POLANSKI AND PERCEPTION

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Abstract

Filmmaker Roman Polanski declares in his autobiography that he was greatly influenced by renowned neuropsychologist Richard L. Gregory (1923-2010), whose work, Polanski claims, gave scientific confirmation to many of his own beliefs regarding the nature of perception. Gregory was a strong advocate for what is referred to as the ‘indirect’ theory of perception, a theoretical model that stresses the agency of cognition, specifically hypothesisation, in the act of perceiving.

This analysis of Polanski’s cinema is guided by an exploration of perceptual psychology, with special attention paid to how the theory of indirect perception differs from competing, and often more intuitive, models of perception. The two main focuses of this thesis are: a) to identify the ways in which Polanski’s cinematography is actively informed by neuropsychological research on perception, and b) to discuss the various ways in which the key philosophical implications of the theory of indirect perception find expression in his cinema.

My analysis will focus primarily on two (unofficial) ‘trilogies’, what I refer to as the ‘Apartment Trilogy’ of Repulsion (1965), Rosemary’s Baby (1968), and The Tenant (1976), and the ‘Investigation Trilogy’ of Chinatown (1974), Frantic (1988) and The Ninth Gate (1999). Also included are minor case studies of Knife in the Water (1962), Death and the Maiden (1994), and The Ghost (2010). This thesis hopes to demonstrate the manner in which Polanski’s cinematic engagement with perceptual psychology evolves over his career, from more psychologically intimate explorations
of the perceptual mechanism via portrayals of schizophrenia in his earlier films, to more distant studies of highly proficient perceiving bodies who are nevertheless confronted with serious challenges to their perceptual (and epistemological) frameworks.
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Preface

A Few Words on the Structure of this Thesis

I begin this thesis with an examination of the early part of Roman Polanski’s career, in which I shall discuss Polanski’s educational background, his early shorts, and his first feature, *Knife in the Water* (1962). This introduction serves as an attempt to ‘locate’ the director within the discourse of national cinema, but what soon becomes evident are the challenges Polanski poses to such a task. The discussion then veers towards the notions of transnationalism and nomadism, which prove a better means to address Polanski’s work. Emerging from this discussion is Polanski’s special interest in visual perception, the issue that ultimately guides this analysis of his films.

Whilst this thesis is primarily intended as an analysis of Roman Polanski’s cinema, my particular approach to these films requires that the reader be acquainted with some of the basic tenets of perceptual psychology as well the clinical discourse surrounding the diagnosis schizophrenia. Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the polemics of perceptual psychology and schizophrenia as a means of communicating the conceptual framework upon which my specific means of addressing Polanski’s cinema is based. The thesis then moves on to three dedicated case studies (Chapters 3, 4, and 5), collectively referred to as the ‘Apartment Trilogy’.
I then turn my attention to another group of films in which Polanski’s engagement with perception takes a new direction. I begin the second part of this thesis with an inter-film discussion of what I refer to as the ‘Investigation Trilogy’ (Chapter 6), which is then followed by dedicated case studies (Chapters 7, 8, and 9).

In the final chapter (Chapter 10), I discuss Polanski’s latest feature film, *The Ghost* (2010), through which I summarise the key points of this thesis and highlight some areas worthy of further investigation.
INTRODUCTION

Polanski and Poland (Knife in the Water)

Roman Polanski began his career in cinema as a young actor, most notably featuring in Andrzej Wajda’s A Generation (1955). Wajda’s film is credited with starting the Polish Film School, a movement that broke from the Marxist didacticism of Poland’s post-war social realist cinema, in favour of putting forth a more ‘individualised vision’ (Ostrowska, 2006: 63) of cinema. Although Polanski’s early involvement with Wajda probably accounts for a large part of his early education as a filmmaker, Polanski’s own cinema, even his early ‘Polish’ output, sits uncomfortably alongside the Polish school, with his first feature, Knife in the Water, marking yet another ‘break’ in Polish cinema. Whilst Polanski’s cinema shares, to varying degrees, Wajda’s concern with the plight of the individual, the idea of cinema serving as ‘psychotherapist of the Polish audience’ (Ostrowska, 2006: 66) was rejected by Polanski. Even Polanski’s cycle of schizophrenia-based films (what I refer to in this thesis as ‘The Apartment Trilogy’), although heavily concerned with psychosis, offer no therapy. Whilst the Polish School rejected the prescriptive aesthetics of the ideologically didactic post-war Polish cinema, these films were equally defined by their resistance to it. Knife in the Water, in contrast, is one of the first examples of truly post-regime Polish cinema.

Nevertheless, Polanski’s cinema is certainly influenced by his direct experience of the Polish School, especially in its emphasis on the technical prowess of its filmmakers.
There are also indications of strong Polish cultural influences on Polanski’s work, from Polish romanticism to Grotowski and the theatre of the absurd. These influences are often papered-over in analyses of Polanski’s cinema, which tend to ‘claim’ Polanski as a global entity; as convincingly argued by Mazierska (2007), however, the ‘Polishness’ in Polanski’s cinema is indeed informative and not to be entirely overlooked. But the greatest influence on Polanski’s early cinema education is, ultimately, cinema itself. Whilst studying at Łódź, Polanski was able to access a far greater range of world cinema than would have been possible for even the most passionate Polish cinephile in the mid-1950s, a special privilege the government afforded film students (Polanski, 1984: 112), along with granting access to otherwise banned texts (if not directly, then through professors who ‘carelessly’ left these books scattered about classrooms [see Polanski, 1984: 80]). So whilst the influence of distinctly Polish culture on the formation of Polanski’s approach to cinema should not be undervalued, it is the influence of filmmakers, not only Wajda, but globally renowned directors like Carol Reed and Orson Welles, who most deeply informed his craft.

The only example of Polanski’s early works to employ a specifically Polish set of references is *When Angels Fall* (1959), a film which combines historical events, mythology and the personal recollections of an old woman to explore the ways in which all three intermingle and inform the formation of memory. Even without dialogue, the foregrounding of these iconic Polish elements firmly established *Angels* as a ‘Polish’ text. Polanski anchors the cinematic experience to the vision of an individual, the old woman (a Polish icon in her own right), whose subjective recollection-images we are permitted to observe. Oddly, at times, these ‘subjective’
images move beyond her (life’s) subjective reach, to an era before her birth. Thus the film transcends its specifically Polish framework to explore the malleability of memory and the influence that popular mythology, and possibly even the state, can have on personal recollections of the past. Here we have the first hint of Polanski’s concern with the manner in which perceptions are formed, a concept that dominates much of his cinema.

As Ostrowska writes, ‘Polanski’s scepticism towards the possibilities of direct access to memory put him in opposition to the exploring of it, the central task of Polish cinema [i.e. the Polish School] at the time’ (2006: 66). Indeed, the most enduring strength of Angels is not specifically due to its Polish iconography, but its discussion of memory through the superimposition of the woman’s vivid recollection-images on to the film’s drab actual-image of the men’s toilet in which she works. To overemphasise the ‘Polishness’ of When Angels Fall is to miss much of what Polanski is observing about the functioning of human memory and the manner in which each of our concepts of reality are constructed by our individual perceptual mechanisms.

The rest of Polanski’s shorts are far more difficult to identify as specifically Polish, although all, save The Fat and Lean (1961), were made in Poland during Polanski’s time at Łódź. Much of this is simply down to Polanski’s tendency of keeping his shorts abstract and dialogue-free.¹ Polanski’s preference for dialogue-free shorts, what he nevertheless considered to be the ‘correct’ language of the short film, suggests a

¹ Polanski’s preference for dialogue-free shorts is also evident in his most recent short, Cinéma Erotique, which he made for the 2007 Cannes film festival, as well as his spots for Parisienne, Vanity Fair, and for Francesco Vezzoli’s fictitious ‘Greed’ perfume.
desire to move beyond fixed concepts of nationally-, linguistically-, or culturally-based cinema towards that elusive universal language of the moving picture, that purely visual form of communication cultivated by the likes of Murnau, Chaplin, and Griffith that had been all but forsaken after the birth of the talkie:

Cartoons and documentaries proved that even very short films could tell a convincing story with a beginning and an end, but to do the same with actors required a different approach. Sounds had to be used as punctuation, dialogue kept to a minimum or dispensed with altogether. As far as I was concerned, a realistic theme was out. Though hung up on surrealism, I also wanted to convey a message. The short I aspired to make would have to be poetic and allegorical yet readily comprehensible. (Polanski, 1984: 132)

In *Knife in the Water*, Polanski manages to retain the allegorical element of his more abstract, silent shorts, but combines symbolic imagery with the realism offered by the inclusion of dialogue, the form he believes should be reserved for the feature film. But as soon as his characters begin to speak, an inextricable link is inevitably forged between language and the nation with which it is associated. Whilst *Knife in the Water* did not fit into the individually-focused Polish School with its attempts to assume ‘the role of “psychotherapist” of the Polish audience’ (Ostrowska, 2006: 66) through neorealist-influenced recreations of wartime and post-war Poland, it was certainly not the sort of contemporary social(ist) realism preferred by the state.

Polanski's Polish films move beyond a Polish cinema defined by either adherence or resistance to communist ideology. As Wajda himself identified, *Knife in the Water* marked the end of the Polish school, signalling ‘the beginning of the new Polish cinema' (in Miekle, 64), a type of film undefined by the regime. Instead, with *Knife in
*the Water*, Polanski contemporises Polish cinema whilst de-politicising it, offering observations on humanity, but not analysis. The camera does adopt an objective standpoint, but not quite like the neorealist style aped by the Polish School. Polanski’s camera ‘sees’ the unseeable through intra-frame compositions that betray the film’s unspoken power struggle and gender relations. Analysis, however, is left up to the audience. Polanski’s observational stance in *Knife in the Water* would prove to be one of the most enduring aspects of his work. And consistent with this ‘distance’ is Polanski’s refusal to become a moralist filmmaker, favouring stories that explore the complexities of morality overly didactic tales of right and wrong (or those that try to *right* wrongs).

Haltof (2002) makes note of the ‘split’ that was beginning to form in the mid-1950s between Poland’s established filmmakers such as Aleksander Ford and Wanda Jakubowska and the new generation of Łódź graduates influenced by the Italian neorealist films they had the privilege of seeing at university; these graduates were more concerned with individual expression and the ‘genuine depiction of national themes’ (79) than they were with the Marxist ideology or socialist realism. Coates compares this division to the Polish flag itself, ‘torn across, between politics and aesthetics … between … “the red and the white”’ (2005: 1). The influence of neorealism on this new generation is evident in Wadja’s *A Generation*, a film Haltof argues to be a ‘transitional’ work that ‘heralds the Polish School phenomenon’ (79); but even Wadja’s film, Haltof argues, is a ‘work tainted by political compromise’, which stills bears the marks of socialist realism and is ‘heavily stereotyped’ in its recreation of ‘recent Polish history from the communist perspective’ (79).
In the early 1960s, a discernable ‘third generation’ of young Polish film makers was beginning to make its mark; this group included filmmakers such as Janusz Majewski, Henryk Kluba and Roman Polanski, but the most significant contributions to this movement, Haltof suggests, came from Jerzy Skolimowski, and, a few years later, Krzysztof Zanussi. Haltof cites Skolimowski’s ‘new generation trilogy’, *Rysopis [Identification Marks: None, 1965], Walkower [Walkover, 1965], and Bariera [The Barrier, 1966]*) (125-126), as well as Zanussi’s ‘Bergmanian’ television films *Face to Face* (1968) and *Pass Mark* (1968), and his features *Struktura krysztatu (The Structure of Crystals, 1969)* and *Illuminacja (Illumination, 1973)* as examples of films that demonstrate the towards ever more personalised cinema (Haltof, 2002: 127-128).

Polanski’s *Knife in the Water*, for which Skolimowski is also credited as a screenwriter, is a film that should be considered as a work of this post-Polish School movement. However, jaded by his experience with the Polish censors, Polanski would leave this ‘third generation’ to continue his career outside Poland. It would not be until *The Pianist* (2002) that Polanski would return to Poland to make a film, and so he is rightfully considered to be a minor-player in the history of Polish national cinema.

The Gomułka government’s censorship policies of the late 1950s and early 1960s had major impact on the cinema of the time; it is worth briefly examining *Knife in the Water*’s own struggle with the authorities in order to gain a better appreciation of the situation Polanski left behind when he opted to continue his career outside the Polish system. A word of caution is perhaps warranted here, as much of the account of
Polanski’s encounter with the Polish censors I presented below is based on Polanski’s own testimony, as described in his autobiography. As Coates (2005) warns, during this time in Polish history, there was both a ‘mythical censor’ and a ‘real one’; he points out that many artists have a ‘propensity to recall the more colourful incidents and to colour those that are recalled, his or her primary intention to divert the audience’ (75). That being said, Coates also concedes that the ‘real’ censors, namely the government’s Script Assessment Committee, the Central Committee, and the Politburo, did indeed monitor film projects closely with an eye towards ‘nudging’ works towards the party line. Coates even directly cites the ‘blighting’ of Polanski by the First Secretary Gomułka (Coates, 2005: 75-76), who was displeased with Knife and the Water, considering it to be irrelevant to Polish society (Polanski, 1984: 170).

