

Three Articulations of *The Sweet Hereafter*:
The Auteur, the Novelist and the Co-authored Text

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This is dedicated to my parents, Carol and Sonny.

Thank you for your love and encouragement.

Abstract

The repetition of the title *The Sweet Hereafter* for novel (1991), film/DVD (1997/1998) and book chapter (2004) is suggestive of the slippages between them. The research traces the intermedial transitions of the *TSH* through three articulations to demonstrate how the texts subvert the temporal hierarchy posited by the notion of ‘fidelity’ in adaptation studies. The concepts of ‘original’ and “derivatives” are replaced by an intertextual simultaneity that posits the novelist and the auteur as co-authors of *The Sweet Hereafter* text. The first section of this RP considers the process of adaptation of the novel into film and draws on the highly self-reflexive dialogue between novelist and writer/director included on *TSH* DVD (1998). The second section of this RP traces how the ideas from the DVD discussion are reoriented through a collaboration on a book chapter which deconstructs the interplay of the visual and verbal as they work on screen.

Keywords: Adaptation, Atom Egoyan, Auteur, *The Sweet Hereafter*

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Three Articulations of *The Sweet Hereafter*:

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The director Atom Egoyan followed up his breakout film *Exotica* (1994) with *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997), an adaptation of the homonymously titled novel by Russell Banks (1991). *The Sweet Hereafter* (henceforth *TSH*), was the first screenplay Egoyan wrote that was based on a source text. The novelist Banks was involved throughout the production and promotion of the film, even participating in the voice-over commentary with Egoyan on the film's 1998 DVD release. The two revisited their initial collaboration eight years later when Egoyan offered Banks a selection of publicity stills taken on the *TSH* film set and asked him to respond with extracts from his novel. The photographs and text were published as a co-authored chapter titled *The Sweet Hereafter* in the book *Subtitles: on the foreignness of film* (2004), co-edited by Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour.

The simultaneous presence of Egoyan and Banks in both texts (audio commentary and chapter) subverts the linear relationship between an original text and its derivative favoured by adaptation studies. The *TSH* chapter is a pastiche of media forms that rejects the positing of an original text, as it draws material from both the novel and the film. *TSH* chapter (2004) deconstructs the interplay of the visual and verbal as they work on screen. The primacy of the visual in film and the assumption that photographic images do not require translation is denaturalized. The *TSH* chapter is representative of Egoyan's highly self-reflexive practice, which reveals the processes integral to filmmaking and the concept of authorship in film.

The research questions to be addressed are: How does the *TSH* chapter (2004) elaborate on the self-reflexive discourse presented in the *TSH* DVD (1998) commentary?

How does the *TSH* chapter (2004) re-articulate authorship in film as a collaborative endeavour?

The research utilizes the theoretical lens of intermediality¹, as it is attentive to the phenomenon of adapting a novel into film and how meaning is generated through the synergy between these texts. To define the difference between the intermedial relations presented in the adaptation of the film and those evoked in the co-authored chapter, the research discusses two phenomena of intermediality defined by Rajewsky (2010) as *medial transposition* and *intermedial reference*. Media transposition implies a transitioning across media forms including adaptation (i.e. Egoyan adapting the Russell Banks novel into a film) while intermedial reference is the referencing of various medial forms within the material conditions of one media (i.e. the *Subtitles* chapter reference of literature, film and photography).

In order to analyze the *TSH* chapter (2004) I will draw from Ljungberg's (2010) study of highly self-reflexive texts wherein intermediality is construed as the iconic enactment of one medium within another.

1. Auteur Theory

The personae of the auteur was defined within the 1950's French New Wave film culture and endorsed by critics writing for the publication *Cahiers du Cinema*. The concept of the auteur provided a theoretical mode in which to discuss the work of a select group of filmmakers whose films displayed a distinct fingerprint. The centrality of the individual auteur in defining a unique angle of vision shifted the responsibility of a film's quality solely to the film's director. The

distinct style of the auteur was perceived to be so powerful that it triumphed over the standards of production and the collective collaboration inherent in filmmaking.

The authority of the director was aligned with that of literary authorship, and ascribed the very literal designation of author (auteur in French) of their films. Auteur theory conceived that the control over the film was similar to the novelist's control of a book captured perfectly in Alexandre Astruc's (1948) metaphor of the *caméra stylo*, wherein the act of directing was transformed into a form of writing. The director used filmic language to compose scenes and "in this kind of film-making the distinction between author and director loses all meaning. Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing. The filmmaker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen" (Astruc, 1948, p.35)

The assessment of the quality of films was based on the recognition of the filmmaker's unique style as it emerged across their oeuvre. Appreciating the work of the auteur required careful analysis of the creative elements that made up the distinct style of the filmmaker and to recognize when these nuances appeared throughout their films. The notion of the auteur elevated the status of film from mass culture entertainment to a legitimate artistic endeavour on par with literature. The auteurs often wrote, produced, directed and even acted in their own films.

While auteur theory has been critiqued for diminishing the reality that filmmaking is a collective endeavour (perhaps most evident in the awarding of the Academy Award for best film to the film's producers) and diminishing the role of screenwriters. The notion of auteur remains a relevant concept, as the name of the director is a central part of the marketing of contemporary films. A director's name is a commodity that can signal to the audience what they can expect to see in the theatre. Melnyk (2004) identified Egoyan (along with Cronenberg) as an auteur of English Canadian cinema.

2. Egoyan as Auteur

Atom Egoyan is a multifaceted artist whose prolific output includes film, documentary, opera, theatre, television and gallery installations. He is best known for his work as a director and has come to represent Anglo-Canadian cinema internationally. Since 1984, the Armenian²-Canadian filmmaker has directed twelve feature films and his distinctive style earned him the title of “a true auteur” (Tschofen & Burwell, 2007, p. 4). His oeuvre has demonstrated such a consistency that the public has become familiar with “Egoyan as his own genre” (Gray, 2010, p. 65).

Egoyan has also provided an extensive body of writing and criticism of his own films. Unlike some of his auteur peers, he is very willing to de-mystify his own methods and discuss technique and style. In the introduction to the screenplay for *Exotica* (1994), Geoff Pevere noted:

Apart from Jean-Luc Godard, there may be no other director so systematically critical of his own practice as Egoyan. In interviews, he relentlessly wrestles with his own right to be doing what he’s doing, and constantly demands our critical scrutiny of the work he produces (1995, p. 17)

This self-reflexive disposition may have contributed to the extensive body of academic writing and scholarly critique that surrounds his work³.

In addition to directing⁴, Egoyan has written almost all of his films, and his website (<http://www.egofilmarts.com/>) lists his occupation as Director/Writer/Producer. The production house EGO Film Arts that Egoyan founded at the very start of his career “remains his base of operations today” (Romney, 2003, p. 8). The director’s independent status permitted him to

make films that are distinct from the aesthetic and industrial conventions of the Hollywood studio system. In an interview, Egoyan described in his own words the seductiveness of the cinema and his purposeful working against the grain:

There are certain properties inherent in the presentation of moving pictures. We believe in a reality, we want to believe that what we're seeing is actually happening. And rather than succumb to that, I love the idea of challenging that and playing with that (Katz, 2010, p. 97)

It is this self-reflexive drive to denaturalize the cinematic image and maintain a critical distance that distinguishes an Egoyan film from mainstream narrative cinema. The filmmaker's effort to impede his viewers from full immersion into the narrative has been referred to as Brechtian as "the traditional suspension of disbelief is challenged creating a lack of identification" (Melnyk, 2004, p. 162).

While the characteristic of auteur coherence⁵ is generally traced onto the work of a director, in Egoyan's case it "is very much programmed in by the film-maker himself" (Romney, 2003, p. 9). The Egoyanesque in filmmaking denotes a fragmented structure that eschews the chronology of a linear narrative. The "alluringly postmodern" (Romney, 2003, back cover) films reject classically realist storytelling. The complex film structures are disorienting as they deny the viewer any coherent point of view and juxtapose multiple temporalities.

Nöth (2007) discussed self-reflexivity as a characteristic of postmodern culture, as the text examines its own operations and acknowledges the degree to which it refers to other media.

Withalm (2007) defined several of the techniques that can be utilized in film to draw attention to its own artifice:

A self-reflexive film is a film, which focuses or reflects on itself, that is, on the specific film that is being watched. Various cinematic devices are used to draw the spectators' attention to the film itself in this sense: lines of dialog, the "materialization" of filmic means, and in some less frequent cases, to the showing of the dispositive, the technical device of film production and film showing (p. 130)

Egoyan's self-reflexive film style is characterized by the purposeful transgression of the diegetic⁶ and non-diegetic⁷ boundaries. The transgression of narrative boundaries draws attention to the film itself and displaces any attempt at definitively locating the 'real' within the frame. The visual and aural disorientation is intended to "prevent [the viewer] from falling into a static fetishized relationship to the screen" (Tschofen & Burwell, 2007, p. 227). This technique is evident at the end of the film *Speaking Parts* (1989) when absurd images overtake the point of view of the camera. The 'impossible' images on the screen cannot be grounded within a coherent point of view and the scenes can only be assimilated into the film if they are understood as the psychotic projections from inside the mind of one of the characters. This ambiguity displaces the distinction between the perceived 'reality' of the film, as the camera can no longer be trusted to represent the story world 'objectively'.

Another stylistic feature of Egoyan's films is the incorporation of the tools of technological production within the diegesis. In Egoyan's own words he is interested "in showing the frame as well as the picture" (Romney, 2003, p. 2). Several of the films represent

the forms of watching facilitated by technology and the perceptual distance it offers to the user: surveillance (*Family Viewing* 1987), voyeurism (*Exotica*, 1994) and cyber sex (*Speaking Parts*, 1989) and pornographic material (*The Adjuster*, 1991). The characters are confronted by their relationship to the wave of mediated images that surround them and the ways that they attempt to control their reality through the use of technology (i.e. the obsessive rituals of substitution by re-watching and rewinding video). The films deconstruct their own process by incorporating references to different media and exploiting “the contrast in tones and textures between photography, film, video, and eventually, digital imagery” (Tschofen & Burwell, 2007, p. 7).

The most overt example of self-reference is presented in *Ararat* (2002) with a *myse-en-abyme*, of a film about making a film. The plot circles around a group of protagonists who are connected with the production of a film called *Ararat*- the ‘fictionalized’ film notably shares the same title as Egoyan’s film. The director portrayed in the film is called Edward Saroyan (Charles Aznavour); he is making a movie whose subject is the 1915 Armenian genocide and the politics of denial that surround the historical event- also the subject of Egoyan’s film *Ararat* (2002). The primary concern of both films is the relationship between technology and memory and how media culture is used to represent the past and construct a collective consciousness. One horrific section of Saroyan’s *Ararat* is screened for the viewer of the Egoyan film (the scene cuts back and forth between the movie and reactions from the crowd viewing it). The film within the film represents a big-budget “Hollywood” version of the genocide that depicts the trauma as a sensationalized spectacle that fixes a clear historical narrative as the truth (but it also involves the creative interpretation of facts i.e. the decision to move the position of Mount Ararat to suit the shot). The film shown within his film is the kind of seductive blockbuster that Egoyan refused to

make thereby acknowledging the limits of the film to express traumatic events such as genocide and refusing to fix a single version of the truth.

3. *The Sweet Hereafter*

The Canadian art-cinema industry support of auteur achievement allowed Egoyan to transition from experimental short-films to larger projects that achieved commercial and critical success. His early productions were financed with funds from Canadian provincial and federal arts councils and the perceived coherence of the films in his first decade as a feature filmmaker from *Next of Kin* (1984) to *Exotica* (1994) could arguably be a result of the small budgets and production constraints the director was working under on these early films. The film *Exotica* (1994), was Egoyan's breakout, "distributed by Miramax, it grossed US 5.13million in North America. This and the film's prominence at Cannes cemented his status as an A-list auteur" (Romney, 2003, p. 125).

Following the success of *Exotica* (1994) Egoyan embraced his newly affirmed auteur status (and success in drawing an audience to the theatre) by optioning Russell Bank's novel *The Sweet Hereafter* (1991). *TSH* (*De Beaux lendemains* in French) was released in 1997 and is considered a transitional film in the director's oeuvre. Melnyk noted that *The Sweet Hereafter* and later *Felicia's Journey* marked "a diversion from auteorial intensity" (Melnyk, 2004, p.160).

While his seven previous films were all based on original screenplays, *TSH* (1997) was the director's first literary adaptation⁸, which is "a film that relies for some of its material on a previous written work and the word differentiates such films from films produced from an original screenplay. This distinction is recognized at every level of the industry up to the categories of the Oscars" (MacCabe, 2011, p. 3).

TSH (1997) was a commercial success “grossing US\$ 4.30 million in North America” (Romney, 2003, p127) and achieved significant acclaim with “two Academy Award nominations, for best Adapted Screenplay and Best Director, and won the Grand Jury Prize in Cannes” (Romney, 2003, p127). Although Egoyan lost the Oscar that year to James Cameron for *Titanic*, the recognition from his peers within the Academy for both his directing and screenwriting were considered a “turning point for the English Canadian film industry”(Gillian, 2000, p. 337).

The response from critics was mixed as the film demonstrated a more emotional tone that made it accessible to a wider public than his earlier more detached work (some reviewers preferred the high modernist feel of Egoyan’s experimental early films). When asked why he chose to adapt Banks’s novel, Egoyan responded, “I wanted to find something that would challenge me and still provide a framework on which I could **impose** my structural concepts, and this was the perfect story for that” (Rayns, 1997, p. 61). The novel provided a valuable framework for Egoyan as it dealt with the familiar themes of family, loss and sexuality but allowed Egoyan to distance himself from his own familiar writing method. The director admitted that he was tired of his own approach to drawing characters and wanted to “learn more about what a novelist does” (Katz, 2010, p. 102).

The *TSH* novel (1991) is divided into five chapters⁹, each titled with the name of the character that narrates it. The chapters follow consecutively and the Dolores character has two chapters (both opening and concluding the story). While the four stories in the novel do not necessarily contradict each other they are all presented independent of those of the other characters. Each character addresses the reader in a first-person monologue that is reminiscent of testimony or a legal deposition. The novel maintains an intersubjective structure that does not

privilege one narrative voice over the others as each character recounts their intimate thoughts or ‘truth’ directly to the reader.

The novel *TSH* (1991) tells the story of the small community of Sam Dent, reeling in the aftermath of a tragic school bus accident that killed almost all of its children. The title of the book was taken from the line “it was as if we were citizens of a wholly different town now, as if we were a town of solitaires living in a sweet hereafter” (Banks, 1991, p. 254) which is delivered by the character Dolores in the final chapter to explain the difference between the town before (pre-accident) and after (post-accident) the crash. The town has been fragmented by the trauma of the accident and further divisiveness in the town has been caused by the arrival of several lawyers intent on convincing the townspeople to pursue lawsuits. The novel is told from the perspective of four individual storytellers: Dolores is the bus driver who survived the accident; Billy is the father of twins who were killed in the accident; Nicole is the sole child survivor of the accident, and Stephens is a lawyer from out of town intent on persuading the townspeople to pursue a class-action suit. The novel has an additional subplot of an incestuous relationship between a father, Sam Burnell, and his daughter Nicole, who is a paraplegic after being the only child to survive the crash. The two plots converge as Nicole lies in her court deposition where she is the key witness and she blames Dolores for the accident saying that she was speeding. The lie sabotages the lawsuit initiated by the lawyer Stephens and prevents her father from continuing to exploit her damaged body. In the novel Nicole reveals her ‘truth’ about lying in court to put an end to her father’s exploitation of her for a profit and an end to all the lawsuits and the lawyers from further exploiting the town’s loss. The tag line of the film “there is no such thing as the simple truth” captures the complexity of the intersubjective structure of the narrative.

