to the mat, knocked cold. The crowd freaks out. Flashbulbs pop.

CROWD

Spider-Man! Spider-Man! Spider-Man!

Spider-Man, looks around the arena, raises his arms, triumphant.

SPIDER-MAN

Ahhhh... show biz.

42 INT ARENA OFFICES NIGHT 42

The administrative offices, upstairs at the arena. The PROMOTER puts a single hundred dollar bill into Spider-Man's palm (Peter is still wearing the costume).

PROMOTER

Now get outta here.

SPIDER-MAN

A hundred bucks? The ad said three thousand!

PROMOTER

Check it again, webhead. It said three grand for three minutes. You pinned him in two. For that I'll give you a hundred, and you're lucky to get it. You made my best fighter look like a girl out there.

42 CONTINUED:

42

Enraged, Spider-Man grabs the guy by the shirt and pulls him closer. A side of Peter Parker we've never seen before.

SPIDER-MAN

I need that money!

PROMOTER

I missed the part where this is my problem.

Spider-Man stares at him for a long moment, burning with rage, he wants to bust this guy right in the nose --

-- but he turns and leaves instead, passing a squirrelly-looking GUY on the way in, his hair dyed platinum blonde. 19

43 INT HALLWAY NIGHT

43

Spider-Man walks away down the corridor, clutching the lousy hundred dollar bill, muttering under his breath. He's nearly to the elevator when he hears a SHOUT from behind him.

PROMOTER

Hey! What the hell do you-

He turns, as the door to the Promoter's office BANGS open hard, shattering the glass, and the squirrelly-looking guy races out, clutching a canvas bag. He is a THIEF.

PROMOTER (cont'd)

Help! That guy stole the gate, he's got my money!

A SECURITY GUARD approaches from one end of the corridor. The elevator behind Spider-Man DINGS, its doors start to open, and the Thief takes off down the hallway toward it.

SECURITY GUARD

Hey, you! Stop that guy!

Spider-Man looks up, at the Thief racing straight at him, at the Security Guard giving chase, at the opening elevator behind him. He thinks, debates --

-- and takes a step back. The Thief races right past him and into the elevator.

THIEF

Thanks, pal.

The doors close and he gets away. The Security Guard arrives, SLAMS his fist on the elevator doors.

SECURITY GUARD

What the hell's the matter with you?!
You just let him go!

The Promoter comes rushing up out of the office, a large red welt growing on his cheek.

PROMOTER

You coulda taken that guy apart! Now he's gonna get away with my money!

SPIDER-MAN

I missed the part where this is *my* problem.

19

He turns and walks away, down the corridor.

44 EXT NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY NIGHT

44

As night falls, Peter walks down the street toward the library, dressed in street clothes again. He looks around for Uncle Ben's car. *

Peter stands on the corner where Ben said he'd pick him up. Looks to the left, to the right. Not there yet.

A POLICE CAR races by him, SIREN wailing, and heads for the far corner. We hear an AMBULANCE'S SIREN in the BG. *

He takes an interest, moves across the street. As he walks, his brow furrows, two and two coming together in his mind in a bad way. *

He walks faster. And faster. He elbows his way through the back of the swelling crowd. Then the middle. As a desperate conviction grows in his mind, he thrashes, breaking through the front of the crowd and looking down at the ground --

-- where police officers stand over a body. It's Uncle Ben! *

PETER

UNCLE BEN!!

He lunges forward, but COPS stop him, pulling him back.

COP 1

Hang on, hang on!

PETER

My uncle! That's my uncle!

COP 2

That's not gonna help him!

PETER

What happened?!

COP 1

Carjacker. He's been shot.

Frantic, Peter tries to reach his uncle.

COP 2

Hold on, kid! You can't help the guy.

PETER

The guy? He's not the guy! He's my
uncle.

He pushes in, moves to Ben, kneels, takes his head into his
lap.

PETER (CONT'D)

Uncle Ben! Uncle Ben! It's me,
Peter!

19

Ben opens his eyes, his mouth forms a smile, then the word
"Pete." He dies. Peter cries, holding him. Sirens continue
in the BG.

Behind him, a THIRD COP turns around suddenly, radio in hand. *

COP 3

They got the shooter! He's headed
south on Fifth Avenue!

Very close on Peter -- listens intently, stoney-faced. *

45 EXT A DARK ALLEY NIGHT

45

An exaggerated shadow falls on the brick wall of an alley. A
man tears off his clothes, violently. The shadow grows bigger
as the man starts to run, suddenly the shadow leaps, high into
the air, sailing toward the building right in front of us.

The costume's still not right and he's not wearing a mask (or
face paint), but make no mistake, this is truly *THE AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN*. He climbs straight up the building. We climb
with him, rising higher and higher until we burst out over the
roof's edge.

A46 Spider-Man jumps backwards, grabbing a flag pole, swinging on A46
it, allowing his momentum to hurl him to the next building,
which he scales quickly.

B46 ON THE ROOF,

B46

he scans the horizon. He sees a cluster of police lights, screaming down Fifth Avenue in pursuit. Spider-Man's right arm rises, palm up.

THWIP!

A silver strand of web fluid shoots out across the street. Spider-Man wraps his hands around it and leaps.

46 We leap with him, swinging out over the city, held aloft by the tensile strength of the web. We plummet down, in a graceful, terrifying arc, and as the ground races up toward us, Spider-Man's left hand rises -- *THWIP!* 46

Another web strand rockets out into the night, the web-slinger shifts his weight to the second strand, abandoning the first, pulling himself back up in a graceful arc that leads him out into the avenue.

Well, above the avenue anyway, he's now swinging along directly above the chase, which is below him.

19

DOWN ON THE STREET,

Uncle Ben's Oldsmobile SCREECHES around a corner and SMASHES through a row of newspaper boxes. Three police cars follow, not far behind.

Above, Spider-Man follows, unseen. He webs -- left, right, left, moving faster than the police cars, and THUMPS onto the roof of the Oldsmobile.

INSIDE THE CAR,

Spider-Man's fist SLAMS through the roof of the car and grabs hold of the Carjacker's face.

ON THE STREET,

the car swerves, bumps, scrapes through traffic. Cars SMASH into one another as it careens through an intersection.

