RETHINKING BAUDRY'S APPARATUS THEORY
IN LIGHT OF DVD TECHNOLOGY

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RETHINKING BAUDRY’S APPARATUS THEORY IN LIGHT OF DVD TECHNOLOGY (60 pp.)

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This thesis will explore how DVD technology has provided a new context for viewing films, and how these changes in the technology of film viewing has generated a new relationship between films and film viewers. Using Jean Louis Baudry’s theory of the cinematic apparatus (derived from his essays “Ideological Effects of the Cinematic Apparatus” and “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema”) to illustrate the ways in which former modes of film viewing foster a passive viewer, I will explore how DVD technology is markedly different from previous modes of film viewing, and from these differences I will discuss the need for a new formulation of the psychology of film viewing which takes into account these changes I am discussing in relation to new DVD technology of the past decade.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Adam J. Knee

Assistant Professor of Film
Dedication

To my constant companion, Dana Swartz.
Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................3
DEDICATION .................................................................................................................................4
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..................................................................................................................5
CHAPTER 1: A PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION OF DVD TECHNOLOGY ........................................7
CHAPTER 2: DISCUSSING PROBLEMATIC ELEMENTS OF APPARATUS THEORY ...........10
CHAPTER 3: SEARCHING FOR A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO DVD TECHNOLOGY ....26
CHAPTER 4: TESTING THE VIABILITY OF A FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH TO DVD TECHNOLOGY .....................................................................................................................45
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSING FUTURE POSSIBILITIES OF DVD TECHNOLOGY ............55
BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................................................................58
APPENDIX ......................................................................................................................................60
Chapter 1: A Preliminary Discussion of DVD Technology

The issue of the psychology of film viewing and the desire to formulate an adequate, theoretical explanation of the film viewing experience has held the interest of scholars and writers for nearly as long as motion pictures have been in existence. Similarly, throughout the history of the discipline of film studies, various thinkers and theorists have attempted to analyze and explain the experience of watching films through specific frameworks ranging from film’s mirror relationship to reality (as argued by Hugo Munsterberg), the power of editing to manipulate and possibly control film audiences (as theorized by the Soviet Montage writers, such as Eisenstein or Pudovkin), or the creation of meaning, which stems from film audiences and their interactions with film genres (as proposed by writers such as Robert Warshow, Leo Braudy, or Robin Wood).

As the brief list of theorists and approaches demonstrates, the question of how film audiences interact with films remains a perennial subject of interest. Perhaps this can be traced to the fact that motion pictures are a dynamic medium that has continued to evolve throughout the past century. One such evolution, which will be explored in this thesis is the advancement of DVD technology over the past decade and the impact it has had upon the experience of film viewing. The goal of this thesis is to generate a model that discusses DVD technology within a carefully constructed theoretical framework. Such a task requires that I explain how DVD technology is different from earlier modes of film viewing, and what accounts for that difference.

Since my claim is that it is the digital technology that is responsible for this difference in viewing experience, the methodology employed in the following chapters
can be roughly sketched out in the following way: I begin by providing a descriptive account of two problematic features of how apparatus theory seeks to provide a theoretical explanation as to how films affect viewers. This is necessary because Baudry’s theory, although fraught with problems, can be recuperated and redirected to address specific issues regarding how DVD technology functions to create an alternative experience of film viewing. Next, I turn to an investigation into specific differences in viewing form, procedure, and context of DVDs compared to those that can be identified in earlier modes of film viewing, such as watching a film in a movie theater or on VHS tape or television.

Once these differences have been established, I propose how DVD technology can be handled theoretically, through the introduction of the concept of a functionalist approach to DVD technology. This concept takes into account the role that digital technology plays in the construction of a viewer’s experience while watching a film on DVD, and as such, this concept frames DVD technology in functional terms by addressing how DVD technology can be potentially utilized by filmmakers, as well as film viewers, in the creation of an alternative viewing experience which is unique to the DVD format.

I test the functionalist approach by applying it to a case study, using the *Sin City: Recut, Extended, Unedited* DVD as the variable, in order to surmise if my concept is a valid option for serious theoretical consideration. I focus on certain aspects of the DVD, such as the presence of alternative versions of a film as opposed to the theatrical version and bonus features, for example, audio commentary tracks and behind the scenes
featurettes, to illustrate how DVD technology allows for the creation of a guided model of film viewership through the use of such features by viewers.

The functionalist approach is presented as a possible method of examining DVD technology, not as a penultimate theory to silence all others. Due to the DVD format’s short period of existence, as well as the current lack of statistical data on the subject, it is impossible to claim, with absolute certainty, that all viewers use the features available on DVDs, or that they all glean the exact same experience when they do. That is why the functionalist approach deals with the potential viewing experiences generated by DVD technology, which will undoubtedly grow and change as time goes on.
Chapter 2: Discussing Problematic Elements of Apparatus Theory

In this thesis, I attempt to construct a theoretical framework for addressing the impact of DVD technology over the past decade. In order to support this claim it will be necessary to prove that DVD technology requires theoretical consideration, which is separate from previous discussions that have surrounded film and film viewing in the past. The position that I advance here is that a close analysis of DVD technology, which is patterned after specific elements of Jean-Louis Baudry’s apparatus theory, can judiciously handle the complex issues surrounding DVD technology, which have yet to be thoroughly discussed. My approach is patterned upon a reconsideration of apparatus theory, because it focuses attention upon the technical machinery responsible for the experience of film viewing. Before moving on to introduce the conceptual reconsideration of apparatus theory in chapter three, it is necessary to provide a descriptive account of two problematic features of Baudry’s theory, which rendered the original theory unworkable.

Two features of apparatus theory that need to be addressed in order to articulate why it has long been considered unsupportable, are (i) the supposition that film viewers are inactive victims who are subjected to the ideology of the ruling class and cannot differentiate between the world of the film (a world of illusion) and the real world experienced by the viewer on a daily basis; and (ii) the belief that film viewers misidentify their identities with the identities of the characters on screen, thus making them vulnerable to the ideological positioning that Baudry argues is inherent in films. From this analysis, I move on to propose, that despite the inherent flaws within Baudry’s
theory, a reconsideration of it can yield a more theoretically critical understanding of DVD technology, its impact upon the experience of film viewing, and the psychology of film viewing.

Apparatus theory, as constructed by Jean-Louis Baudry through two essays ("Ideological Effects of the Cinematic Apparatus" (1970) and "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema" (1975)) combined the concept of ideology and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) proposed by the Marxist writer Louis Althusser, along with the psychoanalytic concept of mirror misrecognition and the role it plays in identity formation, advanced by Jacques Lacan, in order to explain the relationship between film texts and film viewers. Baudry’s theory is not concerned with an analysis of a single film or any specific genre cycle of films; instead it concentrates on generating a metacomment upon the social activity of film viewing, an activity that Baudry believes can best be explained as functioning as one of Althusser’s ISAs. However, upon a careful examination of Baudry’s position, it becomes clear that the conception of film viewing as an ISA is highly problematic and difficult to support, as I demonstrate in this thesis.

Before delving into Baudry’s argument, it seems appropriate to address Althusser’s concept of ideology and ISAs, which Baudry is using in his theory. In the essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Althusser states that “ideology is a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”1 Ideology, for Althusser, is a process that generates a picture of everyday life,

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which incorporates common people (akin to Marx’s proletariat) into that picture. Of course, ideology does not ontologically arise as a fully formed entity; ideology is created by ideological state apparatuses. Althusser claims that “an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices”, as well as stating that “this existence is material.”

2 It is through the various ISAs (such as church, school, or family) where the illusion of individuality is generated. However, this is a false image, since the ISAs do not produce individuals, but subjects. The creation of subjects occurs through a process that Althusser refers to as “interpellation” or “hailing”, where individuals are recruited (or hailed) by an ISA and through the process of hailing are transformed into subjects. The process of interpellation is described by Althusser with the example of a police officer hailing an individual in the street, saying “Hey, you there!” The individual turns around after hearing this and has become a subject of the police. It is necessary to point out that ISAs serve as a peaceful means of turning individuals to subjects. For those who are resistant to interpellation by an ISA, they can expect to be dealt with by a representative of a repressive state apparatuses (RSA), such as the military.