Haltof (2002: 102) describes the multiple layers of censoring bodies through which a film project would have to pass, starting with ‘The Committee for the Evaluation of Scripts’, and then on to the supervision by authorities of the filming process itself and beyond. The key concern was a growing ‘Westernisation’ of Polish cinema (102), and so the Communist Party sought to regain the levels of control the authorities exerted before the rise of Gomułka and the ‘Polish October’ of 1956. There are many accounts of the way Polish filmmakers were harshly dealt with by the authorities, many of which are far worse than that which is described by Polanski. Many films of the Polish School were ‘punished’ by the authorities for their ‘lack of compliance to the Polish line’ (103), such as Nikt nie wola (Nobody is Calling, Kazimierz Kutz, 1960) and Koniec nocy (The End of Night, Julian Dziedzina, Pawel Komorowski, Walentyna Maruszewska, 1957), which saw their distribution severely limited, and Aleksander Ford’s Eighth Day of the Week (1958), which was banned (102-103).
Based on examples such as these, it is reasonable to conclude that Polanski’s own description of his dealings with the censors (below) is probably not overly ‘coloured’ by personal animosity.

The script for *Knife in the Water* had originally been rejected by the Polish Ministry of culture on the grounds that it ‘lacked social commitment’ (Polanski, 1984: 144). Unable to get funding in Poland, Polanski sought backing in France, where he had recently co-directed *The Fat and Lean* with Jean-Pierre Rousseau (who was added as ‘co-director’ to avoid funding complications due to Polanski’s non-residential status in France). Encouraged by French producer Rousseau to make a French-language adaptation of the script, Polanski transferred *Knife*’s story to a French setting. In the end, the promise of French funding fell through and Polanski once again pitched the project to the Polish authorities, having ‘tinkered with a few scenes’ and having added ‘some snippets of dialogue designed to impart a trifle more “social commitment”’ (Polanski, 1984: 161) to appease the ministry. In this new form, it was finally approved for production.

*Knife in the Water*’s search for funding is telling in that it reveals the idea itself was not conceived as a specifically Polish story; in fact, what Polish-specific elements the final film does possess are there by way of compromise in order to get funding from the Polish state. The ‘social commitment’ Polanski refers to can be identified in those lines of dialogue wherein the boy and Andrzej discuss politics. Significantly, Andrzej’s politics seem somewhat at odds with his material wealth, and although the (apparent) conflict is complex, Andrzej is presented as abusive and arrogant, and of
the three characters it is he who is positioned as the most unlikeable; he is the closest thing to an ‘antagonist’ the film offers.

The film’s most discussed, and perhaps telling, compromises involved Krystina and Andrzej’s car. Andrzej, a representation of Polish *nomenklatura*, originally drove a Mercedes, but Polanski was ‘encouraged’ to reshoot using a Peugeot 403\(^2\) to avoid provoking this emerging (and ideologically inconsistent) class of Warsaw elites, well-known for driving around Warsaw in their Mercs. The compromise extended only to the exterior shots; Polanski claims that he ‘reluctantly left the interiors as they were’ (Polanski, 1984: 165), but this continuity mismatch would result in a subtle provocation in its own right, suggesting the true nature of the car to those knowledgeable enough (i.e. the *nomenklatura* themselves) to be able to catch the ‘error’.

Although set in Poland and indeed including several Polish-specific references, *Knife in the Water*’s relevance transcends its Mazurian setting through its use of visual style as agent of communication and Polanski’s observations on the dynamics of gender, marital, and generational power relations. The film often draws attention toward the physicality of the characters, the camera lingering on all three bodies, highlighting both gender and age differences. We are positioned as voyeurs, connected to no

\(^2\) The choice of a Peugeot 403 is likely a nod to Godard’s *Breathless* (1960), given the similarities of the opening shots. Polanski states in his autobiography that he was not a fan of the New Wave, unimpressed by the ‘amateurism and appalling technique of films belonging to this movement’ (Polanski in Mazierska, 2007: 167). Mirroring the *Breathless* sequence but having the car stop to pick up the hitchhiker rather than ignore him may well have been intended as a insult (perhaps suggesting how films *should* be made) to Godard rather than a complimentary homage.
individual character in particular, but nevertheless limited to the collective narrative reach of the triad. The camera inevitably draws our gaze towards not only Krystyna’s body (as might be expected), but the men’s bodies as well, each man positioned as icon of visual appeal for his respective generation. Polanski’s use of such imagery serves to expose a repressed component of Polish society at the time. It is also a subtle attack on the idea of a prescriptive sense of nationhood - the bitter conflict between these men combined with the introduction of heavily taboo homoerotic imagery serves to undo what Ostrowska identifies as the prevalent Polish notion of ‘a male brotherhood tasked to defend the nation’ (2006: 69).

Although Polanski avoids outright ideological didacticism in *Knife in the Water*, given the historical context at the time of its release, reading the film as subtle attack on the regime is certainly valid. What is clearly apparent is the great divide in wealth between Andrzej and the young student in what is a supposedly classless society. The elder Andrzej comes across as the embodiment of the chauvinist, hypocritical and power-hungry state, whose authority is challenged by a new generation who, whilst seemingly naïve, finally outwits him. Critical to this reading, of course, is the discord between Andrzej's ideological stance and the material reality of his life. No, we are informed, the yacht is not owned by a club, but is his personal possession. Even his Peugeot, whilst not quite the Mercedes Polanski first intended, requires an act of doublethink to be reconciled with communist ideals. Whilst Andrzej’s apparent wealth is at odds with his politics, so too is it at odds with his job – a key concern of the Polish critical press. How could a mere sportswriter (not exactly a job fitting of the *nomenklatura*) afford both a foreign car and his own boat? Such discords suggest that there is something more to his character than the one-dimensional social
archetype I have outlined above, and raises many questions. Is he lying about his job? Has he inherited the money? Has she inherited the money? (Is this what is hinted at by the opening shot of Krystyna driving the car? What about the fact that the boat bears her name?) It is these types of unresolved questions that give the film a depth beyond readings of it as simply thinly-veiled political criticism, and is the type of narrative depth - the intricate off-screen world that we are made aware of but never given access to - that Polanski would continue to cultivate throughout his career.

When one begins to dissect Knife in the Water it becomes evident that the politically-informed elements of the film are merely a part of a series of complex meditations on offer. Looking closely, for example, at Polanski's use of deep focus and shot composition in the film is greatly revealing. The way in which the young man's body so often divides the space between Andrzej and Krystyna, the camera's meticulous fetishisation of not only Krystyna's, but also the men's bodies, the complex possible worlds contained by the film's final image, all suggest that to over-'nationalise' the film is to underestimate its scope. By the same token, however, to completely overlook the political climate in which it was made is equally remiss.

According to Polanski, the ministry's reaction to the film was 'generally favourable' (Polanski, 1984: 169), but there was some concern raised by the Ministry head over the uncertainty of the finale: 'the idea that an audience should be left to draw their own conclusions about the outcome of the story was an anathema to him: the ending had to be either “positive” or “negative” - preferably the former’ (Polanski, 1984: 169). The finale was originally augmented by two more shots of the car framed from
increasingly greater distances; by removing these shots, which presumably had the effect of emphasizing the non-conclusive ending, the Ministry head was contented and the film was allowed to pass. The Polish critical press was far less favourable than the ministry, however, with criticism starting even before the film’s completion. Polanski recalls an *Ekran* reporter who, based on what he had seen on a visit to the production set, published an article where he expressed his failure to understand how such an intimate film could be relevant to the nation, complaining that Polish taxpayers were being duped by this indulgent young filmmaker. Upon release, the film was panned, in particular due to what was perceived as a lack of realism in terms of the sportswriter’s wealth and a general impression of the film’s irrelevance to the Polish people. Polanski recalls that many critics were also irked by his own ‘cosmopolitan’ status as a passport holder who could hop back and forth between Poland and his native country, France.

Even the Communist Party of Poland’s first secretary, Władysław Gomułka, echoed the press’s sentiments, calling the film’s characters ‘neither typical nor relevant to’ Polish society as a whole (as quoted by Polanski, 1984: 170). Polanski’s own reaction to these kinds of statements would prove prophetic: ‘after this sort of official reception I knew I wouldn't be making another film in Poland for a long time to come’ (Polanski, 1984:170). Outside Poland, however, the film was well received, picking up special honours at the 1962 Venice festival and receiving nominations at the 1964 BAFTAs (Best Film) and Academy Awards (Best Foreign Language Film, 

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3 ‘For Whom and for What?’ read the *Ekran* headline (Polanski, 1984: 165).
4 ‘All Polanski has is an international driving license and no film school diploma’ (as quoted by Polanski 1984: 170).
respectably losing to Fellini’s 8 ½). A still from *Knife in the Water* was even featured on the cover of *Time* magazine (20.09.1963, see *Appendix: Figure 1*), behind the banner ‘Cinema as an International Art’ and the title ‘Lovers in Polish Film’. As the cover suggests, *Knife in the Water*, whilst appreciated in the West, was nevertheless informed abroad by a perceived ‘Polishness’. By leaving Poland behind, Polanski was free to pursue his goal of capturing lucid observations of the human experience unburdened by state doctrine, and by mixing the ‘nationality’ of his productions, he continues to flummox attempts at nation-based readings of his work.

*Knife in the Water* would prove to be Polanski’s only purely ‘Polish’ feature film, with interference from state officials during production (and its ramifications on the film) leading to his decision to leave Poland. Polanski makes his own feelings regarding the idea of nationhood abundantly clear:

> I am glad I am a nomad. I have always dreamed about leaving [Poland], I have always felt that the significance given by people to borders was ridiculous. (Polanski in Ostrowska, 2006: 62)

Consistent with Polanski’s self-professed nomadism, his next two films, *Repulsion* (1965) and *Cul-de-sac* (1966), would both be shot in the United Kingdom (London and Holy Island respectively), using a predominantly British crew and talent, but including a mix of British, American, French, and Belgian (albeit, played by French actresses Catherine Deneuve and Yvonne Furneaux) characters. Over the years, his cinema would become increasingly multinational, reflected not only in the filming locations and financing of his productions, but the very subject matter of his films.
Once he left Poland, Polanski was no longer bound by an imaginary cultural barrier and would go on to pillage from artistic cannons and generic conventions from across the world, from Hardy and Shakespeare to American pulp fiction to South American theatre, from schlock horror to slapstick comedy to costume drama, Polanski’s cinema almost literally does it all. This ‘freedom’ is not that of a transnational, but the kind of freedom that transcends the very concept of national culture.

The influence of what can be identified as Polish culture (cinematic or otherwise) on Polanski’s cinema should not be dismissed, but his resistance to conforming to a ‘Polish aesthetic’ is evident in both his shorts as well as *Knife in the Water*; his subsequent departure from the Polish film industry and the lack of explicitly ‘Polish’ subject matter in his cinema between *Knife in the Water* and *The Pianist* (2002) ensured that Polanski’s association to the ‘new’ Polish Cinema would be limited. I will discuss Polanski in terms of auteur theory in more specific terms later in this chapter, but the key point I wish to emphasise regarding this early period is that Polanski’s resistance to prescribed aesthetics, other than those that might constitute the progression of pure cinema, were evident from the start, which is consistent with his auteurist tendencies; this is not to say, however, that an auteur is *de facto* immune to membership in, or the creation/reinvention of, a cinema concerned with reflecting a nation. One need look no further than the French New Wave for evidence, which sought to invent a new, liberated cinema unbound by studio constraints, and which was more focused on the representation of current social realities, in contrast with the more old-fashioned narratives of the established French cinema (dismissed as ‘cinema du papa’). With its emphasis on the value of a singular creative force (the auteur), the French New Wave, as well as the Auteur Theory of the 1950s that it arguably
spawned, can be interpreted as a reactionary movement (see Hayward, 2000: 145). At the same time, however, due to its focus on contemporary society, the French New Wave, like the Polish School, was also greatly concerned with informing a sense of national identity.

Notwithstanding the notable heterogeneity of Polanski’s cinema, both in terms of genre and ‘nationality’ of production, there remain a number of strong thematic threads that bind much of his work, each film informing the complex discourse that weaves its way through his opus. The present discussion of Polanski’s work will endeavour to uncover a number of these repeated motifs, but will focus primarily on an element I have found to be underrepresented in critical analyses of Polanski’s cinema. As I have already alluded to above, it is Polanski’s concern with the working of human perception that I believe provides a novel and fruitful means of engaging his cinema, and so forms the primary focus of this study.