GUNSHOTS erupt through the roof of the car, fired from within, missing Spider-Man by inches. He leaps off the roof, on top of a speeding truck.

ON TOP OF THE TRUCK,

Spider-Man stands up. Eyes on the Oldsmobile, he sees something else.

*

B46 CONTINUED:

B46

A low bridge! Stretching straight across the street, right about at chest level for Spidey.

He *triple somersaults*, up, over the bridge, and lands on the roof of the truck again. The truck starts to slow, so he leaps again, onto the roof of the Oldsmobile.

INSIDE THE OLDSMOBILE,

Spidey lands right in front of us, staring through the windshield and then *smashing a fist* through the windshield, spiderwebbing it.

47 EXT MARINE BATTERY BUILDING NIGHT 47

The Carjacker loses vision and control, the Oldsmobile SMASHES through the gates of a creepy-looking building near the East River, Spider-Man still on its hood.

The car SCREECHES toward the front door of the building, Spidey sees it coming, knows he'll be crushed, so he leaps, up, out of sight.

FROM UP HIGH,

we see the Oldsmobile crash through and barrel into the building. A second later, the police cars race up, radios SQUAWKING.

The camera tilts up to reveal Spider-Man on the wall above them, clinging there. The police cars pulsating light reveals him, fades and Spider-Man is lost in the darkness. When the light again sweeps by, he is gone.

48 INT MARINE BATTERY BUILDING NIGHT 48

In a far corner of the building floor, the Carjacker cowers with his gun. The sweeping search light from the police boat, through the dirty, leaded windows, reveals only his outline.

Spider-Man descends, upside-down, from a web strand. He rotates, lands softly on his feet behind the Carjacker.

The Carjacker whirls around, BLASTS a shot at Spider-Man. Sensing it, Spidey leaps, onto the nearest wall. The shot SMACKS into the wall where he was.

The Carjacker, whom Spider-Man sees only as a silhouette, starts BLASTING at him, as Spidey leaps from wall to ceiling to wall to floor, just inches ahead of the bullets.

49 IN THE STREET, 49

the Cops hear the shots. Weapons are drawn, rifles steadied. They can see figures moving inside the building.

50 IN THE MARINE BATTERY BUILDING, 50

Spider-Man does an acrobatic leap and lands on the Carjacker's arm, kicking the gun free. It SKITTERS across the cement floor as Spidey holds the guy up, curls a fist --

SPIDER-MAN

This is for the man you killed.

-- and punches the Carjacker in the jaw. The blow lifts the man right off his feet, knocks his stocking cap off, and sends him sailing into one of the unbroken windows, which SHATTERS. Spider-Man leaps into the window frame, grabs the Carjacker, pulls him to his feet.

Spotlights from outside swing around to frame the pair of combatants in the window.

CARJACKER

Don't hurt me! Give me a chance, man, give me a chance!

PETER

DID YOU GIVE HIM A CHANCE?! THE MAN YOU KILLED?! DID YOU?! ANSWER ME!

Suddenly, the Carjacker's face is revealed, brightly lit. His *squirrely* face. And his *platinum blonde* hair.

It is, God help him, the Thief who stole the money at the arena. The one Spider-Man stepped aside for.

PETER (cont'd)

No! No, not YOU!

Yes. Yes, him. Peter hurls him aside, the Thief CRASHES against a wall and falls to the floor. Peter starts to hyperventilate, trembling in horror, realizes the ghastly truth:

He failed to stop the very man who murdered his uncle.

Images flood back at him, fast:

51 INT ARENA OFFICES NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The Security Guard, yelling at him:

51 CONTINUED:

51

SECURITY GUARD

Stop that guy!

52 INT ELEVATOR NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 52

The Thief, standing in the elevator, looking at him evilly as the doors close on his escape.

53 EXT ARENA NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 53

Uncle Ben's body, lying in the street.

54 INT MARINE BATTERY BUILDING NIGHT 54

Back in the building, the Thief stands up, not ten feet away from Peter. The Thief aims the gun at him. Blind with rage, Peter walks toward him. The Thief backs up. Peter advances. The Thief pulls the trigger and --

-- CLICK. Empty. The Thief backs up even further, trips --

-- and CRASHES through a window. Peter lunges forward, tries to grab him but misses, and the Thief falls fifty feet, SMASHING into a wooden dock below. Dead. The money flutters down around the body from the canvas bag.

55 OUT ON THE RIVER, 55

a police patrol boat CHUGS into view, swings a spotlight around toward Peter. They get just a glimpse of him.

COP

YOU, FREEZE! DON'T MOVE! WE'VE GOT
THE PLACE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED!

*
*

The Cops raise their guns to fire, but Peter disappears from the window, headed up --

56 IN THE MARINE BATTERY BUILDING, 56

-- and by the time the rest of the lights hit the window Peter is gone. Across the building floor, a DOZEN COPS SMASH through the door, shine flashlights everywhere.

The building is empty.

57 EXT A ROOFTOP NIGHT 57

Peter, still wearing the suit but not the mask, drops his head in his hands on top of a building nearby, alone. All sound drains away, all sound except Peter's soft voice --

PETER

Uncle Ben...

Preface: The Unwelcome Guest

Imagine being ruled by a tyrant king.

The king is crude to the point of vulgarity, judgmental in the extreme, and bitterly punitive. He likes to sound reasonable, though he's anything but. He wants you, and if possible everyone else, to do what he says all the time. The king is unable to enjoy himself except through acts of meanness and even cruelty. He has no capacity for humane joy or fun. He's incapable of a good time.

"All deities reside in the human breast," said William Blake. To which we might add that demons do, too.

Blake, one of the three great Romantic poets along with Wordsworth and Whitman, had a few names for the rogue king that resides in the human breast. He called him Urizen and Nobodaddy, or sometimes the Spectre. Blake was an illuminating anatomist of the human soul: he understood dimensions of himself (and perhaps of us all) that we still have not come to terms with.