3.1 Adapting *The Sweet Hereafter*

In adaptation studies the discussion has focused on the varying degrees of fidelity of the filmic adaptation to its literary source. This leads “inevitably the evaluative approach of privileging one form over the other-usually literature” (Constandinides, 2010, p. 5). The fidelity discourse posits a clear delineation between the original (novel) and derivative (film), with an evaluation of the film based on its apparent faithfulness to the textual source. It is interesting to consider that the measure of fidelity is often performed between two works of ‘fiction’ with a film evaluated on how **true** it remains to a **fictional** novel.

Several articles highlighted the differences between *TSH* novel and film. Romney (2003) found that Egoyan customized the “source material in his own image” (p. 9) evident in the decision to eliminate the events that take place in the concluding chapter of the novel which describes the experience of Dolores and her husband attending a car-crash derby at the town fair (in the film, the significant lines from the Dolores chapter are attributed to the character Nicole who delivers them in voice over in the concluding moments of the film). Boyd (2007) also listed several changes between the novel and the film: the setting was moved from upstate New York to British Columbia, the character Nicole is an aspiring singer/performer when she was originally a beauty queen and the omission of sequences from the character Billy’s chapter. However, the most notable addition to the film was *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* leitmotif. The Robert Browning poem figures significantly in the film. It is incorporated in the image track as Nicole reads the poem to the children at bedtime and the brightly illustrated pages fill the screen. As well as in voice over with Nicole reciting verses throughout the film and the medieval score composed by Mychael Danna (See Wood, 2006). Egoyan was asked why he incorporated the mythic reference in conversation with Susan Bullington Katz in 1998, and his response was:

It suddenly gave me, also, a sense of authorship. I think that was very important to me, having written seven films on original material. I needed to feel as though this was something which, at a certain point, I could become the author of in spirit, and the poem in some ways gave me that angle and that point of entry” (emphasis added, Katz, 2010, p. 100),

The director acknowledged that the poem was key to his writing process and provided him with a structure as he saw “so many resonances in that poem that reflect on Russell’s book” (AE, audio commentary, 44:33). The reference to the poem in the film is presented in its ‘original’ text form (even though it is interpreted through the images painted by Kat Greenaway that accompany the text onscreen). The poem opened up a type of textual relationship with the source novel that was not dependent on literal translation but an ability to connect with the text.

The film then is not solely based on the novel but is also shaped by the intertextual reference to other texts. Intertextuality is one of the five types of transtextuality identified by Genette (1997a) in his tome *Palimpsests*, it is defined “as a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another. In its most explicit and literal form, it is the traditional practice of quoting” (Genette, 1997b, p. 1-2).

Intertextuality with its focus on the synergy between texts offers an alternative to the discussion of fidelity/purity in adaptation studies. A non-evaluative approach has more recently emerged in adaptation studies, and of its strongest proponents is Robert Stam, who draws on

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism¹⁰ to reconsider the collaborative dialogue that takes place between texts. Stam (2005) also points out that the notion of 'true' fidelity is impossible:

The shift in adaptation, from a single-track, uniquely verbal medium such as the novel to a multitrack medium like film, which can play not only with words (written and spoken) but also with music, sound effects, and moving photographic images, explains the unlikelihood, and I would suggest even the undesirability, of literal fidelity. Along with the semiotic differences, practical and material contingencies also render fidelity in adaptation virtually impossible. A novel is, usually produced by a single individual; the film, almost always, is a collaborative project (Stam, 2005, p. 17).

The different media possess their own vocabulary and conventions and the work of adaptation entails an understanding of what elements need to be altered, invented or eliminated in transitioning them from one to the other (i.e. from the page to the screen). Rather than an attempt to 'copy' the novel the adaptation introduces something new to the source text as the film has access to both a visual track and soundtrack.

Intermediality has its roots in the literary studies of intertextuality but reorients the discussion to all kinds of media. As its most broad definition, it is focused on the crossing of media borders¹¹. Rajewsky's (2010) essay contribution to the book *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, proposes three categories of intermedial phenomena: *Media Transposition*, *Media Combination*¹² and *Intermedial reference*. For the purpose of the current research only the former and latter concepts will be utilized in the discussion. The process of

adaptation falls under the first category of intermedial phenomena of *Media Transposition*, which

has to do with the way in which a medial configuration *comes into being*, that is with the transformation of a given medial configuration (a text, film and so on) or of its substratum into another medium. The ‘original’ text, film and so on, is the ‘source’ of the newly formed medial configuration, whose formation is based on a media-specific and obligatory intermedial transformation process (Rajewsky, 2010, p. 56)

3.2 Cinematic Equivalentents

The process of writing for the screen is downplayed in film studies, a purposeful neglect which arose with the very early cinema. As:

In its attempt to establish itself as an autonomous art form in the early twentieth century, narrative cinema limited all emphasis on its strongest feature: the visual quality of film, as opposed to the written one of its major rival, literature. The term ‘motion pictures’, however denies the fact that writing remained, and remains an important element of the new film medium (Mahlknecht, 2011, p. 1)

For Boozer (2008) the screenplay is a central but oft overlooked step in adaptation studies, as it is “the textual transposition of a single-track medium of published writing into a document that embraces the scenic structure and dramatic codes of the multitrack medium of film” (p. 1). The film does not emerge fully formed from the ‘original’ novel but it is reworked through several texts including screenplay drafts and a final shooting script. The screenplay remains hidden from

the audience's view as it is not presented onscreen nor is it standard practice to publish the text. It is noteworthy, that Egoyan has published two of his screenplays *Exotica* (1995) and *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) and two shooting scripts *Speaking Parts* (1993) and *Ararat* (2002), making them accessible to a wider public and extending an opportunity to engage with the film both on the page and on the screen. The screenplay and shooting scripts are the bridge between the literary and the visual as the words translate the dialogue, settings and action that will constitute the film.

Egoyan chose to adapt a novel that explores the notion of 'handing narrative to someone' by challenging himself to create his own narrative based on someone else's story (Banks's novel). Egoyan acknowledged that the thematic preoccupation of translating narrative and storytelling was what drew him to the novel:

I mean I think that is the thing that I found most inspiring from the book is this idea of people controlling narrative or giving narrative away or handing narrative to someone else or creating their own narrative. And that, trying to find a **cinematic equivalent** (AE, audio commentary, 5:50)

The notion of cinematic equivalence can be contextualized within François Truffaut's seminal 1954 article *A Certain Tendency in French Cinema*. The article notes a difference between "scriptwriter films" (p.54), which are conceived in a literary tradition and those conceived of by auteurs that can convey complex situations through the vocabulary of the cinema and their *mise en scene*.

The challenge for Egoyan was creating scenes that would affect him “the same way as passages in the book will” (AE, audio commentary, 2:20). Depicting the inner life of a character on screen is a challenge and any attempt at ‘literal’ fidelity (i.e. having the four characters deliver monologues directly into the camera) would make for a more experimental and abstract film presentation. In narrative film the form of direct telling presented in the novel would prove out of place, even if presented as voice over track. The four characters of the novel could not address their private ‘interior’ thoughts directly to the audience (by delivering a long monologue to no one in particular within the diegesis) without engendering an immediacy that would transgress the diegetic boundary of the film and alienate the intended filmic audience.

Egoyan kept the horizontal structure of the novel by ensuring that no single character’s point of view would dominate the entire film. The director shattered “the straightforward chronology of Bank’s narrative into a swath of glittering fragments” (Whitesell, 2011, p. 229). The complex circling between timeframes leaves the viewer disoriented as the film abruptly cuts between scenes and the characters are asynchronously shown as their ‘pre-accident’ and ‘post-accident’ selves. The intersubjectivity of the novel is suggested through the complex layering of temporal structures and swift cuts between points of view in the film.

The brief scene of the accident occurs halfway through the film and is shown from the character Billy’s point of view as he is driving behind the bus and witnesses it crash over the guardrail and careen down the hill accompanied by the sounds of children screaming. Rather than zoom in on the accident and the bus plunging into the water to the sound of cracking ice, the camera maintains its position with a long lens shot aligned with Billy’s powerlessness to do anything but watch from above on the road. The shot of the accident then cuts abruptly to the lawyer Stephens in the airplane telling a story about his daughter being bitten by spiders when

she was a baby. The spider-bite scene is a further example of Egoyan finding “cinematic equivalents” as he invented the character of Allison who sits next to Stephens on the plane. The presence of the Allison character enabled the lawyer character to tell his story to someone in the film. The monologue from the novel is presented almost word-for-word (refer to Banks, 1991, p. 121-124) as a dialogue in which the Alison character barely speaks but listens intently and reacts to the story (gasping, wiping away a tear). The shots of Stephens and Alison are intercut with idyllic scenes remembered from Stephen’s past.

The multitrack format of the film signals the aftershocks of the trauma and the splitting of before and after through the disjunction of the images (what we see) and sound (what we hear). Egoyan acknowledged that the effect was intentional:

I felt that it would be very interesting to create a dynamic where the music was indicating something that the images were not immediately relating back. That would create an alchemy that I could use in the dramatic structure of my storytelling
(Egoyan quote as cited in Whitesell, 2011, p. 261)

The dissociation between the image and verbal track in the *TSH* (1997) was the subject of Weese’s (2002) feminist analysis of the feminine voice in the film. The voice of the character Nicole (Sarah Polley) is used for both the character within diegesis and the non-diegetic narrator. The narrative voice provides insights to which the character Nicole would not be privileged to within the diegesis (the character Nicole does not appear on screen in these moments). This ambiguity is amplified by the soundtrack as the actress Sarah Polley recorded several songs that feature throughout the film on the music track (including a scene in a motel where the characters

Billy and Risa engage in an affair) and it is not clear to the audience whether the songs are intended to be interpreted through as the character or actress (as the Nicole character who is an aspiring singer/musician who performs in the film). The voice of the actress works in complex ways shifting meaning each time it appears on the soundtrack. The transitioning the narrative from the textual novel into the audio-visual film is discussed at length on the voice over commentary that was included on the DVD release of the film.

4. *The Sweet Hereafter* DVD (1998)

The new media form of the DVD is part of a re-distribution strategy that makes previously released commercial films available for private exhibition. The DVD is intended for a home viewing audience and according to Egoyan it is “based on the notion of personal familiarity, convenience, and what fits into one’s daily life” (Egoyan & Balfour, 2004, p. 35). The DVD format enables new forms of interactivity (although limited in scope) that offer the viewer a more ‘horizontal’ entry into the text rather than the linear watching of a film in the theater from the beginning (previews) to the end (credits). Alternative film viewings are made possible for the viewer, by their ability to re-watch, pause, fast-forward, rewind or stop the action at their discretion. The DVD is also part of a commercial practice that encourages sales by offering supplementary material not accessible to theatregoers. Even if not all viewers are interested in the material it shows an intention of the director (or of the production company) to re-think the film and present it in new and marketable formats. The DVD in this way is not just a distributable copy of the film but 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” (Parker & Parker, 2011, p. xv).

The *TSH* was released on DVD in 1998, although the DVD case does not make any explicit reference to the Russell Banks's novel except within the fine print of the credits on the back cover which reads: *based on the novel by Russell Banks*. The front cover of the DVD case features the idyllic image of a sleeping family (the scene featured as part of Stephens spider-story scene in the film) that was featured on all promotional materials (posters, trailers) associated with the film. The most prominent feature of the DVD case, in bold red typeface, are the title *The Sweet Hereafter*, the director's name at the very bottom and the actor Ian Holm's name just above the cover photo. A review of "The Best Film of the Year" and the tag line "There is no such thing as a simple truth". Other inclusions are its 1997 Academy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay. It should be noted that the film's 1997 Cannes Film Festival Grand Prix win¹³ is noted on the back cover along with the claim that the film featured "on over 250 top ten lists!"



In the book *Show Sold Separately*, Jonathan Gray applies the second type of transtextuality (paratextuality) identified by Genette to film studies. The paratext¹⁴ “is generally less explicit and more distant relationship that binds the text properly speaking, taken with the totality of literary work...a title, a subtitle, intertitles, prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc,” (Genette, 1997a, p.3). The paratextual elements are “thresholds” (Genette, 1997b, p. xvii) that guide our way into the text. Gray seeks to demonstrate how the paratexts particular to film: trailer, posters, DVD extras, merchandise should be considered part of the film as they “create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them” (Gray, 2010, p. 6). This is especially evident when the DVD features include alternate endings or deleted scenes. His suggestion is to extend the boundaries of the text and consider that all of the intertextual elements combined constitute the text proper, as “for analytical purposes, in fact intertexts and paratexts are always constitutive parts of the text itself” (Gray, 2010, p. 35). The intertexts and paratexts appended to the film offer unique access and critical understanding of the conceptualization of the film, the process of filmmaking and reception.

The *TSH* DVD (1998) presents four options on the main menu: play movie, language selections, special features and scene selections. There are nine special features included on the DVD:

- Audio commentary by writer/director Atom Egoyan and novelist Russell Banks,
- “*Before and After The Sweet Hereafter*” video discussion of the book and film with Russell Banks and Atom Egoyan,
- Q&A interviews with members of the cast “*The Charlie Rose Show*” interview with Atom Egoyan,
- “*The Pied Piper of Hamelin*” by Richard Browning and illustrated by Kate Greenaway¹⁵

- Isolated score by music composer Mychael Danna.
- U.S. original theatrical trailer
- Canadian original theatrical trailer
- The cast
- color bars

The supplementary materials provoke new ways of approaching the film, Egoyan discussed the strangeness of his own viewing experience when he “accidentally pressed an incorrect button on the DVD menu. I found myself watching the film with English subtitles, designed for the hearing impaired. It was disorienting to see” (Egoyan & Balfour, 2004, p. 36).

Mark Parker & Deborah Parker in their book *The DVD and the Study of Film: The Attainable Text* (2011) found that the new media form of the DVD fundamentally changed the ways we access films, particularly the supplementary features that open up further dialogue with the audience. The supplementary content offered on the DVD version of film can be divided between two categories: the menu of viewing options that generally include language preferences, scene selection and the special features which can include making of documentaries, deleted scenes, the director’s commentary, interviews with the director and/or cast and outtakes.

4.1 TSH DVD Commentary

A common film paratext is the director’s commentary, where the voice of an authority on the film vocally guides the viewing. It implies varying degrees of self-disclosure as the director (or another authority figure from the production) scrutinizes the work providing insight into the making of the film through explanations of technique, anecdotes from the set, casting choices and special effects. The voice over of the director (or another authority) shapes the way that the viewer interacts with the visuals on screen and suggests another level of engagement with the

film that results from re-watching the text. The voice of the director has the polyphonic effect as it is played over the existing film with the original soundtrack played at a lower volume and brings to forefront processes of filmmaking that are not evident in the final seamless product.

In their case study¹⁶ of eight voice-over commentaries provided by Egoyan, Parker & Parker (2011) concluded that the director took “unusual pains in the presentation of his work. In his hands, audio commentary provides a capacious medium for discussion of his art, a medium unlike the tendentious and constricting form of the interview” (p. xv). The commentaries provided by Egoyan are not simply explanations of the film but serve as a way “of reorienting the viewer...and at times serve to decipher and decode, they are most engaging at a more general and basic level, offering up rules for watching Egoyan’s films” (Parker & Parker, 2011, p. 98). Egoyan uses the format of the commentary as an additional mode of self-reflexive inquiry as he approaches the films as both the director and a viewer.