Deconstructing National Identity

It is useful to begin this foray into Polanski’s cinema through an attempt (but not necessarily a successful one) to ‘locate’ the director within the wider discourse of national cinema – a process that I have already initiated with my above discussion of Knife in the Water. I will outline some of the useful vocabulary that has emerged from this discourse that may help clarify Polanski's own complex relationship with the issue of national identity as well as his treatment of the often-recurring figure of the
‘foreign’ national in his films. This meditation on the complexities of national identity above all serves to prime a thought process conducive to dealing with the intricacies of perceptual psychology and how this informs Polanski’s cinema, which will immediately follow.

Whilst my approach to Polanski shares the essential assumption of auteur theory, namely that ‘though produced collectively, [a film] is most likely to be valuable when it is essentially the product of its director’ (Caughie, 1981:9), this analysis does not dwell on Polanski’s personal life or the ‘biographical legend’ (Stachówna, 1994: 34) it has become, which has more than sufficiently been written of elsewhere (see, for example, Mazierska [2005], Meikle [2006], Sandford [2009], Kiernan [1980], Wexman [1985], and Leaming [1981]). I will say only a few words about it here, as the events of his early life may help us understand his attitude toward nationhood and the construction of self-identity. Polanski was born to a Polish father and a Russian mother in France in 1933, but his family moved to Poland in 1937. It was not until the invasion of Poland in 1939 that a young Polanski became aware of his ‘Jewish’ identity, a label applied to him by others, notwithstanding the fact that neither he nor his parents were at all religious (Polanski’s father was of Jewish origin, as was his maternal grandfather). Polanski managed to avoid the concentration camps that claimed the life of his mother by having his name changed to ‘Romek Wolf’ and posing as a member of a Catholic family, until he was finally reunited with his father after the war. At the risk of appearing to digress into amateur psychoanalysis, it is reasonable to suggest that Polanski’s experience of shifting identities at least highlighted to him the arbitrary nature of what we usually considered to be immutable components of identity, such as the genetic innateness of religious affiliation.
Although Polanski has never been disparaging about either his Polish or Jewish roots, his autobiography describes a man who openly resists any limits that the imagined community of nation might impose - not only in terms of the rigid cultural limits set by Poland's post-war regime, but to the very notion that certain artistic texts or styles are somehow the genetic inheritance of those born on a given politically defined plot of land.

What is perhaps most evident in Polanski’s work when observed as a whole is that whilst his films appear to be greatly informed by wide variety of cultural artefacts, his cinema cannot be firmly aligned to one culture or movement in particular. Polanski is neither obliged nor inhibited by his national affiliation. In *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (1971), for example, Polanski does not ‘borrow’ from the English canon to create a Polish take on Shakespeare, but rather *owns* it, producing a relatively faithful rendition of the story. The result is not a ‘Polish’ *Macbeth* (in contrast, arguably, to *Throne of Blood*, Kurosawa’s ‘Japanese’ *Macbeth*), but a cinematic interpretation of the stage play text. What is noteworthy in terms of culture clash is not the meeting of British and Polish sensibilities so much as the ‘cultural difference’ between theatre and cinema. In Polanski's *Macbeth*, the textual becomes subservient to the cinematic. Polanski trims the dialogue as needed, creating a decidedly non-theatrical visual aesthetic, and *showing*, often to shocking effect, what is normally only described on stage.

It is not only cultural lines that Polanski’s cinema freely crosses, but also the distinction between ‘art house’ and ‘commercial’ cinema. He is by no means alone in
this respect, as this cross-over between ‘art house’ sensibilities and commercial appeal is notable in many of cinema’s ‘old masters’, such as Bergman, Kubrick, and Fellini, all of whom produced works that defied the conventions of classic cinema, but which nevertheless found favour at the box office, both internationally and in their home countries. It is because of the success of these directors’ films with audiences beyond the ‘art house’ that they are so instantly recognisable as ‘masters’, even by non-cinephiles. The work of these directors can render problematic the divide of the concept of the ‘art cinema’ from that of ‘classic cinema’, as they so often fuse popular generic frameworks with sensibilities more indicative of ‘high culture’; none more so than Polanski, whose cinema, I argue, seeks to deliver pleasure at every level.

Of any other director, it is perhaps with Kubrick that Polanski shares most in common, especially regarding the way their work comfortably resides within the definition of ‘art cinema’, but without sacrificing commercial ambitions.\(^5\) Whilst Polanski’s cinema would never be out of place in an ‘art house’ cinema, when compared to ‘art house’ fixtures like Jarmusch, Wenders, Bergman, Fellini and Lynch, his films have a more mainstream sensibility, discernable in Polanski’s consistent use of stars, the manner that he embraces generic conventions, and his use of Camp and humour. His mainstream ambitions are also evident in his adaptations of literary classics like *Macbeth* and *Tess*, and his cinematic rendering of Władysław Szpilman’s World War II experience in *The Pianist*, Polanski’s most commercially successful film. There is none of the quietness or slowness we often see in Wenders’ and Jarmusch’s work, his dialogue is rarely as existentially loaded as Bergman’s, he is

\(^5\) For a more detailed comparison of Polanski and Kubrick’s work, see Morrison, 2001.
never as openly confessional as Fellini (there is no 8½ in Polanski’s opus), and he is rarely as bizarre as Lynch. Polanski shares with these directors a mastery of craft and the desire to manifest grand issues cinematically, but his films are seldom ‘difficult’ in the way these other directors’ work could be described.

In light of this discussion, we should consider Bordwell’s (2002) commentary on the emergence of ‘art cinema’ after World War II, in which he partitions ‘classic cinema’ from ‘art cinema’. By examining Bordwell’s means of differentiation between these two types of cinema, the hybridity of Polanski’s cinema, which uniformly resists classification, becomes evident. Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of films that he considers to be ‘art cinema’, Bordwell identifies the primary unifying feature of this category as a slackening of the cause-effect formula of narrative progression and diegetic logic that defines the ‘classic cinema’, highlighting the unresolved plot lines in Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* (1960) by way of example (95). Bordwell suggests that in the ‘art cinema’, the impetus for narrative progression is instead that of ‘realism and authorial expressivity’ (95), a combination within which a subtle paradox seems to be embedded.

Whilst Bordwell argues that ‘art cinema’ is ‘realistic’ in its use of ‘real locations and real problem’ and ‘psychologically complex characters’ (95-96), at the same time ‘art cinema’ also ‘foregrounds the author as a structure in the film’s system … a formal component, the overriding intelligence organising the film for our comprehension’ (97). It is the authorial voice, then, that ‘unifies the text’ (97) and frames reality. Bordwell also notes the prevalence of ‘technical touches … and obsessive motifs’
(97) of the director in the ‘art cinema’; as I argue further on in this chapter and throughout the forthcoming case studies, Polanski does indeed saturate his cinema with a series of repeated ‘technical touches’ and ‘obsessive motifs’, which serve to unify his cinema for the close-reader in particular. His cinema also foregrounds psychological complexity, which is, in fact, very much the focus of my approach to his work, along with what I argue to be a very specific form of psychological (perceptual) realism.

A brief comparison of Antonioni and Polanski is informative in this context. An aspect of Bordwell’s (2002) conceptualisation of ‘art cinema’ shared by Antonioni and Polanski is their mutual championing of ambiguity; but a hallmark of ‘art cinema’ they do not share is the disregard for cause-and-effect narrative unity. Antonioni’s emblematic use of temps mort (‘dead time’) in L’Avventura (1960), for example, in which an enigmatic mood is created through the inclusion of a series of scenes that ‘have no obvious function in advancing the plot or illuminating the characters’ (Salt, 1983: 347) is not an approach taken by Polanski, who tends to embed more subtle enigmas within apparently ‘unified’ narratives; however, Polanski often undoes this sort ‘unity’ with the manner in which his films are concluded.

Thus, what I argue is most strongly aligns Polanski’s cinema with the sensibilities of the ‘art house’ is the level of ambiguity that is embedded in these films, a point that is much discussed in the case studies that follow. Polanski’s use of ambiguity is not normally the result of a direct violation of classic cinema’s adherence to cause-effect relations, but rather a subtle undermining of the spectator’s confidence in his or her
own understanding of the diegesis, namely what is and what is not ‘real’, which is most pronounced in the highly dissatisfying manner Polanski tends to end his films. Such dissatisfaction is just the opposite, it could be argued, of the mandate of ‘classic cinema’ to actively move towards stability. Bordwell sees such ambiguity as a hallmark of the art cinema, and indeed cites the final scene of *Knife and the Water* as an example (99). But Polanski’s cinema does not, for the most part, completely forego the cause-effect structure of classic cinema, and nor does it avoid the use of stars nor necessarily privilege passivity over action. Most often, it embraces, even amplifies popular genres and employs cinematographic and montage techniques specifically designed to engage (‘lure in’) spectators. In other words, depending on which Bordwellian definition one wishes to apply, Polanski’s cinema can be considered as either ‘classic’ (audience-focused) or ‘art’ (director-focused) cinema. It is, of course, *both.*

In his history of Polish cinema, Coates (2005) takes issue with Bordwell’s nomination of *Knife in the Water* and Wajda’s *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) as ‘art cinema’; he argues that whilst Bordwell’s classification is not entirely inaccurate, it is, nevertheless, *inadequate,* for it ‘designates the mechanism of their Western distribution rather than their essence’ (42), by which he is referring to these films’ political subtext and their relevance to the Polish political situation at the time of their release. The arguably *covert* functioning of *Knife and the Water* as a critique of the Polish government is a matter of interpretation, but more relevant to the context of Polanski’s overall career is the fact that this film’s ‘art house’ credentials put Polanski onto the international stage. However, what ensured Polanski’s long-term status as an internationally renowned director was his ability to combine his ‘art house’
sensibilities with a Hollywoodian mode of cinema production; it is, after all, the Hollywood style that became the most international.

Polanski’s subsequent departure from Poland began his trajectory towards an identification of his work as truly border-crossing. Polanski is by no means unique in this regard, as many filmmakers of this kind emerged from his generation, such as Losey, Herzog, Kubrick, Wenders, and Bertolucci, all of whom began their careers working within the system of a national cinema, but sought to become unburdened by an over-association with any particular country’s need to define itself through its cinema. As Salt (1983) suggests, when dealing with such directors, ‘the concept of “national cinema” becomes uselessly vague’ (324). Therefore, a variety of terms have been introduced into the discourse surrounding national cinema; or rather, a variety of prefixes have been attached to the ‘national’ (multi-, inter-, pluri-, trans-, etc.) all of which are to varying degrees useful when discussing postcolonial and diasporic cinema, as well as films that are funded from a variety of globally disparate sources or use crews and other resources that are not easily identifiable in terms of national uniformity. Nearly all Polanski’s films demonstrate such complexity in terms of production and distribution. So given the national boundaries his film cross (production-wise, diegetically, and where they are marketed and shown), the term ‘transnational’ is definitely an appealing way to refer to Polanski’s cinema; but such a statement is applicable to such an enormous number of films (especially when we consider the global hegemony of Hollywood cinema) that it is not especially useful when attempting to identify what makes Polanski’s cinema ‘special’. In fact, by using what seems to be a term geared towards widening understanding, we risk inadvertently applying conceptual limits to our engagement with Polanski’s cinema.
As Ezra and Rowden aptly pointed out, the concept of the transnational ‘at once transcends the national and presupposes it’ (Ezra and Rowden, 2005: 4). I suggest instead that in order to more closely consider Polanski’s own complex relationship with all things national, we need to look beyond the concept of the transnational and all that it presupposes.

What may prove to be of better use in the analysis of Polanski’s work is Higbee’s (2007) discussion of ‘cinema of transvergence’. A transvergent approach to nationality de-emphasises concepts of identity based on factors of nativity or citizenship, and allows us to move beyond nationhood as an encompassing identity determinant, urging us to consider the constructed nature of the ‘national’. Transvergence highlights difference in a fluid, complex and most importantly, non-binary way. Similarly, a key feature that runs throughout Polanski’s cinema is a challenge to precisely the kind epistemological certainty that binary or convergent thinking cultivates. Polanski attacks the certitudes of knowledge in a number of ways, notably through his portrayals of national identity, but also through his challenging of apparently binary concepts such as gender, mental health and morality. Underlining all such discussions, however, is what I argue to be Polanski’s primary concern, the functioning of perception, from which all such concepts are derived.

