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Like Some Dummy Corporation You Just Move around the Board

Contemporary Hollywood Production in Virtual Time and Space

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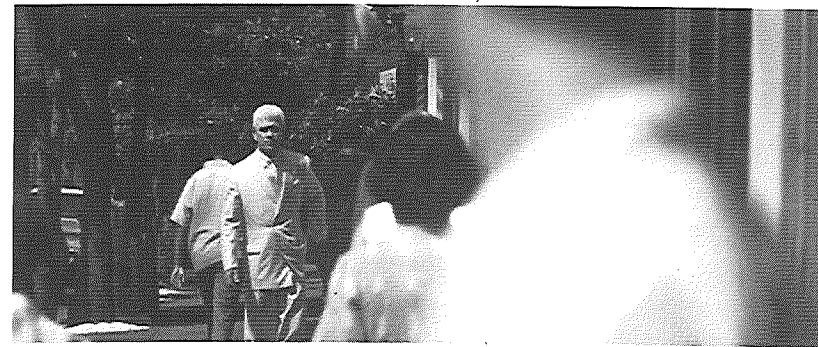
I.

Early in Oliver Stone's *JFK* (Warner Bros., 1991), Jim Garrison is conducting his infamous "walking tour" through "the heart of the United States government's intelligence community in New Orleans" and explaining how it is that ex-FBI man and staunch anticommunist Guy Banister is mixed up with ostensible communist Lee Harvey Oswald. As Garrison tells the tale of a magical building with two addresses, one belonging to Banister's office, one that appears on Oswald's pro-Castro leaflets, we are treated to a high-contrast black-and-white pseudo-flashback to a very particular moment, where we can see, if we are paying careful attention, Oswald catch sight of Clay Shaw, aka Clay Bertrand, aka Tommy Lee Jones, walking down the street. Stone is remaking some television footage that was shot on August 16, 1963.¹ The furtive eyeline match is the barest hint of what is to come in *JFK*, a bizarre homosexual plot to destroy King Kennedy, a Freudian slaughter by the primal horde that Michael Rogin has so incisively unpacked.²

These are the rewards of something like audience paranoia, but when Stone's manic editing met up with the intense and protracted home viewing that DVD made possible, it turned out that there was a second figure off in the distance, a fluttering banner reading "Tax Free." Like most such pieces of free-floating signification in contemporary cinema, it was duly enrolled in the IMDb, under the heading "goofs."³

The rationale for its enlistment is simple: in 1963, there was no program to rebate taxes to international visitors to New Orleans. The banner is part of a program promoting tax-free shopping in Louisiana begun in 1987; it is thoroughly anachronistic. And yet, as Jerome Christensen has argued, Stone's film is a remarkably intense allegory of TimeWarner's corporate agonies circa 1991.⁴ At its heart is the conspiracy of the folks from Warner against those from Time. The Time, Inc.'ers thought they were purchasing Warner Communications; in reality, they were being subverted at every step. In addition to the evidence he marshals, it turns out that Kennedy's real assassins are from ACME, that the Garrison children watch the WB cartoon "Drip-along Daffy," that the agreed-upon alibi for David Ferrie's trip to Texas is that he is going "duck hunting," that Kennedy was killed in a "turkey shoot," etc., etc. Seen in this light, the sign is not a goof at all, but part of what Christensen calls Warner's "humiliation" of Time. Coming on the heels of the grand, hotly litigated but ultimately tax-free merger, the banner is a corporate badge of honor.

Yet there is even more to it than that. As Eugene Schreiber, then the chairman of Louisiana Tax Free Shopping and the managing director of the New Orleans World Trade Center, explained, "The idea



JFK's Clay Shaw, head of the International Trade Mart (*JFK*, Oliver Stone; Warner Bros., 1991).



Louisiana Tax Free Shopping.

for Tax Free Shopping in Louisiana arose at a meeting of the World Trade Center's International Business Committee in early 1987 as an additional way to promote both tourism and retail trade throughout the state, as was done in many countries in Europe. We felt that being the first state in the United States to offer it would create significant attention and publicity."⁵ The World Trade Center was formed in 1985 through the merger of two longstanding New Orleans organizations, the International House and the International Trade Mart, and in the 1950s the director of the International Trade Mart was Clay Shaw, the man we see walking down the street in *JFK*. Indeed, Oswald chose to hand out his leaflets in front of the Mart ostensibly because the Trade Mart and its leadership were major funders of New Orleans anti-Castro organizations.⁶

JFK makes this link clear, repeatedly: When Garrison's investigator first learns, to his astonishment, that Clay Bertrand is Clay Shaw, he puts it this way: "Clay Bertrand is Clay Shaw, the guy who used to run the International Trade Mart?" Midway through this sentence, a figure from the danse macabre leaps into the shot, cackling maniacally, drawing further attention to Shaw's occupation. When the investigator relays this information to the rest of the team, he is positively gleeful. "Grab your socks and hose and pull. Clay Bertrand is Clay Shaw." The immediate response? "Director of the Trade Mart?" "Former director." Finally, and in keeping with the Hollywood rule of

three, when Shaw is at last being questioned, he defends himself by incriminating himself: "I'm an international businessman. The Trade Mart I founded is America's commercial pipeline to Latin America. I trade everywhere. Like all businessmen, I am accused of all things." All of which makes the banner less a goof or an anachronism than a prophecy: through the Trade Mart, Shaw has begun to assemble a global, tax-free trading system centering on Latin America.⁷

In the film, the avatar of this free-trade system is, naturally enough, Oswald himself. In the days leading up to the shooting, he is spotted in Dallas, in New Orleans, in Miami, and in Mexico, where he is looking to get into Cuba and from there to Russia.⁸ Garrison's investigators think this is "positively spooky," but the DA understands that the processes of political conspiracy and free market economics are the same. "God damn," he declares, "they put Oswald together from day one, like some dummy corporation from the Bahamas you just move around the board."

II.

If every screenplay is a business plan, then every production is a dummy corporation, a virtual corporation that gives rise to and reflects the actual corporation that it is. In *Production Culture*, John Thornton Caldwell puts it like this: "Because film and television are so capital intensive, a script also functions as a financial prospectus, a detailed investment opportunity, and a corporate proposal." "A fictional scenario is always tied to and considered alongside an economic one."⁹ This dummy corporation can be "moved around the board" as necessary in order to find an ideal combination of location, labor, financing, and distribution. "The board" here is the matrix of possible combinations of time, space, labor, and capital. (In more contemporary movies, such as the *Bourne* series, it is called "the grid.") Is a star available? Is a location "fresh"? Should this movie be marketed for Christmas release? Does it have a guaranteed cable slot? How will it play across the windows of distribution? These are a film's virtual times and spaces, and as they become actual, they may also, and by that very same maneuver, be retained in their virtuality, as images and sounds, as self-allegorizations.

Surprisingly, perhaps, Gilles Deleuze makes a similar point in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*:

The cinema as art itself lives in a direct relation with a permanent plot [*complot*], an international conspiracy which conditions it from within, as the most intimate and most indispensable enemy. This conspiracy is that of money; what defines industrial art is not mechanical reproduction but the internalized relation with money. . . . Money is the obverse of all the images that the cinema shows and sets in place, so that films about money are already, if implicitly, films within the film or about the film.¹⁰

The eruption of economic critique where we would expect an argument about medium specificity is striking. It comes, unexpectedly, in the midst of Deleuze's chapter on the crystals of time. That chapter is, as Anne Friedberg notes, "the most promising and yet undeveloped section of the book."¹¹ Certainly for anyone who would wish to deploy some of Deleuze's powerful analytics for recent Hollywood film it will seem that way. It feels as though the writer of *Anti-Oedipus* has suddenly taken over, and has knocked the argument and the type sideways. And so Deleuze will say, all in italics, that "*the cinema confronts its most internal presupposition, money, and the movement-image makes way for the time-image in one and the same operation.*"¹² Once it has been knocked off-kilter in this confrontation, film "endlessly relaunched" a "dissymmetrical" exchange: "The film is movement, but the film within the film is money, is time."¹³

The invocation of an "operation" here makes it difficult to know what sort of transition the shift from the movement-image to the time-image is. Few critics have taken up this passage, or even the formal-financial transition it implies, with that problem in mind. David Rodowick, in a characteristically incisive footnote, explains the importance of the dissymmetry between time and money that comes with the advent of the time-image. Gone is the parallel between the fungibility of images and commodities. In place of that parallel, there is now only a "struggle between the image and capital to see who will be exhausted first."¹⁴ For Jonathan Beller, the parallel between images and capital continues to operate, except that the time-image amounts to a new "representational paradigm" that accords with the shift "from monopoly to multinational capitalism."¹⁵ For Beller, the

changes in representational paradigm happen to cinema in general; there is no canon of films whose resistance to capitalist equivalence emerges from their access to direct images of time. In contrast, for Rodowick, time-images constitute a profound form of resistance to the economic order, even if the outcome of that struggle is up for grabs.