Using the brief sketch of Althusser’s concept of ideology and ideological state apparatuses, it is now possible to proceed with a critical evaluation of Baudry’s argument that the film projector and the screen on which films are projected (what Baudry terms “the cinematic apparatus”) are in fact an ideological state apparatus. Baudry attempts to identify the very process of film viewing as an ISA; however, this seems to be extremely problematic, since Althusser’s conception of an ISA is something that exists as a social organizational grouping (such as members of a family or members of a church) who have

2 Ibid. p. 318.
been interpellated by such a grouping and as a result identify themselves with that

grouping. Film viewing may be an extremely widespread and popular social activity, but
there is no evidence that the activity of film viewing functions in the same manner as
membership in a family or in a church. In fact, the activity of film viewing is relatively
new (a little over one hundred years old if we use the familiar date of 1895 and the
Lumiere brothers as our reference point) and as such it does not have the proven social
longevity that Althusser attributes to ISAs.

Baudry tries to circumvent the problem under discussion by attempting to situate
the newness of cinema as the latest incarnation of a shared human desire to entertain
illusions, which goes back thousands of years, by referencing Plato’s allegory of the cave
found in *The Republic*. Baudry analogizes that the prisoners who are trapped in the cave
should be understood as proto film viewers. He tries to draw parallels between the
prisoners in the cave and modern day film viewers in order to support his claim. Using
Althusser’s distinction between reality and the illusion of reality that ISAs produce,

Baudry discusses the allegory of the cave:

As we have seen, Plato constructs an apparatus very much like sound cinema. But, precisely because he has to resort to sound, he anticipates an ambiguity which was to be characteristic of cinema. This ambiguity has to do with the impression of reality: with the means used to create it, and with the confusion and lack of awareness surrounding its origin, from which result the inventions which mark the history of cinema. Plato effectively helps us to recognize this ambiguity. For, on the one hand, he is careful to emphasize the artificial aspect of reproduced reality. It is the apparatus that creates the illusion, and not the degree of fidelity with the Real.³

Here we find Baudry discussing Plato’s allegory of the cave as something like an ancestor in the pre-history of films. However, Baudry’s evocation of the allegory of the cave as a means of supporting his claim that film viewing should be understood as being an ISA does not hold up. To begin, Baudry’s analogy between the prisoners in Plato’s cave and film audiences seated in a movie theater is highly problematic. Baudry’s use of Plato’s cave as a metaphor for the activity of film viewing is not firmly supported by his claim that cinema is just the latest form of a human desire that reaches back through the centuries. As Noël Carroll points out in his discussion of Baudry’s use of the allegory of the cave, Baudry is divorcing the allegory from its place within *The Republic*, and as such is attempting to generate an alternate meaning from the allegory. Carroll asserts, “Baudry tears the myth of the cave out of the context in which it functions as an allegory, and treats it as a fantasy ripe for psychoanalysis,” which is a comment referring to another metaphor that Baudry employs, that of the “dream screen.” The dream screen, a concept which originated in the writings of psychoanalyst Bertram Lewin, is used by Baudry in order to explain that the way dream imagery is projected in the mind of the dreamer is similar to how film imagery is projected before the eyes (and thus absorbed into the unconscious) of the film viewer.

This appropriation of Plato’s cave mainly functions to establish that the cinema is a fulfillment of an ancient human desire to indulge in imagery which appears to mirror our everyday reality without accurately revealing the ideological structures that underpin human society. While this tactic is necessary for Baudry in order to support his claim

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that film viewing is an ISA, the analogy that is used is ineffective due to the weak and improbable linkage that Baudry tries to establish between the prisoners of the cave in Plato’s ancient allegory and modern day film audiences. Without successfully identifying cinema as the realization of an ancient human desire to indulge in illusion, Baudry’s claim that film viewing should be understood as functioning as an ideological state apparatus falls apart, as does his claim that the “cinematic apparatus” are hailing the individuals, who constitute film audiences, into ideological subjects.

In addition to the previous critique of Baudry’s claim that film viewing should be viewed as an ISA, there is also the difficulty in explaining how an audience can be hailed by a film projector and screen (the cinematic apparatus, which Baudry discusses). It seems clear that film audiences could not be interpellated in the same manner as Althusser describes in the example of the police officer and the individual in the street, so what is needed is an explanation as to how audiences are hailed into being subjects of the cinematic apparatus that Baudry speaks of. Although Baudry never directly presents an explanation as to how individuals are hailed by the cinematic apparatus, he does turn to Lacanian psychoanalysis, specifically Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage of child development, as an explanatory device, describing how film viewers come to identify themselves with the characters they see projected on screen. In turning towards Baudry’s appropriation of Lacan’s mirror stage, it is possible to address the second problematic issue of Baudry’s theory, which I discussed earlier, that is the film viewer’s identification with the characters in a film as being themselves.
Baudry’s use of Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage can be seen as being a similar strategy to his appropriation of Plato’s allegory of the cave. To put it another way, Baudry’s use of the mirror stage works in a similar manner to his manipulation of the allegory of the cave, in that both techniques serve to establish a strong connection between film viewing and human development and behavior. For Lacan, the mirror stage, beginning in the sixth month of infancy, refers to a development period when an infant first begins to develop a sense of its own identity as a being that is separate from its parents. Through the recognition of its own image in a mirror, the infant begins to formulate a conception of its identity, despite the fact that the infant still lacks mastery over its motor skills or bodily coordination. It is also during this stage when the infant’s ego begins to develop. The concept of the mirror stage that Lacan describes is not necessarily intended to be taken literally, since the formulation of a child’s identity begins irregardless of whether or not an infant manages to be located in front of a mirror and take notice of its reflection.

In short, for Lacan, the mirror stage is an important stage in the development of individual identity, which every person experiences. However, Baudry’s incorporation of the mirror stage as a method of explaining how film viewers identify with the films they watch differs significantly from the way in which the mirror stage is employed in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Baudry draws an analogy between the infant seeing its image in a mirror and identifying itself with the image and the film viewers, who, while watching the characters projected on screen, identify themselves with the images they see on the screen. Baudry describes this process in the following manner:
From the very fact that during the mirror stage a dual relationship is established, it constitutes, in conjunction with the formation of the self in the imaginary order, the nexus of secondary identification. The origin of the self, as discovered by Lacan, in pertaining to the imaginary order effectively subverts the “optical machinery” of idealism which the projection room scrupulously reproduces. But it is not as specifically “imaginary,” nor as a reproduction of its first configuration, that the self finds a “place” in the cinema. This occurs, rather, as a sort of proof or verification of that function, a solidification through repetition.5

Baudry’s quote indicates how Lacan’s concept of the creation of identity during the mirror stage is being extended well beyond the formative model that Lacan actually uses. Baudry is using Lacan as a means of elaborating upon his argument that the cinematic apparatus is responsible for the ideological construction of subject identity. The “dual relationship” which Baudry claims is established during the mirror stage, helps to explain how an ideological state apparatus creates the illusory sense of identity in individuals, while it actually interpellates them as subjects of the ruling class. Baudry’s emphasis upon the imaginary order can be seen as a reference not only to the imaginary order that is created through an ISA, such as the church or family, but also upon the imaginary order that exists within the world of cinema. Classical film style suits itself to a mode of invisibility, thus allowing the artificial nature of motion pictures to go unnoticed, just as the artificial nature of ideology goes unnoticed by interpellated subjects. However, Baudry states that it is not in the “optical machinery of idealism” that is responsible for the identity formation of film viewers, but rather the repetition of film viewing.

There are a few aspects of Baudry’s use of the concept of the mirror stage that appear to be problematic. For example, he uses it to explain how viewers confuse their identity with those of the characters on screen. The mirror stage, as discussed within the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis, refers specifically to a psychological stage in the development of infants. The mirror stage is not applicable once the child has progressed beyond that period when the identity of the child has been fully formed. However, we find that Baudry’s use of the mirror stage would imply that the mirror stage continued on, long past the point when Lacan had believed it ended, and that film viewing, somehow, has the capacity to generate confusion in film audiences to the point that they mistake their own identities with those belonging to film characters each time they sit down to watch a movie.

If we examine the first possibility, Baudry’s attempt at linking the activity of film viewing with the process of identity construction, as formulated by Lacan in his concept of the mirror stage, is implausible due to the fact that the analogy between the film screen and a mirror does not hold up. Putting all metaphors aside, the mirror that Lacan discusses functions to present an image with which the infant identifies itself, and it is through this identification with its mirror image that the infant begins to develop an understanding of its identity as being unique unto itself at that specific time period. However, the mirror stage as explicated through Baudry’s theory occurs each time a viewer goes to a theater to see a film.