Who are these creatures—who are Urizen and Nobodaddy and the Spectre? They differ in certain ways, but they are all at war against the ethical and imaginative power of the human spirit. They enforce conformity and fear. Urizen draws confining circles—horizons—that keep human aspiration in check. Nobodaddy is an image of the Hebrew Bible's God at his most punitive, sterile, and cruel—he is Nobody's Daddy, but Blake feels we adopt him as a paternal figure of authority for our own reasons. The Spectre is fearful, fretful, jealous,

and competitive: he hates what is most loving and open about the self and throttles it when he can. He is the ultimate figure of self-defeating self-protection. “My Spectre around me night and day,” says Blake, “Like a wild beast guards my way.” The Spectre oppresses the interior figure that Blake calls the Emanation: a being that embodies the individual’s hope for love and imaginative achievement.

The debased god Urizen, the cruel Nobodaddy, the looming Spectre: to Blake the psyche can be a house haunted by fears and anxieties—perhaps above all, by harsh self-judgment. Blake’s inquisitorial figures, different as they are, constantly torment the self for deeds that do not merit condemnation, and sometimes even for deeds worth praising. Where do these figures come from? How do they emerge? Blake seems to think they have a social and cultural origin. He is living in a monarchical age that has yet to throw off feudalism. It’s also an age of reductive empirical science, not of imagination, in which the reigning cultural figures are conservatives like Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson. People tend to believe there is nothing terribly new under heaven and that the best literary art consists in “what oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed.” To Blake, many consequential truths remain undiscovered. He hopes to find them, if he can overcome the resistance of his interior demons.

Blake is right. A power that judges us, often irrationally, and deems us, often without cause, does abide within us. Sometimes it operates consciously, letting us feel the dark pressure of self-condemnation. But it can also work outside the circle of conscious understanding.

Sigmund Freud, who almost surely never read Blake, believed he had uncovered such an agency. He called it the super-ego or over-I. (*Über-ich* is the German term.) As a culture, we’ve lost contact with what Freud and Blake had to say about this inner power, and the loss has been damaging. Cultures do travel backwards. After the fall of Rome, crucial classical texts were lost to the world. Now, as a literate

and literary culture is displaced by a visual, electronic one, we are in danger of losing contact with a consequential piece of wisdom about the human psyche. Call it the Spectre, call it the super-ego: a force that judges and condemns lives in us all. There are manifold ways to contend with this force, and I'll be discussing them in these pages. But to deal well with the Spectre or the super-ego, one must first take seriously the possibility that it exists.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was transfixed by Freud, calling his work a "very powerful mythology." And we might think of what Freud offers as myth. The ego and the id are no more real than Apollo and Dionysus. But we can learn more about our lives and the life of the world from the mythology of the ancient Greeks than from many works that set out to tell us the literal, binding truth.

The ultimate test of Freud's thinking is its power to illuminate and transform. Does the myth of the super-ego (call it that for now) ring true to our experience? Does it persuasively describe consequential aspects of life that we have yet to fully understand? Does it add, to take a phrase from the critic R. P. Blackmur, to our stock of available reality? If so, we want to know if the myth can lead us forward to a better life: more sane, less afflicted, more useful to others. Does it allow us to understand ourselves and to change life for the better? To borrow a criterion from William James, is it good in the way of belief?

Freud was sometimes willing to see his work as myth: "the drives," he said once, "are our mythology." But he also believed that empirical science would eventually confirm his educated intuitions and imagining. Scientists are now making such attempts. In a brilliant recent paper on the "entropic brain," Robin L. Cahart Harris and his colleagues argue that there is empirical evidence of an unconscious element of the mind that functions much as Freud said it did. I'm intrigued by such developments but am, at least for now, content to stay with

Wittgenstein's perception: that Freud provided a very powerful mythology. The Greeks gave us Apollo and Dionysus; in the profoundly suggestive *Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche drew on Apollo, Dionysus, and an imaginatively revised version of Socrates. Freud the myth-maker offers us the ego, the id, the super-ego, and more.

In the Freudian myth, the super-ego is a fiercely oppressive agency. Yet people now use the concept much differently, employing *super-ego* as a synonym for *conscience*. "My super-ego is going to be unhappy if I don't get my problem sets done," says the student. "I have a strong super-ego, except on Friday and Saturday night," says the man on his way to a party. Freud, however, located our conscious moral standards and creditable hopes in the ego: the super-ego is something else.

Freud sees the super-ego as increasing its grip over time. In his most frequently read book, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he describes how it gathers strength. Its powers are enhanced by a society that grows constantly more restrictive and more capable of surveillance and punishment. As society compels us to repress aggression, the over-I takes up that anger and directs it at the self. The super-ego is dynamic. A hundred years ago, Freud saw its powers increasing in individuals and in the culture at large. It is hard to imagine that matters have improved.

As a teacher, I see the ravages of the super-ego almost daily. My students are bright, talented, and kind, but oppressed by standards that have been instilled deep within them. They are often overwhelmed with anxiety. They're frequently depressed. Both of these conditions, I believe, can arise from having an internal agency making demands that are virtually impossible to meet. My students take six courses per term, they are in five clubs, they cultivate numberless "friends" online and off-, and at a certain point, usually near the end of the school term, it can become too much. At a time in life when they should be alive with possibility and excited by all they've learned

and all that's left to learn, they're riven with anxiety or weighed down by depression. They often tell me that their lives shuttle between anxiety and deep boredom.

Depression takes hold of young people early now. A thoughtful piece in the *Atlantic* tells us that “rates of adolescent depression declined slightly from the early '90s through the mid-aughts. Shortly thereafter, though, they started climbing, and they haven't stopped. Many studies, drawing on multiple data sources, confirm this; one of the most recent analyses, by Pew, shows that from 2007 to 2017, the percentage of 12-to-17 year olds who had experienced a major depressive episode in the previous year shot from 8 percent to 13 percent—meaning that, in the span of a decade, the number of severely depressed teenagers went from 2 million to 3.2 million.” Things get no better when young people arrive at college.

Few of my students have heard of the super-ego. None of them believe that coming to terms with one's inner agency of authority, and maybe transforming it, are crucial to attaining a measure of happiness in the world. They simply suffer on, unarmed with the basic resources that Blake, Freud, and a few others offer.

They are in some measure victims of the wholesale cultural repudiation of Freud. In the current environment, a major thinker with some bad ideas—and Freud had at least a few—is dismissed out of hand. To be worthy of serious hearing, one sometimes feels, an authority figure has to approach moral perfection. This in itself is a form of super-ego thinking. It's self-righteous and ultimately self-defeating. One might say, perhaps a little fancifully, that the super-ego-style repudiation of Freud enhances the super-ego's power by persuading people to ignore it.