Rodowick and Beller, then, illustrate potentially incommensurable ways of understanding the critical transition in Deleuze's writing on cinema. Deleuze locates that transition after World War II, but there is simply no way for the uneven and at least apparently historical shift from the movement-image to the time-image to occur in the postwar period if the crucial event or aspect of that shift is a confrontation with financial scarcity. Such a confrontation was baked into the movement-image from the moment the patent trust was busted. Indeed, Deleuze's authority for the decisive effects of what we might call first-stage financialization on cinema is a lecture by Marcel L'Herbier delivered in 1926. Beller, then, takes Deleuze's point to be, implicitly, that the time-image marks the emergence of a new accord between cinema and the mode of production. What appear to be strategies of resistance through formal innovation are, instead, further elaborations of the "representational paradigms" belonging to monopoly (movement-image) and multinational (time-image) capitalism. Beller saves Deleuze's history by rejiggering his account of capital. For Rodowick, in contrast, the too-early arrival of the confrontation with money suggests the logical possibility of an earlier, *forced* disequivalence between time and money under the regime of the movement-image, emblemized by montage. Rodowick saves Deleuze's history by rejiggering his notion of form. Neither manages (or really, attempts) to save Deleuze's account of the eruption of money as an event *within* the postwar history of film.

And what are we to do with Hollywood cinema in the wake of the transition to the time-image? Does it constitute a retrograde departure from the advanced cinema of the time-image, and can it amount to a historical deviation despite its overwhelming importance to the market and its global social reach? Perhaps the "operation" that both constitutes the confrontation with money and launches the time-

image is something more like a material trope—a transition that happens within narrative and that is supported by a host of filmmaking practices that could be impinged upon by such a shift, but that nevertheless retains the abstraction, formality, and iterability of a storytelling function (e.g., the “irrational interval”).

If that is the case, it would explain why Deleuze’s apparently historical argument gives way to his assertion of disequivalence between the motion of the film and the eruption within those films of time. In other words, this apparently historical transition may operate materially or formally, depending upon one’s analysis of the relative predominance of industry or art within the contest for supremacy. Consider the span from the material to the formal as a scale along which this double operation must find a place. When the confrontation with money occurs in the cinema that will be dominated by the time-image, that relationship is internalized in such a way that the results create the appearance of time liberated from the logic of equivalence and exchange, the logic of capital. In that case the Rodowickian struggle ensues. But for a cinema that confronts money materially, the relationship retains the appearance of determination: time remains money. For the cinema that remained within the movement-image—that is, for Hollywood—the challenge of money—that is, time—is one that is met through the assertion of symmetry. Or, to put it in less grandiose terms, if you are a practitioner of industrial art, you will find that the scale will be tipped toward either the art or the industry. Whether and how you decide to right that balance is a calculation that has both aesthetic and economic aspects. And the discourse both within and outside the film will find itself divided between those aspects, rippling along the fault line of a mutual allegorization.

Hollywood’s reassertions of symmetry take two forms—one is relatively easy to see, and one requires some unpacking. The first accords with Deleuze’s contention that films about money are films about film. In Hollywood, this becomes an almost literal allegory, the sort of thing that makes a heist movie like *Ocean’s 11* (Steven Soderbergh; Warner Bros., 2001) the projection of its own backstory, the nearly effortless display of its own process of assembly. But even

within Hollywood we should be able to see that films about time are films about money—or they might be, if the fundamental dissymmetry that launched the time-image can be jerked back into a place of rough equivalence. The reassertion of this second parallelism proves more difficult to achieve than the equation between film and money. Contemporary Hollywood manages it only fitfully and only at certain moments in its recent history. Faced with a cinema headed formally and materially along a schizoid trajectory, the major studios hoped to successfully revitalize the classical canons of balance, proportion, causality, and intention. Yet as epigones of the classical studios, they inevitably performed this counter-operation at one remove, carrying within them the quasi-historical scar of their own reorigination. Every abandoned possibility lurks virtually in the belated actuality of contemporary Hollywood. For Deleuze, the scar takes the form of *déjà vu*:

The present is the actual image, and *its* contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror. According to Bergson, “paramnesia” (the illusion of *déjà-vu* or already having been there) simply makes this obvious point perceptible: there is a recollection of the present, contemporaneous with the present itself, as closely coupled as a role to an actor.¹⁶

The passage above repeats both the italics and the reliance on mirror imaging of his earlier discussion of film and finance, which suggests that for Deleuze the internalization of the relationship to money in the form of temporal awareness might produce a feeling of duplication so exact that it is disquieting. To test that possibility in the context of Hollywood’s continuing literalism, I will turn to Tony Scott’s *Déjà Vu* (Touchstone, 2006). *Déjà Vu* is a film about time, and in its configuration of virtual and actual temporalities it internalizes a relation to money that is both very particular and paradigmatic of the contemporary film and television system.

III.

Déjà Vu (Touchstone, 2006) was the third collaboration between Denzel Washington and director Tony Scott, the third between Washington and producer Jerry Bruckheimer, and the third between Scott

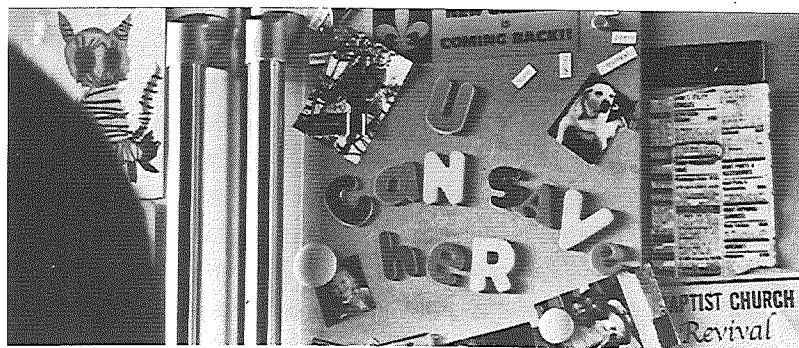
and Bruckheimer, although it was only the second film the three of them had made together (*Crimson Tide* was the first). The story is roughly as follows: following the explosion of a New Orleans ferry, ATF agent Doug Carlin (Washington) hooks up with a secret part of the FBI that can look four days and six hours into the past in order to solve the case. The key to the crime is Claire Kuchevar (Paula Patton), who, they believe, was killed by the bomber (Jim Caviezel) *before* the ferry explosion; by surveilling her, they will be able to find him. And though they do, in fact, capture the bomber, Carlin decides to go back into the past to save Claire, with whom he has fallen in love. (So it's *Laura* with a time machine instead of a place in Connecticut.) Together, Carlin and Claire prevent the ferry bombing, but he dies in the process. As she sits grieving on the dock, another, not-dead Carlin approaches her and they drive off together; he gets *déjà vu*. The plot, of course, is full of holes and makes no sense, in the way all time-travel movies of any complexity are full of holes and make no sense.¹⁷ The production, though, makes perfect sense.

Déjà Vu was supposed to shoot in October 2005, but the devastation wreaked by Katrina made that impossible and forced Bruckheimer to begin moving the project back around the board. At one point, when the film was to be shifted to Seattle or Miami, Tony Scott reportedly “ankled,” doubtless taking with him his cinematographer, production designer, and editor. Yet Scott came back in what *Variety* irresistibly called “*déjà vu* all over again.”¹⁸ And in February the film became the first production to be mounted in New Orleans after the hurricane. The revival of the film found ready allegories in the revival of the city and of the film’s central characters. Thus Claire, who has been killed when the film begins, will be “revived” by Carlin after he travels back in time. Of course, time travel will temporarily kill him and he will have to be resuscitated. When he appears, suddenly, in a hospital operating room, he bears instructions, just as Claire’s fridge had.

Throughout the “Commentary” track on the *Déjà Vu* DVD, we are told that New Orleans was simply the right place for this movie to be set. The implication, of course, is that it *could* have been set somewhere else, somewhere less optimal. (You wouldn’t say that Iraq was the right place to *set* a fictional film about the war in Iraq; instead,



Aftermath: Production returns to New Orleans (*Déjà Vu*, Tony Scott; Touchstone, 2006).



Allegorical instructions II: Carlin’s memo to himself (*Déjà Vu*, Tony Scott; Touchstone, 2006).

you would talk about where you were *shooting* it, which would in all likelihood be somewhere else.) The script initially placed the action on Long Island so that the investigation could occur in close proximity to Brookhaven National Laboratory, one of the few facilities that would have the sort of particle accelerator that would be necessary for any sort of time travel. Of course, if you could somehow conjure a *mobile* particle accelerator—and why not?—the action could shift to any place with a substantial ferry—Seattle, Miami, even Boston. The particle accelerator is contingent; the ferry is necessary. And so

it happened that although New Orleans ferry rides are short, the film ended up set in New Orleans.

At no point in the commentary does anyone mention the enormous cost savings that shooting (and setting) the film in Louisiana would yield. Yet the state did not achieve its recent cinematic prominence because of its unique landscape, culture, or creative institutions. Louisiana became Hollywood South for the same reason that Vancouver became Hollywood North: because it pioneered using tax credits to draw production. This is the relationship to money that *Déjà Vu* internalizes.