When looking at issues of ethnicity and nationality in Polanski’s work, it is useful to introduce the concept of transvergence into the discussion in order to overcome the limits of terms like ‘national’ or even ‘transnational’. The manner in which Polanski explores the issue of national identity provokes questions as to the meaningfulness of
such terms and ultimately proposes a more complex way of approaching identity than is offered by (legal) frameworks of nationality or even personal concepts of nationhood. Polanski’s films are often populated with émigré characters whose very status as political/cultural other is, at least subtly, always in question as a possible contributing factor to the turmoil these characters inevitably find themselves facing. Critically, the cause-effect relationship between the characters’ ‘foreignness’ and the obstacles he or she faces is usually not clearly delineated.

Nearly all of Polanski’s feature films include major characters that are readily identifiable as ‘foreign’ to the place in which they reside or find themselves, or contain an ethnic mix in a nationally neutral location, namely the open sea, in the cases of Bitter Moon (1992) and Pirates (1986). What is often difficult to determine, however, is the extent to which these characters’ national status actually informs the narrative trajectory of the films. It may be important, partially relevant, or it may even be completely irrelevant – we are left guessing. Repulsion, for example, features Belgian sisters Carole (Catherine Deneuve) and Hélène Ledoux (Yvonne Furneaux); but however tempting it may be to draw a causal link between Carole’s mental disintegration and her diegetic status as a foreign national, Repulsion does not allow for such ‘neat’ conclusions. Similarly, Polanski’s portrayal of Polish-Jewish French national Trelkovsky in The Tenant (1976) serves to subvert straightforward readings of the film as being a simple critique of French xenophobia. Whilst both films centre on a character’s descent into madness, in neither case can the issue of national or cultural ‘difference’ be categorically assigned as even a contributing factor.
Differences of culture and language are also sometimes explicitly linked to interpersonal conflict, as seen in Cul-de-sac and What? (1972). Such conflict becomes more explicit in Polanski’s later works, most pronounced in The Pianist, where perceived ethnicity becomes literally a matter a life and death for Szpilman (Adrien Brody). In Frantic (1988), Dr. Walker’s (Harrison Ford) ‘stuckness’ in linguistic, national, and cultural difference creates significant obstacles and is directly relevant in the narrative’s unfolding on several occasions. The antagonism between the French and Spanish is very much a part of Pirates’ narrative, as exemplified by ‘Frog’s’ purported motivation to help (the English) Captain Red. In Bitter Moon there is a similar standoff between America and France, with nationality serving as a major issue of conflict between Oscar and Mimi, and on several occasions Nigel's ‘Britishness’ is identified as a determinant in his actions (and reactions). In The Ninth Gate (1999), on the other hand, Polanski emphasises the unity of the (capitalist) West in a film that spans America and Europe, and in which these cultures intermingle seamlessly and linguistic obstacles are easily overcome.

So, whilst Polanski’s films can indeed be considered through a transnational, or even transvergent optic, I ultimately argue it is more useful to consider his cinema along nomadic lines. Rather than identifying many of Polanski’s characters, or even Polanski himself, as émigré or diasporic subjects, we can instead judge these characters as to the degree to which they can be considered as ‘nomadic bodies’. By nomadic I do not exclusively refer to Polanski's own shifting domiciles (as far as I am aware, he has been resident in Poland, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and the United States), but more so to the attitude of deterritorialisation that is reflected in his sentiments regarding his own life as well as his cinema, in which he
often adopts certain nationally-associated aesthetics (often generic) to his own ends, without letting the need for an inherited sense of nationhood interfere. In common with transvergent thought, the key aspect of nomadism is the decentralized subject - the nomad has no coveted ‘starting point’ to which he or she is physically or psychically anchored and from which all other occupied space is relative to. In contrast, the exile or ex-patriot remains ‘connected’ (or purports to be) to a homeland. With the nomad, previously occupied or traversed places and cultures may well influence the individual’s actual cognitive state, but the psychical nomad is not bound by such influences as a means of constructing reality. It is in this regard that we can utilise the concept of ‘nomadism’ also as a means of addressing Polanski’s refusal to conform to any particular philosophical ideology or set concepts of morality or ethics. Polanski’s nomadism indeed extends beyond the traversal of land and nation, and can be considered in terms of psychical nomadism, or what Deleuze titles pensée nomade in his countercultural analysis of Nietzsche (Deleuze, 1977: 142).

Mazierska’s (2007) identification of Polanski as a ‘cultured traveller’ is especially relevant in this context, for her description of both the director and his films echoes Deleuze’s notion of nomadic thought. Mazierska acknowledges the multiple countries in which Polanski’s cinema has been produced over the years, but this fact alone is not of paramount relevance; it is Polanski’s attitude that matters most, the way he ‘traverses’ cultures without any acknowledgement of barriers, not looking for difference, but unity (for better or for worse). The following quote illustrates Mazierska’s point well:
Curiosity about the cultures encountered through his journeys is accompanied by Polanski’s unwillingness to elevate the cultures where his roots lie, namely Jewish, Polish and French, either as locations of the narratives or as the sites of moral norms. On and off screen the director distances himself from any type of nationalism, regarding it as the way to overestimate oneself unjustly and consequently underestimating fellow human beings. (2007: 187)

The idea of Polanski as a ‘cultured traveller’ represents not only the literal traversal of land, but of concepts as well; it is a freeing of oneself from the conceptual limitations imposed by an overly robust sense of national identity, a ‘deep scepticism for such products of culture as religion and political ideology’ (Mazierska, 2007: 189). This freedom applies to his artistic influences as well. Mazierska highlights a number of artists with whom Polanski seems to engage with in his work, both cinematic and non-cinematic, Polish and non-Polish, Jewish and non-Jewish, etc. These include Alfred Hitchcock, Luis Buñuel, Andrzej Monk, René Magritte, and Samuel Beckett, many of whom I will discuss later in more specific terms.

Also strongly represented in Polanski’s cinema are characters who themselves embody cultural conflicts, and it is upon these characters that Polanski most often fixes the camera. These are the ‘outsiders’ who usually become our chief perceptual objects, and sometimes even our perceptual surrogates. But whilst Polanski does indeed include many expatriate bodies in his films, these do not tend to be displaced subjects who ‘long for a return to an idealised homeland’ (Higbee, 2007:83), nor do they tend to be elective immigrants abused by an adopted homeland (although in
some cases this may be a possible reading, such as *The Tenant*). Rather than a straightforward portrayal of the plight of the foreign national, Polanski favours explorations of states of becoming in which issues of national identity or perceived ethnicity are but possible factors in what are rhizomic, often dissonant states of being. By including the issue of nation, nationality, and nationhood in the frame, Polanski calls attention to the artificial constructs that make up many of the cognitive frameworks that compose one’s concept of identity, and in turn, as I shall later discuss, influence perception. In fact, I believe that the recurring presence of the issue of national identity in his cinema is merely symptomatic of Polanski’s chief, and far more basic, concern with the working of perception, an authorial trace that appears throughout much of his cinema, irrespective of whether or not he is author of the source material upon which a given film is based (thus my assertion of Polanski as an auteur, as I discuss later in this chapter). By introducing the spectre of mental illness, Polanski presents a complex ontological sketch in his foregrounding of the unreliability of characters’ perceptual abilities. It is Polanski’s interest in the way perception works that has perhaps most greatly informed both the thematic content of his films as well as the manner in which they are presented to the spectator. I propose that by retracing Polanski’s study of perceptual psychology, a novel and informative means by which to engage his cinema emerges. It is to this conjecture that I will now turn my attention.
1. **Initiating a Perceptual Discourse**

1.1. **Approaching Perception Theory: Polanski and R.L. Gregory**

The young man in Roman Polanski’s *Knife in the Water* (1962) lays on the deck of his host’s boat and stares at his own index finger. He extends his arm and observes his finger in relation to the boat’s mast, which towers over his prone body. In a POV shot from the young man’s perspective, light floods the frame and both the young man’s finger and the mast are in focus. Counter shot. He shuts his eyes, one at a time, alternating rapidly between right and left. Back to the POV. His finger leaps across the screen and back again as he closes each eye. After several seconds of this, the scene ends and is followed by the young man and Andrzej discussing the relative merits of compasses. The finger-leaping sequence has apparently no bearing on narrative progression, nor does it seem to add much to our understanding of the character. So why bother including it at all?

Besides qualifying as what Bazin calls a ‘microaction’ (see Bazin, 2004: 90), in this scene we have the first explicit allusion to the mechanisms involved in human visual perception in a Polanski film. The scene replicates the effects of eliminating stereoscopic vision by (slightly) changing the position from which the boy’s hand and mast are filmed, and then cutting between these two shots to suggest that each corresponds to an ‘eye’ being covered. At least two key issues emerge from this rudimentary effect:
1. Attention is drawn to relative size and distance perception; that is, our ability to guess the distance of an object based on size comparison to another object whose size and distance is known. In this case, knowledge of the hand signals how far away the mast is, based on its relative size. Even though both are in plain focus, knowledge of how big the mast should be informs our perception of where it is in relation to the hand, moderated by our (logical) rejection that the mast, which we recognise from previous scenes, has shrunk.

2. The (faux) depth effect of the cinematographic image is simultaneously exposed and heightened. Just as the young man does on-screen, we too can reduce the world to 2-D any time we wish by simply covering up an eye and thus eliminating the 3-D effect caused by stereoscopic vision (which, in any case, causes a ‘depth effect’ that is limited to about 100m, after which it is only knowledge of objects that informs our sense of distance). Paradoxically, by cinematically replicating this effect we are actually encouraged to overestimate the parallel between the way we see the cinematographic image (which is flat) and how we see the rest of the world.

Above all, with this simple gesture of montage, Polanski invites us to consider the way in which reality is constructed through the senses, specifically sight, and introduces the concept of perception as hypothesis into his work.

Whilst extended, inter-film analyses of Polanski’s work have tended to focus on biographical elements as a means of engaging his cinema, shorter academic pieces

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6 Typical examples of the biographical approach include Barbra Leamings’s Polanski: Filmaker as Voyeur (1981), Polanski’s own Roman on Polanski (1984), and Denis Miekle’s Roman Polanski: Odd
(far too many to catalogue here) are as diverse in their approach to Polanski’s films as the opus is itself. Notwithstanding the diversity of the critical work on Polanski, an often-neglected aspect of his cinema is his concern with the functioning of perception and how this is manifested in his filmmaking; it is this particular authorial hallmark that is the focus of this present analysis of Polanski’s cinema. Polanski himself cites the work of neuropsychologist Richard L. Gregory (1923-2010) as having had a great influence on his approach to filmmaking, claiming that Gregory ‘lent scientific confirmation’ to many of his intuitive beliefs regarding perception, in particular those related to optical illusions (Polanski, 1984: 254-255).

The influence of Gregory on Polanski’s cinema and their collaboration in the 1970s is sometimes mentioned in the Polanski-based literature, but these tend to be passing references. Other than the informative interview with Gregory included on a DVD version of Repulsion (Gregory, 2003), the effect of Gregory’s research on Polanski’s work has, for the most part, been overlooked in academic discourse. One important exception, however, is an article by Orr (2006), promisingly entitled ‘The Art of Perceiving’, which begins by acknowledging the fact that critics of Polanski’s cinema have long neglected the importance of perception in his work. My own research confirms Orr’s claim, and I propose that this is likely due to an overemphasis on biographically-based readings of Polanski’s films.

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*Man Out* (2006). However, this trend is showing signs of change - two recent exceptions to the heavily-biographical approach are *Roman Polanski: The Cinema of a Cultural Traveller* (Mazierska, 2007) and *Roman Polanski* (Morrison, 2007). (For an extended recap of the Polanski-based literature, see Caputo, 2007).
Whilst Orr initiates a fruitful discussion on Polanski’s fascination with the nature of perception and how he realises its implications at a philosophical level, he too mentions R.L. Gregory only in passing, referring to him as ‘Polanski’s favourite philosopher’ (2006: 12, emphasis my own) rather than neuropsychologist – a mislabelling that is neither disparaging nor entirely inaccurate, but is certainly incomplete. Most importantly, whilst Orr does allude to the theoretical basis of Gregory’s model of perception (‘the nature of perception is at times inseparable from the question of emotion’ [12]), there is also much value to be added to this discourse by highlighting how the model of perception to which Gregory is aligned differs from other, and still tenacious, models. It is my intention to carry on Orr’s approach to Polanski’s cinema by investigating Gregory’s model more closely, highlighting how it differs from other theories of perception, and finally examine the manner in which Polanski’s own perceptual discourse engages with these theories.  

Approaching Polanski’s cinema via a study of a model of perception does not necessarily mean the total abandonment of what Bordwell refers to as ‘Grand Theory’ (1996: 3); reading a film via an examination of perceptual psychology, for example, neither excludes not entails a parallel psychoanalytic reading. And neither does such an approach necessarily reduce itself to the level of pure empirical ‘fact finding’. What is most interesting about Polanski’s active mobilisation of perceptual psychology is indeed the manner in which it enables the reader to simultaneously

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7 Although Gregory’s work is not widely cited in film theory, mine is not the first analysis to bring up his name. Alexander Mackendrick, for example, cites Gregory in his much-revered filmmaking course (see Mackendrick, 2004: xxviii).
address two dimensions of the perceptual discourse, each side informing the other. By this I intend:

a) the thematic discourse embedded in these films both at narrative and aesthetic level, and

b) the actual cognitive experience of the spectator watching these films.