We first hear about this agency of the psyche in Freud's 1914 essay “On Narcissism,” though he does not actually name it until 1923. Freud says that patients suffering from paranoia tell him they feel they

are being watched by an independent agency that criticizes them constantly. This force, which is largely administered through the voice, sometimes issues a running commentary on the individual and what he is thinking and doing—and also on who and what he is. The commentary is not kind. Says Freud, “Patients . . . complain that all their thoughts are known and their actions watched and supervised; they are informed of the functioning of this agency by voices which characteristically speak to them in the third person.”

Then Freud makes a leap that puts him in the poetic territory of Blake. The complaint of the paranoiac, he says, “is justified; it describes the truth. A power of this kind, watching, discovering and criticizing all our intentions, does really exist.” Then the critical turn: “Indeed, it exists in every one of us in normal life.” A force that watches and comments and judges, most of all judges, is a factor in everyone’s inner life. It will be almost a decade before Freud begins to call this power the super-ego and affirms it as a third element in the psyche, along with the ego and the id. From then on, until his death in 1939, Freud is preoccupied with the problems of authority and accordingly with the problem of the super-ego.

We are all, he will tell us in the 1923 volume *The Ego and the Id*, in a difficult fix: the ego or conscious mind must navigate a perilous external world and deal with the pressure of desire from the id, the seat of the instincts. But it must also contend with the force of judgment and prohibition that originates in the super-ego. Often, especially among the more socialized, this force becomes unendurably harsh: it punishes us for transgressions, but its sense of transgression is crude. It assumes we are children in need of a harsh parent. Not only does the super-ego punish us for actual trespasses, it punishes us for sins we only imagine committing.

The super-ego is not moral, it is supra-moral. The ego, the thinking self, may approve a certain action: perhaps indulgence in some

PREFACE

sexual pleasure. But the over-I does not concur. The self, the ego, may give its approval to a homosexual connection, let us say, but the super-ego may still become enraged. There follows punishment. The punishment can be conscious and perceptible: a voice that both is and is not the subject upbraids him as a degenerate and even an evil-doer. But the ego, which has no problem with homosexuality, condones and encourages the act. This does not matter—the super-ego will have its say and take its revenge. Sometimes, Freud says, the super-ego exerts itself unconsciously. Its punitive rants are unheard. But people suffer anxiety, depression, or psychosomatic illness.

People are implanted young with super-egos, be they weak, strong, or in between. The cultural context sometimes strengthens and sometimes weakens the punitive super-ego. How could it be otherwise? Culture is inconsistent. At times a loose and tolerant ethos reigns, as in the America of the late 1960s and, perhaps more so, the 1970s. At other times, for reasons that are not easy to determine, a more stringent morality takes hold. At present, among people who think of themselves as educated and liberal, a potent streak of morality or even self-righteous moralism has emerged. They are always on the alert for infractions against right-thinking and correct action. The judgments go on and on, often triggered by very little. An era of oppressive morality? Living amidst the ostensibly enlightened, it is easy to imagine so.

Why has the super-ego become ascendant in culture now? One suspects there are many reasons, but surely the Internet is a primary one. What began as a zone of free speculation and open exchange has become a site of ridicule, condemnation, and character destruction. The archetypal action on the Internet now appears to be scapegoating. The mob finds a transgressor—someone who in the past or present broke the codes of current speech or thought—and goes after him. The objective is to do as much damage as possible in as little time as possible.

The prize is to disgrace the victim, and to rob him of his livelihood. This is a victory for the super-ego–inspired mob. How the Internet became the culture’s chief manifestation of the over-I is uncertain, but no one can doubt that it is. Almost every instance of super-ego tyranny that I’ll examine in this book is yoked in some way to the Internet.

Freud and Blake tell us something similar about an overaggressive moral streak: it can become ravingly unbalanced and it can take over an individual. Nietzsche knew this as well. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, he warns us to distrust those who talk obsessively of justice. The hangman peers from their countenances. They long to be judges. They would love to be Pharisees too, if they had the power. Nietzsche is being hyperbolic, but he understands that beyond a certain point, judgment becomes a form of sickness. “Distrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful.”

Surely there are individuals in the world who have authentically high moral standards and are devoted to reform. All honor to them. They tend to be modest, humane, gentle people, intolerant of oppressive laws and customs, but tolerant of the foibles of other human beings and aware of their own.

Too many of our contemporaries bear the signs of possession by the super-ego. They are, like the super-ego itself, immune to irony, void of humor, unforgiving, prone to demand harsh punishments. They align themselves with super-ego–affiliated institutions. They see deans, CEOs, and human resource departments as vehicles for visiting punishment on transgressors. All too many situations devolve to black and white, with no hint of an intervening shade. There is no forgiveness and no redemption.

There’s a well-known story about Martin Luther King. When he was on the street leading a demonstration, he passed a screaming White woman, who spat at him. He walked up to her, looked her in the eye, and said simply, “You’re much too beautiful to do something

like that.” The super-ego is baffled by such a story. Why would anyone want to brush off an offense and try to lead someone to higher ground? Where is the enjoyment in that? The pleasure of condemnation is not to be surrendered lightly. Those unfortunates who are possessed by the super-ego live in a world of punishment and discipline, with too little room for grace—for themselves or others.

Blake, Freud, Nietzsche: perhaps they know us better than we know ourselves. All three set up the problem of judgment and condemnation as critical for human beings. They recognized that in the normal course of life, people need to make judgments. They need to evaluate experience. Perhaps at times they need to condemn this or that. But all three understand that people often get drunk on judgment: drunk on criticism, of themselves and of others. This is a tendency we must understand and in time struggle with.

In a marvelous essay on self-criticism, Adam Phillips, a follower of Freud, writes about what it would be like if the super-ego left the confines of the psyche and went out into the world as an individual. It’s a scenario that would have pleased Blake, who liked to imagine aspects of the spirit embodied as characters. In Phillips’s rendering, the over-I turns up at a party. He goes around criticizing everyone. He speaks in a dead monotone. He’s a complete bore, no one likes him, and he has to go home. (I elaborate on Phillips rather freely here.) He is, as Phillips says, “strikingly unimaginative; both about morality and about ourselves—the selves he insists on diminishing.”