The audio commentary on the *TSH* DVD (1998) was Egoyan’s first one (he provided commentary for his earlier films when they were re-released on DVD in 2001). The *TSH* audio commentary is slightly unorthodox due to the joint-presentation of writer/director Egoyan and the novelist Banks. This is the only time that the relationship between the source novel and film is explicitly stated.

Both of their voices feature on the audio track, which is appropriate given that the theme of the film is the struggle for narrative authority and the playing out of multiple narratives simultaneously. The inclusion of both in a dialogue offers the viewers a glimpse of a dynamic dance between author and filmmaker, which is typically not witnessed by the audience. The filmmaker has decided to give viewers access to the creative collaboration that went into adapting the novel. The discussion between the two is comparable to an exploratory ‘making of’,

as they discuss which elements from the novel have disappeared from the film version while others not present in the literary text that are part of the film.

The novelist and the writer/director acknowledge in the commentary that the process of adapting the book was a collaborative project from their first meeting; when Egoyan visited Banks in the Adirondacks to request the option for the novel. Banks was involved throughout the filmmaking process and even has “a cameo role as a doctor tending Nicole, while his daughter Caerthan Banks plays Stephens’s daughter Zoe” (Romney, 2003, p. 129). Banks applauds the adaptation on the audio commentary and Egoyan for realizing what he himself envisioned while writing sequences in the book. Banks describes what he interprets as a “novelistic technique” several times in the film’s transition between narratives. In an interview with Wilson (2009), Egoyan reflected on the relation of the texts and his use of the word ‘extend’ is suggestive of an approach to adaptation where the boundaries between the source novel and film are difficult to determine.

There’s a strange point where you cannot recall exactly what has been added to or reinvented from the source material. Adaptations are painful, especially when the source material is strong, because they fill you with a sense of regret that you can’t do everything a novelist does. But hopefully you are able to extend the world of the novel (p.139)

The dual voices of novelist and director engage in a free flow conversation where they sometimes address each other, sometimes the audience directly or they simply describe the action on screen. The dialogue is casual and contains several instances where the commentary is

inaudible, due to laughter, muffled speech or the two men talking over each other making it impossible to decipher what was said. The lack of intelligibility creates an effect of spontaneity something that is utterly lacking in the careful construction of the film. The two men tease each other (i.e. Egoyan ribbing Banks about his cameo as the doctor) and respond in turn to various scenes in the film. The effect of the commentary playing over the images in voice-over is comparable to the disjunction between sound and image noted in the film's structure, as the voices and tone of the conversation do not always seem fit for the sombre action on screen.

For the purpose of the analysis, the DVD commentary was transcribed in its totality (and is included in the appendix) and sections of particular interest were identified for elaboration (AE is used to designate Atom Egoyan and RB for Russell Banks followed by the running time on the DVD). Some of the preliminary observations were that Banks offered fewer insights and most of them relate to his experience watching the film as a viewer. Egoyan dominated the discussion as he speaks for a collective of individuals involved in the filming of *TSH*. Egoyan acknowledges the elements of production not readily visible to the audience (editing, sound design, art design, score) and names his collaborators by pinpointing their visible influence on the film: Allan Bell the script reader who suggested the *Pied Piper* poem, Steven Munro the sound designer and Mychael Danna who composed the music. This fact of acknowledging the crew highlights how important each visual detail contributes to the film. As a novel is translated to the screen many of the words must be enacted rather than spoken or written to fit the conventional maximum running time of a couple of hours.

The director also acknowledges almost the entire cast and their roles in his other films as well as their appearance in films by other directors (i.e. Maury Chaykin as the Indian chief in *Dances with Wolves*). Egoyan uses the actors' names and those of the characters interchangeably

to refer to the individuals on screen. The physicality of the actors is an important aspect of finding “cinematic equivalents” in adaptation, as facial expression and gestures can replace dialogue and express the “interior character observations and their thought processes all of which help to convey story tone as well as character psychology” (Boozer, 2008, p. 7). Three of the actresses who were cast, Sarah Polley (Nicole), Sarah Morgenstern (Alison) and Caertharn Banks (Zoe), bear a strong physical resemblance to each other and this works with the structure of return and repetition in the film. At several points throughout the commentary, Banks refers to how the actors’ physicality supplements the intention of the scene and how they resemble how he imagined his own characters while writing. He identifies only one discrepancy between his vision and the film, namely, the casting of the actress Gabrielle Rose as Dolores the bus driver, as he had conceived of his Dolores as an older woman with a family backstory regarding her two adult sons.

RB you know it is funny, of all the actors the only one who doesn’t look the way, I sort of Imagined her to look is Dolores, hmm the bus driver. I think in my mind she was older, I don’t really know how the characters looked in detailed fashion but I know what their sociology is and their age and their demographics and she was always (inaudible interruption)

AE you probably thought of Kathy Bates, right? (Audio commentary, 00:21:00)

The casting choices also draw attention to the simultaneity of the texts as a potential reader/viewer may only access either the novel or the film or experience them in ‘reverse’ order by seeing the film before reading the source novel (and perhaps while reading the text imagine

the physicality of the film actors in mind). Another possibility is that viewers of the film who were not familiar with the novel may choose not to read the book and in these cases the actor Rose will come to stand in for the “character” of Dolores. Banks observed the synergy that resulted from the relation of novel and the film. Certain film viewers who had previously read the book were shocked with the troubling dream-like representation of incest in the film, and questioned Russell Banks whether the subplot of abuse existed in the novel (which it did in Nicole’s chapter).

AE it’s fascinating to me how many people have uh seen the film especially men and don’t quite understand that that is a moment of incest or deny it. They can all see the evidence but somehow they don’t want to acknowledge what they are seeing and in a way that would suggest to me that that is how an event like that would be perceived in a community there would be a degree of denial

RB The same thing has happened with the book you know. Where people have seen the film and read the book prior and say that incest is not in the book is it? You’re right they are almost all men in fact. (Audio commentary, 00:52:34)

The scene in the film proved most controversial as it portrayed the incest between the father, Sam, and his daughter Nicole. The camera slowly pans up to reveal the father and daughter in a romantic embrace in a barn surrounded by candles. Egoyan explained in the audio commentary, that the scene was intended to capture the scene from Nicole’s point of view and the romantic fantasy was something she would have to imagine to survive the abuse. The film allowed those

viewers to 'see' something that they had missed in their first reading of the novel. The viewer feedback to Banks implied that the film rendered the incest episode more visible.

Through most of the audio commentary, Egoyan gives the impression of being an authority on the film, as he explains scenes in detail: from the motivations of the actors to the justification of one camera technique over another (i.e. the use of scope for the wide landscape shots). The audio commentary provides the director a unique chance to answer to the critics/reviews/articles that followed the release of the film. He is able to reintroduce his voice and clarify his intentions. Egoyan takes the opportunity on the audio commentary to clear up what he sees as misinterpretations of two scenes. Egoyan states that neither he nor Banks intended to suggest that Nicole has a sexual fantasy for Billy (AE, audio commentary, 1:26:30) and he identifies the stenographer's mask as many people were not sure what to make of it (AE, audio commentary, 1:35:40). Despite the highly constructed nature of film, the director later admits uncertainty as to why he chose to include a scene in which Billy offers Nicole a pile of his dead wife's clothes. The director confesses to Banks (and the viewer) that to him even as the creator of the scene, it still seems out of place:

AE Billy is giving this as a gift but it is also a transference it's a very loaded scene and I am still not entirely sure what it has to do with this movie, it is very much a scene from one of my other films, um with all this shrouded mystery and people not really being able to express themselves. And it's a scene that is not in the novel and it is a device or a sort of situation that I created and I am not entirely sure, it seems almost exactly like a scene from *Exotica* and this is where he looks most like Francis in

Exotica and um it's...I don't know how true it is to who Billy is but it appealed to me and it's there (audio commentary, 00:47:49)

The intertextual reference to *Exotica* (1994) is appropriate given that the two actors in the scene Bruce Greenwood (Billy) and Sarah Polley (Nicole) were also featured in the previous film in a similar situation of a babysitter and the father of the children. However, this moment stands out in the commentary, as Egoyan cannot assign meaning or intention to the scene. This shows a limit to the director's ability (or willingness) to ultimately define his own work. Despite the careful construction of the film, which has been discussed throughout the commentary, this statement implies that there are interpretive gaps in the film that infuse the text with a degree of openness to interpretation. Near the end of the film, the commentary deals more explicitly with the role of the viewer to elaborate the film's meaning within the fixed structure of the supposedly 'closed' text of the film. The director draws attention to the limits of his ability to control the interpretation of his text and the power of the viewer to make connections and generate new meaning

AE You know the beautiful thing about structuring a film this way and being, keeping a certain open-endedness to the form is that you allow the viewer to drift and to create their own strands of narrative and their own story. And I get so excited about that about the possibility that here I am you know imposing something which will never change. I mean these images will unfold the way they were designed.... (Audio commentary, 1:44:20)

The relationship described between filmmaker and viewer can be referred back to the idea of creating narrative explored in the film and through the process of Egoyan adapting the book. From the seemingly ‘closed’ structure of the novel, Egoyan was able to find his own resonances (i.e. *The Pied Piper*) to create a new text. The process of adaptation is valuable in its ability to draw attention to the plurality of meanings associated with a text. While the materiality of the texts will not change, new forms of engagement and interpretation transform the texts (and these meanings continue to be altered through their relation to other texts).

The ambiguity that structures the *TSH* film invites the viewer to engage his/her individual interpretations and intertextual association to other texts and other films. In the final moments of the commentary (see below) Egoyan responds to Banks’s interpretation of a gesture made by the lawyer Mitchell Stephens who raises his hands to his face and rubs his eyes. Egoyan responds to Banks in the audio commentary stating:

AE I mean it was not really designed that way but of course it’s clear that that is a way of finding your way through this final montage. It’s to me the most exhilarating aspect of filmmaking is being able to allow something which is so predetermined as film to have space within it to accommodate the viewers’ own trajectory and their own need to define the narrative for themselves. (Audio commentary, 1:45:00)

In this exchange, we glimpse the act of re-interpretation of the film by Banks (which is explored more explicitly in the next section on the *Subtitles* book). Egoyan extended the opportunity for Banks to participate in the audio commentary and discuss how he (interprets) relates to the film.

As Bank's 'reading' of the film demonstrates an action to define the narrative for himself (as Egoyan did in the act of reading the novel and interpreting it by writing the adaptation).

5. The *Subtitles Book*

Subtitles: on the foreignness of film (2004) was edited by Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour and contains a collection of essays from an impressive list of contributors. It has been described as a "tactile book" (Wilson, 2009, p. 1) whose "glossy pages replicate the dimensions of cinema frames" (Wilson, 2009, p. 1). The book was produced with a ratio of 1:66:1 dimensions which is equivalent to those of the widescreen frame. Quite literally the reader is presented with a filmic frame further emphasized by the title *Subtitles*, which denotes a textual device that is related to a film¹⁷, as a text intended to translate dialogue for viewers or to provide a written support for those who cannot hear.

In the introduction to the book, Egoyan muses that for him subtitles translated formerly inaccessible linguistic spaces that made him "feel inside and outside at the same time" (Egoyan & Banks, 2004, pp. 35-36). He also describes the seeming paradox that the words communicate the story to the viewer and challenge that diegetic space by appearing transposed over the action. On the screen, subtitles are positioned "both in contact with, yet at the same time detached from the diegetic universe, it conflicts- apparently irreconcilably-with the illusion of reality that filmmakers attempt to create on screen" (Mahlknecht, 2011, p. 77). The text appears on screen for the benefit of the viewer and is located beyond the 'reality' of the characters that do not interact or refer to the subtitles. While they are not part of the fictional world of the film, the subtitles determine how we approach the text and interpret its meanings.

The chapter was produced eight years after the film was released, and was inspired when Egoyan mistakenly accessed the *TSH* (1998) DVD menu and re-watched his own film with the

subtitles intended for the hearing impaired. The co-authored chapter in *Subtitles* is titled *The Sweet Hereafter*; it is credited to Russell Banks and Atom Egoyan (p. 33-63) and is summarized in the table of contents as “Texts from Bank’s novel *The Sweet Hereafter* are reclaimed as subtitles for publicity stills” (Egoyan & Balfour, 2004, p.13). The use of the term ‘reclaimed’ implies that through the adaptation Banks lost his ‘original’ text when Egoyan adapted it to film. This sentiment is echoed in the use of the term trivialize, in the following passage from the introduction to the chapter:

It was disorienting to see the images I had wrought from Russell Banks’s book played back accompanied by words. The subtitles somehow seemed to trivialize the film’s literary source. While I-the filmmaker-certainly wanted to instil a sense of trust in the viewer-to take them somewhere-the source book would have certainly taken them somewhere else (Egoyan & Banks, 2004, p. 36)

While the chapter appears to bring the adaptation full circle, returning the words of the novel to the page and enabling Russell Banks to *reclaim* his source text in the form of ‘subtitles’. The chapter establishes itself as a third *TSH* text in the chain of signification and definitively displaces the distinction between an original and derivative. The new chapter challenges the definition of an ‘adaptation’, it simulates an imaginary film that as per the definition of film adaptation (provided on p. 12 of this RP) relies on previous written work for some of its material. However, the chapter reorients the practice of adaptation as truly collaborative with Egoyan and Banks co-creating the text by contributing material aspects that are visual and verbal. The chapter was conceived as an intermediated text as was constructed from the existing media of

photographs selected by Egoyan and extracts pulled from Russell Bank's novel. The existing materials were combined in the final presentation of the chapter to create a new text. It is an example of the intermedial phenomena that Rajewsky (2010) defined as intermedial reference:

The given media-product thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another conventionally distinct medium (through the use of its own media-specific means) depending on the specific form of intermedial relations, such interplay may be experienced as a synthesis or fusion of different modes of medial articulation, but also as an oscillating 'in between-ness', something actually situated between two or more medial forms (Rajewsky, 2010, p.59).

The chapter references several medial forms and explores how the literary and filmic components are presented on 'screen'. The pages show an imaginary subtitled film within the static pages of a book that highlights the influence of both co-authors: as the novelist Banks (literary) and the director Egoyan (filmic) are simultaneously represented. The discussion will unpack the two media systems represented in the chapter: The Visual (photographs) and The Verbal (subtitles).

5.1 The Visual Component of the Photographs

At first glance the photographs on the page are reminiscent of film stills, they appear to be copies of film scenes that are frozen in mid-action. It is significant that the images presented to Banks were not film stills from *TSH* (1997) but photographs taken on set by Johnnie Eisen. The use of on set photographs subverts the hierarchy of source and derivative, as the images never existed as part of the 'original' film. The photographs feature the actors/characters on-set

but abstracted from any recognizable locales or existing scenes. They provide a glimpse of the ‘backstage’ of the film set and were not intended for the public. They are exemplary of the residual material (much like the oft forgotten screenplay and shooting scripts) from the process of making a film referred to in the statement below as “discards”. The director described the process of selecting the images in the introduction to the book:

What constitutes a “good image”? In taking still photographs on the set of *The Sweet Hereafter*, photographer Johnnie Eisen took some “accidental” shots of the characters staring into his lens - discards revealing stark portraits of the characters in Russell Banks’s novel. For these images Banks created “found” subtitles from his original text that could reflect the emotional effect of the depictions. By taking these leftover images from the machinery of a film production (images that would otherwise never be used or seen), the writer is able to reclaim his authorial authority through a series of imaginary subtitles (Emphasis added, Egoyan & Balfour, 2004, p 25-26)

The use of the term accidental shots in the above description seems out of place when the photographs of the characters are obviously posed, with the camera intimately close to their faces as they stare into the camera lens. This intimacy is the very reason that the photographs could not have been scenes in the movie, and also proved un-usable for the promotional shots. The proximity of the gaze as they confront the viewer transgresses the diegetic frame. The characters in the photos demonstrate an awareness of the technology in front of them and thus they transgress of the convention of the objective camera by looking directly into the camera lens.