Baudry’s supposition, that the mirror stage occurs each time that a film viewer sits down and watches a film, assumes that the viewer’s identity is constantly in flux, or
at best, is vulnerable to the possibility of confusion with some sort of pseudo identity resulting from what is projected on screen. This claim seems to be unsupported by Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as by most theories that deal with an individual’s identity formation. Once again, it appears that Baudry’s attempts at framing the activity of film viewing as a process responsible for the identity formation of viewers, function as a means of supporting his claim that the cinematic apparatus is an ideological state apparatus that interpellates viewers into unknowing ideological subjects, while deceiving them into believing that they are actually individuals who are unique from other groups in society.

A major flaw in Baudry’s argument is the fact that films are a form of mass entertainment, catering to an amorphous grouping of people, where the typical distinctions and separations which exist between the various ISAs (such as church, family, or education) are, by and large, unimportant. There are no specific beliefs required for viewing a film. Aside from purchasing a ticket and not causing any interruptions, there are no tasks that are necessary to complete, and there are no recognized ideological agents (such as a priest, professor, or parental figure) who direct viewers in how to think or respond to particular events. By analyzing Althusser’s concepts of ideology and ideological state apparatuses, it seems clear that Baudry’s attempt to identify the machinery responsible for presenting films (projectors and projection screens) as being an ISA is unconvincing. The ISAs that Althusser discusses are capable of playing such a major part in the interpellation process because they are connected to the subjects in question on a daily basis. Family members are always family
members, there is no option for discussion or choice because familial relationships are final. This is not the case when it comes to film viewing, which is completely contingent upon the amount of free time a person may have, what types of films are being screened at a theater at any given date, and, perhaps most important, whether or not the viewer has enough money to purchase a ticket.

Of course, it is important to note that ideological content can find its way into individual films or even into specific production cycles. It is possible to examine individual films in order to identify any possible ideological leanings of either the film or the filmmakers such as Leni Reifenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935), Veit Harlan’s *Jud Suss* (1940), or D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915). The ideological content of these films are located within the presentational mode of characters (such as the divine image of Hitler, the parasitic representations of Jews in 19th century Germany, or the heroic construction of the Ku Klux Klan) rather than in the process of watching them. Ideological content is present in things other than character representation, which include plot structure, film style, and narrative themes, which become familiar cultural stereotypes. It is essential to make this distinction, since the ideological connotations of these films were detected by film audiences and protested against. This would indicate that film viewers are not necessarily ideologically constructed by the images they see on screen; if viewers can be cognizant of the ideological content of a specific film, it would seem that film viewing cannot be a genuine ISA as Baudry is claiming. If viewers were aware of how ideology is constructed, then Baudry’s argument would be nullified, as Richard Allen points out:
The position of the spectator in the cinema is said to be “ideologically” constructed by the image; yet the spectator must simultaneously be capable of recognizing and resisting the ideological effect of the image. Although the theory of the cinematic apparatus is designed to demonstrate how the experiencing self is constructed in and through representation, it depends upon a subject who is not constructed in and through representation and who recognizes this process and can criticize it from the outside. Thus the theory provides no basis to predict how any given spectator will experience the standard projected moving image as it occurs in narrative cinema. The spectator may equally experience the image illusionistically and hence “ideologically,” or not illusionistically and hence as a critique of ideology.6

Allen’s quote makes clear one of the largest problems with Baudry’s theory. If film viewing is to be understood as being an ideological state apparatus, as defined by Althusser, then it would be unable to be identified as being a work of ideology. Since film viewers have the capacity to spot a work that is ideological in nature, Baudry’s argument that film functions as an ISA is shattered. Not only is Baudry’s attempt to classify film viewing as an ideological state apparatus highly problematic, but his appropriation of Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage as means of explaining how film audiences are interpellated as subjects of the ruling class fails to hold up under scrutiny.

So far, I have focused my analysis on what appears to be the most problematic features of Baudry’s theory; namely his supposition that film viewing functions as some sort of ideological agent that turns viewers into subjects of the ruling class. It would seem that Baudry’s concept of film viewers as ideological subjects needs clarification and adjustment in light of the discussion of the problematic features of his argument. In order to find a more accurate conception of the activity of film viewing, I would like to turn to

film theorist Richard Allen’s discussion of film viewing as a conscious activity in which the viewer participates freely.

Like Baudry, Richard Allen frames his discussion of film viewing as a process that can be accurately explained via psychoanalysis. However, unlike Baudry, Allen asserts that previous film theorists have applied psychoanalytic concepts and theories incorrectly, leading to ineffective or incorrect theories. Allen advances an approach, using psychoanalytic theory, for understanding the activity of film viewing as being both “conscious and rational”, which he refers to as “projective illusion”, and defines in the following way:

Projective illusion is like mirror illusion in that our knowledge about what we are seeing can break the hold of the illusion; but as we have seen, projective illusion, unlike mirror illusion, does not involve epistemic illusion. So in the case of projective illusion it is not simply that knowledge about what we are seeing breaks the hold of the illusion, but that the illusion might not be experienced at all.⁷

Allen’s characterization of projective illusion, which includes film as well as television, is not centered upon a belief in the reality of the illusions that are experienced, something which is a necessary component of Baudry’s apparatus theory, but instead is built upon the viewer’s awareness that the illusion is not a mirror representation of the real world. This approach diverges significantly from Baudry’s approach in the way in which psychoanalysis is employed. Allen’s use of psychoanalysis functions as a means of explaining how and why film viewers intentionally pursue projective illusions:

What is also required is an explanation of our predisposition to entertain the image as a projective illusion or to entertain in thought that the object is real. There must be a propensity in the mind itself to seek out or even create the form

⁷ Ibid. p. 100.
of experience afforded in the cinema, since that experience is not dictated to us by the medium. I shall argue that a psychoanalytic view of the mind can illuminate our predisposition to entertain projective illusion and hence the quality and character of our involvement in the cinema that fosters this experience. Of course, this argument is not a new one; as we have seen, it is put forward in the writings of Baudry and Metz. However, the argument requires reassessment and restatement in order to redeem a psychoanalytic approach to the cinema from some of the ambiguity and equivocation that beset the arguments of contemporary film theory, and to answer the criticism that psychoanalytic theory ignores the fact that cinema-going is a conscious and rational activity.8

Here, Allen explicitly states that his approach identified the role of the viewer as a conscious, intentional activity in which the viewer willingly participates. It is necessary to point out that Allen’s position on film viewing is not an outright revoking of Baudry’s theory, but rather serves as a critique of Baudry’s methodology, particularly his appropriation of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a means of supporting his claim that film should be understood as an ideological agent that is on the side of the ruling class. Allen’s concept of film viewing as a projective illusion utilizes psychoanalysis to link the viewer’s conscious pursuit of film viewing and the enjoyment it generates to the formulation of fantasies, which function as a form of wish fulfillment.

Allen builds upon this linkage by pointing out that individuals create fantasy imagery all the time in order to satisfy various desires and interests which, when the fantasy imagery is entertained, provides the individual with a sense of satisfaction. Of course, the individual realizes that the fantasy imagery is not reality, just as the individual is also fully aware that they have generated the fantasy imagery in order to satisfy their interests and desires. Similarly, Allen argues, film viewers choose to go to the movies to engage in fantasy imagery that is designed to fulfill certain basic desires of entertainment.

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8 Ibid. p. 122.
and illusion, which extend to viewers universally. I am invoking Allen’s concept of film viewing as projective illusion because it seems to adequately deal with the motivations of the actual film viewer rather than an attempt to construct a model of the activity of film viewing with a predisposition towards identifying collective social groupings or social activities as inherently ideological in nature. Allen’s discussion of projective illusion can be applied to DVDs in a similar manner as it is applied to film. The alternative viewing experience provided by DVD technology, as I will explain in greater detail in the second chapter, depends on whether or not the viewer chooses to use those features which are specific to DVDs.

Although Baudry’s apparatus theory is important within the history of film theory, it is necessary to point out that his theory fails to logically sustain itself. Yet, despite its obvious flaws, Baudry’s theory could prove to be useful, beyond simply being a chapter in the history of film theory. A more flexible approach to the issue of film viewing, such as Allen’s concept of projective illusion, is necessary to discuss the changes that DVD technology has had upon the film viewing experience.