But I fear that when the over-I goes to a party today he finds more super-egos. They ask him who he thinks the administration’s biggest racist is. They exchange antisexist jokes. He tells them about his new Twitter campaign to rid the world of speech crimes and thought crimes to boot. He’s the life of the party. Or maybe it’s better to say that he’s the death of it, which really charms everybody. It’s that kind of party.

It's easy to smile at such figures. But not only do they inflict pain, they are in pain themselves. It would be helpful to all if they were delivered from it.

Phillips is one of the few public intellectuals who takes the super-ego seriously. Another is the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. Žižek follows Jacques Lacan, who also had a long-standing interest in the idea of the over-I, but he modifies Freud's conception of it. To Žižek, the super-ego is a figure of "obscene enjoyment." It pretends to be virtuous, righteous, an upholder of admirable laws both public and private. It masquerades as a disinterested, even a noble force. But it revels in seeing others punished. Behind a sober, high-minded mien, it takes unmitigated joy in the sufferings of the fallen. And it takes masochistic joy in its own self-lacerations. I must do better, better, better! Says Žižek, "No wonder, then, that Lacan posits an equation between *jouissance* and super-ego: to enjoy is not a matter of following one's spontaneous tendencies; it is rather something we do as a kind of weird and twisted ethical duty."

What's to be done about this unwelcome guest, this Spectre? I think Freud's initial answer would be rather simple: start by experimenting with the idea that it exists. Try out the hypothesis that within you dwells a figure and force that both is and is not yourself. The figure lives to criticize and even condemn you. And—important addition—you sometimes get relief from condemnation by aiming its judgment outside of you. It's a relief to fuse with him and move his attention away from yourself and into the world. But a problem arises. The more you let him play freely, the stronger he gets, so when he once again aims his venom at you, he does so with redoubled force. The solution is to turn him outward again. Drunks tell you that the only real remedy for a hangover is a morning shot of booze: hair of the dog that bit you. As a long-range strategy, this seldom ends well.

The projection of the super-ego outwards also has daunting political effects. It sometimes seems that the judgment the right-thinking

sector of the culture visits on the less refined tends to enflame them. They are tired of being judged by their supposed betters, and they respond not by reforming but by becoming more entrenched in their ways. “Evil be thou my Good,” they effectively say, and commit themselves to a theatrical backwardness to shock the super-ego-inflamed. They become more Morlock-like to affront the refined, vulnerable, ever-judging Eloi. They too are victims of the super-ego, letting its force in the culture deform their inner and outer lives. As one side grows tighter, more judgmental, more self-righteous, the other grows callous, mean, aggressive in its ignorance.

When you submit to the reign of the super-ego you make the world a more shabbily puritanical place, and you let yourself in for a lot of pain. What is to be done, after you have been willing to admit that Blake and Freud and Nietzsche *could be* right? You might start by asking yourself questions from time to time. As in, What’s going on here? Why am I ranting about this or that? Why do I need a daily political tantrum? Why am I walking back and forth in the senate chamber of my mind delivering half-deranged speeches about the turpitude around me? How come the thought of someone voting for a candidate other than my own makes me boil over, flood the stove and the kitchen floor too? More generally, Why am I so damned critical of everybody and myself to boot?

Or you might say, it’s possible that this Spectre thing, this super-ego thing, is beginning to act up. It does that. It’s a little like a tantrum-prone baby with the values of a tin-pot dictator. When it starts screaming for what it wants—Revenge! Retribution!—one might tell it to calm down and get some sleep. God can take care of righteous judgment. Until I can simmer down and make my judgments sane and thoughtful, I’ll try to stay quiet. In the meantime, I’ll see if I can’t substitute some cool understanding for rancorous judgment.

Where id was, there ego shall be. That was one of Freud’s therapeutic slogans. He meant that allowing the repressed desires of the id

into consciousness could be conducive to enhanced sanity. Freud believed that when we turn mute inner experience into words, we begin to make progress. There's something about expression that liberates. We can calm down and move with circumspection rather than simply rely on reflex. With the wisdom of Freud (and Blake and Nietzsche) at hand, one might even stop in the midst of a self-righteous rant and say to oneself: I know there's a part of me that tends to irrational raving. It's not good for the objects of my rant and it's not good for me, either. And the more I exercise this inner beast of righteousness, the more ferocious he gets, and when he's done working out on people in the world, he turns against me—and that is not so pleasant.

How many loud patrons of righteousness do you know who have serious problems with depression and anxiety? These conditions are not easy to explain, but one strong possibility is that they arise from the super-ego's rage against the self, the ego. When you slow the over-I down and question its motives and its tactics, you may make progress toward relative sanity and spare yourself needless pain. Where super-ego was, Adam Phillips has said, there ego shall be.

It may be possible to educate the super-ego. One can perhaps turn it from a spirit that denies to one that affirms. Freud speaks not only of a super-ego but also of an ego-ideal. Unluckily for us, he never got around to drawing a firm line between them. Usually he used the terms synonymously. But given time, he might have propounded a full theory of the ego-ideal as a benign form of inner authority. I will offer the beginnings of one in the following pages.

Perhaps the best way to satisfy the drive to reach higher states of being is through the embrace of ideals. We can grasp a feeling of purpose when we commit ourselves to courage or wisdom or compassion or artistic creation. We can try to fulfill classical ideals actively and positively, rather than trying to bully others (and ourselves) into transient forms of virtue. The super-ego is a rather passive agency. It sits

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on its brass throne like a child in a highchair and pronounces its inane judgments. It makes us and those around us miserable. But if we try to embody ideals rather than enforce conduct, we may end up feeling better.

With the pursuit of ideals, life takes on meaning and coherence. We have something to do with our energy that's worth doing. Some self-awareness about the machinations of the super-ego is a good temporary remedy, but finally, the best response may be to find alternatives to inner sadomasochism through the active pursuit of values worth affirming. Where super-ego was, there ego shall be? That's a good start. Where the over-I was, there action in pursuit of the ideal shall be? That may be yet better.