The characters are aware of the camera and of the act of being looked at; they respond by looking back at the viewer.

The photographs are presented as a series and blank black pages separate one from the other. These blank pages are suggestive of the space between each frame as film runs through a projector. The blank between images evokes the movement of individual frames/pictures in cinema and how they give the illusion of a seamless moving reality. The separation of the characters also suggests the format of the individual chapters dedicated to individual characters in the novel. The individual photographs of “stark portraits of the characters in Russell Banks’ novel” suggest a return to the format of the book from the mixing of point of views incorporated in the structure of the film. The “film” captured in the images of the chapter is the type of literal adaptation that Egoyan chose not to make. As the characters transgress the diegetic boundaries and address the viewer directly to communicate their interiority as they did in the novel. This observation is echoed in Egoyan’s description regarding the appeal of the images as being due to their apparent difference from the ‘look’ of the final film:

Johnnie Eisen - who had been the still photographer on almost all of my films - had taken hundreds of images. Most were very close in composition and tone to moments in the finished film. What I found most exciting, however, were the images that could never be used for publicity purposes. In this selection of photographs, the actors were looking directly into the lens - sometimes on purpose and often unintentionally - to form a series of extremely intimate and completely inadvertent portraits (Egoyan & Banks, 2004, p. 37)

It is noteworthy to compare how Egoyan refers to the individuals in the photographs. In the introduction to the book Egoyan refers to them as “the characters in Russell Banks’s novel” and in the above excerpt Egoyan switches to the term “the actors”. Introducing a further level of interpretive ambiguity as to whether we are intended to see the images as a representation of the characters of the novel, the characters in the film or the actors on the film set. The individuals depicted on screen occupy a dual situation as actor/character (the ambiguity described earlier in the RP in reference to the use of Sarah Polley’s voice as character and narrator on the soundtrack) and further as they are related to the character in the novel/character in the film. Alluding to the simultaneity between the two texts, the photographs were considered a device that would allow Banks to ‘reclaim’ his authorial position and reintroduce writing as an important element of the film medium.

5.2 The Verbal Component of the Subtitles

The placement of the selected extracts at the bottom of the page and superimposed on to the photographs establishes them as subtitles and not captions. The spectator is cued to approach the work from a cinematic/filmic frame, because subtitles are related to film and serve to translate or transcribe (for the hearing-impaired) the dialogue or narrative action.

The convention of the subtitle is subverted by the presence of endnotes that appear on the end of the text in each one of the photographs. An endnote is a literary device, which alerts the reader that there is further information available that would not fit on the page or in this instance to the full extracts that do not fit at the bottom of the ‘screen’. The cutting down sections of the extract-text suggests the imposed restrictions of the amount of text that can be shown onscreen and the conventions dictated by the practice of subtitling. Subtitling requires a particular type of translation that must respect the maximum of characters that can fit on the screen and move

along at a pace that allows the reader to read from the bottom of their screens and take in the action as it unfolds. As only a sentence can appear along the bottom of each photograph, the last pages of the chapter pages 58-61 offer the full extracts selected by Banks. The additional information is available in its entirety “off screen” (similar to the paratexts appended to the DVD version of the film such as the director’s commentary). It is reminiscent of the cutting of sections from the ‘original’ text in adaptation to make it fit within the conventions of narrative film (i.e. maximum running of a couple of hours).

In all of the portraits in the chapter each character has his or her mouth closed as they all look directly at the camera while the presence of subtitles suggest the presence of dialogue, narrative or music. Somewhere in the frame someone is speaking and the text in the third person providing descriptions of the characters suggests that it is a narrative observer. The subtitles refer to a verbal action that is not presented physically in the frame. The text recalls the voice over, that most literary device used in movies. The subtitles in the chapter do not translate the story but provide descriptions for the characters that appear onscreen (which would be redundant in a film as the “telling” of the description would be characterized in the narrative through physicality, gesture and voice). The use of the third person singular, in many of them, suggests the literary context, as in a novel. The characters’ descriptions suggest an all-knowing narrative voice, and in this way Russell Banks is reintroduced as the authoritative storyteller by framing the various scenes.

When Egoyan re-watched *TSH*, he found that the words transposed on the screen “somehow seemed to trivialize the film’s literary source” (Egoyan & Balfour, 2004, p.36). It was not the images themselves but the combination of the text and the images. The self-reflexive consideration of his treatment of the literary source provoked an additional adaptation. Egoyan

selected on-set photographs “with the idea of inviting Russell Banks to react, years after the film was completed, to this gallery of faces” (Egoyan & Balfour, 2004, p.37). The use of the term *react* in the above quotation is reminiscent of Egoyan’s statement on the voice-over commentary that

In this whole process of adaptation I’m trying to find images which will affect me the same way as passages in the book will though sometimes I am not using the exact location for instance this carwash is not in the book uh but what is very important with this is the this feeling of entry that we are going into something (AE, audio commentary, 00:02:20)

The director started his conceptualization of the film from the text and he requested that Banks complete an alternative version of the film by reacting to the photographic images with text from the novel. Egoyan extended an opportunity for Banks to reclaim his authorial authority through a series of imaginary subtitles. As described in the *Subtitles* book, Banks was invited:

To choose extracts from his novel to subtitle them. I was intrigued by the alchemy that might occur when the source writer is able to use his original words to respond to performances and images interpreted by others. These are subtitles to an alternate version of the film (Egoyan & Banks, 2004, p. 37)

But *TSH* chapter (2004) uses photographs that are not original as they do not reference any actual scenes in the film. The director provides Banks with a ‘new’ material that resulted from the film

production. Banks is responding with selections from his novel to the “performances and images interpreted by others”, essentially Banks is responding to the process of adaptation. The extracts are referenced in the chapter by the name of the character and the page (i.e. Stephens 129) rather than to the novelist himself. By offering up the extracts from the original novel, Banks is co-creating a third *TSH* (chapter) text and subverting the status of his “original” novel through this act. Just as Egoyan subverted his auteur status by turning from original writing to adaptation with *TSH* (1997).

5.3 *TSH* Slippages

The repetition of the title *The Sweet Hereafter* for novel (1991), film/DVD (1997/1998) and book chapter (2004) is suggestive of the slippages between them. While the *TSH* is articulated as novel, film and chapter, the meaning of the *TSH* is constituted through their relation.

The ‘alternative film’ presented in the *TSH* chapter (2004) deconstructs the screen as a two-dimensional surface that is able to offer the viewer an immersive experience of seamless reality through the combination of visual and verbal elements. While the pages of the chapter initially resemble film stills, a re-reading reveals the visual and the verbal are related in unconventional ways. The chapter references the film screen while simultaneously drawing attention to the limits of the representation. The perceived failure of the chapter to fully integrate the “novelistic” and the “filmic” through breaks with convention (i.e. endnotes as subtitles are too long for the ‘screen’) is an intentional demonstration of the relation between the texts and draws attention to how ‘literature’ does seem to fit on the screen (as words are transformed into dialogue or voice over).

The chapter makes more explicit the role of writing and literature and the images on screen. *TSH* chapter (2004) also makes viewer aware of the subsequent (literary) transpositions of the text that do not appear within the novel or the film, as Atom Egoyan's *TSH* (1997) exists simultaneously as screenplay, shooting, script and DVD. Authorship in film is not a simple concept as the filmic text is produced within the convergence of several simultaneous levels of the industrial, economic and aesthetic. As the audio commentary revealed the text that we recognize as the film is the sum of all of the elements of writing, production, technology, culture and surrounding paratexts/intertexts that constitute it. It becomes evident that what constitutes the *TSH* text is continually reoriented through a complex system of associations, references and resonances.

The texts are reoriented in a position that is collaborative (intertextual/intermedial) rather than hierarchal (fidelity). *TSH* (2004) chapter is posited as a third *TSH* text, whose mixed origins displaced the temporal hierarchy of source novel and derivative text. *TSH* chapter (2004) drew material from both the novel and the film, and its use of on-set photographs rather than fill stills suggests an opening up of what constitutes the film text itself (as the residuals of the process proved a valuable source to accompany Banks's extracts). This is indicative of the impossibility of identifying an original text or a literal translation of an original, as all texts are constitutive of other texts.

TSH chapter (2004) is highly self-reflexive as it draws attention to its mixed mode of production. The self-reflexive nature of intermedial texts:

Becomes particularly evident when hybrid media forms of art and media are used, which heighten the degree of self-reference: the switching between or among various

media not only forces its viewing of rather participating audience to make comparisons among them but it also exposes the particularities of the various semiotic systems that each media embodies (Ljungberg, 2007, p. 292)

The self-reflexive nature of the mixed text shifts the role of the audience from viewing to participating. The interpretation of the hybrid media form is a process of moving between texts and media systems to trace the relations between them. The meaning of the text depends on the viewers' recognition of established codes and conventions and their subsequent subversion or transgression. The work of the viewer comes in their ability to assimilate the apparent differences between semiotic systems. The viewer is implicit in "making the narrative his or her own" defining the text not only the sum of its material parts but deeply imbricated in the processes of interpretation through watching, listening, reading.

Conclusion

Egoyan chose to subvert his auteurial personae by highlighting the collaborative and intertextual work involved in filmmaking and specifically adapting a source text to screen. The director consciously shifted his position from auteur to co-author by challenging himself to write for the screen using existing material. The displacement of the conventional understanding of the director as auteur is in line with his highly self-reflexive oeuvre. The three articulations of *The Sweet Hereafter* text prompt the viewer/reader to consider not only the transformation of narrative across media but also the concept of authorship and ownership of the text across these transformations.

The research sought to examine the transposition of a text as it is moved from one medium to another. The intermedial articulation of *The Sweet Hereafter* as novel, film and

chapter provided an understanding of the traces between the texts and how meaning is generated through their relation to each other. The self-reflexivity of the texts deconstructed the process of adaptation by explicitly highlighting their source material while drawing attention to the impossibility of literal fidelity between them as they moved between media forms. The process of adaptation from novel to film was reoriented as collaboration through the co-creation of the audio commentary and the chapter. The co-authored chapter in *Subtitles* (2004) proposes a more complex understanding of conventional definitions of authorship in film.

The work suggests that adaptation studies must move beyond its own literary bias as new modes of ‘adaptation’ are emerging that are not novel to film based. The three articulations of the text suggest the simultaneity of multiple narratives rather than a hierarchy understanding of an original text and/or author. This leads to further consideration of the concept of adaptation within a new media environment, where the pastiche of content would suggest that most texts meet the definition of some form of ‘adaption’ as they are based on material from other texts. The three articulations of the TSH draw attention to the notion of authorship within the co-production and co-creational practice inherent in the transposition of texts from one media to another

¹ Intermediality “refers to relations between media, to medial interactions and interferences...that can be

² Egoyan was born in Egypt to Armenian parents; his family immigrated to British Columbia when he was three. Egoyan later moved to pursue his studies at the University of Toronto.

³ See Tschofen & Burwell (2007) for a comprehensive list of publications,

⁴ Egoyan has additional credits in his filmography for editing, music and acting

⁵ The coherence throughout the films can also be attributed in part to the continued collaborations with the same crew over several films, the cast of regulars includes the “director of photography Paul Sarossy, composer Mychael Danna, production designer Linda Del Rosario, editor Susan Shipton, sound designer Steven Munro” (Romney, 2003, p. 9). Egoyan is also well known for casting the same repertoire of actors who reappear across several of his films, the most notable is his wife and muse Arsinée.

⁶ The concept of diegesis “was originally used in narrative theory to distinguish between the particular time-space continuum created by narration and everything outside of it. For instance, jazz music in a nightclub scene is diegetic, when the film includes shots of the musician or band” (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010, p. 5)

⁷ The non-diegetic refers “to elements made meaningful within the film but located outside of its storyworld” (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010, p. 5)

⁸ Egoyan has completed three adaptations to date; *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) was immediately followed by *Felicia’s Journey* (1999) based on the novel by William Trevor and then *Where the Truth Lies* (2005) based on the novel by Rupert Holmes.

⁹ The order in the novel: Dolores (p. 1-36), Billy Ansel (p. 37-88), Mitchell Stephens, Esquire (p. 89-158), Nichole Burnell (p. 159-220) and Dolores (p. 221-257).

¹⁰ The concept of Bakhtinian dialogism refers “to the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the matrix of communicative utterances which “reach” the text not only through recognizable citations but also through a subtle process of indirect textual relays” (Stam, 2005, p. 27)

¹¹ Media borders for Rajewsky (2010) are not strict delimitations but awareness of the conventions “that is, specific medially-bound frames which are called up in the recipient, but which can also be modified and displaced, not least by the medial performance itself” (p.61).

¹² Media Combination is the second intermedial phenomena where “the various medial forms of articulation are all present in their own materiality and contribute to the constitution and signification of the entire performance in their own media-specific way” (Rajewsky, 2010, p. 57)

¹³ The film also won the International Film Critics Prize and the Ecumenical Jury Prize at Cannes in 1997 (Wilson, 2009. P. xi)

¹⁴ These are further distinguished between *peritexts* “elements as the title or preface and sometimes elements inserted into the interstices of the text, such as chapter titles or certain notes” (Genette, 1997, p. 5) that are appended to the text and *epitexts* “the distanced elements are all those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under cover of private communications (letters, diaries, and others)” (Genette, 1997, p. 5)

¹⁵ The poem was featured in glimpses during a scene where Nicole reads the children a bedtime story; the viewer is now offered an interactive version of the illustrated “Pied Piper Poem” with the text in its entirety and the ability to click through using the arrows on the screen to advance the pages.

¹⁶ Egoyan has provided audio commentaries for nine of his twelve feature films-notable exceptions are *Exotica* (1994) and *Where the Truth Lies* (2005)

¹⁷ According to the *Oxford English dictionary* (subtitles) are “captions displayed at the bottom of a cinema or television screen that translate or transcribe the dialogue or narrative”.

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Appendix 1

Voice over commentary

Welcome to new line home videos audio commentary of *The Sweet Hereafter* with director Atom Egoyan and author Russell Banks (intro music)

Atom Egoyan (AE)

Well, the first images that we see are very mysterious, they're patterns of light set against wood and um these two motifs of light and wood are going to be repeated throughout the film, umm, a lot of the domestic interiors in the film are wood lined and certainly the idea of light and where light comes from and both in a literal way and how that is used metaphorically is really important to the movie. This is also an important scene because it has a lot to do with disorientation and positioning as we're seeing the camera panning we are assuming that we are going along a wall but then it's revealed that we are actually looking at a floor and that there is a mattress where we see a sleeping family and this is a very idyllic image um a very inviting image and there is a child that will recognize later on. But this image is very, it's sort of the emblematic image of the movie notion of a place where things are fine balanced and where there is a sense of peace.

Russell Banks (RB) A before and after story

AE that's right

RB In the novel it establishes it in a different way, obviously, with the children and the school bus picking up the children one by one on an ordinary winter morning

AE and that is very much in this whole process of adaptation I'm trying to find images which will affect me the same way as passages in the book will though sometimes I am not using the exact location for instance this carwash is not in the book, uh, but what is very important with this is the feeling of entry, that we are going into something and that there is a, what I love about a carwash, umm, is that for the period of time that you are in a carwash, you feel somehow that you are assigning responsibility to this machine this machine is leading you through, the car is something that we have to, uh, pay a lot of attention to in our normal life, because it's either something that can, either take us somewhere or it can kill us

RB (interjects) also, it is also a rite of passage he is passing out of one world into another

AE exactly

RB it is a baptism

AE (repeats) it is a baptism! That's right. Because, it is a tunnel and also it is wet

RB yeah

AE and it is a movement towards the light

RB When you first meet Mitchell Stephens in the novel he is inside a car too looking out at the world outside

AE exactly

BR entering the village and the world is outside his car. And he has to exit from his car in order to enter the village but he must leave where he is safe and sound and where he knows the rules

AE Now um, this is a scene where, we're disoriented for a moment and we are suddenly, you know the sense of peace that we created with Mitchell going through the car wash is suddenly very rudely, ah, interrupted and what I found kind of interesting here is this idea that even in this place where, uh, Mitchell is for that brief moment trying to find some sanctuary he's even there his daughter Zoe is able to access him so he can never get away

RB yet he carries his backstory with him

AE that's right!