Baudry’s theory attempts to provide an explanation of the underlying causes that account for the impact that the experience of viewing a film has upon film audiences, which appears to be well suited to my task in this thesis. Baudry’s analysis focuses upon the cinematic apparatus (consisting of the film projector and movie screen), or, the technical machinery responsible for generating the experience of film viewing. In the case of DVD technology, machinery is the fundamental element that is responsible for the differences in viewing experience, which distinguish DVDs from other modes of film
viewing. In the next chapter, the issue of how DVD technology can be addressed in a theoretically adequate manner will be the focal point. Questions, such as what is the relation of DVD technology to other modes of film viewing?; does the success of DVD technology signal the end of motion picture art?; and what is the best way to characterize the bonus features on DVDs?, will all be addressed as we proceed to examine the impact of DVD technology.
Chapter 3: Searching for a Theoretical Approach to DVD Technology

This chapter focuses on generating a theoretical rearticulating of Baudry’s theory and will address the need to investigate what role the technical machinery behind DVD technology plays in effecting a viewer’s experience of a film. In addition, this rearticulating will focus on how DVD technology functions for the large numbers of viewers who embrace the interactivity made possible through this technology. In short, this rearticulating of apparatus theory will seek to address what role DVD technology plays in the experience of viewers who use it, as well as how this technology can be seen as performing different functions for movie studios and distribution companies, filmmakers, and viewers.

I begin by examining how DVD technology has created a new type of film viewing experience, one which is distinctly different from the viewing experience afforded through movie theaters, VHS tapes, or on broadcast television. I argue that, in addition to the economic issues that surround DVD technology, it is necessary to make theoretical distinctions between the form and contextual process associated with viewing films in movie theaters or on VHS tape, and viewing films using DVD technology as it has developed over the past ten years. Through this analysis of DVD technology I will explore how the viewing experience generated by this technology creates an interactive viewing experience between filmmakers and film viewers, which calls for greater theoretical analysis. To clarify, I do not wish to deny the economic elements that surround DVD technology, but to suggest that a location for textual exchange between
filmmakers and film viewers has become possible through advancements in this technology.

DVD technology has been most commonly addressed as the replacement of VHS tapes and the VCR in the age of digital technology. DVD technology has been widely discussed as being an improvement in home viewing, specifically in terms of providing viewers with picture and sound quality, which is closer to the experience of watching a film in a theater than VHS tapes could ever hope to achieve. Evidence of this can be found in the joint advertisement of DVD players and home theater systems in the late 1990s. An advertisement for Sony’s Digital Cinema Sound helps to illustrate this point. The advertisement explains what Digital Cinema Sound is in the following manner:

Digital Cinema Sound brings home the realism and excitement of movie theater sound. The advent of DVD signals the beginning of ultra high fidelity sound in home theater enjoyment. To fully realize the potential of this exciting new movie software media, Digital Cinema Sound incorporates the newest technology that enables astonishingly realistic sound playback. Digital Cinema Sound performs extremely powerful processing of digital signal data in amounts too large to be handled by conventional methods. Not surprisingly, Digital Cinema Sound was developed through the collaboration between Sony and Sony Pictures Entertainment, the Hollywood-based movie company of the worldwide Sony group and licensor of Sony Dynamic Digital Sound (SDDS), the advanced digital sound standard for movie theaters. The future of DVD movie soundtrack playback is Digital Cinema Sound, based on advanced Hollywood production expertise.9

This ad is one example of many that sought to convince viewers that through the purchase of the right equipment it was possible to achieve the experience of watching a film in a movie theater without leaving the comfort of home. Terrence Rafferty discusses DVD technology in a similar manner:

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I suspect that many DVD owners use their players exactly as I do, as a way of recreating as nearly as possible at home the experience of seeing a film in a theater. The DVD picture is sharp, the sound is crisp and the film is almost invariably presented in its correct aspect ratio - i.e., letterboxed for movies made in wide-screen process, as all but a few since the mid-50s have been. The DVD player is, by common consent, the best-selling new device in consumer-electronics history. It’s said that the “market penetration” of DVD players (which were introduced in 1997) into American homes is progressing at a rate twice that of the VCR. And the unprecedented “penetration” of this format cannot be attributed solely to the Rohypnol of advertising hype; the DVD is a distinct improvement over the videocassette, and even over the extinct laserdisc.\(^\text{10}\)

Rafferty’s comments help to target two issues that floated around early discussions of DVD technology upon its initial release on the consumer market in 1997; its enhanced sound and image quality, and its status as the replacement of the VHS format. These two issues are centrally tied to the economic aspects of DVD technology; namely, how it was marketed to viewers, and why it has been so widely accepted by viewers. These are issues which will have to be pursued elsewhere to adequately address the impact of DVD technology over the past decade. The main focus of this chapter will be to examine how the DVD format is clearly different from other modes of film viewing, and how these differences warrant serious theoretical attention.

In order to argue that DVD technology deserves serious theoretical attention within in the field of film studies, it will be necessary to first prove that there is a difference between the DVD format and other viewing formats, such as movie theaters or VHS tapes, for example. My analysis of DVD technology will focus primarily upon the specific differences which generate a viewing experience which is unique to the DVD

format. Having said that, I will proceed to examine the differences in form and contextual process of viewing, which indicates that DVD technology provides a distinctly different sort of viewing experience. To avoid any confusion, I will focus on each of these areas of interest individually, carefully addressing what I am referring to as traditional modes of film viewing experience and differentiating that from the new mode of film viewing experience, which is symptomatic of DVD technology.

In order to discuss how the experience of viewing a film in a movie theater is different from that of viewing a film on DVD, it is necessary to describe what the movie theater experience is like. Since this is, undoubtedly, quite familiar to many people, my account will focus on the most fundamental procedural steps that occur as a viewer watches a film in a movie theater, before moving on to discuss some issues that effect the viewer’s experience. The viewer, upon arriving at the movie theater, purchases a ticket, walks to the specific auditorium where the film is being screened, selects a seat and sits down to wait for the film to begin. The film starts, with the viewer remaining seated (with the exception of possible bathroom breaks) until the film has ended. The viewer stands up and exits the theater. This routine, I would assume, mirrors the process undertaken by most viewers when they go to a movie theater to see a film, and it is during this process when the viewer’s experience of the film being screened is formulated.

One may wish to object to the previous statement, raising the example of a film which is not a traditional narrative film, such as Luis Bunuel’s film, *Un Chien Andalou*, where the viewer may ruminate on the film after having seen it in order to come to
understand the meaning of the film. I would agree that not all films generate a solid experience on the part of the viewer during the first viewing; however, I would claim that for the majority of the films screened in movie theaters, my claim, that the viewer’s experience of the film is generated as they watch the film, is accurate. This view of how a viewer’s experience of most films is generated while they are watching the film is advanced by theorist Noël Carroll, who calls this process “erotetic” relation. Referencing Soviet Montage theorists such as V.I. Pudovkin and Lev Kuleshov, Carroll describes viewers watching linear, narrative films as consciously generating questions as the film unfolds, based upon what has happened up until that specific point in the film. These questions are formulated and later answered by how individual scenes are structured together. Carroll discusses how viewers generate questions based upon the unfolding of scenes in a film in the following manner:

Using the idea of a question to capture the idea of raising narrative possibilities seems appropriate since the most convenient way in ordinary language to state such possibilities is “Will x happen or not?” The concept of the question, as well, enables us to explain one of the most apparent audience responses toward linear movie narratives: expectation. That is, the spectator expects answers to the questions the film raises or intimates about its fictional world.\textsuperscript{11}

Carroll’s concept of erotetic relation helps to provide a lucid and seemingly accurate description of how film viewers’ experience of a film is generated while watching it in a movie theater, or on a VHS tape, or on television. In all three instances, the film unfolds in a linear fashion while the viewer raises and answers questions consciously as the film progresses towards its conclusion. This experience of film

viewing, which is familiar to many film viewers, is markedly different from the experience of film viewing made possible by the advancement of DVD technology over the past ten years. DVD technology, unlike celluloid film, VHS tapes, or television stations, provides the viewer with different options as to how a film can be viewed. A viewer can watch a film on DVD from beginning to end (as they would in a movie theater) or they can watch it by randomly selecting what scenes they would like to watch in the order in which they would like to watch them, or they can watch the film in conjunction with some or all of the bonus features that might be found on the DVD.