So far, I've only outlined the theory of the super-ego, sketched its perils, and gestured toward some remedies. (There are surely more.) But the problem, left virtually unaddressed for decades, is more complex than I've suggested. This is true in part because the super-ego often operates unconsciously. Thus diagnosis is more difficult, the elaborations of super-ego sickness more varied, and the cures (perhaps we should speak of tactics instead) more complex and intriguing. A great deal of human possibility might unlock if we were to come to a critical and humane comprehension of the super-ego, and then move beyond its reign to more satisfying, fruitful ways of being in the world.

TELEVISION

Normalizing Torture on '24'



By Adam Green

May 22, 2005

THE acclaimed Fox series "24" has received a lot of attention over its four successful seasons: for its innovative real-time format, its braided storylines, its heady brew of national security and sentimentality, and its uncanny topicality. From Balkan nationalist revenge to rogue agents with biological weapons, wars on and of terror have been portrayed in exacting detail, shaping entertainment out of headlines that often stretch the imagination.

This is even more true of the current season. with its potent mix of diverse elements -- including a two-stage nuclear conspiracy plot; the formation of an unsympathetic confederation of sleeper cells, defense contractors and rogue scientists; and even a subplot about Sino-American conflict -- all poised for unpredictable resolution Monday evening. Yet it's possible that this year's "24" will be most remembered not for its experiments with television formulas, but for its portrayal of torture in prime time.

This is not the first time torture has been featured on the show. In Season 2, a national security adviser was interrogated with a defibrillator, while the president watched on a monitor. The Counter Terrorism Unit (C.T.U.) agent Jack Bauer extracted information from a detainee by forcing him to watch streaming video of the execution -- staged, it turned out -- of his child. Later Jack himself was captured by enemy operatives and cut, burned and shocked to the point of heart failure. Interrogation in the first three seasons involved various forms of threat and violence, meant to produce information vital to the defeat of an unending number of emergencies

But on
infrequent

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...to being a main thread of the plot to rescue a man



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In the sort of marriage of political crisis and melodrama that marks "24" as a leader in television's post-9/11 genre of national security thriller, Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland), now romantically involved with Heller's daughter, Audrey (Kim Raver), interrogated her estranged husband, Paul, using the electrical cords of a hotel lamp, only to discover that the allegations linking Paul to the unfolding nuclear-threat plot were false. The prospects for Jack and Audrey's relationship took several turns for the worse from that point, reaching a low with Paul's death after Jack withheld urgently needed medical care in order to save another patient, a Chinese scientist being prepared, fittingly, for interrogation.

All of which brings to mind the debate over torture that erupted -- and just as strikingly receded -- after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and news of the administration's efforts to redefine military interrogation standards. Engaged as "24" is with the fine points of actual counterterrorism policy, its current interest in torture could be seen as a way of questioning the limits way.

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resigned from C.T.U. to disassociate colleagues from his actions and then, in a parked car outside the C.T.U. building, expertly broke Prado's handcuffed hands to procure vital and, in this case, accurate leads. An earlier revelation -- that the anonymous call prompting the lawyer's action had come from a terrorist mastermind -- underscored the apparent moral of the episode: regardless of good intentions, those seeking to protect suspects' rights risk abetting terrorist activities, to catastrophic ends.

Yet in the end, the question of torture's role on "24" seems more complex than whether the show presents it as deplorable or justified. To be sure, very little public scrutiny -- much less protest -- of violent interrogation is depicted. In fiction, as in real life, human rights violations take longer than 24 hours to come to light, when they do at all. But if the good guys on "24" go about their work largely unaccountable to law or to public opinion, they remain obligated, within the show's moral order, to one another.

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politics but also emotional and professional relationships. The C.T.U. data

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off attack -- and even loyally taking a bullet for him. In all of these interactions, torture doesn't deaden the feelings between people, rather it deepens them.

It is often noted that torture goes against the tenets of human community in two fundamental ways. Because torturers deny the basic humanity of their victims, it's a violation of the norms governing everyday society. At the same time, torture constitutes society's ultimate perversion, shaking or breaking its victims' faith in humanity by turning their bodies and their deepest commitments -- political or spiritual belief, love of family -- against them to produce pain and fear. In the counterterrorist world of "24," though, torture represents not the breakdown of a just society, but the turning point -- at times even the starting point -- for social relations. Through this artistic sleight of hand, the show makes torture appear normal.

That twist raises questions about whether the devastation of war can be contained by the rules of proper conduct. What "24" illustrates, more effectively even than the headlines from which it draws inspiration, is that such boundaries are unsustainable, in fiction as in real life. This is a problem that transcends easy political distinctions between liberal and conservative, as the capacity to abuse is just as universal, it seems, as the desire to be free.

Has "24" descended down a slippery slope in portraying acts of torture as normal and therefore justifiable? Is its audience, and the public more generally, also reworking the rules of war to the point where the most expedient response to terrorism is to resort to terror? In the world beyond the show, that debate remains heated. How it plays out on "24" may say a great deal about what sort of society we are in the process of becoming.

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THE POLITICS OF STORY DESIGN

In an ideal world art and politics would never touch. In reality they can't keep their hands off each other. So as in all things, politics lurks inside the story triangle: the politics of taste, the politics of festivals and awards, and, most important, the politics of artistic versus commercial success. And as in all things political, the distortion of truth is greatest at the extremes. Each of us has a natural address some-where on the story triangle. The danger is that for reasons more ideological than personal, you may feel compelled to leave home and work in a distant corner, trapping yourself into designing stories you don't in your heart believe. But if you take an honest look at film's often specious polemics, you won't lose your way.

Over the years the primary political issue in cinema has been "Hollywood film" versus "art film." Although the terms seem dated, their partisans are very contemporary and vocal. Traditionally, their arguments have been framed in terms of big budget versus low budget, special effects versus painterly composition, the star system versus ensemble acting, private finance versus government support, and auteurs versus guns-for-hire. But hiding inside these debates are two diametrically opposed visions of life. The crucial frontier stretches across the bottom of story triangle: stasis versus change, a philosophical contradiction with profound implications for the writer. Let's begin by defining terms:

The concept "Hollywood film" does not include REVERSAL OF FORTUNE, Q & A, DRUGSTORE COWBOY, POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE, SALVADOR, RUNNING ON EMPTY, BLUE VELVET, BOB ROBERTS, JFK, DANGEROUS LIAISONS, THE FISHER KING, DO THE RIGHT THING, or EVERYBODY SAYS I LOVE YOU. These films, and many more like them, are acclaimed international successes produced by Hollywood studios. THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST made more than \$250 million worldwide, surpassing most Action films, but doesn't fall within the definition. The political meaning of "Hollywood film" is narrowed to thirty or forty special effects—dominated flicks and an equal number of farces and romances that Hollywood makes each year—far less than half of the town's output.