Since World War II there have been several successive but overlapping regimes of Hollywood film financing, each epitomized by a certain allocation of risk assumption and deferral. High marginal tax rates after the war encouraged stars to incorporate and spread their compensation out through net profits participation. Expansion of passive loss accounting rules led to film-financing syndicates in the '60s and '70s. The advent of lottery funding in the UK, alterations to the German tax code, the avalanche of hedge-fund money—all of these have diverted, temporarily, the flow of capital. And yet the possible consequences for story and style of these drastic alterations have been largely unexplored.

The implication here is not that taxation structures are the hidden key to the history of Hollywood cinema; I am not making a connoisseur's version of the old finance capital argument.¹⁹ Rather, I want to suggest that the changing relationships between the different aspects of capital deployment are strongly correlated with the time horizons on which financial success is measured, and that, furthermore, the complications that come with these new funding systems may not simply be reflected, but also thought through, in the films that they support. This impulse to aestheticization is a regular feature of Hollywood filmmaking and much else. And at its most successful we find tight allegorical links between particular films and their funding regimes. *Winchester '73* (Anthony Mann; Universal, 1950) is not simply a net profits film; it is a film about the inexplicability of perfection, the impossibility of correctly valuing industrial products based on their origins. *The In-Laws* (Andrew Bergman; Warner Bros., 1979) is

not simply a film underwritten by the contributions of hordes of Long Island dentists; it is about the agency of Long Island dentists. *Alexander* (Oliver Stone; Warner Bros./InterMedia, 2004) is not simply a German tax-shelter film; it is about the amortization of library rights. And *Déjà Vu* is not simply a film where tax credits were crucial to its success; it is a film about catching up to a past fulfilling itself—it is a film largely told in the future perfect.

In addition to attracting dozens of television series and films, from *True Blood* and *Treme* and *The Riches* to *Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans* and Denzel's *Great Debaters* and *Battle: Los Angeles*, the motion picture tax incentive system in Louisiana has bolstered virtually every cliché about the state's political and economic culture.²⁰ Until 2009 the program for production worked as follows. Motion picture productions received a large percentage of their expenditures—it has been 30 percent—back in the form of tax credits. However, since these companies did not ordinarily have tax liabilities in-state, they could not make use of their substantial credits. In many other jurisdictions, the credits were refundable, and the state would simply cut a check to the production company: cash in, cash out. In Louisiana, though, the credit was not refundable. To receive their funds, producers had to re-sell the tax credits to someone who had in-state tax liability. Thus it happened that wealthy out-of-state motion picture producers and wealthy Louisianans looking to reduce their tax burden were drawn together. Between them, naturally, there arose a host of brokers who would match producers with taxpayers and negotiate the rates at which the tax credits would be sold—they are always sold at less than par, and the brokers always take a cut. This is the cliché of Louisiana as a system where corruption makes the economy work.

The more successful the state was in luring production, the more money sloshed around in the tax credit market and the more prone to corruption it became. The legal tax skimming that the system counted upon gave way to a collection of illegal transactions. As has been true in past statewide corruption cases, the system sheltered its prominent players until the FBI began investigating. Eventually, tax credit scams would bring down the state's film commissioner, the

Louisiana Institute of Film Technology (LIFT), and many prominent Louisianans, including several players on the New Orleans Saints. This is the cliché of Louisiana as a system so corrupt that someone finally oversteps the line between functional corruption and something that must be stopped.²¹

In 1992, Louisiana became the first state to turn to tax credits as a way of developing its local screened entertainment industry. The program was relatively small-scale, and it was limited to investment losses. In 2002, Louisiana and New Mexico launched a much more ambitious scheme.²² They were following Canada's lead. There, in 1995, a system of tax syndication dating from 1974 was overthrown in favor of a production tax credit. Initially, the system was intended to support the national film and video industry, and it was restricted to Canadian producers. But in 1997, the doors were thrown open to outside (i.e., Hollywood) investment. British Columbia and Quebec added their own huge tax credits to the national rebates, luring production to Vancouver and Montreal.²³ In this strategy Canada was not alone. Countries around the globe made similarly enticing offers—Hungary had tax credits, the UK had lottery-funded rebates. Back “home,” Hollywood studios were stymied in their efforts to convince the federal government to match Canadian largesse, so they turned to individual American states, with tremendous success. More than forty states eventually offered tax breaks beyond mere tax exemptions for out-of-state productions, and those breaks have been astonishingly resistant to drives for fiscal austerity. Despite the extreme constraints on state budgets in the Lesser Depression, tax credit programs still rebated \$1.5 billion nationally in 2010. The pervasive availability of credits forced even the longstanding production centers in Los Angeles and New York to respond. They saw business leaching away to such a degree that studio interests were able to lobby successfully for generous credits. New York's went to 30 percent on labor, 5 percent on infrastructure. California's has been more limited, but even in the midst of a fiscal catastrophe, the state preserved its \$150 million program, with credits of 20 percent for major motion pictures and 25 percent for “independent” films and television series that relocate to California. The race to the bottom is largely over;

producers need only run the numbers to determine which virtual location best suits their budgets.²⁴

What has become a system for the studios is, for states, a far more precarious situation. The industry is both large and exceptionally mobile and flexible. States and nations attempt to purchase production industries through tax credits and other incentives on the assumption that when Hollywood (or other) capital and labor are regularly deployed in a particular area, the industry will become a permanent fixture in the jurisdiction's economy. This is not the case. As Robert Tannenwald of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities put it in November 2010, “No state can ‘win’ the film subsidy war. Film subsidies are sometimes described as an ‘investment’ that will pay off by creating a long-lasting industry. This strategy is dubious at best. Even Louisiana and New Mexico—the two states most often cited as exemplars of successful industry-building strategies—are finding it hard to hold on to the production that they have lured.”²⁵ As advice to policy-makers, Tannenwald's conclusions may be perfectly accurate and absolutely impossible to implement. But our interest lies as much in the representation of political economy as its actualities, and there again the situation in Louisiana has been paradigmatic.

In the early years of its tax credit-fueled dominance of runaway Hollywood production, the greatest threat to Louisiana's hold on its film production industry was Katrina. In the wake of the hurricane, the state became the first to realize just how tenuous its industry was. A consensus gripped Louisiana and New Orleans politicians alike: it was imperative that the state re-open itself for the film business as soon as possible. Beyond the regular tax incentives, then, *Déjà Vu* also benefitted from a city and state that could not afford to say no. The bomber has a house in the lower Ninth Ward, which adds a bit of devastation porn to the mix—the neighborhood was preserved in its wreckage for filming. And it is unlikely that any other city would have allowed the dramatic multitemporal car chase to tie up a major commuter route. Looming over both of these was the ferry explosion. As director Tony Scott described it, “Their biggest concern was that the size of the explosion we wanted to do could actually breach the banks of the Mississippi. [laughs] . . . People were so cooperative. I

think generally the people of New Orleans are, but they were just so grateful that we were there, that we were employing a lot of people in the city.”²⁶

As they compete for productions, states all emphasize the speed with which expenses will be recouped. Whether that recoupment comes through refund or transfer, it can be realized nearly simultaneously with the investment. (This is what separates the new tax credits from earlier strategies of liability syndication, which often took years to pay off.) Indeed, unlike every other major film-financing regime, the amount of money that is realized through the credit grows in direct proportion to the expense.²⁷ What you spend comes back to you. Or, to put it in the future perfect tense of the time-machine movie: you will not have spent it. And so it is that the tax credit movie instantiates a version of the Bergsonian duality of virtual and actual that is the “crystal of time.”

Déjà Vu is a time-travel movie where the distance that is travelled is comparatively small—four days and six hours, a sort of displaced simultaneity that allows only for *events*, not for *processes*. That is, in a story where you can time-travel anywhere, be it Nazi Germany, 100,000 years from now, or a 1980s hot tub, the span is capacious enough to allow history to unfold in dramatically different ways, but in *Déjà Vu* the gap between now and then is only large enough to assure us that the past carries the sign of its pastness.

As a result, *Déjà Vu* is less about the past than it is about an uncomfortable proximity, the sense of exact coincidence paired with a feeling of simultaneous distinction. It achieves *déjà vu* formally through three aspects of the array of video feeds that it calls “the time window”: the fragmentation of the screen, the indeterminate dimensionality of the image, and the manipulation of resolution. These aspects of the image are both technical and formal, emblems of both the production and the narrative.