I will begin my analysis of DVD technology by addressing how the form of film viewing via DVD technology is unlike any other method of film viewing. The difference in form of which I am speaking here refers to the non-linear form of film viewing that is made possible through DVD technology as opposed to the linear form, which has been traditional form since the advent of motion pictures in the 1890s. When I refer to the traditional linear mode of film viewing, I am referring to the fact that prior to the advent of DVD technology, the process of film viewing was conceived of in terms of the film unfolding from beginning to end. The linear model of film viewing is demonstrated by viewers watching films in movie theaters, where the viewer sits down (presumably) at the beginning of the film and remains seated until the end of the film.

This linear mode is also demonstrated in the VHS format and in the broadcast television format as well. It could be claimed that VHS tapes do not strictly enforce a linear mode of viewing since viewers can fast forward or rewind. For example, let us imagine that a viewer wishes to see a specific scene from a VHS copy of Eisenstein’s The
Battleship Potemkin (1925), such as the “Odessa Steps” sequence, the viewer will have to fast forward and search out this scene. However, if the viewer were using a DVD instead, the scene could be selected and viewed in complete isolation from the rest of the film.

DVD technology’s adoption of a non-linear mode of viewing allows viewers to skip to a desired sequence in a film, locating it directly without having to spend time hunting for it. By providing viewers with the chapter selection option, the DVD format provides the viewer with the option of viewing a film in a linear fashion, or of selecting specific scenes outside of any intended constructed order. One may wish to point out that a viewer may choose to view a film in a linear fashion, despite having the option of viewing individual scenes in a non-linear fashion. It is possible that viewers will still watch films on DVD from start to finish; in fact, a good deal of film viewers will do that. However, I have raised the shift from linear form to non-linear form in order to demonstrate that the DVD format allows for a non-linear viewing experience, thus making it different from other film viewing formats that have come before it. By creating the possibility of a film viewing experience that is non-linear in nature, the DVD format has generated an experience of film viewing significantly different from the viewing experience examined and theorized previously in the field of film studies.

Keeping in mind my analysis of the difference in the form of film viewing made possible by DVD technology, I would like to shift to an examination of how the contextual process of film viewing has been affected by that technology. This issue, which overlaps slightly with the issue of non-linear form in the previous paragraph,
involves the use of bonus features on DVDs, and more specifically how these features impact the viewer’s experience of the film. As we have established in the previous paragraph, the process of film viewing prior to the advent of DVD technology centered on the linear progression of events as they unfolded from the beginning of a film until its ending. As such, the viewing process involved sitting down and watching the film. This process has changed as a result of the influence that the DVD format has had upon film viewers, who not only look at the particular film that is reproduced on the DVD, but also at the bonus features located on the DVD as well.

The presence of bonus features on DVDs, once seen as functioning solely as a marketing device of the DVD’s distribution company, has become highly influential to the viewer’s experience of the film. Through bonus items, such as audio commentaries, behind the scenes featurettes, and deleted footage, the DVD format has created a more interactive viewing experience. These features allow the viewer to interact with the film by selecting any (or all) of these bonus feature options. Although it is difficult to deny the novelty aspects of DVD bonus features, it is important to note that these features have created a viewing procedure predicated upon the active participation of the viewer, who is no longer sitting down and watching a film unfold in front of them from points A to B, but decides what features of the DVD will be used and when they will be used.

This viewing procedure associated with the DVD format is clearly different from the viewing procedure that takes place by way of a movie theater or a VCR. Through DVD technology the procedure for viewing a film is no longer restricted to taking a seat and watching a film; rather viewers now make conscious decisions as to whether or not
they will view the film with the commentary track(s) turned on or off, whether or not they will watch the deleted footage that was excluded by the director and editor(s), or if they will watch a program explaining how the film took shape from the initial planning stages through its theatrical release.

Bonus features provide DVDs with a distinctly different context in which films can be understood by viewers. The contextual understanding of film viewing as emerging entirely from watching a film shifts to a contextual understanding of the experience of a film as a mixture of the film along with the bonus features accompanying the film on the DVD. Here I am speaking specifically of how the viewer’s use of a DVD’s bonus features causes the experience of the film to be a result of factors other than the film itself. I will use the DVD of Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* as an example to help illustrate my point. The DVD is a two-disc set containing Welles’ film on the first disc, along with audio commentaries by film critic Roger Ebert and filmmaker Peter Bogdonavich, newsreel footage of the 1941 release of the film, and items such as call sheets, storyboards, and memos from RKO studios, while the second disc features the two hour long PBS documentary *The Battle Over Citizen Kane*, which chronicles the history of the production of the film, the early career of Welles, and William Randolph Hearst’s attempts to destroy the film. The viewer’s experience of the film does not rest solely upon the finished film, but rather how the viewer experiences the film along with any of the features that might have been used by the viewer.

My discussion of DVD technology has been somewhat influenced by Terrence Rafferty’s analysis of the differences between watching a film in a movie theater and
watching a film on DVD. I have found Rafferty’s analysis useful in helping to articulate some of my own ideas about DVD technology more clearly, while at the same time I have found certain aspects of his argument to be problematic. In this next section I will argue against specific aspects of Rafferty’s position, using this as a spring board for suggesting how we can deal with DVD technology in a more careful, theoretical manner.

In his analysis of DVD technology, Terrence Rafferty concludes that the popular acceptance of DVD technology is highly problematic on the grounds that motion pictures are an art form and that the DVD format greatly compromises the integrity of film art. Rafferty’s main argument is embedded in the romantic notions of the filmmaker as artist and the film viewer as passive observer. Let me clarify what I mean by these two notions. The romantic notion of the filmmaker as artist can be most accurately described in theoretical terms as the auteur theory where one person is seen as being responsible for the thematic and formalistic elements that manifest themselves as a sort of artistic signature within a given film, and more broadly within a larger body of work. The romantic notion of the film viewer as a passive observer is similar to Baudry’s discussion of the passive viewer. For Rafferty, viewers connect with films, as they do with paintings in an art museum, that is, by stepping back from a given work and allowing the form, content, and style of the piece to affect them.

I will not delve into an in-depth analysis of the strengths or weaknesses of the auteur theory, since they are quite clear within the realm of film studies, nor will I argue against Rafferty’s formulation of the film viewer as a passive observer since I have already addressed that issue in the previous chapter. Instead, I will be discussing certain
issues within the framework of Rafferty’s critique of DVD technology, which seem to be inaccurate or overlook vital aspects of the type of viewing experience that DVD technology provides to the viewer.

Rafferty’s argument centers on the flexibility that DVD technology provides to film viewers. It has features such as the chapter selection option, which presents the film as a set of individual scenes instead of being a complete work. Rafferty states that he thinks of film as a “unified, self-sufficient artifact that, by its nature, is not interactive in the way that, say, a video game is.” Here, Rafferty refers to the extra features, such as listening to audio commentary tracks or viewing scenes which were edited out of the final version of the film. Such options make the process of film viewing through DVD technology “interactive” since the viewer has the option of fragmenting the film (by viewing the film with an audio track external to the diegetic world of the film or by viewing scenes that are outside of the completed film), which for Rafferty is not germane to an appreciation of a work of art since it violates the traditional linear form of film viewing (i.e., watching the film, uninterrupted, from the beginning credits until the end credits).

It is necessary to focus upon Rafferty’s conception of film as art to fully articulate his critique of DVD technology. Rafferty links film with other, more traditional modes of visual art (such as painting or sculpture), which entails his adoption of the concept of the intentionality of the artist. The intentionality of the artist presupposes that a work of art is created in a specific, fixed manner in which the artist intends for the work of art to be seen. So, when a film viewer sits down in a movie theater and watches a film from

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12 Ibid. p. 44.
beginning to end, they are viewing the film in the manner in which the filmmaker intended the film to be seen. The fixity, which is crucial to Rafferty’s understanding of film as art, is displaced by the power provided by DVD technology, since it allows viewers to randomly select their entry point into the film, instead of watching it unfold in the straightforward linear fashion found in a movie theater. In fact, it would seem that DVD technology lacks any specific viewing procedure or even any clearly designated viewing context, is also highly problematic from Rafferty’s perspective.