"Art film," in the broadest sense, means non-Hollywood, more specifically foreign film, even more specifically European film. Each year western Europe produces over four hundred films, generally more than Hollywood. "Art film," however, doesn't refer to the large number of European productions that are blood-spattered action, hard-core pornography, or slapstick farce. In the language of cafe criticism "art film" (a silly phrase—imagine "art novel" or "art theatre") is restricted to that trickle of excellent films, like BABETTE'S FEAST, IL POSTINO, or MAN BITES DOG, that manage to cross the Atlantic.

These terms were coined in the wars of cultural politics and point to vastly different, if not contradictory, views of reality. Hollywood filmmakers tend to be overly (some would say foolishly) optimistic about the capacity of life to change—especially for the better. Consequently, to express this vision they rely on the Archplot, and an inordinately high percentage of positive endings. Non-Hollywood filmmakers tend to be overly (some would say chically) pessimistic about change, professing that the more life changes, the more it stays the same, or, worse, that change brings suffering. Consequently, to express the futility, meaninglessness, or destructiveness of change, they tend to make static, Nonplot portraiture or extreme Miniplots and Antiplots with negative endings.

These are tendencies, of course, with exceptions on both sides of the Atlantic, but the dichotomy is real and deeper than the seas that separate the Old World from the New. Americans are escapees from prisons of stagnant culture and rigid class who crave change. We change and change again, trying to find what, if anything, works. After weaving the trillion-dollar safety net of the Great Society, we're now shredding it. The Old World, on the other hand, has learned through centuries of hard experience to fear such change, that social transformations inevitably bring war, famine, chaos.

The result is our polarized attitude toward story: The ingenuous optimism of Hollywood (not naive about change but about its insistence on positive change) versus the equally ingenuous pessimism of the art film (not naive about the human condition but about its insistence that it will never be other than negative or static). Too often Hollywood films force an up-ending for reasons more commercial than truthful; too often non-Hollywood films cling to the dark side for reasons more fashionable than truthful. The truth, as always, sits somewhere in the middle.

The art film's focus on inner conflict draws the interest of those with advanced degrees, because the inner world is where the highly educated spend a large amount of time. Minimalists, however, often overestimate the appetite of even the most self-absorbed minds for a diet of nothing but inner conflict. Worse, they also overestimate their talent to express the unseeable on screen. By the same token, Hollywood's action filmmakers underestimate the interest of their audience in character, thought, and feeling, and, worse, overestimate their ability to avoid Action genre clichés.

Because story in Hollywood film is often forced and clichéd, directors must compensate with something else to hold the audience's attention, resorting to transformation effects and cacophonous derring-do: *THE FIFTH ELEMENT*. In the same vein, because story is often thin or absent in the art film, again, directors must compensate. In this case, with one of two possibilities: information or sensory stimulation. Either dialogue-heavy scenes of political argument, philosophical musing, and characters' self-conscious descriptions of their emotions; or lush production design and photography or musical scores to pleasure the audience's senses: *THE ENGLISH PATIENT*.

The sad truth of the political wars of contemporary cinema is that the excesses of both “art film” and “Hollywood film” are the mirror images of each other: The telling is forced to become a dazzling surface of spectacle and sound to distract the audience from the vacancy and falsity of the story ... and in both boredom follows as night the day.

Behind the political squabbling over finance, distribution, and awards lies a deep cultural divide, reflected in the opposing world-views of Archplot versus Miniplot and Antiplot. From story to story the writer may move anywhere within the triangle, but most of us feel more at home in one place or another. You must make your own “political” choices and decide where you reside. As you do, let me offer these points for you to weigh:

The Writer Must Earn His Living Writing

Writing while holding down a forty-hour-a-week job is possible. Thousands have done it. But in time, exhaustion sets in, concentration wanders, creativity crumbles, and you’re tempted to quit. Before you do, you must find a way to earn your living from your writing. A talented writer’s survival in the real world of film and television, theatre, and publishing begins with his recognition of this fact: As story design moves away from the Archplot and down the triangle toward the far reaches of Miniplot, Antiplot, and Nonplot, the audience shrinks.

This atrophy has nothing to do with quality or a lack of it. All three corners of the story triangle gleam with masterworks that the world treasures, pieces of perfection for our imperfect world. Rather, the audience shrinks for this reason: Most human beings believe that life brings closed experiences of absolute, irreversible change; that their greatest sources of conflict are external to themselves; that they are the single and active protagonists of their own existence; that their existence operates through continuous time within a consistent, causally interconnected reality; and that inside this reality events happen for explainable and meaningful reasons. Since our first ancestor stared into a fire of his own making and thought the thought, “I am,” this is how human beings have seen the world and themselves in it. Classical design is a mirror of the human mind.

Classical design is a model of memory and anticipation. When we think back to the past, do we piece events together antistructured? Minimalistically? No. We collect and shape memories around an Archplot to bring the past back vividly. When we daydream about the future, what we dread or pray will happen, is our vision minimalistic? Antistructured? No, we mold our fantasies and hopes into an Archplot. Classical design displays the temporal, spatial, and causal patterns of human perception, outside which the mind rebels.

Classical design is not a Western view of life. For thousands of years, from the Levant to Java to Japan, the storytellers of Asia have framed their works within the Archplot, spinning yarns of high adventure and great passion. As the rise of Asian film has shown, Eastern screenwriters draw on the same principles of classical design used in the West, enriching their

tellings with a unique wit and irony. The Archplot is neither ancient nor modern, Western nor Eastern; it is human.

When the audience senses that a story is drifting too close to fictional realities it finds tedious or meaningless, it feels alienated and turns away. This is true of intelligent, sensitive people of all incomes and backgrounds. The vast majority of human beings cannot endorse the inconsistent realities of Antipplot, the internalized passivity of Miniplot, and the static circularity of Nonplot as metaphors for life as they live it. As story reaches the bottom of the triangle the audience has shrunk to those loyal cinephile intellectuals who like to have their realities twisted once in a while. This is an enthusiastic, challenging audience ... but a very small audience.