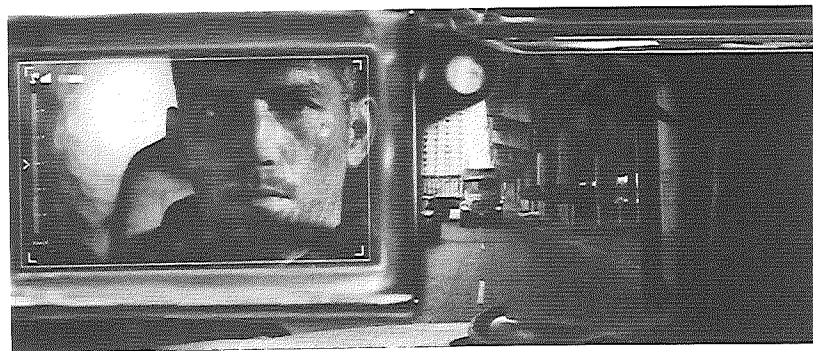
Fragmentation is the simplest to capture: the frame is divided within itself between feeds that are marked as present and those that are designated as past. This is true not only in the main control room, but more spectacularly in a car chase where Carlin pursues the bomber, driving *four days ago* at night. For the first half of the chase, Carlin



The time window (*Déjà Vu*, Tony Scott; Touchstone, 2006).

wears a special “goggle rig” that allows him to look into the past as he drives. This turns the screen into a nested POV shot, one made more complex because Carlin is driving against the flow of traffic. “Oh, this is trippin’,” he muses. The overload of information through the display proves dangerously distracting, and at the chase’s static midpoint, Carlin is able to stare into the face of the bomber, oblivious to the jackknifing eighteen-wheeler bearing down on him. The collision knocks out Carlin’s goggle display but not the feed to the time window. Even though Carlin is now effectively time-blind, the feed allows the agents and physicists in the control room to direct his driving while he is able to devote all of his attention to the road he is presently driving on. And with that reduction in complexity, the chase loses momentum.

Tony Scott has said that left to his own devices, he would be likely to produce a film that looks like *Domino* on speed. This sequence, then, would be Deleuze’s mobile section on speed, the hypermobility through time and space that is the essence of the car chase but also, and not really very figuratively, the essence of contemporary capital. Screaming across the bridge in his tricked out Hummer, Carlin is living beyond the dreams of the New Frontier-era free traders. Kennedy only wanted to lower taxes and tariffs; today’s Jindals have managed to make them negative.



The time chase: the mobile section on speed (*Déjà Vu*, Tony Scott; Touchstone, 2006).

And yet with Scott there is always a countervailing pictorial pressure in which the rules of composition are bared.²⁸ So in Claire's French Quarter apartment, the architecture divides up a wall into subframes, but the mural she is executing works against those frames according to its own perspectival laws. This countervailing autonomy (the still as opposed to the mobile, the analog as opposed to the digital, the historical as opposed to the contemporary) is, in the world of the film, the ghost of New Orleans authenticity: the mural, naturally, depicts Satchmo and Jelly Roll Morton. Claire is recovering from Katrina, and a bad breakup, by gaining some perspective on her life—by reimagining New Orleans as the birthplace of jazz and not the emblem of governmental incapacity and malfeasance that it had become. The film ferries between these poles, endlessly relaunching its investigations of “the board.” In the time window, the frames are obvious and the possibilities are open; in Claire's apartment the frames are occluded and New Orleans is inevitable. The tension between the two is a Hollywood love story.

Claire is also, and more than once, the figure for and vehicle of a simulation of dimensionality. In order to create a convincing sense that the time window was simply an extension of satellite surveillance technologies, the production used LIDAR, a laser imaging sys-

tem that measures distances with exceptional precision. From that data, the visual effects crew was able to generate 3D skins of buildings which they could then render and into which they could drop Claire.²⁹ The aim, though, was not to create a virtual world but to articulate the passage from the present *into* the past of the time window. As director of photography Paul Cameron described:

How do we go in and out of the past? We wanted to develop something that was more tactile, more realistic for people to understand. . . . We start out with more traditional satellite footage, and then it goes down to Louisiana, and then it goes down into New Orleans, and as we come down to the rooftops of the building we incorporate the 3D architectural skin that enables you to travel through walls or rooftops down shaftways or stairwells and into a location, hence giving the sense of passing through space.³⁰

Within that rendered space, Claire would appear with what Scott called “this weird sort of ghosting toffee effect” generated by a frozen-moment camera system. She would acquire, they hoped, a sort of spatiotemporal blur that, combined with the near-3D spaces, would give an added dimensionality to the frame. Between 2D and 3D, she becomes the figure of passage in and out of the screen, and in so doing she differentiates herself from her onscreen, 2D trackers while at the same time acquiring a greater degree of proximity to us.



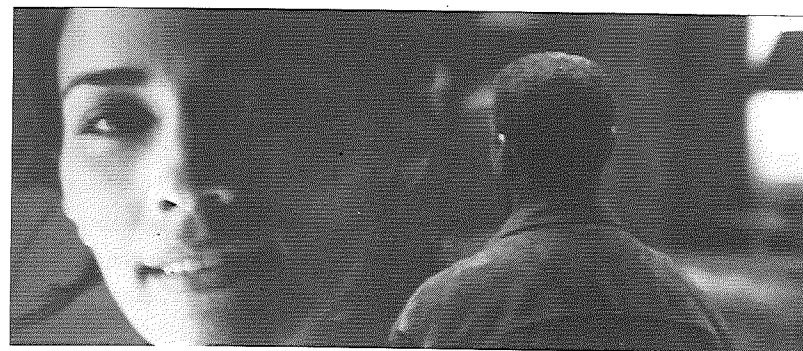
The mural in Claire's apartment (*Déjà Vu*, Tony Scott; Touchstone, 2006).

The final piece in this technical puzzle is resolution. In the main lab, Scott shot using Panavision's Genesis camera—then the state-of-the-art digital system. The tiles in the time window were being projected in real time; they were not inserted via a green screen. Among those tiles, the main window, usually focusing on Claire, was originally shot in high definition while the others were shot in ordinary resolution. This bolstered the tactility of the past. Scott effused, "The contrast and the separation when you see the finished print is huge. So the main window, it hums, and sings, and stands out. It's pretty different from the other, smaller tiles."³¹ For the crew, at least, it was convincing. As director of photography Cameron put it, "For me the best sense of feeling déjà vu occurs when we do projection onto glass with Denzel behind it. It's a very subtle photographic technique, but we're racking focus from the surface of the glass to Denzel, to people in the background. It's this kind of multi-layered image that's very emotional. Then when you cut back and go over the shoulder, it's got this sense of it really happening."³²

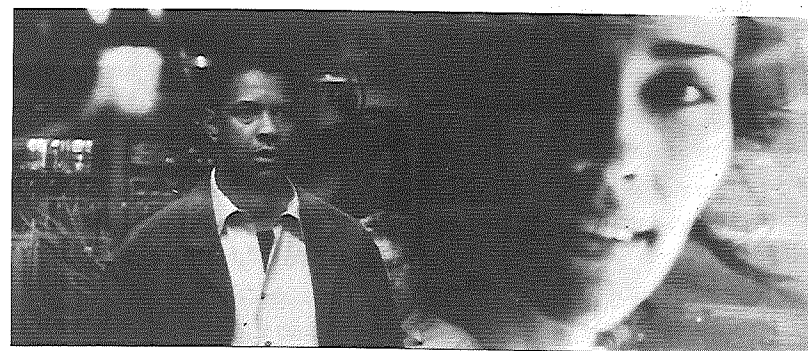
"The sense of it really happening": what is, for Cameron, the realization of a particular aim in a particular film might be understood as the aim of immersive filmmaking in general. What *Déjà Vu* almost uniquely realizes is that such immersions have an inevitably proleptic effect: if you feel as though it is really happening, you will want it to; you will do things to make it happen, even if those things require you



The LIDAR point cloud (*Déjà Vu*, Tony Scott; Touchstone, 2006).



Claire in the time window (*Déjà Vu*, Tony Scott; Touchstone, 2006).



The reverse on the time window (*Déjà Vu*, Tony Scott; Touchstone, 2006).

to go back in time. That "doubling back on itself" is the form of desire that underlies the time loops of déjà vu. Here is the way Bergson describes it:

If I recognize the present instant, am I not quite as surely going to recognize the coming one? So I am unceasingly, towards what is on the point of happening, in the attitude of a person who will recognize and who consequently knows. But this is only the *attitude* of knowledge, the form of it without the matter. As I cannot predict what is going to happen, I quite realize that I do not know it; but I foresee that I am going to have known it, in the sense that I shall recognize it when I shall perceive it; and this recognition to come, which I feel inevitable on account of the

rush of my faculty of recognizing, exercises in advance a retroactive effect on my present, placing me in the strange position of a person who feels he knows what he knows he does not know.³³

In these Bergsonian terms, then, *Déjà Vu* is a retroaction movie.

IV.

At its conclusion, Bergson's first-person account becomes both knottier—feeling he knows what he knows he does not know—and more objective—casting him into the “strange position” of a more general type. Something similar has happened to Hollywood filmmaking in the tax credit era. Even a decade ago, the situation was subtly different. Massive expenditures always constitute massive risks, even if producers “know” that those risks are contained by anticipated ancillary revenues or balanced out across the corporate siblings of an integrated media conglomerate. But in that era of high neoclassicism, the studios (through their allies in the entertainment industry) cultivated what Justin Wyatt and Christine Vlesmas have called “the drama of recoupment.”³⁴ Would *Titanic* break even? *Could* it? Such drama still exists, and it can still occasionally become the rallying point of a production or its reception; but as immediate, guaranteed, partial recoupment has become the norm, some of the “drama” has leached out of the revenue stream and been replaced by a narrative fascination with the manipulation of contingent certainties.