It is my intention to initiate a discussion of Polanski’s cinema along these lines, in an approach that I believe is neither low-level empiricism nor Grand Theory, but more in line with what Bordwell calls ‘middle-level theory’ (1996: 26).

Although it is beyond the scope of this piece to elaborate on the intricacies of cognitive theory and spectatorship, I hope to at least establish a framework that allows Polanski and Gregory to be incorporated into this wider discourse. The actual degree to which Gregory’s research informs Polanski’s cinema may be difficult to determine; nevertheless, reading Polanski’s work through the optic of Gregory’s model of perception proves a fruitful way of gaining a greater understanding of Polanski’s complex (cinematic) discourse on the nature of perception, which in turn connects to Polanski’s grander existential concerns, which I shall address in due course.

1.2. Direct and Indirect Theories of Perception

Gregory’s influential book *Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing* was first published in 1966, the culmination of decades of published research on visual
perception, and continues to this day to be essential reading in the field of psychology. His work emphasises what is often referred to as a ‘classic’ psychological stance on perception, one that reflects the view of nineteenth century polymath Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894) in its description of an indirect and active model of perception. Gregory’s stance marks a major break from the tenacious direct realism model of perception espoused best by influential psychologist J.J. Gibson (1904-1979) in his theory of Ecological Perception (see Gibson, 1979). Gibson’s stance echoes that of empiricists like Hume, Berkeley and Locke, for whom perceptions were directly connected to the objects perceived. Whilst Gibson’s ecological theory of perception continues to have its disciples, and has even been proposed as a meta-analytical tool for film theory (see Anderson & Anderson, 1996), the basics of the neo-Helmholtzian model of indirect perception are well established as received wisdom in all areas of medical science, and Eye and Brain remains a seminal introduction to indirect perception, having refined its arguments with each edition (the fifth released in 1997). Nevertheless, it is useful to examine Gibson’s still-tenacious theory of direct perception, at least as a means of understanding the theory of indirect perception by way of contrast.

Gibson authored several volumes on the theory of direct visual perception, in which the ‘common sense’ or ‘man-on-the-street’ (Gibson, 1967: 169) approach to perception is argued most convincingly in modern times. The direct perception model suggests that perception is an unmediated experience that is not dependent on sensation, in which information is ‘picked up’ from the outside world (Gibson, 2002:

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8 The International Society for Ecological Psychology and their publication Ecological Psychology best summarises Gibson’s enduring influence.
Gibson's central claim is that the theory of direct perception serves as a ‘sophisticated support for the naïve belief in the world of objects and events, and for the simple-minded conviction that our senses give knowledge of it’ (Gibson, 1967: 168). Due to this direct connection between perception and the external world, in philosophical discourse it is often referred to as direct (or even ‘naïve’) realism. Gibson's essentially empirical, ecological theory of perception abandons both the mechanical behaviourist view of perception as well as cognitive models in which the brain is positioned as representational device:

The act of perceiving is one of becoming aware of the environment or picking up of information about the environment ... nothing like a representation of the environment exists in the brain or the mind which could be in greater or lesser correspondence with it - no ‘phenomenal’ world which reflects or parallels the ‘physical’ world. (Gibson in Allen & Otto, 1996: 212)

Direct perception’s competing theoretical model has logically been labelled *indirect perception*, and although it has only gained serious scientific currency relatively recently (Gregory, 1997a: 2), the concept can be traced back to Plato’s cave. Following Helmholtz (1821-1894), indirect perception is perhaps best argued by neuropsychologist R.L. Gregory, who provoked a paradigm shift in the scientific community away from the direct perception model supported by Gibson to the more abstract *indirect* model. Rather than perception being described as a passive experience of ‘picking up’ information from the world, indirect perceptions instead theorises that perception is a highly mediated process, in which the brain actively creates perception via intelligent problem solving (hypothesising) based on *a priori* knowledge.
It is important to note that whilst J.J. Gibson makes reference to a form of ‘indirect’ perception, he does not use this term as intended by Gregory. Gibson uses ‘indirect’ as a means of discussing the perception of representational images like photographs, cinema or alphanumeric symbols and photographs, but this is a profoundly different level of ‘indirectness’ compared to the Helmholtzian model of perception I will outline here. For Gibson, this form of perception is ‘indirect’ only due to nature of the object itself, being, as it is, a representation of a thing and not the thing itself. A simple example of what Gibson means would be the (‘indirect’) perception of the photo of an apple versus the (‘direct’) perception of the apple itself. Gibson’s use of such language indeed highlights the central assumption of his ecological theory, namely the passive role of higher cognitive functions in perception.

In the model of indirect perception espoused by Gregory, on the other hand, the concept of ‘indirectness’ takes on a much more complex meaning, relating not the nature of the object of perception, but specifically to the higher cognitive functions involved in the construction of perceptions. In contrast to Gibson, Gregory plays down the role of the senses to ‘seek’ information, and instead repeatedly stresses the active neurological process of sorting out data and decision making, what he frequently refers to as ‘perceptions as hypotheses’ (best summarised in Gregory: 1980, but referred to throughout his writings on perception). Inevitably, Gregory’s description of the indirect nature of perception leads to a conceptualisation of perception (in turn, one’s experience of reality) that is only indirectly connected to the
world.\(^9\) Gibson, conversely, has perceptions firmly attached to the world itself, which reflects our intuitive way of thinking of our lived experience.

Although Gregory often gives the impression that the model of perception espoused by Gibson is essentially passive in nature, Gibson actually stresses the active component of direct perception. Critically, the *locus* of activity differs between direct and indirect perception. Where Gibson stresses the active nature of sense organs in the ‘picking up’ of information from the world, Gregory shifts the focus of activity to the brain, which serves to interpret stimuli, acting like a trial court judge (Gregory, 1997a: 112). And where Gibson stresses the psychosomatic nature of perception (an act ‘not of the mind or of the body but of a living observer’ [Gibson, 1979: 239]), Gregory instead emphasises the gap between sense organs and the brain. Direct realism denies the impact of higher cognitive functions in the perceptual process, instead suggesting that the brain is more of a receptacle into which visual information from the outside world is *passively* accepted. Conversely, the indirect perception model proposes that it is the brain, more so than the senses, which is *active* in perception. In turn, indirect perception stresses the gap between the object of perception and the perceiving subject, who employs learned knowledge to neurologically construct a perception of the object.

Central to the model of indirect perception is the notion that cognitive representation is not composed of images, but is made up purely of cortical electrochemical activity,

\(^9\) What Gregory describes as the indirectly connected nature of perceptions to the world should not be confused with descriptions of mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, in which perceptions (hallucinations) become *disconnected* from the world.
which is indescribable by the language of the senses. What differentiates it most from Gibson’s direct realism, however, is what Gregory (building on Helmholtz’s model) identifies as an identity between perception and the scientific method, describing perception as a process of predictive hypothesisation, in which a hypothesis is generated that may (or may not) ‘hit upon truth by producing symbolic structures matching physical reality’ (Gregory, 1980: 182). The result of considering perceptions as hypotheses is a model of reality in which perception of the world and the world itself are forever divided by an insurmountable gap. Gibson, on the other hand, demonstrates little regard for this highly subjective ‘privatised’ model of perception, attacking such notions as potentially solipsistic and futile (Gibson, 1967: 171).

As a matter of great emphasis, Gregory states the shortcomings of comparisons of the visual apparatus to mechanised systems such as the cinematographic device (Gregory, 1997a: 5). Where a photographic or cinematographic image remains substantially connected to its source through a chain of light and chemicals, no such connection, *nor artefact*, exists in the process of visual perception. As Gregory makes clear, it is misleading to utilise a ‘pictures-in-the-brain’ (5) paradigm for the understanding of the way we see, a criticism of indirect perception that is often made by Gibson. Whilst light does indeed enter the eye through the iris and is projected onto the retina (much like a camera, yes), the retinal image is electrochemically coded and sent to the brain via the optic nerve (itself arguable a part of the brain). The retina serves as interface ‘between the optical projection from objects to the neural-coded signals to the brain’ (53), but no light enters the brain, and no *images* are stored as such. The pictures-in-the-brain paradigm, as Gregory points out (in total agreement with Gibson) ‘would
need a further eye to see *its* picture – another picture, another eye – and so on forever, without getting anywhere’ (5). Once this ‘pictures-in-the-brain’ notion is removed from the discussion, what remains is the question as to how the brain decodes the neurological signals from the retinal image, and what this tells us about the way we understand and interact with the external world; the cognitive process that allows this to happen is far too complex, too abstract a reality, to be described via parallels to the comparatively primitive technologies of photography or cinema.

The concept of ‘perception as hypothesis’ (Gregory, 1997a: 10) is fundamental to the model of indirect and active perception. To better understand this, Gregory discusses the effects not only of *a priori* knowledge of objects and their use, but the profound effect that mental states have on perception. In order to deal with the mass amounts of data flooding in, Gregory’s research leads him to describe the brain as acting like a trial court judge, having to determine what is or is not relevant based on experience and understanding of objects (112). Such judgement is what allows us to identify important or dangerous situations quickly and react accordingly (or even just play games like table tennis). In other words, perception is not total representation, but instead the result of what the brain (not the eye) has deemed necessary to filter. In evolutionary terms, the working of this filter is based on what is necessary for survival. It is precisely the limits imposed by this survival instinct that makes even the healthy mind prone to experiencing illusions (a term I shall shortly define properly) and allows heightened emotional states to have an impact on what is seen. Gregory describes the ramifications of the gap between physical reality and our perception of it as follows:
The fact that perceptions can depart from physically accepted realities of objects has philosophical implications and practical consequences. It tells us that our perceptions are not always, and very likely never, directly related to physical reality. (Gregory, 1997a: 197)

Like a car suffering from engine trouble, it is often only when things go wrong that we consider the nature of the mechanism. Likewise, Gregory examines a variety of cases of things ‘going wrong’ as means of understanding the workings of the perceptual apparatus. Gregory is keenly interested in what non-veridical perception tells us about the way we perceive. For Gregory, differentiating between optical *illusions*, such as the Müller-Lyer lines (*see Appendix: Figure 2*), and *hallucinations* is critical. Whilst both illusions and hallucinations demonstrate the nature of subjective reality, each does so in a different way. Hallucinations were originally defined by Esquirol (1838) simply as ‘perception without an object’ (in McKenna, 1997: 6), sense-experiences fabricated by the mind independent of the stimuli actually being received. Illusions, on the other hand, are the result of legitimate visual cues that for some reason (accidentally or orchestrated) ‘fool’ the correctly functioning perceptual apparatus. Whilst the study of illusions helps us understand the evolution of perception, Gregory is also interested in the types of hallucinations experienced by sufferers of schizophrenia, a condition that he describes as a state in which ‘the outside world makes little contact with the individual, so that he or she is effectively isolated’ (Gregory, 1997a: 199).
What appears to be one of Polanski’s most central tasks is to combine cinematically a representation of this type of schizophrenic ‘isolation’ onscreen with an evocation of a similar sensation in the audience. But before turning my attention to Polanski’s use of the camera as a means of fabricating specific perceptual effects in the spectator, it is important to unpick another theory that relates perception to cinema, especially as it bears a superficial resemblance to the theory of indirect perception, but is in fact fundamentally different. I am referring specifically to Sobchack’s (1992) concept of ‘Film’s Body’. From my analysis of this notion, there also emerges a useful contrast between Sobchack’s use of the term ‘body’ and my own idea of a ‘tethered camera’, the latter of which greatly informs my analysis of Polanski’s cinema.

1.3. Film’s Body?

Sobchack (1992) delineates a novel, but problematic, concept of film as a perceiving body - an ontology of cinema grounded in Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology. It is Sobchack’s persistent non-metaphorical use of the term ‘body’ that is particularly problematic to my discussion of Polanski’s cinema, and so it is worth a short digression to juxtapose Sobchack’s concept of film’s body with current neuropsychological models of perception, namely direct (or naïve) realism and indirect perception. I will first outline Sobchack’s theory of ‘film’s body’, and eventually utilise this construct as a point of discourse in reference to Polanski’s cinema. In particular, I hope to make clear what I understand to be the important departure of her theory from the model of indirect perception promoted by Gregory, but also take stock of the important common ground shared by phenomenology and
Gregory’s model of perception and how both provide a useful vocabulary to address the various ways that Polanski approaches some complex issues in his cinema. My intention here, itself polemical, is to explore the degree to which Sobchack’s theory corresponds to these models of perception as a means of determining the degree to which her concept of ‘film’s body’ is useful as a theoretical construct, especially in the context of my discussion of Polanski’s engagement with perceptual psychology.