If the audience shrinks, the budget must shrink. This is the law. In 1961 Alain Robbe-Grillet wrote *LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD* and throughout the seventies and eighties he wrote brilliant Antipplot puzzle pieces—films more about the art of writing than about the act of living. I once asked him how, despite the anticommercial bent of his films, he did it. He said he'd never spent more than \$750,000 to make a film and never would. His audience was faithful but meager. At an ultra-low budget his investors doubled their money and kept him in the director's chair. But at \$2 million they would lose their shirts and he his seat. Robbe-Grillet was both visionary and pragmatic.

If, like Robbe-Grillet, you wish to write Miniplot or Antipplot, and can find a non-Hollywood producer to work at low budget, and are happy with relatively little money for yourself, good. Do it. But when you write for Hollywood, a low-budget script is no asset. Seasoned professionals who read your minimalist or antistructured piece may applaud your handling of image, but decline to be involved because experience has taught them that if the story is inconsequential, so is the audience.

Even modest Hollywood budgets run into the tens of millions of dollars, and each film must find an audience large enough to repay its cost at a profit greater than the same money would have earned in a secured investment. Why should investors place millions at enormous jeopardy when they can put it into real estate and at least have a building when they're done, not something that's shown in a couple of film festivals, shoved into a refrigerated vault, and forgotten? If a Hollywood studio is going to take this wild ride with you, you must write a film that has at least a chance of recouping its huge risk. In other words, a film that leans toward the Archplot.

The Writer Must Master Classical Form

By instinct or study, fine writers recognize that minimalism and antistructure are not independent forms but reactions to the Classical. Miniplot and Antipplot were born out of the Archplot—one shrinks it, the other contradicts it. The avant-garde exists to oppose the popular and commercial, until it too becomes popular and commercial, then it turns to attack

itself. If Nonplot “art films” went hot and were raking in money, the avant-garde would revolt, denounce Hollywood for selling out to portraiture, and seize the Classical for its own.

These cycles between formality/freedom, symmetry/asymmetry are as old as Attic theatre. The history of art is a history of revivals: Establishment icons are shattered by an avant-garde that in time becomes the new establishment to be attacked by a new avant-garde that uses its grandfather’s forms of weapons. Rock ‘n’ roll, which was named after black slang for sex, began as an avant-garde movement against the white-bread sounds of the postwar era. Now it’s the definition of musical aristocracy and even used as church music.

The serious use of Antiplot devices not only has gone out of fashion but has become a joke. A vein of dark satire has always run through antistructure works, from UN CHIEN ANDALOU to WEEKEND, but now direct address to camera, inconsistent realities, and alternative endings are the staples of film farce. Antiplot gags that began with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby’s THE ROAD TO MOROCCO have been worked into the likes of BLAZING SADDLES, the PYTHON films, and WAYNE’S WORLD. Story techniques that once struck us as dangerous and revolutionary now seem toothless but charming.

Respecting these cycles, great storytellers have always known that, regardless of background or education, everyone, consciously or instinctively, enters the story ritual with Classical anticipation. Therefore, to make Miniplot and Antiplot work the writer must play with or against this expectancy. Only by carefully and creatively shattering or bending the Classical form can the artist lead the audience to perceive the inner life hidden in a Miniplot or to accept the chilling absurdity of an Antiplot. But how can a writer creatively reduce or reverse that which he does not understand?

Writers who found success in the deep corners of the story triangle knew that the starting point of understanding was at the top and began their careers in the Classical. Bergman wrote and directed love stories and social and historical dramas for twenty years before he dared venture into the minimalism of THE SILENCE or the antistructure of PERSONA. Fellini made I VITIONI and LA STRADA before he risked the Miniplot of AMARCORD or the Antiplot of 8 1/2. Godard made BREATHLESS before WEEKEND. Robert Altman perfected his story talents in the TV series Bonanza and Alfred Hitchcock Presents. First, the masters mastered the Archplot.

I sympathize with the youthful desire to make a first screenplay read like PERSONA. But the dream of joining the avant-garde must wait while, like the artists before you, you too gain mastery of Classical form. Don’t kid yourself into thinking that you understand Archplot because you’ve seen the movies. You’ll know you understand it when you can do it. The writer works at his skills until knowledge shifts from the left side of the brain to the right, until intellectual awareness becomes living craft.

The Writer Must Believe in What He Writes

Stanislawski asked his actors: Are you in love with the art in yourself or yourself in the art? You too must examine your motives for wanting to write the way you write. Why do your screenplays find their way to one corner of the triangle or the other? What is your vision?

Each tale you create says to the audience: "I believe life is like this." Every moment must be filled with your passionate conviction or we smell a phony. If you write minimalism, do you believe in the meanings of this form? Has experience convinced you that life brings little or no change? If your ambition is anticlassicism, are you convinced of the random meaninglessness of life? If your answer is a passionate yes, then write your Miniplot or Antiplot and do everything possible to see it made.

For the vast majority, however, the honest answer to these questions is no. Yet antistructure and, in particular, minimalism still attract young writers like a Pied Piper. Why? I suspect that for many it isn't the intrinsic meanings of such forms that draw their interest. Rather, it's what these forms represent extrinsically. In other words, politics. It isn't what Antiplot and Miniplot are, it's what they're not: They're not Hollywood.

The young are taught that Hollywood and art are antithetical. The novice, therefore, wanting to be recognized as an artist, falls into the trap of writing a screenplay not for what it is, but for what it's not. He avoids closure, active characters, chronology, and causality to avoid the taint of commercialism. As a result, pretentiousness poisons his work.

A story is the embodiment of our ideas and passions in Edmund Husserl's phrase, "an objective correlative" for the feelings and insights we wish to instill in the audience. When you work with one eye on your script and the other on Hollywood, making eccentric choices to avoid the taint of commercialism, you produce the literary equivalent of a temper tantrum. Like a child living in the shadow of a powerful father, you break Hollywood's "rules" because it makes you feel free. But angry contradiction of the patriarch is not creativity; it's delinquency calling for attention. Difference for the sake of difference is as empty an achievement as slavishly following the commercial imperative. Write only what you believe.

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