Rafferty’s fears about the loss of film’s traditional artistic form, context, and viewing procedure are clearly articulated when he states that “the more ‘interactive’ we allow our experiences of art – any art – to become, the less likely it is that future generations will appreciate the necessity of art at all.”13 It is clear that Rafferty finds the differences in the form, context, and procedure of the DVD format to be extremely problematic. In the conclusion of his essay he quotes comments made by David Lynch in regard to DVD technology:

“The film is the thing,” he tells me. “For me, the world you go into in a film is so delicate - it can be broken so easily. It’s so tender. And it’s essential to hold that world together, to keep it safe.” He says he thinks “it’s crazy to go in and fiddle with the film,” considers voiceovers “theater of the absurd” and is concerned that too many DVD extras can “demystify” a film. “Do not demystify,” he declares, with ardor. “When you know too much, you can never see the film the same way again. It’s ruined for you for good. All the magic leaks out, and it’s putrefied.”14

On the face of it, Rafferty’s argument about DVD technology seems similar to arguments in the early history of film as to whether or not movies could genuinely be considered to be art, except in this case Rafferty is focusing on the presentational format

13 Ibid. p. 47.
as a criterion for whether or not a work can be understood as being genuinely artistic. For Rafferty, DVD technology allows the viewer to tamper with the film, by using the bonus features, as well undermining the artistry of the filmmaker by including footage that the filmmaker had removed during the editing process. Rafferty concludes by stating his belief that the DVD format “in its current, extras-choked incarnation - represents a kind of self-destruction of the art of film.”¹⁵ Rafferty’s characterization of DVD technology seems to be jumping to a premature conclusion by predicting the death of film art. I would like to turn to a brief discussion of the most problematic features of Rafferty’s argument before moving on to my own characterization of how the viewing experience afforded to DVD viewers can be discussed in a more judicious manner.

Rafferty’s argument hinges upon his linkage between the growth of DVD technology and the death of the art of motion pictures. This argument is highly problematic because it claims that DVDs place film viewers in a position of creative power by providing them with too many choices as to how a film can be experienced. This power is a result of taking away the creative power of filmmakers, and by extension, taking away the integrity of the film artist. Upon closer scrutiny, Rafferty’s argument is unsustainable due to the fact that its focus is limited to an economic framework. I will examine specific flaws in Rafferty’s argument before proceeding to offer my own analysis of how DVD technology functions.

Rafferty’s claim that DVD technology ultimately provides viewers with the decision-making power traditionally held by filmmakers, has two distinct flaws that prevent his supposition from being acceptable. The first flaw is his insistence that the

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 47.
filmmaker had been the chief driving force behind the construction of films from pre-production all the way through post-production. Rafferty’s position, while maintaining the romantic tradition of the creative genius, fails to discuss the large number of films in which producers, movie studios, or in certain cases, actors have caused it to be created in a particular way. Films such as *Duel in the Sun*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, or *Spartacus*, are just a few examples of films where the director had to bend to the will of others while shooting or editing a film. Since Rafferty’s argument rests so heavily upon the issue of the filmmaker as artist, we need not engage in the creation of a taxonomy of films where the driving force behind those elements, which are considered to be artistic, were individuals other than the filmmaker. The three examples I have listed above show that prior to the introduction of DVD technology, people other than the filmmaker were responsible for making important decisions in the creation of a film. This significantly weakens Rafferty’s argument, that this has occurred only since the inception of DVDs.

This last point is closely connected with the next point I want to discuss, that is Rafferty’s claim that the artistic integrity of the film artist is irreparably damaged by DVD technology, because it allows the viewer to make creative choices that trump those made by the filmmaker in the production and post production periods. This supposition seems to be a misidentification of the effect that bonus features on DVDs have upon the viewer. I would argue, contrary to Rafferty’s position, that the bonus features on DVDs confirm artistic intent rather than deny it. I make this claim based upon the functions that the bonus features perform when they are utilized by the viewer. As Rafferty argues, bonus features do perform a specific economic function, namely to entice potential
viewers into purchasing DVDs. There is, however, a more complex dimension to the features which have become fairly standard aspects of DVDs. Over the past few years more and more filmmakers are becoming intricately involved in the distribution process of their films, including overseeing the creation of bonus features to accompany the film on DVD.

For example, David Lynch not only oversaw the entire remastering process of his film, *Eraserhead*, as it was transferred to DVD, but he also included specific directions to the viewer as to how to make the appropriate technical adjustments in order to fully experience the film as he originally intended. This is not the only example where DVD technology has been utilized by a filmmaker in order to direct, or guide, viewers into experiencing a film in a particular way. The recent example of the multiple releases of Oliver Stone’s 2004 film, *Alexander*, aptly demonstrates this sense of DVD technology as one which can generate a guided model viewership quite effectively.

In 2005, there were two versions of the film, *Alexander*, released on DVD; *Alexander: the theatrical version* and *Alexander: the director’s cut*. While both DVDs contained three behind-the-scenes featurettes, there were differences between the two versions. The director’s cut had a running time of 167 minutes in which several segments of the film were re-edited in order to smooth out the narrative flow of the film, while the theatrical version had a running time of 175 minutes, preserving the original version of the film that was screened in movie theaters. The other, significant difference between these two versions was in the audio commentary tracks. The theatrical version featured audio commentary by Oliver Stone and historian Robin Lane Fox, which focused upon
the historical aspects of the life of Alexander the Great and the empire he built, along
with details of the film’s production. The director’s cut features an audio commentary by
Oliver Stone, which is different from the one on the theatrical version. On the director’s
cut commentary, Stone discusses various issues that either he, Warner Brothers, or the
viewing public seemed to be dissatisfied with in the theatrical version, and how he
attempted to correct them through this alternative cut of the film. This discussion of the
audio commentary tracks on the two versions of *Alexander* helps to demonstrate how
filmmakers are using DVD technology as a means of interacting with their audience by
way of a more focused form of direct address through the DVD features.

The release of multiple versions of Stone’s film on DVD is a clear indication that
the studio was attempting to recoup the money it lost due to the film’s poor performance
at the box office. However, by releasing different versions of the film that also feature
bonus features, the filmmaker is given a platform where he can communicate with
viewers directly about their experience of the film. In this sense, the bonus features of a
DVD can function as both a means to lure viewers into buying a particular product and an
opportunity for interested viewers to engage directly with the filmmakers who are
responsible for the film in question.

Through my rebuttal of Rafferty’s critique of DVD technology I have sought to
explain what the experience of viewing a film through the DVD format is from a critical
perspective. As I have demonstrated, DVD technology presents films in a manner that
mirrors the sound and image quality experienced in movie theaters, while at the same
time allowing filmmakers to utilize the technology, such as the inclusion of bonus
features, in order to help form a desired model viewership of the film. Through the use of DVD technology, filmmakers, critics, and historians have the ability to guide the viewer’s experience of the film by discussing the film, pointing out things that may have affected the production, distribution, or reception of the film. Contrary to Rafferty’s claims that the DVD format is destroying the artistic underpinnings of films, I have argued that DVD technology allows for a guided viewership which actually affirms the role of the filmmaker rather than displacing it.

In the previous chapter, I introduced Richard Allen’s concept of films as a particular type of projective illusion. Based upon my analysis of how the experience of film viewing functions through the use of DVD technology, I would like to advance the suggestion that the DVD format should also be understood as functioning as a type of projective illusion. It seems clear that DVD technology offers the viewer several options to experience a film. The viewer may choose to experience a film linearly, from beginning to end, or they may decide to watch the film by selecting sequences to watch at random; in either case, the viewer is making a conscious decision as to how the film will be experienced at that given time. By incorporating Allen’s concept, it is possible to come to a more flexible understanding of how DVD technology can affect the experience of film viewers, as well as how it can be utilized by filmmakers and film critics in order to guide the viewer’s experience of a given film.

Rather than visualize the advancements in DVD technology as Rafferty does, I would argue for what I refer to as a functionalist approach to DVD technology. This functionalist approach would acknowledge the particular type of experience generated by
DVD technology. In addition, this approach would recognize that DVD technology has the capacity to create a desired model viewership through the inclusion and use of bonus features, such as audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and deleted scenes. Viewers are not unconscious subjects who are being duped into participating in this experience; rather they are willing participants who seek out and engage in the viewing experience that DVD technology provides.