RB It also has the effect of separating the village from the larger outside world so that when we deal with the village we are dealing with something so outside of time outside of ordinary felt time, alright, this is ordinary felt time

(00:05:03)

AE Right (pause) there is also this feeling of suspension, I mean I think it is latent, the car is no longer moving, ah, we'll find out why, but there is this feeling that there is something quite surreal suddenly

RB I love that, now the music is key to this, you're holding him and then you release him into the story

AE right

RB there is a little hesitation in the opening, I think that is a novelist trick as well to hold it for a while and then to release the reader into the story as you release the characters into the story

AE I mean, I think that is the thing that I found most inspiring from the book is this idea of people controlling narrative or giving narrative away or handing narrative to someone else or creating their own narrative. And that, trying to find a cinematic equivalent. Now this is a scene which is again not in the book, but it is trying to set up a very important aspect of the novel which is this relationship between Nicole and her father, which in the book is, she was a beauty pageant queen, and, uh, I've decided to make her instead an inspiring sort of folk, rock musician

and this is her practicing, um, before a big concert she is giving at the county fair, um this evening

RB Is that part of the Canadianization (both laughing) of the book?

AE Canadianization, that's right she is a young Alanis Morissette (both laughing) um, but again at this point again we start doing very odd things with time. This, this, this scene is taking place a year before where we're about to find ourselves in the next shot when Mitchell arrives so and yet I really feel that what I love about using this sort of structure is that we can just drift, we just have to allow things to go. And now in this scene this is a very important exchange because as Nicole is looking over at her father she could be addressing a boyfriend um and I purposefully tried to cast Sam as being a very young father that there be confusion up until this point, there is no reason for you to think that Sam is Nicole's father and umm, the tension and the body language between the two of them would suggest that they are young lovers and um then surprisingly as they are crossing here she mentions the word daddy. You could almost choose not to hear or think that it is some weird nickname they have.

RB what you are doing with time though is very novelistic in a way, the novel can cue you to time jumps just by saying 'I remember' and then jump right into the scene, you have to cut it abruptly but the freedom to do it is very much a novelistic technique

AE Well I, I really do feel that the great thing that you have as a filmmaker is that the moment people see a projected image they believe it's real that it is happening, and they want to believe that and there is an immediate attachment and identification so if you begin to disrupt that through placement, uh people will go with you for a while because there is the immediate need to absorb, and, this is a very funny moment because it is the absolute nightmare, here he was in this sanctuary this place where he was finding some refuge and suddenly it becomes absolutely nightmarish the car is stopped, he is being completely overwhelmed

RB it is like Buster Keaton

AE yeah, that's right (both laugh) uh and then there is, we don't, where we are suddenly, we were attached to the carwash, and there is this tracking shot full of menace we hear this electronic buzz this hum and then we realize it is actually feedback coming from an electric guitar. And, that guitar will figure later in this film this whole office will figure later in the film but right now we don't know where we are and there is a sense of menace, tension and it is a very creepy shot and it almost anticipates something horrific and in fact what we are about to see is the central horror of the film, um, we, uh, come into a body shop and we see in the background you know the carwash and we hear this water and then Mitchell catches sight of what will be his key piece of evidence which is the shell of this bus, which has been destroyed

RB But you now you've done something here, that is necessary and imaginative at the same time where you have distanced the viewer from the horror of the wrecked schoolbus with a pane of glass, by looking at it through a window it achieves a kind of distance that is not in your face

AE right

RB next time we see the bus it is in tact and um

AE (interjects) yeah, here suddenly we are miraculously a year ago, perhaps and this is again this is the first time we see Dolores, who is the schoolbus driver and we see Sam and Nicole and this is um just moments after her rehearsal is finished and um, Dolores who is really in some ways the um, the um, the organizing and most loved character in this community, um, talking to the kids about how they should behave and this is actually a very important section because this is the only time that we actually see the community. Actually

(00:10:40)

RB the whole town, yeah

AE this is the closest we get to seeing the whole town, I mean the rest of the movie we are just seeing fragments, people in their homes, but this, these first fairground scenes are the only time we ever see a communal activity and they were really important to sketch out. And now again, we are going back in time, sorry flashforwarding

RB flash forward

AE flashforward in time, this is the classic cinemascope stranger arriving into the town shot, this is very inspired by *Bad Day at Black Rock* or Tracey er ah Spencer Tracey arriving into town, it's like every Western epic has this moment and uh, the scope format really allows us to indulge in that a bit. And one of the ways of really emphasizing that is seeing someone dwarfed against landscape, and that is one of the visual concepts of the film, is that at all times we go to back to this incredible landscape through these aerial shots and sort of showing what it permanent set against this trauma that the community is suffering. It is the closest that we come to a sort of spiritual transcendence in the film, is the actual um, the use of light and use of the typography of the mountains and the location of these people within that and the reassurance that one feels, um when the setting is so clearly defined

RB you know what, I don't know if it is (pause) but I wanted to ask you, when you first bought the option for the film and you were starting to develop the, you came down to the Adirondacks and visited the house and we went around to the different sites where I had imagined the story taking place, the physical locales, the mountains and so forth. And I have often wondered, because the film looks so much like what I imagined if on that visit you were sort of creating a kind of visual tableau for yourself, then when you went looking for location you were trying to corres... (trails off) find locations that corresponded to what you had visualized on that weekend

AE absolutely, because I mean, one of the things when we doing the location search, I first thought of the Rockies but when I went to the Rockies it was almost as if those mountains were too overwhelming and I wanted something that had the feel of the Adirondacks, something that, where there was a milder range and something that was more human

RB some of it is very specific like the fairgrounds it was alarming to me when I walked onto the set, like ‘Good god it was entering my own dream in a funny way

AE right

RB and then the motel with the

AE Well we designed it to Freak you out Russell (chuckle)!

RB well I really appreciate that (laugh)

AE the whole thing (pause as both laughing) this whole project was just to disorient you

RB my psychiatrist thanks you

AE that’s right (both laughing), ok so this is, uh where we see Mitchell at work and this is one of my favourite scenes, it’s probably one of the most comedic scenes as well, as it is a great reckoning that Wendell gets to have with the townsfolk and here is this man who comes in to really get a sense of what is, what is the glue that holds this community together. Who are the bad apples, who are the people to watch out for, who are the people who are going to help his case and who are the people who might potentially you know...to avoid, and the moment Wendell get’s a sense that this is what is going on, and he just has a field day and we can understand quite immediately why this marriage between Risa and Wendell is not working out, and it kind of sows the seeds to what we are going to see with her affair with Billy Ansel. This is one of my favourite sounds effects coming up, it is not an actual location recorded sound but it is the sound of Mitchell crossing out this family’s name, the moment he realizes what their history is and there is something just incredible about the process of banishment, right here, it is like, that’s it! Their out (both laughing) yeah like their gone

RB like God and his little black book

AE That’s right, that’s it, banished, there is something like, I find, from the book this idea of banishment is almost biblical I think to the, to the position of what it is, how it is that Mitchell can enjoin people and also reject them and the power that he is invested with in a scene like this is, has the demeanour and aspect of a priest really he, um the film makes a very conscious choice not to show clergy, and so and he is the only source

(00:15:16)

RB he is wearing a parsons suit

AE that is right

RB but he is also satanic, he is also, he is also a kind of demonology that is being worked out

AE (repeats line from film) “that is good Wendell” the way he says that is good Wendell and knowing full well that this is probably a man who has been humiliated most of his life and what this effect will be and there is this other great moment coming up, where you can just see Mitchell’s excitement and how he has been able to heat this guy up and thinking about him as a possible witness seeing him on the stand, and this is like very funny here and you know he almost can’t contain himself from breaking out laughing, it get’s a bit absurd here with the figure of Maury Chaykin just lumbering over him, Maury is an actor that I’ve used a number of times, one of my favourite actors and great friend as well

RB oh he is great, so physically present

AE yeah, and we can always remember him from *Dances With Wolves* and the scene with Kevin Costner where he folds the paper up and chews it and eats it, there is something incredible about his madness, which is at once very compelling. You see he is just brimming, he can’t say anything wrong about the Ottos, the Ottos seem to be

RB (interjects) he would love to!

AE yeah, he is just looking for something to say and the moment we see this picture and we hear Wendell going (repeats line from film) “yeah they probably smoke weed” we um

RB but and remember the picture, connecting to the poster behind Nicole’s rehearsal which is only a few

AE (cuts in) yeah, right and this art is very important, we had a, we were working with a photographic artisan and it is again a way of knitting the community together, were we see as Russell said that backdrop behind Nicole and then we see it on the wall here and it, someone who threads these things. And now again Mitchell’s world has been interrupted by this call. And this is a very important sequence for me, because it, there are so many things going on, you have Mitchell trying to communicate with his daughter and then you have the Walkers tearing each other apart behind and you can see here that Mitchell wants to lose himself into the Walker’s hell, right, that somehow, you know he can’t deal with daughter and this shot says it all, the planes of action and then you have the calendar on the wall, which gives us a date December 1995

RB lead us into the future

AE and suddenly we are going to cut to November 29, 1997

RB see, that is an interesting composition too, because you have three blocks of time represented, there on the left you have got the past, Mitchell Stephens past blocked out, the middle you have got the present time which is this ongoing quarrel with the walkers and then at the right you’ve got the calendar indicating, the future cuts to the calendar a year later

AE and suddenly we are in another womb-like atmosphere, this the first class cabin of a plane and again things have broken down and things aren't working, again technology has failed Mitchell and he is suddenly given a gift from an attractive passenger seated beside him and she knows who he is and he pretends to know who she is and is trying to figure out who is this familiar face and then she uh, basically says that she was the daughter of one of his former partners and um this is a very important line that I developed in the film, it was my attempt to try and find a voice that Mitchell could speak to, because of the way the novel is constructed we have a number of people telling their stories in first person narrative and Mitchell story was so important and I could not find anyone in the town that he could befriend, so I created this character Allison, who is uh a repository of his past, uh and specifically of Zoe, knows that Zoe was a drug addict, knows that she was trying to find help and he lies to her and says that Zoe is better and we find out that gradually he can't keep that lie. Again a time cut to that morning, umm we see, we see the Ottos who we've heard mentioned in the scene with the Walkers now dropping off their boy there, and the moment we see Wanda's artwork, we make that connection again between the artwork we have seen on the wall and this wild sort of photograph that Bear is expected to take to the school Bazaar. And, it's a linkage, I mean the challenge here was to create a sense of community through these small details that would link people. And, um here is Arsinee Kanjian, an actress I worked with many times who happens to be my wife and who actually gave me the book as a gift. And so I owe a tremendous amount to her

(00:20:58)

RB and so do I

AE (both laugh) yeah and so does Russell

RB you know it is funny, of all the actors the only one who doesn't look the way, I sort of imagined her to look is Dolores, uh, the bus driver. I think in my mind she was older, I don't really know how the characters looked in detailed fashion but I know what their sociology is and their age and their demographics and she was always

AE you probably thought of Kathy Bates, right?

RB yeah

AE And in a way when I read the book that is, I thought Kathy Bates, and that is

RB yeah, because she has older children

AE right

RB her backstory involves her relationship to her two sons who were grown and out in the world, from whom she feels somewhat alienated. So each of the characters is meant to have some kind of connection to their own children that is under duress

AE yeah, and there is no real mention in the film of her two children, so in a way I almost prefer that she hasn't had children and that the only children that she has are the ones that she takes to school every morning, um there is this, this is again another um, this is Mitchell again in another wood panelled home, um the um, trying to get as much evidence as he can and here is a classic shot of him looking around at details, looking at Abbott the paralyzed husband seeing the Canadian legion badge on Abbott's uh chest, knowing that Abbott must have been uh a veteran, um the detail of the way Abbott's paralysis is affecting his hand, something snapped back. This moment where Dolores is giving her reality, so here we have a sense of his need to kind of like lose himself into the detail of other peoples lives

RB Well he is an oddly reactive personality, in order to manipulate people he has to react, he has to find out how he is supposed to act in their context

AE right

RB and then he manipulates them by creating a kind of shadow self

AE and here again he is losing himself into another world, of this, Dolores had just mentioned the photographs of the fair last year, and this is the fair that we saw, the scene that we saw Dolores taking the kids all, this is Bear with the rabbit, we saw all this scene happen, we saw this shot that we see now Dolores and the bus, we saw that morning when we saw them at the county fair, so there is a sense of association, she is lost here is a great thing here where she says he would have made a wonderful man and she suddenly recognizes that Bear is gone, because up until this point in the scene she has referred to him in the present tense, and uh it's a very powerful moment that Gabrielle has, again Gabrielle Rose an actress that I have worked with on a number of my films including family viewing. Umm, Sarah Polley, ah is now, the last time we saw her was in the county fair, we see Bear in the background.

RB and now we see her as a little girl

AE and now we see her as a little girl, and um over this shot we hear her singing, her uh cover of *Courage* which is a song by the Tragically Hip, a really great band, and it's the song that is going to mean a lot in the film and uh it is also the scene that connects, uh that connects the bus with Billy Ansel, this is the first time that we see Billy and this is Billy's early morning ritual following the bus to school and uh, it's a...this is Bruce Greenwood who was the lead character Francis in *Exotica* and whom no one recognizes on this film, it's incredible it is such a testament to Bruce I think, that he has been able to completely transform himself. This is a very haunting shot, um seeing the kids wave, this was a very difficult shot to do obviously because we had to set up a whole platform on the back of the bus to get this pan and we uh, it was a miserable grey day.

(00:25:00)

RB This is a great use of the bridge as an image well literally making a bridge as well

AE yes, this is really a funny sort of moment, where Mitch goes ‘ah, oh I will help you’ and starts carrying the tray into the room and gets caught up first of all asking about Billy possibly having a criminal record and then lingering on these images, again it is evidence that he sees

RB (interjects) I love too the homely details the way that you managed to finish the tea cosy and the pictures on the refrigerator

AE (returns to earlier thought) and suddenly we have this whole sense of who Lydia was, this woman that we never see, we know that she used to sing in the church choir, she was a great mom, you know it is a really important little window into this character that, this absent character who of course has had a tremendous impact on Billy’s life, here she is saying that he, that Billy was always thinking about Lydia and then suddenly we see Billy uh in the car, and we assume that that’s what he is thinking about... but of course what he is actually thinking about is calling Risa and making plans for that evening, again we have this incredible scene where it’s all done by phone, you know where these connections are made by people who are miles apart. You know I think that technology is something that I have worked with in a lot of my movies, in terms of the way that it has in enhancing and bringing ourselves together and on the other hand separating us, but in this film I have pulled back a little bit and used it as a device connecting through wires, Bruce Greenwood is actually missing that tooth by the way

RB (inaudible mumbling)

AE yeah he got into a bar brawl after *Exotica* and actually had that one tooth knocked out. So we have coming up one of my absolute favourite transitions in the movie which is again a shot that goes from the ground to the sky and it is a very important gesture, we see it repeated throughout the film but I think this is just an incredible moment of sound design and camera being sort of in unison. We hear the sound of the flute and we hear this humming this incredible drone as the camera lifts up and cranes to the sky and this drone reaches a peak and then it dissolves into the hum of the airplane. And it actually makes possible what would otherwise be a completely audacious transition and uh, Steven Munro is the sound designer someone I have worked with again since family viewing. I think he does brilliant, brilliant work, which of course you are able to hear in full stereo discrete I think on this version with the five channels, right?