My intention is not, however, to use Sobchack as a means to force a reconciliation between Merleau-Ponty’s and Gregory’s often distinct accounts of perception, but rather to explore how these different intellectual approaches to perception, whilst for the most part sharing the goal of understanding how the individual experiences the world, in many respects differ radically in the models of the perceptual mechanism they each describe and upon which each theory is based.

The focus of Gregory’s description of indirect perception is to argue the case for a concept of perceptions as hypotheses, and in so doing highlight the gaps that exists between

a) the nature of the object being perceived,

b) the senses that receive the stimuli that the object emits, and

c) the interpretation of the object at a neurological level.

Although Gregory does not elaborate on what the ‘philosophical implications’ (as he refers to it, 1997a: 197) of the theory of indirect perception are (which would be, in any case, beyond his remit as a neuropsychologist), it is clear that the theory’s
stressing of the role of higher cognitive functions, specifically the act of hypothesisation, on the formation of perceptions parallels to a large extent developments in twentieth-century science, in particular the growing understanding of quantum physics, which completely overturns common-sense notions of the nature of reality, and which, in a similar vein as indirect perception, stresses the gap between the intrinsic reality of the world and our capacity to perceive it through calling attention to the agency of the observer to influence what is perceived. As if predicting this connection, Gregory is also warns against an understanding of indirect perception that lapses into outright solipsism; he is careful not to overestimate the parallel between the details of Heisenberg’s (1901-1976) uncertainty principle and the sort of ‘everyday’ perception Gregory is primarily concerned with:

If ‘deep’ physics is accepted, there is a danger of calling all perceptions illusory … to call all perceptions illusory is not helpful… so we may accept for reference ‘kitchen’ physics… (Gregory, 2005: 1234)

Notwithstanding this important nuance between the world of quantum mechanics the ‘kitchen’ physics of biological human perception, both indirect perception and the uncertainty principle are premised on hypothesisation as the basis of reality, a distinct shift away from empirical certitudes. I believe that it is this theoretical connection between quantum physics and indirect perception, namely their mutual emphasis on uncertainty and hypothesisation, that helps us understand what Gregory intends by the ‘philosophical implications’ of the theory of indirect perception. It is these two terms, ‘uncertainty’ and ‘hypothesisation’, that will come up time and again in my analyses of Polanski’s cinema, and which will later lead me to the concepts of modernism and

Examining Polanski’s cinema in the context of these theorists’ complex, nuanced discourse proves to be a highly informative means of engaging both the various strains of philosophical discourse at work in Polanski’s cinema, as well as their aesthetics. I shall discuss Polanski’s cinema in relation to modernism and postmodernism in much greater depth in a dedicated section later in this chapter, but it is worth mentioning at this stage of my discussion that active perception’s emphasis on uncertainty and hypothesisation is reflected in both [Heisenberg-influenced] post-war existentialism and the ideological ambiguity of works indicative of the ‘postmodern condition’ (as Lyotard terms it, 1984). Through an examination of the shift from modernism to postmodernism, ideas emerge that help us deal with the complexity of Polanski’s cinema, much of which seems to reside on the ‘cusp’ of modernism and postmodernism. In particular, these concepts help clarify what I believe to be the scope of the ‘philosophical implications’ of both the theory of active perception and Polanski’s own perceptual discourse. But more on this complex issue later.

As mentioned previously, and a point to which I shall often return, a key factor in this reading of Polanski’s cinema is the two-fold manner whereby Polanski utilises contemporary neuropsychological theories of perception in his cinema, namely

a) the films’ concern with and depiction of acts of perception, and

b) the manner in which these films attempt to manipulate how they are perceived during the lived-experience of spectatorship.
If we are to engage with Polanski’s work with Gregory’s neuropsychological research into perception serving as a theoretical basis of analysis, we are forced to consider seriously the actual sensory experience of watching these films; that is to say, the way we (our brains) interact with the stimuli that make up these films, must be treated as a central factor in this type of analysis, from which all other issues stem.

My use of the expressions such as ‘lived-experience’ and ‘acts of perception’ is not casual, as these form part of the language of existential phenomenology’s account of perception. Although my approach to Polanski is not strictly ‘phenomenological’, it proves nonetheless relevant and useful to both contrast and take note of the common ground shared by existential phenomenology as espoused by Merleau-Ponty and the philosophical construct of representational realism based on indirect and active perception put forward by Gregory. In contrast to Gregory, Merleau-Ponty’s meditations on perception were established in ignorance of both ‘deep physics’ as well as emerging before neuropsychology began seriously addressing the nature of optical illusions.

Gregory does not make explicit mention of the philosophical zeitgeist upon the heels of which *Eye and Brain* was published (and by this I refer specifically to the post-war existentialist movement), but he does indirectly address some of the criticism levelled at psychology by Merleau-Ponty, with whom Gregory shares many basic concerns, but to whose philosophy indirect perception needs to be delicately distinguished from. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, first published in 1945, Merleau-Ponty accuses psychology of ignoring phenomena such as the Müller-Lyer illusion, claiming that
‘(p)sychologists have for a long time taken great care to overlook these phenomena’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 7). In so doing, Merleau-Ponty effectively claims the territory of optical illusion for philosophy. Gregory’s *Eye and Brain* serves, albeit without directly recognising it as such, as psychology’s rebuttal to Merleau-Ponty. In *Eye and Brain*, Gregory addresses not only the Müller-Lyer illusion, but also many others, and in the process constructs the model of *indirect* and cognitively *active* perception to account for these strange visual effects. Far from ‘taking care to overlook’ such illusions, Gregory bases much of his research on trying to account for their curious effects on our perception.

The shift towards a model of perception (as proposed by Gregory) that is *indirect* and cognitively *active* is fundamental to an understanding of how this perceptual theory compares to the concept of perception sketched by Merleau-Ponty and echoed by Sobchack, as well as what such models tell us about the experience of watching cinema. Rather than ‘picking up’ information (as in the tenacious direct-realism model), Gregory’s model instead stresses the importance of neurological electrochemical codification and representation of stimuli by the brain from cues it receives from the sense organs. In turn, indirect perception unifies the mind and brain in its description of the raw elements of consciousness (perception, memory, thought, etc.) as (physiological) electro-chemical activity. Phenomenology similarly stresses an active component of perception in its description of the way the subject embodies the *visible* (i.e. objects that can be seen) into the *visual* (i.e. a subject’s sight).
As a research procedure, Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology is primarily concerned with addressing the nature of lived experience, in particular the way in which the subjective realm of the individual interacts with the outside world, with a great emphasis placed on ‘phenomenological intuition’ (Sobchack, 1992: 28), which allows one to circumvent the institutionalisation of perception towards a critical assessment of the manner in which the world is constructed. Gregory’s own challenge is almost identical, and while Gregory steers clear of the question of existence, his focus on understanding the nature of sensory (lived) experience indeed shares common ground with Merleau-Ponty. But where phenomenology stresses the mutually constituting nature of perceiver and perceived (être-au-monde), Gregory avoids such purely theoretical constructs, and instead focuses on the functioning of the brain, the organ to which there is conspicuously no reference in either Merleau-Ponty or Sobchack. Whilst both Merleau-Ponty and Sobchack discuss internal experience, thought, the mind and even the ‘soul’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 87, for example), the brain seems quite intentionally omitted from existential phenomenology. Contrariwise, for Gregory’s theory of the nature of perceptual experience, an understanding of the brain based on neuropsychological research is absolutely fundamental. The fact that Gregory titles his book Eye and Brain may in itself be a reference (or rebuttal) to Merleau-Ponty’s focus on the ambiguous ‘mind’, as it seems to reference the title of Merleau-Ponty’s own essay ‘Eye and Mind’ (1964).

\[10\] i.e. The non-reflective attitude towards existence nurtured by societal structures like religion and government propaganda with the support of the media.
Sobchack adopts Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and delineates a two-fold approach to cinema in which she addresses both

a) the phenomenological visual experience of the spectator and, more unusually for film theory,

b) the ontology of the medium itself, in which she describes film as not only a visible object, but a visual subject as well.

Sobchack describes ‘film’s body’ as being made of two ‘organs’: ‘the camera as its perceptive organ and the projector as its expressive organ’ (Sobchack, 1992: 206). She goes on to clarify that the projector serves to enable a second body, the spectator, ‘to perceive the film’s vision’. For Sobchack, this projection ‘functions to express [the film’s] perception’ (ibid). Consequently, according to Sobchack’s film-body concept, cinema shares with the spectator the status of being simultaneously object (perceived) and subject (perceiving). Importantly, Sobchack refers to the double status of the spectator not within the context of watching cinema, but more so the experience of quotidian perception in which we are concurrently entities that are perceived (by others, and ourselves) and who perceive. For Sobchack, the cinematic artefact (the film) shares this double existence in a non-metaphorical way, in what she (for me, provocatively) refers to as ‘film’s body’.

Sobchack suggests an understanding of the cinematic ‘apparatus’ (in the sense intended by Baudry [1992]) beyond being just a means of representation and stimuli delivery towards an ontology of cinema as a perceiving force, a body (albeit an invisible one), in which the world is embodied in a manner that reflects our own
lived-experience of the perceivable world. It is important to again stress that for Sobchack, the term ‘body’ is employed to establish an identity, not a metaphor. She could not be clearer about her literal use of the term ‘body’; as she puts it, ‘I do not use metaphor... the term film’s body in this work is meant to be empirical, not metaphorical’ (Sobchack, 1992: xviii). It is therefore important not to confuse Sobchack’s literal notion of ‘film’s body’ with the strains of film theory specifically concerned with the spectator’s perceptual relationship with the on-screen corporeal form, such as Shaviro’s (1993) use of the term ‘Cinematic Body’ or Mulvey’s (1975) famous discussion of the ‘male gaze’ and the objectification of women’s bodies.

Sobchack’s novel ontology of film, her main challenge to film theory, is evocative of the Gregory/Gibson conflict of indirect versus direct (cognitively active versus passive) perception. Furthermore, Sobchack is critical of the manner in which both formalism and realism take for granted the status of the film as merely ‘viewed object’ (Sobchack, 1992: 20), either as pure expression ‘subjectively freed from worldly constraints’ (16) in the formalist sense, or realism’s conception of film as pure perception, in which the image is ‘objectively freed from entailment with prejudicial investments of the human being’ (ibid). But by challenging the notions of objectivity and cinematic realism, Sobchack also highlights a serious problem with her own description of the anatomy of cinema in that she similarly positions film as the embodiment of perception.

Sobchack even goes so far as to draw attention to her omission of the inverted commas around ‘body’.

11
The concept of cinematic realism as discussed by Sobchack follows the same perceptual framework as direct perception in its assumption that reality can be embodied/inscribed on film objectively and then passed on to be re-perceived by the spectator. But such objectivity is also a target of phenomenology, and figures greatly in Merleau-Ponty’s criticism of science, which labels its attempts to attain empirical knowledge through observation as ‘mental blindness’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 29). At the risk of oversimplifying Merleau-Ponty’s critique, the phenomenological stance can be reduced to the axiom that since lived-experience is subjective, scientific observation cannot be objective, thus making true empiricism impossible. Such an argument might seem equally supported by Gregory’s own model of active, indirect perception that is ‘likely never … directly related to physical reality’ (Gregory, 1997a: 197), but this ultimately is not the theoretical line Gregory follows, and his research only emphasises the need for careful empirical measurement that takes account of, and compensates for, the (indirect) manner in which perception functions (at the level of ‘kitchen physics’, at any rate).

Sobchack proposes considering the cinematic artefact beyond its role as perceptual object as it has hitherto been considered by film theory. She employs a phenomenological approach to generate a new understanding of not only the experience of watching cinema as a visible object, but also to describe film itself as the embodied act of perception of a viewing entity: ‘(b)oth film and spectator are capable of viewing and being viewing, both are embodied in the world as the subject of vision and object for vision’ (Sobchack, 1992: 23). It is important to highlight that Sobchack is not referring here to avant-garde cinema or certain elements of perceptually ‘aware’ directors like Polanski, but to all cinema.
In her discussion, Sobchack sympathetically highlights Gilles Deleuze’s resistance to having his cinema books labelled phenomenologies of cinema. Deleuze cites the ‘natural perception’ emphasised by existential phenomenology as being ‘at odds with cinematic signification’ (Deleuze in Sobchack, 1992: 31), which is essentially designed to manipulate our vision. Such a description of the manipulative powers of cinema does indeed suggest that the spectator adopts, or is even forced into, a wholly passive role in the cinematic experience, and it is with this point that Sobchack takes issue. Sobchack instead stresses the embodied situation of both the spectator and the film itself (31), and specifically the continual ability of the spectator (the perceptual subject) to maintain a state of intentionality in the face of cinematic stimuli. Perceiving the cinematic image does not exclude the perception of the rest of the world, including proprioception (i.e. perception of one’s own body). Such awareness of the body is echoed by Merleau-Ponty, who describes the body not only as location of one’s own ‘point of view’ but also as an object within the world (2002: 81), and so diagramming the ‘perceiving subject as the perceived world’ (83, emphasis my own).