A functionalist approach to DVD technology seeks to develop an understanding of how the film viewing experience has been impacted as a result of the use of this technology. In order to access this, I would argue that rather than simply look at what sort of features can be found on a DVD, it is important to inquire as to what role those features play for the viewers who use them. Another way to think of this is to expand upon the concept of textual analysis to not only include the film in question but also any other features which could influence the viewer’s experience of the film. It could be objected that features such as an audio commentary or deleted scenes are not genuinely textual because they exist outside of the film and as such, should not be considered in the same manner as the film itself. While the objection that DVD features are exterior to the film text is accurate, I would argue that these features are not necessarily the same as print interviews with filmmakers or publicity pieces designed to entice potential viewers. Through DVD technology, these features exist alongside the film, and if the viewer chooses to use them, would play a role in determining what the viewers’ experience of the film would be. In short, the functionalist approach seeks to analyze how the film
viewing experience has the potential to become a paratextual process where the viewer’s experience is an amalgam of various factors which are present at the time of viewing.
The functionalist approach closely examines how the DVD format can be identified as performing specific functions for both filmmakers and film viewers. I am advocating such an approach to DVD technology because it seeks to address how DVD technology provides a specific type of viewing experience unique to the DVD format through options such as scene (or chapter) selection and bonus features, such as filmmakers’ audio commentary tracks, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and deleted footage. In order to demonstrate that a functionalist approach to DVD technology is an effective form of analysis, I apply this approach to a case study of the DVD *Sin City: Recut, Extended, Unrated*. Through this case study, I illustrate how DVD technology functions to generate a desired model of viewership, where the viewer’s experience is framed by the efforts of the filmmaker(s).

*Sin City* was initially released on DVD on August 16, 2005 as a single disc featuring the film and an eight minute long behind-the-scenes featurette. On December 13, 2005 the film was released as a two-disc special edition set called *Sin City – Recut, Extended, Unedited*, which offered viewers extensive bonus features, including one of Frank Miller’s *Sin City* graphic novels, *The Hard Goodbye*. Rather than enumerating what the bonus features on the two-disc set are I have included a copy of the DVD’s insert card, which lists all of the bonus features. Before analyzing how some of the bonus features function, I would like to discuss how the two DVD versions of the film function from an economic standpoint.
The issue of multiple DVD releases and alternative versions of films is one of the complaints that Terrence Rafferty lodges against DVD technology. His assessment of distribution companies who release them, as well as filmmakers who participate in those releases, is that they have eradicated the artistic elements of motion pictures. For Rafferty, DVD technology is synonymous with generating large scale profits, and he concludes that as more and more filmmakers begin to embrace DVD technology and the possibilities for a non–traditional experience of film, that film art is being reduced to the same level as video games and children’s toys. At first it would be difficult to disagree with Rafferty’s claims that profit is a prime motivation for the release of multiple DVD versions of films, especially in the case of *Sin City*.

With less than four full months between the release of the single disc edition and the two-disc set, it would seem fairly reasonable to suspect that the chief concern of Dimension Studios, the distribution company for the *Sin City* DVDs, was to generate more profits. In this sense, I am inclined to agree with Rafferty’s assessment that profit plays a large factor in the motivation behind releasing multiple DVD versions of a given film. However, I think that if we limit our analysis purely to the ways in which DVD technology and individual DVDs function economically then we are severely limiting our understanding of how that technology can function outside of a restrictive economic framework. In the interest of examining the alternative frameworks in which DVD technology can function, I analyze some of the predominant bonus features of the *Sin City* two-disc set. Through this analysis I extrapolate how the functionalist approach to DVD technology can judiciously be used to understand the potential that DVD
technology has for both filmmakers and film viewers who are interested in creating or participating in extra textual experiences in addition to the viewing of films.

This case study is discussing how DVD technology provides the possibility for the unique type of viewing experience to which I am referring. My analysis here focuses upon how these elements of DVD technology, if they are utilized by the viewer, can be seen as generating a particular experience of a specific film. I do not wish to claim that everyone who owns a DVD uses bonus features, or that all viewers will have the same experience of those features. That claim would not be true. My intention here is to recommend that DVD technology be subjected to more critical or theoretical scrutiny than it has received up until now, and to suggest a method of approaching DVD technology that incorporates theoretical concerns into its framework.

My examination of the *Sin City: Recut, Extended, Unedited* DVD initially focuses on how the DVD’s bonus features, specifically, the audio commentary tracks, the 15-minute flick school, and the all green screen version of the film, provide viewers with an extra-textual viewing experience. Although these features provide interested viewers with strong incentives to purchase the DVD, they also function as an opportunity for the filmmaker to frame the viewer’s experience of the film in a particular way through the features located on the DVD. Although I am dealing with the example of one specific DVD, the claims that I am advancing can be extrapolated to include other DVDs that offer viewers features made possible by DVD technology, which have the potential to generate alternative viewing experiences.
The first feature is the audio commentary track which can be accessed on the first disc. This option allows the viewer to watch the film with one of two possible audio tracks selected to be played over the film’s soundtrack; one features Robert Rodriguez, Quentin Tarantino, and Bruce Willis, and the other features Rodriguez and *Sin City* creator, Frank Miller. On the track featuring Rodriguez and Miller, the two men discuss how the graphic novel was initially created, how the two men came to work with each other on this film, and how specific stories and characters were transformed from graphic novels into a feature film. On the other track, Rodriguez narrates how he decided to make *Sin City*, with brief interludes from Tarantino and Willis, who inform the viewer who is listening to the commentary track of what their experiences were like while making the film, and specifically, of working with Rodriguez.

The contents of the audio tracks function as detailed accounts of how the film was created using digital technology, as well as anecdotes describing how the cast and crew interacted with each other. However, it is not the specific content of the audio commentaries which I discuss here; instead I focus on how the commentary tracks function when they are selected and used by viewers. The two audio commentaries on the *Sin City* DVD are more than merely the filmmakers reporting on how the production of the film unfolded; rather, when the commentary tracks are used by the viewer, they serve as a guided tour through the film. Audio commentaries should be recognized as selling points that movie studios and distribution companies endorse in the hopes of generating large profits. However, I would argue that as more filmmakers become
involved in the distribution of their films, the features that they contribute take on greater significance for themselves as well as for film viewers.

Through the commentary tracks, Robert Rodriguez asserts his power as a director by relating to the viewer what his intentions behind the film were and how he worked with the cast and the crew to capture his vision of what a cinematic version of Sin City should be. I am not claiming that Rodriguez is somehow trying to unjustly influence those viewers who make use of the commentary tracks, especially since I would argue that all commentary tracks function as audio directives from either filmmakers or film critics/scholars who are framing the film in a very specific and intentional way.

In a similar manner, the 15-minute flick school feature on the Sin City DVD functions as a means of direct address from Robert Rodriguez to film viewers who are interested in learning how the film was constructed from a technical standpoint. The feature is not actually an instructional device on how to make films; rather it is dedicated to providing the curious viewer with an explanation of how the look of the film was accomplished. Here, Rodriguez offers the viewer descriptions of the specific technical process responsible for creation of the film’s unique visual style.

At the core of the flick school feature is Rodriguez’s extended interaction with his audience. The flick school feature can also be found on the DVDs for some of Rodriguez’s other films, such as Once Upon a Time in Mexico and El Mariachi, which would seem to indicate that the purpose behind this bonus feature is not only to fill up space on the DVD, but to interact with viewers who are interested in expanding their experience of Rodriguez’s films even further.
Functioning in a similar manner to the 15-minute flick school segment, the green screen feature also functions as a means by which the viewer’s experience of the film can be framed by the interjection of information by filmmaker Robert Rodriguez. This feature has its own introduction by Rodriguez, where he explains how it functions:

Hello this is Robert Rodriguez with a feature that I am very excited about Sin City the all green screen version - what I mean by that is you are going to see the whole movie on green screen with no special effects. You can see exactly what we had or didn’t have on the set when we shot the movie. I sped it up about 800% so you can watch the whole movie in less than 10 minutes. I cut in some of my score so that you can let it wash over you like a very strange music video. I think you’ll also realize how much work is left when we finish shooting a movie like this. Keep in mind we didn’t watch it like this on the set, we always had monitors tweaked so that it was in black and white with high contrast so I could get a better sense of how my lighting was coming out, not wanting to lose all those details in the shadows. So this is just the raw elements of what we shot without any color correction. Enjoy.16

As the introduction indicates, this feature allows the viewer to see what the set actually looked like while the film was being shot. Its obvious purpose is to present the production footage from the entire film in twelve minutes and twenty seconds, revealing how much of the film was actually created during the post-production period. However, this feature also serves another purpose, which is not as obvious as the first one. This feature guides the viewer through the creation stage of the film, pointing out how reliant the film is upon digital effects, something which was elaborated on in the 15-minute flick school segment. As the introduction to this feature indicates, Rodriguez guides the viewer’s experience of the film by speeding up the footage and cutting in some of the film’s musical score. The green screen segment functions as an elaborate form of show-

16 Robert Rodriguez, Audio Introduction to the Sin City Green Screen Feature located on the second disc of the Sin City: Recut, Extended, Unedited DVD.
and-tell between Rodriguez and the viewer. If the viewer is interested in how the film was created or why the film ended up in the form it did, then the filmmaker responds to the viewer through the inclusion of bonus features, which show the viewer what happened during the production and post-production of the film as the director tells them how the film was conceived and created, giving the viewer a feeling of how experimental the filming process was for this film.