The more baroque the daisy chains of executive knowledge or self-consciousness become, the more they cry out for objectification. The “strange position” of the generic subject of *déjà vu* finds its characteristic cinematic home in a control room, taking charge of a vast media array—all versions of *Déjà Vu*'s time window. Control rooms, particularly TV control rooms, have always been locations from which to observe things spinning out of control, going “live” and “uncensored” directly to an audience. But where earlier incarnations of the control room might foreground the abstract outcomes of strategy (*WarGames*) or the techniques of persuasion and performance (*Tootsie*, *Groundhog Day*, *Broadcast News*), or the idea of the public (*Batman*), our new control rooms (in *Syriana*, *Body of Lies*, or the *Bourne* films) work at a metalevel.³⁵ Today, whatever unforeseen complications arise to

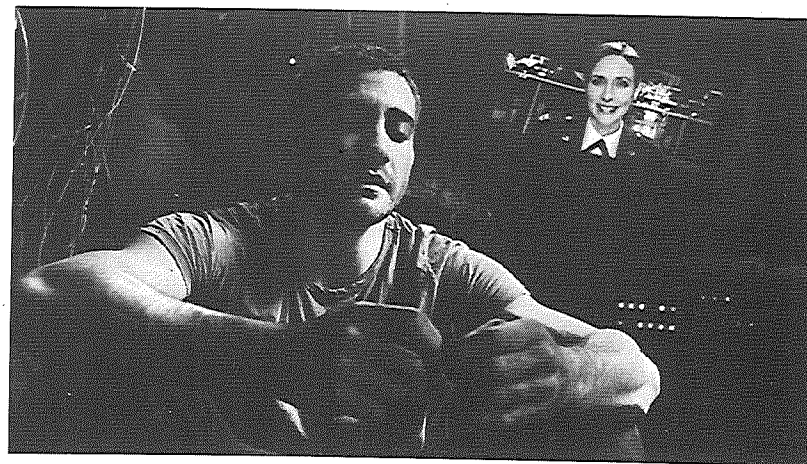
thwart the controller's control can be sloughed off in favor of a fairly desperate belief in the totality of the grid itself.

Five years after *Déjà Vu*, Summit released *Source Code* (Duncan Jones, 2011), a time-travel film that one of its actors called “*Groundhog Day* and *Speed* and *Déjà Vu* on a train.” Because the central conceit involved going back into the past repeatedly, the *Groundhog Day* comparison was inevitable. It was, said Jeffrey Wright, “*Groundhog Day* on the far side of the moon—somewhere in virtual space.”³⁶ But where *Groundhog Day* was an elaborate meditation on the promise and possibilities of Hollywood performance (the sources and worth of “talent”), *Source Code* narrated its way through the distentions of contemporary capital: the ultimate, mobile abstraction comes to ground through the bodies and in the spaces of the world it continuously remakes. Indeed, the film's own narrative is a more thorough conceptualization of the working of capital than its story requires. Instead of allegorizing its own production, *Source Code* is the allegory of the relationship between the *world* of its story and the *world* of its production.

The film itself oscillates between two emblematic space-times: a doomed commuter train making its way to Chicago and a control room at Nellis AFB in Las Vegas. Narratively, the exclusive juncture between them is supposed to be the consciousness of Captain Colter Stevens, a mind that will be dropped into the body of a particular passenger for eight minutes at a time to gather information and then report back to his handlers at *Source Code* headquarters. Consciousness shuttles between *Source Code*'s space-times, and information is its product. There are not supposed to be any other communicating channels between past and present; the temporal “continuum” cannot be “unsettled.” Thus when Stevens announces that he has placed a cell phone call to Wright's character, he is told, “You may have made that call from the train, but I would never receive it here. It's a different reality, Captain. If the call even went through it would be received by a different me entirely.” This is the stable model of time travel in *Source Code*, and when Stevens begins to understand the fatality of time's arrow, he (like Phil Connors in *Groundhog Day*) begs for death.

That stability cannot last, and part of the movie's particular niftiness is the way it staggers the ruptures of the spatiotemporal continuum. The two worlds of *Source Code* are as distinct as possible: geographically (Las Vegas and Chicago); culturally (military/civilian, private cars/mass transit, classified info/public parks); temporally (present and past); even formally (the scenes in the pod were shot with RED digital cameras, those outside Chicago on film). The breach in that distinction is supposed to be limited and, like time, unidirectional, but as in every time-travel movie, there are additional possibilities. Our first hint of that openness appears as changes to the "pod" in which Stevens is being held—it expands, its controls shift, it leaks fluid. What initially seems to be an isolation chamber is revealed (at minute 51) to be a "manifestation" created by his mind. Yet the revelation that the pod is a virtual space has no immediate consequences for the story's progress; the segregation of the worlds remains contained. Still, that segregation has been stipulated to be a matter of information rather than an inevitability of space-time: when Stevens asks where his actual body is, he is told that that is "classified." Several time trips later, Stevens has found the bomber and now wants one final chance to go back into the "source code" to save the passengers on the train—even though he knows that, in the lab's time continuum, they are dead. What appears to be a matter-of-fact reckoning with finitude or fatality occasions one of the film's big reveals. Up until now, we have seen the audiovisual link from the lab to the pod and assumed that it was operating both ways. As it turns out, in the virtual pod Stevens receives audio and visual communication from his handlers in the lab, but within the lab, Stevens's thoughts are displayed as text generated by his brain without another input system. The significance of the reveal is that the viewer now knows that Stevens is not present to the information system in the usual way, and that revelation coincides with a change in Stevens's goals in the film's other world. This communication disturbance will work itself out in Act 3.

In the other world, the train, like the pod, is enclosed and claustrophobic. This social pod is vectored through the actual space of Chicago and its suburbs, a space which registers only when the train

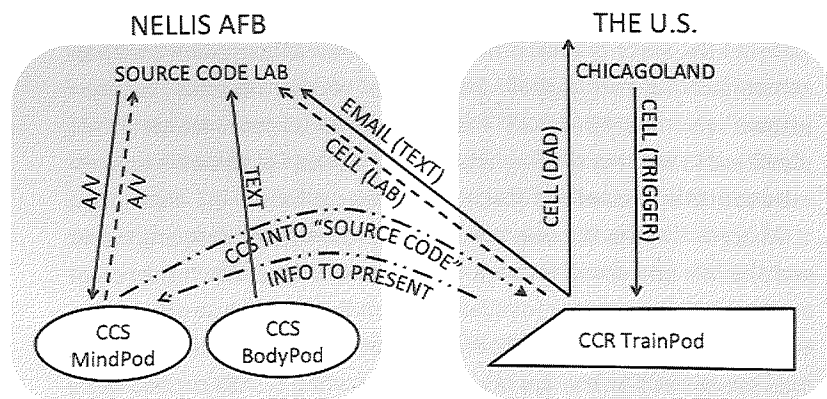


Communications asymmetry, audiovisual (*Source Code*, Duncan Jones; Summit, 2011).

stops or when, in the happy ending, Stevens and his (new) girlfriend visit Chicago's Millennium Park. Communication between the train-pod and the space around it is even more radically asymmetric than communication with the lab: the space of northern Illinois "communicates" with the train only when the film's terrorist makes a cell phone call that sets off the bomb. (The content of the call is irrelevant; it is the connection that triggers the device.)

Once we discover the communications asymmetry between the pod and the lab, and once Stevens's goals have changed, the train's communications asymmetry is adjusted: on his last trip into the source code, and after foiling the bomber, Stevens calls his father, not the Air Force base. The content of their conversation is, like the bomber's triggering phone call, less important than the fact of connection; it does not matter whether that connection has consequences outside its own temporal continuum. Yet Stevens *does* disrupt the continuum: his consciousness cannot return to his mutilated body back in the lab because that body has been euthanized, according to his wishes. As a result, his consciousness continues to dwell in the body of Sean Fentress, the passenger he has displaced. This in-dwelling first ap-

pears as a cinematic trick: whenever Stevens is in the “source code,” we see and hear Jake Gyllenhaal (Stevens’s mind) until his reflection reveals the face of the actor playing Fentress. (We even see Gyllenhaal when his girlfriend looks at him; it’s a clarifying lesson in the difference between formal and narrative points of view.) The flip side of this audiovisual nesting comes when Stevens sends an e-mail to Captain Colleen Goodwin, his handler. Just as, within the lab, she is televisually present to him but he is textually present to her, so in the disrupted temporal continuum at the end of the film, Stevens is cinematically present in Chicago but textually present at Nellis.³⁷ In this new, stable timeline, *Source Code* has found a way of scaling up the media ecology of its lab setting so that it can become continuous with the film as a whole. That medial-temporal asymmetry, both realist and allegorical, ultimately describes the relationship between a host of contemporary films and their tax credit-abetted productions.