(pause) So this is the scene where in this conversation we can see Mitchell deciding whether or not to continue the lie and its some thing that, you know, as Alison is probing him, he makes a conscious choice that he is going to tell the truth, and , well right after making that choice, you can see that he is not sure, he’s not someone who is able to confront his own truth because he’s so, he’s so bent on revealing the truth of others in other situations and he doesn’t, he’s not comfortable in his own skin obviously, but also in in being honest. He can’t look at her. I mean he’s completely um distressed by this and tries to shift the topic of conversation to the meat, saying that the uh, there’s something wrong with the meat and uh calling attention and anything to escape his own reality, who he is, he is someone who needs to distract himself.

RB Well so his relation to the truth and what you were saying earlier is true. His relation to the truth is that of a person who wants to control truth

AE right

RB um, and of course, it's not something that one can control, especially the truth of his own past and his own relation to his daughter. That's why Alison provides him with such, you know, dread and anxiety whenever it occurs

AE right and he has to leave. I mean he can't even, he can't event stay here. I think the other thing too in casting uh, this actress Stephanie Morgenstern, there is a physical resemblance to to to um Sara Polley, and that and also a physical resemblance to his daughter and all, you know, somehow the conflict (confluence) of these three images is what makes it all the more disturbing. So, we have this transition here from um Mitchell looking at himself to remembering this moment again, we don't know, I mean, I suppose we know intellectually when the plane is taking place in 1997 two years after, but in this point its kind of confused and I love that feeling that you're just drifting time and um as Mitchell looks at himself in the mirror, and remembers this moment uh with with the Ottos coming up... we're not quite sure where we are and I think that's one of the things I really hoped to achieve in this.....

(00:30:16)

RB look at once again you have this composition, this tripartite composition you've got three fields; the present the past and the future implied

AE Right

RB as before only now it's horizontal instead of vertical breakout

AE Yes, and this is the A frame the last time we saw this A frame was the uh as the Ottos were ah delivering Bear to the bus. And lets talk about the use of music here because I think Michael Dennis provided an extraordinary score. The early music, these medieval instruments, are just uh, they create a sense of timelessness. And this. It almost sets it as a fable, from the Middle Ages. And the last time we saw Wanda was that happy morning uh as she delivered Bear into the bus and now she's crushed and. You can see here how, how Ian Holm, gives this incredible performance. On the one hand, he's so compassionate and and and and sensitive. And there's this sense of him being very discreet and understanding how how how awkward and how delicate his imposition is. And yet look what happens when he

RB yeah

AE the moment she takes the card, look at the slight smile on his face as he's about to enter. He's like he's he's made his first victory. Look at this! Just that little timeless smile

RB that's it. That's great

AE and you know that's it. Strike one, and he's inside. And he's inside this cocoon. I mean the Otto's have are obviously are people from a large city who have made a retreat into this town

and have created this this this beautiful little womb. And uh . This womb like thing has been emphasized by the use of pink insulation, exposed insulation on the walls and so it's very fleshy. And uh. We see this upper bunk where Bear probably slept. And this moment where um this is a great this is, Wanda is a photographer so we see these images of Bear and we're heading up to one of my most disturbing compositions, I suppose, where we see these two men looking at each other and both of them being looked at in turn by Bear. And it's like the ghostly image of Bear in the background whose confronting both of them and its uh...it's a very haunting uh composition. and we hear the uh...now for those of you who are incredibly, um, specific about detail, yes its true that the that the kettle you are hearing is not uh a whistling kettle. Uh um and I

RB It also whistles in a very timely fashion

AE Yes. But, but uh, I've had a number of people say, "Oh that must be ah, you must be uh, trying to say something by having a whistling kettle that's not a whistling kettle." No, it was just a mistake. That's it. Sorry. I'll admit it. What's happening is that we were editing on an avid and I didn't see the detail of that and by the time we did, it was too late so...Now this is an incredible dialogue because, Wanda, played by Arsinée is completely she's so she's so adamantly uh, hostile, to what Mitchell is proposing. And the way in which he is able to gradually change her mind by trying one tactic, realizing it's not working and then trying something else and going in for the kill. And the body language that he uses, and the uh. This is when Mitchell is most excited. Look at him here. He's so uh, he's so he's humming with excitement and adrenaline because he realizes that he might lose this case.

RB He's like a terrier

AE (repeats) He's like a terrier. He's just like you know, he knows that this is exactly what he wants. He wants someone that is hostile to him and there's no greater pleasure he gets than in turning this person around. And he knows what the challenge is and he's in for the kill. One of these great things about Scope too is the ability to have on the one hand the close up, and yet have all the space in the frame to look at details in the background. Um and its just a wonderful way of informing and entering into someone else's experience. To have the ability to, to see their face with such detail but also to let the mind wander or perhaps not just to absorb you know the details of these photographs, the the colour of the wall, um the instruments behind Mitchell's you know uh head. The green, the trees. This is uh um, the moment where Hartley enters into the fray, and um,

(00:35:00)

RB again too, you, you've surrounded these people with the clutter of their lives. These are lives being lived in a day to day ongoing way. They aren't just staged lives. You give it that sense of texture that I love. And the pattern of the story evolves out of it, the clutter, the apparent clutter, the superficial clutter of their lives...(inaudible comment) with the pictures, the books, the artifacts that surround domestic artifacts.

AE And this is where Wanda basically says what the audience is thinking which is you're here to save us but I don't believe you and what Mitchell does is quite extraordinary he crawls to them (chuckles) and he takes this almost this canine sort of position of passive aggression and as he enters in here he is going for the kill, he is using an image that he knows is going to completely disarm her, which is that of everything, it is every parents worst nightmare and dream, that if, where he says "if everyone had done their job your son would be safe and in school this morning" the moment he says that you know he has pushed the trigger, and um she's completely vulnerable to him, and all that talk you know about corporate mismanagement, cynicism is which he thought would be the way to enter into the Ottos in fact didn't work. And he is using this totally different tactic which is direct, emotional and very very in some ways obvious, but irresistible.

RB Now they are being crushed by a collapse of linear time and expectations and that is the button that he pushes

AE right

RB He brings it up, it is the same button that happens with Dolores. (repeats line from film) "He would have been a wonderful man" - that is about time and observation

AE right- that's right

RB This is the observation too, he would still be going to school in the morning

AE that's right

RB That is what is crushing them

AE And an an and the understanding that that future is gone... and now here is an extraordinary moment for him, because now he remembers something of his experience where he says that he is there to protect all the other children and suddenly the music floats in and there is this pause and his mind drifts. And we're right there with him and his daughter and we're understanding, again why Mitchell is there. What it is that he is trying to comfort in himself and the music is the Pied Piper theme floating in, you know this ethereal wind instrument and here she says it 'are you expensive', he's he's and he makes his little gesture with his hand so much as to say that's it. And he goes up in this, you can see him trying to contain his excitement as he negotiates the terms and when um, Wanda says 'do you have the contract with you' it is this incredible release of energy, umm

RB you do something here too, which I love, you use his diminutive size

AE yes

RB it makes him both ferocious and uh, highly energized and so forth. Instead of hiding or disguising the fact that he is a small man it becomes a real storytelling tool

AE yea, yea

RB I love this next couple of sets here

AE yea, this wonderful shot that we just grabbed when we were out, I mean it is an incredible testament to Ian Holm that he was able you know at the age of...I don't know how old he is now, that he is was able to run across this ice field (AE and RB laugh) but it is

RB the urgency

AE it is a wonderful moment, actually it is one of my favorite shots in the film, him running to get the contract from the car. As we again go back to him speaking to Alison, now here is a good example this is a... what he is saying here is lifted directly from the novel and it is such a important sort of passage. And in the novel he is telling it to the reader and again here he is talking to himself essentially but you can't do that in a film, you can't just have a character talking to themselves. And in a way, Alison becomes this extraordinary listener, I mean all this young woman does is, is, is be witness to his story.

(00:39:40)

RB with a novel you can't have a character talk to himself either for three or four hundred pages you've got to invent a listener, the listener happily is the reader but you've got to have some sense of constant, some sense of connection between the speaker, the first person speaker and the reader or the listener. So in that sense I became Alison myself, I was the reader listener in the writing of the novel. But in a film you've got to represent the reader visually by putting it on the screen to get that monologue out.

AE and I think this is the moment where he decides he is going to tell the next story the spider story, there is something so dramatic about the way he turns around

RB he tests her

AE he tests her, yea. And now we are going to another odd time, this could be even further back, this is, this is, this is...this is maybe the earliest time period that we have referred to in the film. Um, and it's and it's a night that Nicole comes over to babysit and we go back to the electric guitar that we saw at the beginning of the film that the feedback was coming from and we recognize that this is the garage, that uh, that Mitchell was wandering through and we connect that now. These pieces begin to fit and it is a very satisfying little montage. We see

RB it is interesting too, you said that this could be several different time frames...locations in time. In the novel that particular scene, which is about to come is described in a subjunctive case and it would happen like this

AE right

RB it is a typical event in the way that it is represented in the novel and your transferring it to this and the time line of the film you let it float more or less in the subjunctive case

AE that is very interesting and this is very much, this whole film was a study of cases and of tenses really, I mean the use of the subjunctive tense, the present tense

RB future tense

AE future, in French you would say the plus-perfect or the, you know it is all these different tenses and the language is constantly shifting either through the way people describe it or the way that it is literally you know represented and that to me is the great challenge of film language, is to somehow find this cinematic equivalent of these literary tenses

RB yes, but what makes it necessary, in this case is that is the theme of the story too, that is the driving theme, the question of time and what happens when you break time

AE right,

RB what happens to the psyche

AE right

RB the community and the family when you break time through the trauma of something like this, losing children

AE so we just entered into this affair (chuckle) umm, where um this is so, to me it was so liberating for me to shoot this stuff because it was just a really simple affair that Billy is having with Risa. Um this is our first introduction to the Pied Piper, which um become such an important umm layer of this adaptation and it's uh Nicole reading the Pied Piper to, to Billy's two children and there is this incredible moment I think, where, where Mason asks a question which is absolutely crucial to what the film is about which is about the nature of the Pied Piper and a question that only a child could ask. Which is well self-evident as we hear Mason pose the question. But to me it is about, it's about what defines action what it is that informs an extreme action. And this idea of Nicole coming to terms with an action that is fuelled out of anger and rage is such an important foreshadowing of what she will do at the end of the film, umm and that fact that it is knitted in with the Pied Piper at this moment is essential and uh has a huge effect in the development of what is about to happen, um a year from now, a year from this night and um

RB this predicts her role as the Pied Piper

AE That's right,

RB you have no way of anticipating or expecting at this point we would think that the Pied Piper is anybody is Mitchell Stephens

AE right, I mean the Pied Piper came to me really because I was describing the novel one day to a friend of mine and he said that sounds like the modern version of the Pied Piper and I just had goose pimples and I went back and read the Robert Browning poem and it was just, I mean we'll get into it later on but it is so eerie how there are so many resonances in that poem that reflect on Russell's book, uh Russell sort of said that it so audacious because it is such a literary device that he could never use in a book

(00:44:50)

RB it is too literary to use in a book (both laugh)

AE that 's right but it was really perfect for this, this is an odd moment coming up because it's Nicole in Billy's house and it's uh, it's, the children are asleep and she is taking off her clothes and trying on these other clothes

RB she is trying on a woman's clothes

AE yes, she is taking off a child's clothes and trying on a woman's clothes and it is quite a mysterious shot, we don't quite know where to locate it. Umm and we hold it and it will become clearer in a moment and it's a particular, it is a device that I created and umm it has an odd echo later on.

RB the intercutting too between this sex scene and the eroticism of the other scene sets up the dysfunctional eroticism of the next scene to come

AE that's right, it's very much a scene from *Exotica*, you know that feeling of that passage, that feeling of some sexualized ritual that's gone wrong or there is something askew

RB but the three together are necessary when you are cutting from the hotel to Nicole trying on the women's clothes in a slightly mysterious context to the scene which will follow. Here where the two of them become blended in a way, which is finally extremely destructive

AE that's right and again this, the end of the ritual of this affair that these people conduct. There is a great moment here where you can see how Risa just snaps out of it, Billy's going to the door he is about to turn around and there is this moment of surprise as he sees that Risa is already putting on her underwear just like that. You know it is like the evening is over and she is just

RB that fake smile of hers

AE and uh it is just an affair and there is nothing else to it. And this is now going back to that scene where we see that she is changed into a woman's clothing and she has a pile of clothing which we gather belonged to Lydia uh Billy's wife and Billy is giving this as a gift but it is also a transference it's a very loaded scene and I am still not entirely sure what it has to do with this movie, it is very much a scene from one of my other films, um with all this shrouded mystery

and people not really being able to express themselves. And it's a scene that is not in the novel and it is a device or a sort of situation that I created and I am not entirely sure, it seems almost exactly like a scene from *Exotica* and this is where he looks most like Francis in *Exotica* and um it's...I don't know how true it is to who Billy is but it appealed to me and it's there

RB it felt right to me, there is in the book there is the problem of how to dispose of her clothes and it is mentioned several times whether

AE right

RB through the church sale or whatever

AE yea

RB and someone's artifacts, someone's clothing his wife's clothing is a problem and it is totally consistent with his character which is

AE I mean the one thing that is really important about that scene is that he gives her this tape and again it is a way or reinforcing the community you know that is sharing his music with her or that she is someone who likes music. So that is an important gesture

RB you know that he is also contrasted with Sam, he is the good father versus the bad father

AE that's right

RB you need that polarization to understand Sam and the world that Sam is in and understand your particular moral perspective on Sam and the good father

AE and this is the bad father scene (laughs) and this is I guess the most controversial moment in the film because it's the scene, it's the scene where we realize the true nature of the relationship between Sam and Nicole and we, from the moment that we hear the Pied Piper, we hear the music and we hear this crackling of ice in the trees it is very ominous mood. And, we know that and there is also something really creepy about the way that Sam is carrying this guitar case, um it's as though, um that he is know possessing her creative need though he has somehow stolen that from her and is conducting it. And there is something in the way that she looks at him, uh the way she, that poem is brought in and the sense of children being lead to oblivion or innocence being taken away.

(00:49:44)

RB she also looks drugged almost

AE and drugged, yea there is just something very creepy about this moment and um the moment where they are going to the barn and the poem is talking about entering a cavern, um, it anticipates what we are about to see. I really perceived that this ritual started off with Nicole

playing the guitar for her dad in the barn and that overtime it became sexual and that is was this gradual blurring of this relationship. And um this inability of Sam to um to set parameters and really the psychological you know effects this has on Nicole, now this is again a moment which is a heightened sense, really what I was trying to capture here, Nicole if she had a camera that could float this is how she would have seen this moment, this is how she would have pictured it, and it is really her point of view of that moment as it was happening. And so on the one hand it can seem consensual, it is also unrealistic everyone know that you do not put that many lit candles in a barn full of straw but it creates a danger and also a sense of it being a heightened quite unreal event.