Sobchack’s acknowledgement of the intentionality involved in the viewing of cinema is much in line with indirect perception, in which the experience of spectatorship is anything but passive – it must be hyperactive in the double perceptual task inherent in the experience, composed of both the basic act of perception of all stimuli perceived and the focused act of interpreting the cinematic image itself, which also involves the erection of perceptual borders, which we alone hold up, and the understanding of the visual semantics particular to cinema. Although with a superficially lower degree of
abstraction than a book, a film must nevertheless be ‘read’. A filmmaker may well employ special optical techniques to try to create the type of (seemingly) unmediated experience that inhibits awareness of one’s own body (or, for that matter, awareness of the *act of perception*), but even in such a scenario (if it were indeed possible) the spectator remains actively involved in the process due to the *a priori* perceptual biases that are unique to each perceiver.

For Sobchack, ‘film’s body’ exists on two levels. The first is simply a body-as-object paradigm, in which film acts as an enabler of perception for the audience, the means by which visual communication is realised between the filmmaker and the spectator. The second is more radical, in which she proposes a rethinking of film by way of its own ‘means of perceptually engaging and expressing a world – given to us as a *technologically mediated consciousness of experience*’ (Sobchack, 1992: 168, emphasis my own). Such an ontology of film is at odds with indirect perception, which suggests that whilst cinema may be able to make us think *about* perception, it *is not itself perception*, as perceptions have no materiality that can be seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted.

The theory of indirect perception tells us that we cannot share vision, as a subject’s vision is not only informed, but also completely defined by a subjective electrochemical process. The extent to which the spectator is conscious of the representational nature of the image depends on the spectator and the efforts of the filmmaker who, like Polanski, may well intend to disguise the nature of the image by employing cinematographic techniques that produce an image that approximates
natural human vision. Later, I shall argue that Polanski employs special optical
techniques in an attempt to overcome the natural obstacles to total engagement with
the screen image. How effective these attempts are, and how these techniques have
evolved will round out this discussion. It is not my intention, however, to assert that
Polanski’s efforts are totally successful. Rather, it is the manner in which Polanski
makes incremental steps toward this goal that is of interest, as are the philosophical
issues that arise as a result, both those related to narrative content of the films and
those that emerge from a technical analysis of his cinematography (and especially
those cases in which the former and the latter are simultaneously present).
Notwithstanding the technical prowess and intent of the filmmaker or willing
suspension of disbelief of the spectator, the hypothetical case in which a spectator
truly believes, even momentarily, that what he or she is witnessing is anything but
cinema, probably does not exist.

Sobchack is explicit in her dependence on the analogous relationship between human
perception and technologies, describing cinema as being a means of ‘mak(ing) the
introceptive and subjective features of vision objectively visible’ (Sobchack, 1992:
166), as well as pointing to computer technology as an inheritor of this capacity.
Sobchack is not the first to turn to modern technology as a means of understanding
perception. The connection of cinema to perception is in fact reminiscent of the
oversimplified comparisons made by Della Porta in the sixteenth century between
perception and his protofilmic camera obscura (see Gregory, 1997a: 34-35 and
Bruno, 2002, 139-140); both such comparisons, however, ultimately lead to
paradoxical accounts of perception. Although Gregory stresses the Helmholtzian call
to consider perception as a representation of reality based on a process of
hypothesisation (Gregory, 1980: 181), he warns of the falling into the ‘pictures-in-the-brain’ trap the representational model of perception lends itself to (Gregory, 1997a: 5). Such paradigms of perception are also a chief target of Gibson, who disparages notions of the ‘theatre of consciousness’ (Gibson, 1979: 239). In this regard, both direct and indirect models of perception depart from the early twentieth-century Gestalt psychology concept of perceptual isomorphic mapping, in which electrical brain fields quite literally represent objects according to their properties in terms of shape and even colour. Gregory not only stresses that there is no evidence to support isomorphism, but that we should move away from thinking of perceptual representation as producing a visible artefact in any respect, for, like the camera obscura (or cinema) analogy, this would require yet another set of homuncular eyes to see the artefact, ‘another picture, another eye – and so on forever, without getting anywhere’ (Gregory 1997a: 5). By renouncing the ‘pictures-in-the-brain’ paradigm, what therefore remains is a model of perception that is indeed difficult to describe using current language. What seems to be required to articulate the nature of perception, itself a type of cognition, is a new mode of thought that is beyond reliance on limited analogies to technological devices. The most convincing language Gregory uses to describe indirect perception remains, however, an analogy.

Although Gregory makes passing reference to ‘software’ and ‘hardware’ (Colman. A. & Gregory, R.L., 1995: xii), he is careful not to draw too close a parallel between perception and information technology. Instead, Gregory sets up an analogy, or rather, an identity, between perception and the scientific method to help establish a more accurate neurological description. The identity of perception and science remains based in the Helmholtzian concept of perception as predictive hypothesis, in that both
perception and science function by generating hypotheses that may (or may not) ‘hit upon truth by producing symbolic structures matching physical reality’ (Gregory, 1980: 182).

In the context of Gregory’s theory, using the cinematic camera as a model of perception has only limited merit. It is true that both processes are composed of physics and chemistry. At the level of physics, both the eye and the camera use a lens to accept radiant energy. But where in the camera a chemical reaction takes place to inscribe the image into a frame of exposed film, the chemistry of perception is entirely different. When a retinal image is formed from light passing through the lens of the eye, an electrochemical event occurs that stimulates neurological synapses that run along the optic nerve to the brain. Light, Gregory repeatedly stresses, does not pass any further than the eye, and what is transmitted to the brain is not an image but a purely electrochemical impulse or ‘action potential’ (Colman. A. & Gregory, R.L., 1995: xii). In Gregory’s model, perception is representation not through the creation of images (like a camera), but through purely neural activity. Vision, and for that matter, all forms of perception (and by extension, the basis of our concept of reality), is not made up of inscribed stimuli, but flashes of synaptic energy. As Neidich (2003) describes it, subjective reality, both experienced and remembered, ‘is no longer [the reality] of the object but of the neuron, and at this […] level no things as such appear, only fragmented attributes, surges of brain activity […] merely quanta of electrochemical energy discharging along columns and limbs of cortical tissue’ (12). Accessing this information (memory) is not a matter of reapplying light to recreate an image and in turn delivering new radiant energy to the eye (or recreating sound wave to be re-heard by the ear, etc.), but an entirely different and purely electrochemical
process, which, although still not completely understood, is most definitely nothing like cinema.\textsuperscript{12}

Other than the physics involved in radiant energy passing through a lens, literally everything else about the process is radically different, so much so that there is little to be understood either about human perception or cinematography, or for that matter the perception of cinematography, if the analogous nature of the two is overstated. So to reverse the analogy by claiming cinema itself to be a perceiving body that shares vision with the spectator directly is to establish an identity founded on a largely discredited model of perception.

Another key assertion upon which much of Sobchack’s discussion rests is also apparently at odds with modern theories of perception, namely her claim that physiological descriptions of human perception ‘never really account for what is seen but only the fact that it is seen’ (170), likening this to a similar deficit found in film theory, which tends to stress the ‘physiology’ of the cinematic apparatus (i.e.

\textsuperscript{12}We must equally be careful not to overstate the parallel between digital cinema and perception, notwithstanding the fact that certain elements of digital ‘inscription’ seem to account for the discrepancies outlined above. It is true, of course, that in the digital recording of images (moving or still) no actual images are stored in the device. Here the parallel to biological vision seems to stand up better than film, and the fact that the radiant energy that passes though the lens onto a receptive plate (the sensor) is then codified into electrical pulses to be stored as pure data only further justifies the comparison. Indeed, just as Gregory reminds us that there are no ‘pictures in the brain’, we can equally state that there are no pictures in the hard drive.

But the parallel between the way the brain deals with vision and the digital camera, whilst compelling, is again superficial. The digital devices entire raison d’être is to reproduce the image, onto a screen, to then serve as object of perception to a perceiving body. Whilst the digital device is not literally storing images as images (the way film does), this does not move it much closer to serving as analogy for our visual system, which is not geared to reproduce an image for the proverbial ‘mind’s eye’ that is meant to serve as both perceiving organ and projection room.
Baudry’s description of the camera, projector, and screen), and which has ‘not adequately accounted for what the film is as a particular form of existential meaning’ (170). There is undoubtedly merit in pursuing this line of thought, but Sobchack’s parallel between cinema and biological perception is unfortunately overstated. The model of indirect perception stresses that there is no artefact of vision, and nor can it be reproduced or communicated via any means which require the reengagement of the sensory process. Cinema, therefore, is not and cannot be visual, in the sense intended by Sobchack; but cinema can be something visible that causes us to reflect on the nature of vision.

Merleau-Ponty models his discussion of cinema on what he calls the ‘new psychology’, in particular Gestalt theory’s unity of signs and significance, judgement and sensation (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:50). The contrasting view of perception is represented by what he refers to as ‘classical psychology’, in which sensory data is described as neutral, needing to be ‘interpreted according to hypothesis’ (ibid). The fundamental conviction that allows Sobchack to envision film as a perceiving body is indeed a Gestalt theory concept of perception. Neither the indirect nor direct model of perception permits such an identity. The value, therefore, of Sobchack’s concept of film’s body is connected to the ‘perceived’ value of Gestalt theory, which has been widely rejected by scientists due its limited ability to explain perception in anything more than unprovable, unfalsifiable, or ambiguous descriptive terms (Gregory, 1997a: 5).
Notwithstanding the various conflicts with the prevalent models of perception outlined above, it is not my intention to completely drain Sobchack’s phenomenological description of cinema of its relevance to film theory. Anchoring my own theoretical approach to Polanski’s cinema in the model of indirect perception, I take issue only with the semantics of what Sobchack maintains is an empirical reference to ‘film’s body’ and the ontology of film itself as vision. If this has been clarified, however, it is possible to overcome this discrepancy and more fully appreciate the important common ground shared by phenomenology and Gregory’s model of perception and how both provide a useful vocabulary to address the various ways that film theory can stimulate discourse on the complexities not only of the perception of cinema, but perception itself.

1.4. Manipulating Perception

So great was his interest in Gregory’s research, that Polanski reportedly (Gregory, 2003) carried Eye and Brain around with him on set, with evidence of this research especially noticeable in Polanski’s ‘Apartment Trilogy’ of Repulsion (1965), Rosemary’s Baby (1968) and The Tenant. In these three films in particular, Polanski meticulously attempts to represent the distorted perception of a schizophrenic subject, at times even employing optical illusions discussed by Gregory to reflect diegetic psychosis. The central aim of this thesis is to explore the way in which Polanski has utilised neuropsychological research to both

a) depict diegetic acts of perception, and

b) influence the manner in which the spectator perceives the cinematic object.
In all three films that make up the ‘Apartment Trilogy’, the protagonists experience severe psychological horrors, located for the most part within the confines of their urban homes; the apartments serve not only as sites of their crises, but often actively contribute to them. In each of these films, Polanski seems to employ Gregory’s research both to direct narrative relevance and as a means of heightening the spectator’s engagement with the diegetic reality. Gregory (2003) compares Polanski’s approach to filmmaking to the Venus Fly Trap (see Appendix: Figure 3), whereby Polanski uses a variety of neuropsychology-informed techniques to draw us into (to accept) the world of these films, and then utilises the same knowledge to repulse us at the moment of greatest engagement.

In the 1960s, Polanski established himself as a commercially successful international filmmaker of great technical prowess. This was an era of rapid technological development in cinema, some aspects of which Polanski took advantage of, and others of which he did not. The use colour film stock was now widespread as both Eastman Kodak and Technicolor developed new forms of film with more nuanced colour rendition and improved definition (Salt, 1983: 324-325). Polanski took advantage of both, shooting his first colour film in 1967, Dance of the Vampires, using Eastman Kodak’s ‘Metrocolour’ stock, and his second in 1968, Rosemary’s Baby, with Technicolor. The Technicolor stock in particular lent itself to the creation of special effects through manipulation in post-production. In 2001: A Space Odyssey (Kubrick, 1968), released the same year as Rosemary’s Baby and also shot on Technicolor, Kubrick takes advantage of Technicolor’s printing technique by
manipulated the three colour matrices to produce a ‘false colour’ effect to create a special effect for the film’s ‘trip through space and time’ sequence. Salt credits Kubrick with having invented this technique (1983: 325); but, as I discuss in my case study of Rosemary Baby, in his film, Polanski also manipulated the stock in post-production to produce a similar effect, in which the matrices of colour seems to come ‘unglued’.