LEGEND

- CCS Capt. Colter Stevens
- CCR Chicago Commuter Railway
- Successful Communication
- - - Failed or false communication
- · - · - Movement of consciousness

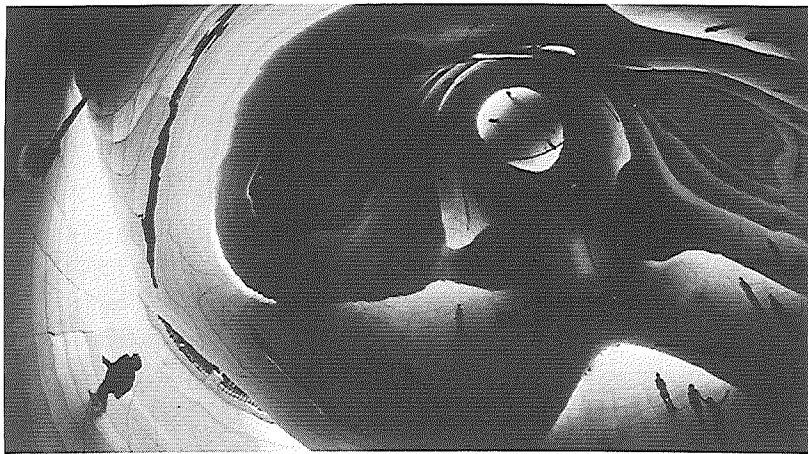
Source Code's communication system.

How thoroughgoing was the drive to save money on *Source Code*? Producer Philippe Rousselet's Vendôme Productions drew on his French background when the production headed to Montreal to shoot all the interiors. (The raft of French surnames in the credits makes that abundantly clear.) Mobile productions like *Source Code* typically fill their rank-and-file with local workers and bring along enough Hollywood talent to spread across the production like a layer of icing. The thickness of that layer is the evidence of the production's balance between its commitment to aesthetic autonomy (how much labor do department heads get to choose?) as opposed to financial constraint (how many subsidized local salaries will there be?). In the case of *Source Code*, the availability of first-rate crew in Montreal meant that the production was able to staff up locally almost all the way: the costume designer, the effects houses, and the camera operator were local. When screenwriter Ben Ripley asked director Jones, "How much of the crew was Montreal-based and how much did you bring from elsewhere?" the answer made it clear that financial considerations were overriding: "Ninety-nine percent. It was very much a local crew. . . . Don Burgess obviously came up from the United States, but because of the speed and the budget of the film he came up on his own. Normally he likes to move with a team of people, and he agreed that on this project he would work with a whole new crew from Montreal."³⁸

But while the control room might have been located anywhere, the film needed an actual, traversable location in which to situate its train disaster, just as *Déjà Vu* needed a location for its ferry disaster. Screenwriter Ripley initially imagined the train in the Greater New York area, but that possibility gave way for budgetary reasons. The major incentive was a more generous Illinois tax credit. Still, *Source Code* would insist on converting its constraints into virtues. The helicopter shots over the opening credits alternate between images of the train in the great horizontal landscapes of Chicagoland and the sudden verticals of the city itself. Such vistas and contrasts are harder to come by around New York. The shift in location had narrative consequences as well. As director Jones explained, the penultimate scene at Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* sculpture was only possible be-

cause the production had been moved to save money: “I know that when we had to move the film from New York to Chicago, the fact that that [sculpture] existed made me very excited because I felt the whole idea of distorted reflections was going to be very useful as a joining tool [between the sequences in the pod and those on board the train].”³⁹

How seriously should we take “the whole idea of distorted reflections” as the formal principle that joins the different worlds of *Source Code*? Jones is certainly alluding to the moments when Stevens sees someone else in the mirror, but those reflections are more than distortions—they are substitutions. (There are no half-Stevenses/half-Fentresses in the mirror. To take it a step further, Hollywood’s Jake Gyllenhaal is replacing Frédéric De Grandpré, the Quebec-based actor playing his reflection.) Distortions occur when one person or thing or idea morphs into something else. The concluding conversation between Stevens and Christina is exemplary. He belatedly recognizes the sculpture as the silver kidney from his passages out of the source code, realizing that he has, in fact, known the future all along. “Do you believe in fate?” he asks. She responds that she’s



The Cloud Grid (*Source Code*, Duncan Jones; Summit, 2011).

“more of a dumb luck kinda gal.” The film, naturally, imagines that one is the distorted reflection of the other, just as *Forrest Gump* had reconciled determinism and free will by supposing that “maybe both is happening at the same time.”⁴⁰ *Cloud Gate* embodies that simultaneity. The shape channels its reflections groundward so that, according to the *Source Code* “Trivia” track, “80 percent” of it reflects the sky. But the low angles of the sequence reverse the balance between sky and ground, and, what is more, the ground that we see is the grid of possibilities itself.⁴¹ In this way, the Chicago of fate and luck becomes the equivalent of Nellis AFB, a zone of militarized risk control. Stevens, like Oswald, like Carlin, is the dummy corporation that has been moved around the board. Like almost all films that successfully make it out of development hell, *Source Code* imagines this manipulation as romance.

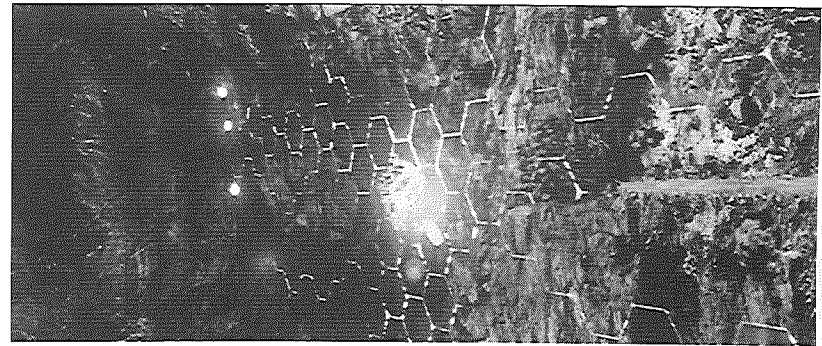
Coda: No Future

There is a price to pay for Stevens’s romance: by successfully usurping Sean Fentress’s body, Stevens erases Fentress’s consciousness. That Fentress would otherwise have been killed in the train explosion is some compensation, but his eradication is the unacknowledged cost of forgoing at least one cinematic possibility. To put this another way, for Colter Stevens, *Source Code* is an action-romance; for Sean Fentress, it is a body-snatching horror film.

The flip side of the time-travel movie’s confidence in the inevitable grid of contingencies is the horror film’s almost desperate need to cordon its characters off the grid. As cell phones have chipped away at the isolation necessary to make the genre go, screenplays have been forced to account for technological failures, resulting in an endless stream of “no signal” and “dead battery” moments.⁴² Few movies have been as canny about this convention as *The Cabin in the Woods* (dir. Drew Goddard, scr. Goddard and Joss Whedon; Lionsgate, 2012).⁴³ As a band of slaughter-ready coeds heads for the eponymous locale, one of them notes that the road they just crossed “doesn’t even show up on the GPS. It’s unworthy of global positioning.” The stoner sage responds, “That’s the whole point. Get off the grid, right?”

No cellphone reception, no traffic cameras . . . go somewhere for one goddamn weekend where they can't globally position my ass. This is the whole issue." As it happens, though, the execution of the five college students is not simply a genre-driven requirement. It is, rather, an expiatory ritual managed in a control room, and the cordon that will keep the students off the grid is itself an elaborately maintained electrical curtain. Once the impending victims pass through a mountain, "a bird comes from behind the camera, flying directly above the tunnel. About halfway across it hits an invisible barrier and falls in a shower of sparks as for one moment an electrical grid seems to appear where it struck, before sparking away into nothing."⁴⁴ The grid here is a hexagonal honeycomb pattern, mimicking vertically the conventional pattern of cellular phone coverage.⁴⁵ The "off-the-grid" is nested inside the grid.

Cabin's sales pitch assumes a high degree of generic self-consciousness: "You think you know the story" is its tagline. But by literalizing generic conventions ("The Director" is in charge) and crossing the "cabin-in-the-woods" slasher film with the televised-life film (the production intern is named Truman, after *The Truman Show*)—*Cabin* draws our attention to the process of locating the production in a particular woods: "A helicopter shot floats over the rambler as it winds through an endless expanse of firs, finally consumed by them" (20). Within the film, these woods are the setting for the "reality" production within which the victims will unknowingly choose their own mode of execution. As it happens, they are pursued by a family of farm implement-wielding zombies, but they might have been killed by something like *Hellraiser's* Pinhead, werewolves, vampires, mutants, or even an "angry molesting tree."⁴⁶ "We chose," one of them belatedly realizes. "They made us choose how we die." The monsters are housed in a subterranean warehouse of potential carnage and illusory choice, a "Costco of death."⁴⁷ The spectacular array of death-dealing creatures is mere distraction; the location was already fatal. Before the victims might have chosen their mode of execution, they had been "consumed" by "endless firs." The woods are, as it happens, in British Columbia, which is to say they are woods where the tax credits are monstrous.⁴⁸



"No Signal": The cellular barrier (*The Cabin in the Woods*, Drew Goddard; Lionsgate, 2012).