RB In the novel she describes the scene with her father as if it were a dream and at the time she literally thinks she dreamed it, that it literally did not happen and um of course the nature of the relationship that they are both participating in a fantasy

AE right

RB that the father has created for the daughter and that the daughter has walked into

AE and by juxtaposing that moment with, again this movement from dark to light and the camera craning up to this dark beam and then cutting to this expansive white is a shock that really knits the moment of that catastrophe at the personal level in the destruction of a relationship between father and daughter and then to the destruction of this terrible accident. We're about to anticipate

RB which you're distancing yourself very carefully here by posing her between Mitchell Stephens

AE it's fascinating to me how many people have uh seen the film especially men and don't quite understand that that is a moment of incest or deny it. They can all see the evidence but somehow they don't want to acknowledge what they are seeing and in a way that would suggest to me that that is how an event like that would be perceived in a community there would be a degree of denial

RB The same thing has happened with the book you know. Where people have seen the film and read the book prior and say that incest is not in the book is it? You're right they are almost all men in fact.

AE yea, it is fascinating

RB that did not really happen did it

AE yes, this to me is one of uh so much about responsibility and about being a parent. You know this idea of letting your child, you know how Nicole becomes this guardian angel, you know how she has this boy who is slightly retarded sit next to her and uh, it's a moment of anticipation and

here is where we lead right into the accident and Dolores, here begins to breakdown. And this is an incredible shot because we're, this is Mitchell watching Dolores but we don't cut back to the reaction from Mitchell. So we contain this shot as it drifts up and we see the out of focus shots of all the kids set against this wood wall and the music begins to drift in again. And this is all somehow at a subconscious level it's Mitchell's point of view. Mitchell remembering and Mitchell imagining this scene and um it's not something that any viewer would ever pick up literally but it is very much a design of the sequences, is, whose point of view are we seeing them from as we get to the point of the accident itself it becomes really quite crucial. Here this wonderful image to me of Nicole trying to reassure this young boy and um we cut to Billy, um and seen in a sweeping shot following the bus um along this valley. And we hear this dirge and the music at this point is almost a funereal dirge and we can anticipate the horror that is about to happen

(00:55:20)

RB In the novel this is where it breaks away from Dolore's telling and picks up at Billy Ansel's telling

AE right

RB as well as the actual accident

AE that's right, which is exactly what we are about to see, I mean we see his two children waving to him from the back of the bus and um then the whole accident is first glimpsed through his reaction at this moment, his disbelief. Uh we have the bus crash through and then this whole sustained passage where we are hearing the bus crashing we are hearing the kids screaming but it is all contained from Billy. And then we cut to this extraordinary image which um I will confess at this point is a computer generated effect, there is no way we could have done this where we have a specific moment where you think everything is okay then you hear this terrible crack and the bus goes through the ice an image of such horror and devastation. And then to go from this image to the image of the sleeping family that we have seen at the beginning is uh is shocking because we associate this image with comfort and sanctuary and peace. And then we now understand that it is an image from Mitchell's past

RB and Mitchell is about to deconstruct that and take it apart

AE right and um an image at a time where he seemed very happy but which is and again look at this whole story. I means, this is a remarkable tour de force performance by Ian Holm

RB I just love this scene

AE you're seeing really one of the finest actors in the English language tell this story where he never looks at the person he is telling the story to and he seems to be lost in the fantasy of this moment

RB and he never looks at the viewer

AE (repeats) and he never looks at the viewer

RB he looks in

AE and this is an event that is drawn almost word for word from the book. It's one of the stories which I really left um in tact. And it's a story that he deploys with Alison and it is something that he needs to express and yet he does not ever quite release

RB the context in the film is right after the accident and we're most aware of his relation to the story the larger story through the accident. And in the context of the novel he is talking about, he tells this story as a way of explaining how he feels now and he is involved in one of these suits and engaged in this kind of pursuit and it is when most this adrenaline is rushing so he goes back through that association to his own past.

AE and for the first time we see an image actually from his subconscious and these are actually the two images that we ever see of Mitchell's own personal history. This image of, this pieta like figure of his wife and daughter and the horrifying image that we're about to see um later in the story as he remembers the way his young daughter was looking at him.

RB he is able to divide himself

AE it's scary, it's scary

RB A powerful man and frightening man at the same time, that he can be the good dad and he can the surgeon with the knife in his hand

AE That he is so capable of analysis so capable at one level an understanding of his own behaviour and actions and yet he is so helpless. You know, he is so, that is what is so frightening about this character, that, how can someone who is so capable of controlling other people's narratives be so inept at finding closure to his own.

RB I love this too, at one point you begin to realize that he is really good at telling stories but he can't resist using that ability to control the emotions of the listener the next one and you can see her start to react, he takes it, he ratchets it up another notch.

AE Well there is that whole thing, Russell that we have talked about before about lawyers as being storytellers. The whole idea of being a successful lawyer is being able to have a story that people believe more than someone else's.

RB more than their own

(00:59:51)

AE (repeats) more than their own, in this case and here is this image that for many people is the defining image of the movie coming up as he remembers driving uh his daughter and uh singing her a lullaby and having the instrument with which to perform this tracheotomy and uh, it's uh, it's incredible actually that we were able to find this little girl who I said it's my son's best friend at nursery and she just understood somehow, uh she's three years old but she looks at the camera with such an expression of intensity. I mean how could anyone ever forget that and uh, it's uh, she wasn't aware as we were shooting it that there was a knife beside her, and it uh... I think she would have completely freaked out if she knew but.

(pause)

And again here, this, he has brought Alison to tears, Alison just wipes away the tear and look at this moment where he goes 'huh' I mean he knows exactly what the effect of the story is on her without even looking and he is able to just end it like that. And it's a very contrived moment and then it sort of culminates in this very weird physical gesture where he strokes his neck, which again is just so theatrical. And we're not quite sure why we have heard what we heard, why he's had to tell it. And yet there is something, so fundamental, and here is this image again and this image again in the story in the book we have him going back to the cottage at night and there is this great moment where he burns the mattress that the spiders were in. But here we have this image again that he remembers again seeing his wife and daughter as the camera lifts up to light and to sky and again that gesture of transcendence. And then this moment resolves into the moment where Billy looks down and identifies his, uh, the bodies of his two kids and this is an incredible moment for Bruce, where just here is the nod where he says lower the blanket and there is the nod where he says yep those are his kids. And um

RB he mercifully

AE It is a heartbreaking moment, you know... ah up until the last minute it was funny I remember Russell I showed you this cut on the editing system and we had the kids we actually had the kids, the figure of these two kids and we decided that, remember that last day to take it out.

RB it was too horrific

AE it was just to horrific and

RB it is all in his eyes

AE and then we this moment here were he does recall, we have the sound of the train and uh again the sound it built on this haunting transition where we remember this image from Billy's uh past with the two kids playing with snow balls and then running past him, it's again this moment that he will never forget. So we go from this image of his two kids that Billy will never be able to raise and to him in this hotel room. This room that he has come for countless nights of, of a

RB easy intimacy

AE (repeats) easy intimacy with Risa and fun. You know just something to escape the pain of his life. And suddenly to see Risa again in this setting um in this room that they have shared so many times but now to see the pain, to see their body language so completely different. I mean before they were so free and easy,

RB now they are wrapped, each in their own station, in their own cell by themselves

AE and to hear Risa talk about Mitchell and Mitchell's belief that something was wrong with the bus. And Billy saying that he serviced the bus and there is nothing wrong with it. And to hear, and to hear Risa say that she needs to believe that there, and there really is a statement here of Billy's sense of fatalism,

RB there is a radical difference in their characters that suddenly come forward. When where she is groping after fact and groping cause and he is willing to accept

AE that's right

RB that is was a cosmic accident

AE you realize that these people whose intimacy was entirely sexual have nothing in common with each other whatsoever. And uh, there is this moment where, again it is a very similar shot to how we left the room before and uh Risa played by Alberta Watson says is it true that you let her wear one of Lydia's old dresses. And again her desperate need to find some explanation and she is even able to go into the supernatural here. That somehow that brought bad luck. And this is one of my favorite lines when Billy says 'seems to me that you are looking for a witch doctor not a lawyer' and they may be the same thing and it anticipates you know Billy's inability to want to find any other reason except the fact that it happened. Just his complete, and there is something heroic about his ability to just go on. To be so, to be so, uh

(01:05:35)

RB you've got an interesting moment here, there is an old saying that says when you can't believe in one thing you believe in nothing or you believe in anything. He's the man who believes in nothing and she's the woman who is willing to believe in anything.

AE right. Now this is Russell's great moment!

RB my shining moment

AE there he is Russell Banks!

RB (inaudible as they are talking over one another)...my great acting (both men laughing) that is where I learned that I never want to act.

AE Well I think it is such, the perfect line for you Russell

RB “the mind is kind”

AE (repeats) the mind is kind, and now we leap ahead. I mean um, Nicole has been in physical therapy in the hospital for a number of months and it’s

RB springtime

AE uh, the season has changed. And uh, it’s uh, there is a remarkable moment here, where where Sam is talking about this ramp he’s built and he’s just so nervous, you know bringing her back into this house and um you know just, just, just rattling on and on.

RB the nattering on of a guilty man.

AE that’s right. A green ramp and remember that color, uh because it is about to change. This is the first time that we have seen the Burnell home and there is this incredible passage where we see the slightly sort of rundown and tacky sort of setting and then opening up into this glorious fable like princess den that um Sam has built for his crippled daughter. And uh,

RB the art design of this particular sequence is really pleasing to me because it is so close to the way that I had imagined it in the writing of the novel. That you would go from this kind of funky cluttered lower middle class household into a little magical chamber that the father has built for her which reflects in the movie back on the magical chamber that she imagined in the barn

AE exactly, yea, and it’s so

RB this is clearly a child’s room

AE that’s right

RB that was some kind of a place for a tryst, this is a place for a child

AE And this is an incredible moment here where she asks to have the lock put on the door and then chastises Sam um for putting the lock too high. And just the body language with which he sort of retreats to fix it immediately. I mean as opposed to putting in the lock in the proper place he has to

RB this is also where you see a shift in power

AE right

RB he is suddenly for the first time aware that power is flowing in the other direction now and hers, her end of the story now, not in his and only she knows it

AE this relationship between the two sisters was a bit more elaborate in the first cuts of the film but we cut back on it, um, the, this gift is Nicole's first introduction to Mitchell. And you can sense that the parents are very unsure as to how to approach this. It's a, they know that it is going to be a loaded issue, um they intuitively understand that Nicole is going to resist. And um, there is this great little moment that the mother has where she tries to ease the idea of the computer in by mentioning that it is something that Nicole can use to help compose her songs, which is, of course is the absolute insult to Nicole. The mother never understood and will never understand what it is that she needed to do and why she had to compose the songs. And the songs are very much for the private mythology that she has with her father, which has now been ruptured. And uh, this is a very odd moment too because we see Mitchell looking down at the sleeping figure of Alison and this next shot is almost a predatory shot. Where there is something that we think might be happening which is sexual but we realize that it is just a fatherly gesture of wanting to cover her body. And that ambiguity is so much a comment on the scene that has preceded it. And what we're about to go into. Now, Sam has of course painted this a glaring red

(01:10:24)

RB you know that scene with him and the coverlet and drawing it up over her shoulder and, is reminiscent of the earlier scene with Billy Ansel handing the clothing over. One of the things that you are doing throughout the film is a very important kind of defining of the lines between a custodial protectiveness male relation to a female child and where it gets blurred and the consequences of the blurring of the lines.

AE right

RB and in these two instances and there are others that do exactly that

AE right, and here is another gesture which defines something that Sam is about to say, something and the way that Mitchell just silences him uh with a gesture of his hand and um without even looking at Sam really impresses Nicole. Uh, you know Nicole seeing her father silenced. This is coming right up in this moment where Sam tries to conclude her thoughts and take her narrative and silenced. And look at the way that Nicole looks at the father after this moment and realizes that he has lost his power and that Mitchell is somehow controlling the shots. And so this leads

RB and she

AE (repeats) and she

RB this is where they both become the intellectual center of the story

AE right, 'what is it that you want me to do for you' (inaudible as comment is muffled by the dialogue of the film)

RB and the way that she narrows her eyes

AE that's right

RB she is going to use him and he is going to use her

AE You know the amazing thing about the construction of any sort of dramatic scene is that it is really about defining territory and you know, how you use the camera and how you use um the actors to somehow establish the shifting relationships to power. I mean here we have a shot of Ian Holm as Mitchell and by framing let's say the family in the background in this uh photograph. You are able to kind of show that he has now assumed the patriarchal role

RB he supplanted

AE this is, this again, this incredible moment uh where off-screen we have Sam ask when do we get the money. And just look at Ian Holm's response, it's like this absolute disbelief and shock and then (laughs) like how could you bring that up. And then having to somehow deal with it in a very condescending patronizing way. And then through Nicole's response, then look at that greedy sort of rubbing of hands is almost over the top. We go from Nicole's complete disenchantment and attempt to reorganize who the father is, to this one image of the interior of the bus. This moment of complete catastrophe and

RB in that sequence too you watch her going from being a child to an adult

AE yes

RB just the transition is just that scene is extraordinary in that way

AE Now this is the scene that could probably come from one of my other films (guffa) of the character videotaping and trying to make a record

RB see the novel is more an eighties document I think he uses a Polaroid

AE that's right, and he is actually outside. He is looking at the curb, right?

RB no he went to the garage

AE that's right, that's right

RB he was taking pictures with his

AE that's right, that's right. And again, this to me is an extraordinary moment. Billy pays reverence, this is the only moment really of someone trying to pray in the film when he is looking at the back of the bus and he wants this moment to himself to mourn his kids. And eh to have it interrupted at this moment by Mitchell is just such a transgression uh and there is palpable violence in Billy as he is about to assault Mitchell. And Mitchell again is probably so

excited by this, you know the adrenaline is just streaming through him as he feels the threat of a physical violence. And he, you know again, you know this man knows no bounds. What a challenge to try, to try and enjoin Billy, I mean at this point when he hands him the card, I mean his heart is just racing

(01:15:35)

RB this is the strongest character he has to confront other than Nicole. The one that is most grounded in reality.

AE and what is interesting in the book is that he actually does not want Billy to join his case. I mean there is that whole weird thing that happens in the book in fact, he is so manipulative that he tries to set up a situation where Billy can't join his case because he wanted to have Billy serve, he wants to have Billy serve as a witness, so his purposes are so complex. And really, quite in some ways incomprehensible, you know in terms of how what he really wants through this scene. You know in a classic dramatic sense where you are trying to figure out what a characters wants, I mean what he wants when he says 'let me, let me, you know, let me use your rage, and emm and it's like ah. And then to have this interrupted by this phone call. And there is this great moment that Ian has, Ian Holm where when he gets the phone call from his daughter. At first it's a complete disruption, he immediately you can tell thinks of a way that where can use it as a device as a prop. Here where the phone rings and he is like, and he says that's my daughter and suddenly you can see him of wait a second I can use this. Here, and he suddenly makes it into a theatrical device that he can use to tell his story. And his story here it's so completely forced somehow that it does not work with Billy at all. And uh, um it is the one moment in the film where I think uh Mitchell allows himself a complete indulgence. Where he, it is a very theatrical moment but the theatricality doesn't really work. Billy leaves the scene and he continues talking to himself and it's a, and it's a moment where you realize what a weak character he actually is or how, how disembodied his pain has become.

AE and here we have this, the uh the distance is really reinforced by time zone here. His daughter is calling him from one end of the continent and totally different time zone than the one that Mitchell is in. And so this play between light and dark

RB Just fascinating to me because you cutting away from the story of which is he in total control of, to her story her reality of which he has no control over. And she just takes it one more step and takes it entirely away from him in the next sequence here.