In the previous chapter I worked to illustrate how Noël Carroll’s concept of erotetic relation, where viewers subconsciously generate questions as to how the narrative of a given film will advance (and ultimately resolve itself), is fundamentally different from the potential experience which DVD technology has provided to viewers over the past decade. As the examples from the Sin City DVD indicate, bonus features can function as both a sales incentive to potential buyers as well as the location for an interaction between filmmakers and film viewers. Instead of experiencing Sin City simply by sitting down and watching the film from beginning to end, the viewer is given the opportunity to use the bonus features in order to derive an experience of the film which is specific to watching it on DVD. This is evidenced by the introduction that plays when the viewer inserts the second disc into the DVD player, where Rodriguez states:

Hello this is Robert Rodriguez and welcome to the special edition of Sin City. On this disc you’ll find the full cuts of the Sin City stories, including the scenes of footage not included in the theatrical version. But instead of sandwiching the stories together, which is not how Frank Miller ever wrote them, we kept the stories separate so you could watch them the way you would read Frank’s books by choosing your own order, or watching them at your leisure, whether it is all at once or one every other day, whatever it is your choice. The correct chronology is actually:
That Yellow Bastard
The Customer is Always Right
The Hard Goodbye
And then, The Big Fat Kill
Also on this disc are my own special features I put together, including things like the 15 minute flick school. The all green screen version, where you can watch the movie without any effects. A cooking school. Yes. The long take. And *Sin City* live so check it out.

Disc 1 has the original theatrical cut with audio commentary track with myself, Frank Miller, Bruce Willis, Quentin Tarantino and there’s also something on there I like called “the audience version” where you can select an audio track which plays the movie with a lovely audience recorded during the premier of *Sin City* in Austin, Texas. Thank you.17

This brief introduction, which provides the viewer with a short overview of what the bonus features are and where they can be located, generates the viewer’s expectations as to how the features discussed might inform them about the film and how this information can influence their experience of the film. For example, Rodriguez explains that on the second disc the full cuts of the four stories, which are woven together throughout the film, are separated so that the viewer can experience them as they are in Miller’s graphic novels. The viewer is free to use or disregard the “recut and extended” version found on the second disc. In either case, DVD technology still functions by providing the viewer with the opportunity to experience the film in the manner in which they choose, rather than as a necessary procedure as in the case of watching a film in a movie theater.

Throughout this case study, I have focused upon how a close analysis of the DVD of *Sin City* could support the functionalist approach to DVD technology that was introduced in the previous chapter. This approach relies upon understanding how DVD technology functions as a method of addressing film viewers, where filmmakers, critics,

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and scholars have the opportunity to frame the viewers’ experience of a particular film in a specific way. This can be seen through the examples of the bonus features I discussed from the *Sin City* DVD, where Robert Rodriguez utilizes DVD technology in order to frame the viewer’s experience of the film. At the same time, it is necessary to point out that Rodriguez is not using DVD technology as a means of duping viewers into using the bonus features found on the DVD. Film viewers who make use of audio commentary tracks, deleted footage, or any other bonus features that might be located on a DVD are not tricked into using those features; they choose to use them, just as there are undoubtedly viewers who choose to not use them.

What I have tried to do in this chapter is to demonstrate how DVD technology can function, both for filmmakers and film viewers who wish to use that technology to its full extent. As noted earlier, I am not arguing that every film viewer who owns a DVD player intently watches the bonus features on the DVDs in their collection. What I am arguing is that DVD technology possesses the potential for a unique type of film viewing experience, which viewers are free to pursue or ignore. The reason behind the functionalist approach to DVD technology that I advocate is that this approach acknowledges the possibilities that exist because of the increased popularity of the DVD format in the past decade, without claiming that all film viewers will be affected by DVD technology in the same ways.

The benefits of a functionalist approach to DVD technology is that it views the DVD format as being more complex than simply the replacement of the VCR. Rather than linking the growth of DVD technology with the death of film art as Terrence
Rafferty has, the focus is placed upon crafting an analysis of DVD technology around a shifting level of functionality, which is not gauged on a grand scale, but in terms of individual films and individual film viewers.
Chapter 5: Discussing Future Possibilities of DVD Technology

The goal of this thesis has been to construct a rearticulating of apparatus theory that addresses the advancements in DVD technology over the past decade. By reviewing those aspects of Baudry’s theory which were highly problematic, I have emphasized why apparatus theory has been repeatedly critiqued and often deemed unsupportable. However, I have argued that although Baudry’s formulation of apparatus theory failed to sustain itself it is possible for apparatus theory to be applied to DVD technology. To this end I have presented an alternative approach to Baudry’s theory, which, although it cannot completely recuperate apparatus theory, it can suggest how apparatus theory can lend itself to a critical analysis of DVD technology.

Rather than being an all-encompassing theory, the concept of a formalist approach to DVD technology is an investigative approach that seeks to outline how DVD technology can be used by film viewers as well as filmmakers to generate a desired film viewing experience. Film viewers who choose to utilize all of the technological features of a DVD are consciously seeking to go beyond the linear experience of film viewing found in watching a film in a movie theater by selecting specific features from the DVD, which will play a part in their experience of a given film at that particular time of viewing. DVD technology also provides filmmakers with the opportunity of crafting their films in such a way that the viewers can experience the film exactly as the filmmaker desires, through the various bonus features that can be included on DVDs.

The functionalist approach which I discuss here examines how the experience of film viewers can be positioned, not by the ruling class, but by filmmakers who utilize
DVD technology to create a model of film viewership which frames the viewer’s experience of the film through the creation and use of the optional features that accompany many DVDs. However, the functionalist approach stresses that viewers are not unaware of the positioning as they are in Baudry’s theory; instead, it points out that they are fully conscious of how DVD technology functions. The alternative viewing experience, which I claim DVD technology makes available to viewers, is completely optional, which is different from Baudry’s theory that claims that viewers are unaware of the process of positioning that takes place each time a film is viewed.

My concept points out that the viewer’s experience of a film on DVD is completely dependent upon the viewer’s choice to use those features. It would be impossible to claim that most viewers who own DVDs experience films in a way which mirrors the model of film viewership, as presented in the last chapter. Such a task is outside of the scope of this project; however, this should not be a factor in the dismissal of the concept, since I have pointed out that my purpose is to investigate the potential alternatives to traditional linear film viewing that DVD technology makes available to viewers in a theoretically critical manner. The merits of this approach are that it clearly indicates that it is not a blanket concept that claims this is the only method of examining DVD technology, but rather a movement towards a more careful consideration of this popular film viewing technology.

Lastly, I would like to note that although I focused primarily upon contemporary films in this thesis, I do not intend to frame my discussion of DVD technology as some sort of technological fad. There are increasing numbers of early silent films, works of
“art cinema”, as well as experimental films that have found their way onto DVD. Films such as F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922), Jean-Luc Godard’s *Contempt*, or the early films of Kenneth Anger have all been released on DVD, and they all include bonus features which can be viewed as functioning both as supplying added sales quality as well as fulfilling the film fan’s desire to immerse themselves in the historical or cultural aspects which surround those films. This discussion of how DVD technology functions on multiple levels will undoubtedly need to be revisited and expanded as the technology continues to develop.
Bibliography


Appendix