The global system of tax credit-driven film and video production successfully virtualizes even the stubborn realities of location shooting—not by dematerializing those realities but by shadowing them with their future perfect selves.⁴⁹ The proliferation of control rooms may appear to be a way of insisting upon the difference between places real and places virtual, but that insistence is always undermined in order to vouch for a higher order of control. At the end of *Cabin in the Woods*, an unlikely romantic couple have nearly managed to escape their prescribed death, but instead of constituting the happy ending, their survival will result in the destruction of humanity by renascent evil gods that dwell deep within the earth. The control room will be destroyed, and the cabin will be crushed by "a gnarled hand, bigger than the house and on an arm a hundred feet long."⁵⁰ Capitalism didn't quite go under this time around, so it makes perverse sense to rewrite the system's survival as the mythos of a jokey, faux-ancient theology repurposed for the collapse of the housing bubble. If Hollywood remains sanguine about the continuing operations of the global economy, that is because it had adopted a post-crisis mode of production even before the crisis hit. For more than a decade, the industry had been telling a story that we seemed to know already but that we were unprepared for nonetheless.

NOTES

- 1 Robert J. Groden, *The Search for Lee Harvey Oswald: A Comprehensive Photographic Record* (New York: Penguin Studio, 1995), 75. Photos originally WDSU TV archive.
- 2 Michael Rogin, "Body and Soul Murder: JFK," in *Media Spectacles*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Jann Matlock, and Rebecca Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3–22.
- 3 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0102138/trivia?tab=gf>.
- 4 Jerome Christensen, "Post-Warners Warners: *Batman* and *JFK*," in *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 245–279.
- 5 Louisiana Tax Free Shopping 20th anniversary [brochure] (2007), n.p.
- 6 Groden, *The Search for Lee Harvey Oswald*, 74; photo originally WDSU TV archive.
- 7 This story of the interplay between the rabid anti-Communism of New Orleans's business elite and their drive for international market dominance is told in Arthur E. Carpenter, *Gateway to the Americas: New Orleans's Quest for Latin American Trade, 1900–1970* (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1987). In Dallas, Kennedy is shot on his way to deliver a speech at the Dallas Trade Mart.
- 8 Oswald's famous radio debate with Carlos Bringuier, later released as *Oswald: Self-Portrait in Red* (New Orleans: Eyewitness Records/Information Council of the Americas, 1964), came about after he was spotted distributing "Hands Off Cuba" leaflets in front of the Trade Mart building.
- 9 John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 232, 233.
- 10 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 77.
- 11 Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 129.
- 12 The French reads: "Bref, c'est dans une même opération que le cinéma affronte son présupposé le plus intérieur, l'argent, et que l'image-mouvement cède la place à l'image-temps." *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), 105; the English version appears on page 78.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 236–237 n.13.
- 15 Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2006), 19. See also 235 n.1: "Not coincidentally, this shift from

- one representational paradigm to another coincides, historically speaking, with the break . . . between the movement-image and the time-image."
- 16 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 79.
 - 17 The exception is *Primer* (Shane Carruth; THINKFilm, 2004).
 - 18 "Scott Revisits 'Déjà Vu,'" *Variety*, October 19, 2005, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117931300.html>.
 - 19 The finance capital argument is explicitly anti-connoisseur, as can be seen in the first drafts of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. When they revised the manuscript during the war, they removed the rhetoric of finance capital but retained the critique of connoisseurship. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). See the editor's afterword for an account of the revision process and the notes on pages 268–272 for specific changes. The best outline of the historical importance of taxation to the motion picture industry is Eric Hoyt, "Hollywood and the Income Tax, 1929–1955," *Film History* 22, no. 1 (March 2010): 5–21.
 - 20 *True Blood* (Alan Ball; HBO, 2008–); *Treme* (Eric Overmyer and David Simon; HBO, 2010–); *The Riches* (Dmitry Lipkin; FX, 2007–2008); *Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans* (Werner Herzog; Millennium/First Look, 2009); *The Great Debaters* (Denzel Washington; Weinstein Co., 2007); *Battle: Los Angeles* (Jonathan Liebesman; Columbia/Relativity, 2011).
 - 21 Gordon Russell and Robert Travis Scott, "FBI investigating Louisiana's film industry incentives," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 29, 2007, http://blog.nola.com/business_of_film//print.html; Robert Travis Scott, "LIFT officials pressured state to speed tax credits," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 4, 2007, <http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune//print.html>; Tim Morris, "Gov. Bobby Jindal seeks renewal of film, music tax credits," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 9, 2009, http://blog.nola.com/news_impact/print.html?entry=/2009/03/gov_bobby_jindal_szeks_renewal.html; Robert Travis Scott, "Increase in movie tax credit endorsed," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 19, 2009, <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/capital/index.ssf?/base/news-7/124538940923020.xml>; Laura Maggi, "Former Louisiana film official gets two-year sentence in bribery case," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 29, 2009, http://blog.nola.com/news_impact/print.html?entry=/2009/07/former_louisiana_film_official.html; Robert Travis Scott, "More than two dozen with ties to the New Orleans Saints invested in movie studio deal," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 2, 2009, http://blog.nola.com/saintsbeat/2009/07/more_than_two_dozen_with_ties.html; David Hammer, "New Orleans Saints Charles Grant, Jeremy Shockey sue Kevin Houser over film tax credits," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March

- 8, 2010, http://blog.nola.com/crime_impact/print.html?entry=/2010/03/new_orleans_saints_charles_gra.html.
- 22 William Luther, "Movie Production Incentives: Blockbuster Support for Lackluster Policy," Tax Foundation Special Report No. 173 (January 2010), <http://www.taxfoundation.org/sites/taxfoundation.org/files/docs/sr173.pdf>.
- 23 The Canadian case remains the paradigm for US production subsidies. In addition to the sources in note 24 below, see the following. For the transition to the credit regime: Stephen Godfrey, "Producers protest tighter tax rules; Province restricts definition of 'made-in-Quebec' film," *Globe and Mail*, February 22, 1991; John Schreiner, "Lights, action, financing!" *Financial Post*, March 30, 1992, 3:24; Ian Austen, "Lobby group urges Ottawa to introduce new, refundable tax credit for film industry," *Gazette*, November 16, 1994, B4; Gayle MacDonald, "Mixed Reviews for Film Tax Changes: Federal budget brings down gradual elimination of shelters in favor of credits," *Financial Post*, March 11, 1995, 2:31.

For the extension of tax credits to non-Canadian producers, see Susan Walker, "Tories boost tax credits for culture," *Toronto Star*, May 7, 1997, D2; Harvey Enchin, "Canada extends pic tax-shelter program," *Daily Variety*, July 31, 1997, 8; Paul Gessell, "Bigger, perhaps better, but less Canadian," *Gazette*, October 4, 1997, B2; Christopher Harris, "Lights! Camera! Action! HOLLYWOOD NORTH: Toronto remains the third-largest film and TV production centre on the continent, and the city would like to keep it that way," *Globe and Mail*, October 30, 1997, C1; and Brendan Kelly, "B.C. offers tax credit," *Daily Variety*, June 4, 1998, 10. The last captures precisely the beggar-thy-neighbor approach that marks the tax credit arms race: "The tax credit will save producers roughly five percent of their overall costs and brings B.C. on par with Ontario and Quebec, which both recently unveiled similar tax-credit schemes. . . . 'The film industry is a growing industry here and it's footloose,' said [B.C. film commissioner Pete] Mitchell. 'It can move anywhere it wants very quickly. We heard from our key customers that they wanted this and we responded. It's all about competition and about staying on a level playing field.'"

The byplay became a debate over "runaway production," with Hollywood unions leading the charge for parallel domestic subsidies. Ian Bailey, "U.S. unions declare war on Hollywood North: Film industry wants tax breaks to woo business back from Canada," *Ottawa Citizen*, July 5, 1999, A5; Don Townson, "Canadian Goose: Defying H'w'd whining, Canucks sweeten pot," *Daily Variety*, July 9, 1999, 1. When the national effort failed, the arrival of Louisiana's subsidies was cast as an anti-Canadian salvo. Dana Harris, "Prod'n gets Bayou boost," *Daily Variety*, August 8, 2002, 1.