AE right, where uh there is this great moment where she confesses that she went to donate her blood and that they would not take her blood because she tested positive and you know uh Mitchell who is suspicious uh asks for a blood test because and the daughter is so outraged that she has this great line that you know 'I like when you don't believe me daddy, it's better that you don't believe me but have to pretend that you do' which is just it's the most excruciating thing I could imagine a father having to witness is a relationship that is so, that's that's where she knows him so well and yet there is absolutely no comfort to be drawn from that in fact all that means is pain. You have this great moment where you hear her disembodied voice over the

image of her as a child and somehow the eyes of this child are completely deadified with her voice. And it's a haunting moment because um there is a collapsing of time. As you mentioned before Russell and then suddenly to see her eyes now as a child vulnerable needing his help and his inability to give her any comfort

(01:20:24)

RB it is so complicated in certain ways watching my own daughter's face

AE yes I can imagine. It's Caerthan Banks playing the role of Zoe. And this whole use here of the sound of breath. Of them hearing each other's breath and I think that really informed the type of wind instrument that we wanted for the flute. Which is, we wanted to hear, we wanted to hear the notes of a flute but we also wanted to hear the breath.

RB and thinking back to the knife

AE the knife, yea

RB and the tracheotomy and such

AE and is here again, you know the uh, this use of landscape as an escape. As a temporary sense of grounding and placement and again then again the wood background reinforcing that. Um, and, this was a very complex scene to shoot. This is one of the toughest scenes that the actors had especially Ian as we were rehearsing this. Cause it's a, what he is doing in fact here is really odd. He is, he is listening to her doubt and he suddenly gets this idea for an entirely different suit. Umm, which has nothing to do with the class action suit that he is proposing but it is to do with personal damages. And it is just an act of complete desperation, umm it's a and you, he is trying to control himself but he is obviously about to break, you know and that of course being that one of his key witnesses is expressing doubt which is something that he can't uh can't accept. But also, it is about reaching out really this scene is about understanding someone else's pain, and he is saying here that the only way that people are going to understand your pain is through a process that I can initiate and if you don't accept to join that no one will understand who you are or why you are feeling what you are feeling. And suddenly who comes to her protection but Abbott and this is such a extraordinary moment. Because Abbott who is played by David Hemblen again one of my actors that I have been using for years and a good friend of mine. But this is an extraordinary moment where Abbott tries to defend Dolores and there is this moment real moment of comfort and contact between two human beings one of few moments in the film really. And uh, uh

RB she knows his secret language

AE (repeats) she knows his secret language and

RB this whole sequence is about storytelling too and being threatened that he is going to lose control of the story so he aggresses her

AE right

RB and then she is forced to be defended by her husband to hold onto her story and at least that only the people of her town, her community can know her story.

AE right

RB they will judge her

AE right

RB it is an interesting

AE and what is really perverse, is that moments after telling this woman that only he can understand her pain, that he is the only person who can you know somehow deliver her pain to other people. We have this scene where we see Dolores in a deposition and again the time reference here is really odd. We have just gone from a scene right after the accident to this scene, um, which is, you know um in the bus and then going to a scene in the deposition, which is months after the scene that we have just experienced. And Dolores giving a litany of all the names, the children's names and this is really such a harrowing moment for her. Where the camera, the movement of the camera is really designed to reinforce her sense of testimony, you know. To see her figure floating as the community hall where all these events and you know celebrations and various you know community oriented celebrations you know were conducted and do that sort of drifting around, you see the figure of Mitchell, this dark foreboding shadow. The music and the text here are integrated and it's almost like an aria here, an aria of, of a despair and loss and to see Dolores deliver these names to see the way she is clutching her handbag, you know she is so in need of support and comfort as she breaks down. And then we cut to Mitchell who in the scene before was telling her that only he can understand her pain suddenly completely cold and detached, playing with his wedding ring and then going in this analytical, surgical way 'then what happened'. And it is almost brutal in its exposition. (pause) This is the scene of great reckoning this is Billy driving to the Burnell's home. And uh, it's a, an extraordinary moment. We uh, uh see Nicole's point of view as she watches Billy entering the house. And what's about to happen is really, I think one the key moments that informs her decision. Um, Billy is the, someone that she projects a tremendous amount into. I think a lot of people have misinterpreted this as a sexual fantasy that she has about Billy which was never really my take. I don't know if it was yours?

(01:26:50)

RB No

AE Uh, Russell, Billy, a bit of transference there. Umm and again here there is a tremendous tension in the, in the choreography. This triangle and this, this crossing of the arms, you know that they don't really want him inside that house.

RB so what Nicole is doing in these several different scenes, the ones preceding it with Mitchell Stephens and this too, is that she is groping her way toward a moral center, she wants to have a moral position that she can live by and she has obviously abandoned the one set for her by her parents especially her father, and she has moved on first to Mitchell Stephens you see the narrowing of her eyes on him and now she is moving on to Billy Ansell who is perhaps even more rock steady, um, um moral center for her. I mean she is looking to become a free person and the meeting of the truths is shifting around and she says I won't lie

AE and I think what happens in this scene too, is in seeing her father trying to defend his position uh and to see Billy's position. You know there is something quite extraordinary as Billy tries to remind them of the community they had but then later on makes this incredible offer, which I will talk about in a sec. Here we have, when Billy at this moment says I was behind the bus and saw it happen we know exactly what he saw in the way that scene has been presented we are in his experience at that moment. And Bruce Greenwood here is, it is an extraordinary sort of scene for him as we see the two parents foolishly try and defend their actions and explain their rationale for going with Mitchell Stephens. And we can Billy's complete incomprehension of this, and now Nicole listens in and what she hears is so extraordinary because she hears her father say that they need money and Billy says well there was money that you got-that we all got from the case. And then Billy says I will give you the money that I got from my kids. And, when Sam says that is not enough, I think it's very clear to Nicole at that point that the father's reasons are far darker than anything she had imagined. That the need to win this case has nothing to do with a material need for money to help her but rather to give closure to his whole history that they had. And it is at that moment that she understands that this case is not about money but rather it is about people denying and trying to camouflage and trying to reward themselves for something that they have no right to claim. And that Nicole will only be used once again, her body is being used uh as a prop, as a device, before it was used as a means of the father being able to satisfy uh his vanity and now it's being used for something else. This is an incredible exchange between Nicole and Billy, a bonding you know. And uh look at Sam here resolving to go and confront Billy and the way he comes out of this, this shed of a home and says to Billy it's about time that you get on with your life. And Billy could literally make the decision to go running back and beat the shit out of this guy but basically just decides to

(1:31:13)

RB not worth it

AE (repeats) not worth it. And uh this leads us into this, I think one of the most crucial scenes in the film. And this is Sam coming in to tell his daughter about the deposition that she has to go to tomorrow. And maybe, this man is in such denial over their history that he can actually say to her that you know, you seem quiet or you don't seem like you have a lot to say. And to me what's incredible is that everyone, this whole film is about the politics of denial and revelation. You know the whole legal process is about that and uh in a way what is incredible about what Nicole is about to do is that she takes the structure of the system that has been designed to reveal the truth to reveal her own truth. And there is such a clarity and simplicity, and here is the moment

where she confronts her father for one last time when she says daddy do you remember this, do you

RB she is actually offering him redemption

AE a chance, yea she is saying if you can address what happened between us. And you see her rage is not such much at this point about the father actually did but rather his denial of it.

RB yea it is about who he is

AE yea who he is. He cannot confront that and there is this incredible triple take that Tom McAmus the actor who plays Sam does here, where he looks at her, looks away, and looks at her again so much as to say that me might confront it and then right here decides he can't. And then pats her on the leg that he knows is paralyzed (chuckle) where she has no feeling and says I am not going to deal with this.

RB changes the subject

AE she shifts away and she has to make a decision what is she going to do tomorrow and over this we have the song playing from the radio, *Courage* which is playing in the background and suddenly it comes up and it becomes in some ways that anthem of her decision And it's ah, this next shot is also quite extraordinary because we see um the father positioned in the driver's seat you know the position of power

RB as if he were alone

AE and that's right you think he was alone and as the camera slowly tracks along the car. Umm we realize not only who is in his mind but also who is really in control

RB looking over his shoulder

AE right, it is one of my favorite shots in the film.

RB (whispers) like who is driving whom here

AE And this also, I have always found this shot very moving as well, something about the way the father is carrying the broken body of his daughter and also at this point the broken spirit. You know that is his daughter and this is the moment before she is able to empower herself. And um there is an extraordinary passage that occurs here where this community hall this site for probably all of Nicole's birthdays, her

RB school graduations

AE school graduation, all these community events were held in this place and now as she makes the passage across the hall, the hall where she had her school dances and where she played

through her childhood and adolescence. We hear the Pied Piper come, through these trophies, these emblems of a community's glory suddenly resolve into this deposition. And uh, we have this moment where the child, the one, who was left behind lame now has her moment of reckoning.

RB and Sam if off, sits in the corner

AE that's right, and again the geography here is just so important. Now we have the prosecutor who is just going through the motions, we have this image that a lot of people are confused by- it's really actually the court stenographer, that mask that she is wearing is an actual stenography mask and people had all sorts of questions

RB that is quite common, you seen them all the time in the States as well

AE It is a very common thing, I have just been very surprised that some people just don't quite know what to make of it. If you'll notice in the background the guitar um on the stage which is uh

RB is that planted?

(01:36:23)

AE that was planted, whenever you see a guitar it is really quite carefully planted, that is probably the stage that Nicole first sang on. And there is something again about the camera movement here, the way the dolly works, there is, there's, there's, the idea here was to reinforce the idea that this whole process is so designed and there is something so calculated about it. And yet it's moving towards something which is so completely unexpected. And you can sense that in the way that um the prosecutor suddenly shifts his attention when she says that there was something unusual that happened that morning.

RB here is where you have the dueling stories come out

AE right, now you'll see in the uh these two shots coming up with Nicole and Mitchell, watch Ian Holm and he, as he sees he case begin to unravel and he shifts his attention to Sam. They both are looking at Sam at this point and he realizes in the way that she is looking at Sam that there was one thing that he did not check (laughs) and as thorough as his case was

RB he is losing control of his story

AE (repeats) he is losing control of his story, and he sees it in the way that suddenly Sam has positioned himself and certainly in

RB the glee in the other attorney's eyes

AE (repeats) the glee in the other attorney's eyes and there is this moment here where she recalls the Pied Piper. And she used it to reinforce and power-empower herself and give her the strength to do what she is about to do. Which is dismantle the case and to somehow reclaim her own authority. And there is a beautiful smile here of acceptance and um, of almost compassion. And there is something wistful and yet she is saying to her father, you know that you had this chance and there is almost a, something forgiving because she has had to create the terms of that herself. She's had to since the father was incapable of defining that, she has to imagine that he will understand this. And it is a very complex series of emotions that she is going through

RB Sarah is brilliant in this scene, she is absolutely wonderful

AE and Ian just realizes that he's lost it, there is nothing that he can do. We were using just to get technical for a second here-this wonderful slant focus lens, which allowed us to keep both Sam and the prosecutor both in focus. There is a sense of regret but necessity and as you said Russell she is grown up. This is the scene where she has become a woman so it's very empowering as well

RB you can really see in this scene and the couple of scenes that preceded it with Sarah that Sarah as an actress matures almost in front of your eyes in the same way that the character matures and goes from being a child to a woman with total authority over her own life. Uh Sarah is doing the same making the same transition just watch her take charge of this character.

AE well I think it's funny because this was so much of Sarah Polley's career up to this point has been Sarah Polley being herself, you know in a number of sort of series and film roles that she's played. I remember this scene she was very nervous about because she really understood that she had to act and uh it was a very um, this is part of the Browning poem that we invented it is not in it and the part where she says and why he lied, he only knew but from my lie it did come true, those lips from which he drew his tune were frozen as a winter moon. Were um not in the poem but we felt it was very important to add that just to make it absolutely clear what the nature of the lie was. And here this is also Ian Holm's invention where he says 'I have no questions' and then he resolves it to a whisper of 'I have no question'. I means it is also a complete collapse of his, I mean his whole hope of being able to find closure. He realizes that his life he is just going to have to find another community. This is

RB I love this little recognition between the two this acknowledgement that we both know what happened. Only you and only I know what happened.

(01:41:48)

AE though of course they do and they don't right. I mean

RB well they know what happened

AE Well in fact Mitchell will never know what actually happened between Nicole and her father, just as Nicole will never know what happened between Mitchell and his daughter. I mean so

those are two histories that are completely mysterious and will remain so. So that when, in this scene Mitchell says ah to Sam 'it does not matter why she lied the fact is that the case is gone. The questions you have to ask yourself if why she would. You know, and it is such a thundering

RB do that to a father? Why would a child do that to a father?

AE right

RB is the echo of why did his daughter do that to him

AE exactly

RB and he does not know if she lied or anything either

AE that's right, so this whole notion of truth telling and this sense there that Mitchell can actually uh find with such clarity a sense of accusing Sam and yet will of course will never try to learn anything from this. This is the thing about, about Mitchell, he will leave this case and he will not be any wiser. You know because of his own despair, he cannot, he is condemned to this. The only character who is really able to empower herself is Nicole.

RB she is the only one who is capable of change. Umm and I sometimes think that is because she is an adolescent. The others are stuck with who they are

AE yea

RB if they change it is only insofar as they become conscious of who they are. And I think in that sense he changes, that he is conscious by the end of this story of who he is. There is a wonderful recognition scene coming up. He, self-recognition and then mutual

AE but as to whether or not he will actually be able to find any resolution and I guess that we are left wondering and...someone mentioned here that in fact at this moment as he covers his face with his hands they were convinced that he is actually going to attend his daughter's funeral, and uh which was never really intended. You know the beautiful thing about structuring a film this way and being, keeping a certain open endedness to the form is that you allow the viewer to drift and to create their own strands of narrative and their own story. And I get so excited about that about the possibility that here I am you know imposing something which will never change. I mean these images will unfold the way they were designed. And yet

RB (cuts in) see, sorry go ahead

AE yes

RB you see how earlier I was talking about the recognition scene where he puts his hands over his eyes and that seems to me that he is thinking that he is seeing himself but he can't see himself in anybody else's eyes. And here he puts his glasses on and they look across from each other and

there is nothing expressed between them except seeing. They see each other and she she becomes the mirror for himself

AE See, that's beautiful, that that is the way that you have interpreted it. I mean I could say in all honesty when he covered his eyes, his face with his hands that was something that Ian came up with at that moment. That gesture that Ian found, and now that you mention the juxtaposition of those scenes. I mean it was not really designed that way but of course it's clear that that is a way of finding your way through this final montage. It's to me the most exhilarating aspect of filmmaking is being able to allow something which is so predetermined as film to have space within it to accommodate the viewers own trajectory and their own need to define the narrative for themselves. So you know with this simple gesture of seeing a suspended bus and knowing what a repository of information and mythology that bus is, and seeing Billy's face and seeing him leave that frame. Uh and then using the image of this bus twisting in the air resolving into the image of the. The ghostly image of the children drifting in the sky to the to the empowered Nicole now coming to a resolution. And then this narrative for her finding some closure as she uses the poem to to give definition to her experience and then as he finds closure we see an open sky and we see her literally closing a book. And the story has come to an end. And yet it is a very provocative end because what we see is her kissing the children goodnight, the children that we now know are have been taken to another land and another place. Um, there is um almost something angelic now because we realize that all of these characters are suspended in time, in a time that is gone. We are moving toward this final image of um these headlights approaching the house. And these headlights contain um a very dark history for this young woman but it's a history that she has found her way out of. So even though

(01:47:20)

RB and it is a history that illuminates the end

AE that's right, so that even in this moment of complete darkness and in this moment of loss as we see as we see these headlights come to illuminate her to a scene of great personal devastation. There is light in that moment and transcendence and uh grace.