- Just as it pioneered tax credit financing, so Canada pioneered the tax credit scandal, this one involving the children's programming producer CINAR, which falsely labeled screenplays to qualify as Canadian content. Mark Lamey, "Cut! Cinar owes \$27.5 million: Film house's settlement with Ottawa and Quebec includes ill-gotten tax credits," *Gazette*, December 20, 2000, D1. Rumors also abounded that Canadian houses issued "local" invoices for work so that they would qualify for provincial tax credits when the equipment and work were run out of US offices. Doug Saunders, "A Cheater's Guide to Canadian Television: How to bilk taxpayers and influence people," *Globe and Mail*, October 23, 1999, C1. Worries that the scandal would cause legislators to restrict or remove production subsidies inspired fierce lobbying; ultimately, no charges were filed, no major changes were instituted because of the scandal, and the fraud and abuse were chalked up to a few bad apples.
- 24 See Robert Tannenwald, "State Film Subsidies: Not Much Bang for Too Many Bucks," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, November 17, 2010, 2, for figures. The Motion Picture Association of America maintains a one-stop website to track current production incentives at <http://www.mpa.org/policy/state-by-state>. The Association of Film Commissioners International performs a similar clearinghouse function, <http://www.afci.org/>. A roundup of the global system as of 2005 can be found in *The Global Success of Production Tax Incentives and the Migration of Feature Film Production from the U.S. to the World: Year 2005 Production Report*, Center for Entertainment Industry Data and Research, 2006, <http://www.ceidr.org>. CEIDR appears to have shut its doors; however, KPMG regularly issues *Film Financing and Television Programming: A Taxation Guide*; the publication is now in its sixth edition (2012).

I have said that tax credit financing turns filmmaking toward the future perfect. It has other effects as well. As it has become more prevalent and as studios have come under renewed pressure to drive down costs, more and more of the entertainment coverage of budgets has reported the budget-net-tax-credits. What is particularly odd about this trend is that it has not been accompanied by a concomitant rethinking of marketing expenses. Imagine a film with a negative cost of \$50 million that will be supported by a typical advertising campaign. For years, the rule of thumb has been that marketing is roughly half a film's budget. If tax credits reduce the effective budget to \$40 million, do producers lobby for the same \$25 million campaign? Or, to take another tack: Since the tax credits are not actual reductions in the budget, they must be credited against the film's negative cost (or counted as part of its "gross receipts"). This would seem to be a simple-enough matter. But for producers and others who will share in the film's revenues, when and whether those funds count

toward the film's "cash-break" point are crucial questions. Without very precise contracting, talent is liable to find itself farther from its back-end payments than it might otherwise be. The tax credits might go directly to the distributor, might be excluded from the producer's share, and might therefore count as something like double free money for the studio. (I want to thank a former student who now works in the industry—and who wishes to remain anonymous—for working through these possibilities with me.)

- 25 Tannewald, "State Film Subsidies," 2.
- 26 "Commentary," *Déjà Vu*, Scott (Touchstone, 2006), DVD.
- 27 At least, it does so unless it is specifically structured otherwise. California, for instance, attempts to avoid subsidizing studio tentpole projects by capping the budget of the films eligible for the program.
- 28 Here's an example of the way he talks about the pictorial: "Because of Katrina . . . we had to move our shoot back to the winter, but I loved the winter in the Bayou because all those trees, those birch trees became silver and white and the graphics were spectacular." "Commentary," *Déjà Vu*, DVD.
- 29 A fuller discussion of the film's special effects appears in Tara DiLullo, "Déjà Vu: Time Tripping to New VFX Heights," *Animation World Network*, November 22, 2006, <http://www.awn.com/articles/reviews/ideja-vui-time-tripping-new-vfx-heights/page/1%2C1>. Scott was a particular proponent of the "raw" look of the LIDAR point cloud. Asylum, the effects house on the film, hired Steve Snyder of Bohannon Huston, a civil engineering firm, to do the local scans in New Orleans. Even at the level of technology, the production was ghosting the hurricane. In October 2005, the National Science Foundation sent in its own investigators (the Independent Levee Investigation Team, ILIT) to examine levee breaches throughout the city. The members of the team from the US Geological Survey brought their own LIDAR with them to produce rapid digital maps of the damage. Their work is reproduced in the ILIT's *Investigation of the Performance of the New Orleans Flood Protection System in Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005*, Appendix A, <http://www.ce.berkeley.edu/projects/neworleans/report/A.pdf>. They released their final report on July 31, 2006. *Déjà Vu* recommitted to New Orleans in October and was released in November 2006.
- 30 "Commentary," *Déjà Vu*, DVD.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Henri Bergson, "Memory of the Present and False Recognition," in *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays*, trans. H. Wildon Carr (London: Macmillan, 1920), 109–151, 137.

- 34 Justin Wyatt and Christine Vlesmas, "The Drama of Recoupment," in *Titanic: Anatomy of a Blockbuster*, ed. Kevin Sandler and Gaylyn Studlar (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 29–45. The emblematic form of self-knowledge under neoclassicism is the self-similarity of chaos theory, as in the lyric from *Pocahontas*'s "Colors of the Wind," "But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger, / You'll learn things you never knew you never knew." For a more extensive consideration, see my "Let's Make the Weather: Chaos Comes to Hollywood," in *The Studios after the Studios* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).
- 35 *WarGames* (John Badham; MGM, 1983); *Tootsie* (Sydney Pollack; Columbia, 1982); *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis; Columbia, 1993); *Broadcast News* (James L. Brooks; Twentieth-Century Fox, 1987); *Batman* (Tim Burton; Warner Bros., 1989); *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan; Warner Bros., 2005); *Body of Lies* (Ridley Scott; Warner Bros., 2008); *Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman; Universal, 2002); *Bourne Supremacy* (Paul Greengrass; Universal, 2004); *Bourne Ultimatum* (Paul Greengrass; Universal, 2007).
- 36 Both quotations from "Cast and Crew Insights," *Source Code*, Duncan Jones (Summit/Mark Gordon/Vendôme, 2011), Blu-ray.
- 37 His body remains in its preservation pod in both cases, but in the first case, the consciousness in that body is communicating textually, while in the second, the consciousness has been shifted to Sean Fentress.
- 38 "Commentary," *Source Code*, Blu-ray.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 The full quotation is: "Jenny, I don't know if Momma was right or if, if it's Lieutenant Dan. I don't know if we each have a destiny, or if we're all just floating around, accidental-like on a breeze, but I, I think maybe it's both. Maybe both is happening at the same time."
- 41 This Jamesonian tic ("the grid itself") is meant as both homage and critique: homage to the remarkable reading of global cinematic production in "Totality as Conspiracy," in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 8–84; and critique of Jameson's elision of the industrial categories that mediate between a film's image of totality (or possibility: the streets of Washington, DC, in *All the President's Men*) and the capitalist system as a whole.
- 42 The "No Signal" supercut by Rich Juzwiak captures the many modes of cell phone failure. <http://fourfour.typepad.com/fourfour/2009/09/no-signal-a-supercut.html>.
- 43 The film, although finished in 2010, was a victim of the MGM bankruptcy; it sat on the shelf until Lionsgate acquired it for release in 2012.
- 44 Joss Whedon and Drew Goddard, *The Cabin in the Woods*, screenplay (n.d.), 20. <http://alexcassun.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/cabin-in-the-woods.pdf>.

- 45 See, for example, the patent application for 4144411, <http://www.google.com/patents/US4144411?printsec=drawing#v=onepage&q&f=false>.
- 46 *The Cabin in the Woods*, screenplay, 45.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 48 Without access to the books, it is impossible to know precisely how much *Cabin* received. Roughly 49 percent of its Canadian labor costs were refundable, with the possibility of more depending on how far away from Vancouver the location was.
- 49 Hollywood does imagine a complement to filmmaking in the future perfect: the abandoned serves as the substrate of filmmaking in the imperfect. In the making of a featurette for *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell; MGM/Columbia, 2006), "James Bond: for Real" (DVD), producer Michael G. Wilson explains, "When you're looking for a building under construction for filming they're just about impossible to find because by the time you go and look at a building, you have to plan to work there, and by the time you're done planning, the building's moved on and probably finished. But this place, being an abandoned building, it was easy for us to make it look like it was a construction project that was still going on."
- 50 *The Cabin in the Woods*, screenplay, 105.

Anti-Capitalism and Anti-Realism in William T. Vollmann's *Poor People*

CAREN IRR

As a slogan updating the presumably spoiled goods of socialist realism for the neoliberal present, "capitalist realism" initially suggests an effort to interpret and organize reality in terms consistent with capitalist ideology. Understood in this sense, capitalist realism might prove an especially unsustainable literary project, since so many American writers habitually present themselves as offering an insight deeper or more critical than that of the reigning ideology. Echoing the words of Bill Gray, Don DeLillo's abject writer-hero in *Mao II*, they use the novel as a "democratic shout" just barely audible above the industrial din.¹ Apart from a few devotees of Ayn Rand, who in the contemporary literary pantheon finds advocating capitalism a pressing literary task? Surely a far greater number of writers today adopt a stance premised on a disruptive or ironic relation to capitalism and therefore to any aesthetic described by a label such as capitalist realism.

"Capitalism," after all, is a word more commonly found on the lips of those who imagine themselves its critics (much like "communism," for that matter). Its proponents prefer to repackage its phenomena in a discourse of "the market" or—even more broadly and banally—"economics," where that purported science is understood not in the comparative sense but rather as the on-going management of a naturally occurring and inevitable system of exchange to which only other, surely tendentious persons insist on attaching an "ism." For economists of this sort, a literary project of capitalist realism implies an anti-capitalist agenda based on a revelation of the horrors of the system, and such a practice of exposé continues the aforementioned and unpopular socialist realism rather than inverting it.