There were also several developments in lenses at this time; the most important, Salt suggests, was the advent of the Angenieux zoom lens in 1963. The zoom lens was initially used in European films, such Schlesinger’s Billy Liar (1963), and Lelouch’s Un Homme et une Femme (1965), but was also employed in some American films including Brooks’ The Professionals (1966) and Nichols’ The Graduate (1967).

Whilst the zoom might work well to create a specific effect, its use is highly conspicuous and can work against the establishment of audience engagement, an anathema to the classic Hollywood style with its mandate of seamlessness. As Salt notes, there was a considerable amount of resistance to the use of the zoom lens in Hollywood, which was seen as a ‘cheap substitute for a tracking shot’ (1983: 335). Polanski’s keen awareness of perception and his desire to achieve cinematic perceptual realism precluded the use of the zoom as a shortcut, but he does not put it to ‘artistic’ use either, preferring instead to work towards ‘classic’ seamlessness, thus the absence of the conspicuous ‘zoom shot’ in Polanski’s cinema.

Experimentation with lenses of different focal lengths was also becoming more widespread in the 1960s, which corresponded to the increased availability of lenses
with focal lengths ranging from 25mm (wide angle) to 360mm (extreme telephoto), and everything in-between. In contrast to Polanski, who preferred to minimise distortion in favour of perceptual realism (as I will later discuss, a technique he employed to maximise the effect of distortion when it is actually employed), Antonioni, who also came into international recognition in the 1960s, attempted to achieve an expressive form of ‘psychological verisimilitude’ (Bordwell, 2002: 99) through his use of colour, camera movement (in particular his use of pans) and zooms, as well as the employment of a range of lenses in films such as *Il Deserto Rosso* (1964) and *Blow-Up* (1966). For example, he employs a 100mm lens for large part of *Il Deserto Rosso*; instead of attempting to render a ‘natural’ image, in this film, Antonioni knowingly utilises the ‘flattening’ effect of the telephoto lens to produce ‘near-abstract compositions’ (Salt, 1983: 336). In contrast, for the most part, Polanski’s use of lenses tends to be more conservative, sticking to a combination of camera placement and lens choice that avoids excessive distortion; as Gregory puts it, this technique serves as a means of keeping the image closer to what the brain expects to see (2003). But there is also evidence, at times subtle and at times pronounced, of both ‘telephoto’ and ‘wide’ type lenses in films such as *Chinatown, Repulsion, The Tenant* and *Rosemary’s Baby*, as I shall address in due course. But Polanski’s ‘conservative’ use of lenses is no less deliberate or less ambitious than Antonioni’s more eclectic choices; the distinction in their individual approaches to psychological realism lies more so in Polanski’s attempt to achieve such realism by working within the ‘classic’ style versus Antonioni’s more abstract sensibilities.

Polanski’s goal of exploring cinema’s potential to provide the spectator with the semblance of unmediated experience seems to be behind many of his directorial
decisions. It is unsurprising, then, to discover that Polanski experimented with 3-D.13

In the mid-1970s Polanski enlisted Gregory to collaborate on a series of test shots that Polanski hoped would lead to the creation of a convincing 3-D cinematic effect, a type of cinema that would heighten an audience’s willingness to devote their minds to the world of the film and let themselves be open to the experiences on offer. The 3-D films made up until that time showed promise, but were ultimately exercises in gimmickry that added little to the ‘wraparound effect’ Polanski sought.

Gregory (2008) explains that he and Polanski experimented with a split-frame version of an offset image as a means of reducing the jittering effect caused by dual projection (the standard way to project a 3-D film at the time). Whilst the brain seems capable of compensating for a regular vibration of the frame, which is normal in any 35mm projection, the ‘double jitter’ caused by the additional projector proves too difficult for the brain to deal with and is thus distracting. In theory, Polanski and Gregory’s split-frame 3-D technique would jitter no more than a conventional film. Ultimately, however, according to both Gregory (2008) and Polanski (1984), Polanski decided to abandon the project because the 3-D effect they achieved in these experiments was insufficiently convincing; thus, not only would the ‘wraparound’ effect not be aided, it could potentially be diminished due to the audience’s awareness of the effect (see Polanski, 1984: 327).14

13 ‘My filmmaking ideal has always been to involve audiences so deeply in what they see that their visual experience approximates living reality. Anything that enhances this “wraparound” effect – colour, large screens, stereo sound - is an asset. A logical extension of the same idea is 3-D.’ (Polanski, 1984: 326).

14 The recent advent of digital projection has eliminated the type ‘jittering’ found with 35mm projection, and so unsurprisingly 3-D is having a resurgence. Nevertheless, a convincing 3-D image that increases, rather than decreases, engagement remains elusive. Polanski has always been more of a
Notwithstanding this failed 3-D experiment, Polanski has used a variety of techniques to move ever closer to the elusive ‘wraparound’ effect. Polanski reduces his goal of achieving perceptual verisimilitude as follows:

I’m trying to show on-screen what I see, it’s as simple as that. I’m trying only to repeat with the camera as closely as possible what I have seen with my own eyes during the rehearsal of a set-up. Therefore I use the appropriate angle. The angle is determined by the distance from which I watch the person. The face seen from the other side of the room is not the same face which is seen across the table. (Polanski in Thompson, 1995: 9)

Polanski’s flippancy aside, to achieve such a goal is anything but ‘simple’ given the inherent limitations of the cinematographic image or any lens’s (‘normal’ or otherwise) ability to truly replicate the way the human eye deals with light, regardless of how carefully the camera is placed. In Repulsion, apart from those images that depict distorted vision, Polanski favours the ‘normal’ (50mm) lens with the camera placed at the same distance from the subject as the nominal observer; in theory, such a set-up best approximates the perspective of natural human vision (natural perspective). The approach is most effective if the spectator sits the same distance from the screen (relative to the size of the screen) as the camera (the invisible diegetic observer) was from the subject (Gregory, 2008). (Luckily, this ‘ideal’ seating footprint represents most of the centrally located seats of the cinema.)

perfectionist than innovator, preferring to fully realise the potential of ‘classic’ cinema rather than reinvent the medium (Polanski has never, for example, aligned himself with or initiated an aesthetic ‘movement’), but it remains to be seen whether or not he will renew his fascination with 3-D given the latest developments.
According to Gregory, Polanski’s use of natural perspective creates an image for which the brain need not compensate, and thus we are more readily ‘drawn in’ to the image as it more closely matches the perspective we expect to see (Gregory, 2003 & 2008). Heightening this effect is Polanski’s tendency to favour longer takes and fluid camera movements over rapid editing to cover the action of a sequence. Polanski is not, however, bound by any one technique in his quest to achieve what is perhaps best described as perceptual realism, a term effectively defended by Currie (1996), which I will employ often in my case studies to indicate a style of realism in which attempts are made to manipulate perceptions as a means of evoking a specific spectatorial perceptual effect through the manner in which profilmic elements are constructed, creating not only a representation of the real world, but perceptually ‘realistic in its recreation of the experience of the real world’ (326, emphasis my own). Given the framed-nature of the cinematic image and the ever-conspicuous presence of the cinema theatre environment (or, worse, the home-viewing environment), which itself includes the one’s sense of one’s own body within this environment (‘proprioception’), it would be step too far to suggest that true visual

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15 As any good photography book will show, shooting a subject with a telescopic lens at a greater distance could yield a similarly constructed image as shooting the same subject more closely with a normal lens, or even more closely with a wide-angle lens. The perspective of each image, however, would be radically different. The normal (50mm) lens is thought to best approximate the perspective of natural human vision, if the observer was positioned at the same distance from the subject as the camera.

16 I use the term ‘perceptual realism’ here to signify a specific form of cinematic ‘realism’, but the term is more often used to describe a philosophical stance that stresses the existence of objects independent of our perceptions of them. Both direct and indirect theories of perception are forms of realism, although each describes a very different version of the workings of perception. Nevertheless, both direct and indirect theories are distinct from ‘idealism’, which instead identifies the mental sphere alone as custodian of existence.
perceptual realism could ever be achieved within an apparatus that still engages the brain through the sense organs instead of directly.

Cavell (1971), discusses the reproduction of visual stimuli as vastly inferior to the type of perceptual realism achieved by sound reproduction, which has, especially in the four decades since his comment, achieved levels so close to perfection that any difference between the representation of the thing and the thing itself (in this case, sound waves) is imperceptible to the human listener (19). As Cavell also observes, when it comes to stimuli that appeal to the eye, convincing representation has proved more difficult to achieve: ‘if the sense-data from of photographs were the same as sense-data of the objects they contain, we couldn’t tell a photograph of an object from the object itself’ (20). Of course, we can tell the difference. The goal of ever achieving the level of fidelity between representation and ‘original’ that has been accomplished by sound reproduction (even this term, ‘reproduction’, indicates re-making of an original rather than a representation of it) remains elusive, greatly due to what seems to be the insurmountable issue of the image’s frame and our constant awareness of it due to the means by which the image is presented to the eye. Even with recent developments in digital cinema, screen size (such as IMAX) and 3-D taken into account, the representation of the visual image has yet to achieve the ‘framelessness’ of sound reproduction. So it is important to emphasise that whilst I may often refer to the issue of perceptual realism in relation to Polanski’s work, I intend this in the sense of ‘efforts towards’, or, on rare occasions, ‘moments of’, rather than to suggest an absolute achievement of the goal.
Polanski often uses a carefully placed wide-angle lens to represent space more effectively and heighten perceptual ('interior') realism within the over-arching diegetic reality, such as the close-ups in *Repulsion, Rosemary’s Baby*, and *The Tenant*, where the distorting effects of lenses are often used to great advantage as a means of reflecting the distorted perception of the schizophrenic subject. For the (presumably) sane spectator, such contrasts are both disquieting and fascinating in that they draw attention to the malleability of what we cling to as being essentially immutable external realities. Conversely, if the distorting effects are limited by careful camera placement, Polanski maintains that a wide-angle lens can also serve to heighten the illusion of depth:

> I choose to use wide-angles whenever I want to be aware of the walls around, where I want it to be more three-dimensional. They give a greater sense of a location, and a greater depth of focus. (Polanski in Thompson, 1995: 9)

The central notion of Gregory’s *Eye and Brain* is that the brain constructs perception; the ‘construction’ is representative of the stimuli perceived, but never complete. Reflecting Gregory’s thesis, the perceptual experiences of Carole, Rosemary (Mia Farrow) and Trelkovsky (Roman Polanski) illustrate the fact that it is the brain, not the eye, which ‘sees’ (as I shall discuss in my first three case studies). Whilst using Gregory’s research to help decide which lens and camera position will best lure us in, Polanski is equally concerned with the philosophical conundrum that results from the kind of neuropsychological research Gregory is associated with; namely, Gregory’s question ‘how do we know the truth?’ (Gregory, 1997a: 194). The ramifications of

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17 Or drugged, or drunk, depending on how one reads the rape sequence in *Rosemary’s Baby*. 
this question find expression not only in Polanski’s films dealing with the issue of mental illness, namely *Repulsion, Rosemary’s Baby*, and *The Tenant*, but resonate throughout his work, in particular those films in which the diegetic truth of the past remains elusive, like *Bitter Moon, Death and The Maiden* (1994), and Polanski’s most recent film, *The Ghost*; as well as Polanski’s investigation cycle of *Chinatown* (1974), *Frantic*, and *The Ninth Gate* (which I will discuss in my second set of case studies), in which perceptual crises also emerge, not as the result of illness, but from close encounters with concealed reality.

It is admittedly difficult to determine whether by demonstrating the influence of perceptual psychology in his cinema Polanski is intentionally entering into the perception-based discourse and adopting a specific stance in favour of indirect perception, or whether he is simply manifesting an interest in perception and exploring the issue cinematically. It is evident that his particular fondness for representing acts of non-veridical perception, as well as his evocation of such perception in the spectator, does indeed align him with indirect perception over Gibson’s ecological model, but I would stop short of claiming Polanski is ‘taking sides’. More important in this context is the fact that Polanski’s cinema demonstrates how a filmmaker can engage with psychological research and apply it both to the manner in which the cinematic image is realised (and received), as well as to direct narrative/thematic relevance, thus (potentially) engaging with the perceptual discourse onscreen.
1.5. **Polanski’s Two Cinemas**

Although Polanski’s concern with perceptual psychology and its philosophical implications are evident in much of his cinema, the manner in which the issue is dealt with has evolved over the years. Many critics have made note of various periods or shifts in Polanski’s work, but perhaps the most evident of these can be identified by targeting *Tess* (1979) as a kind of transitional moment. Mazierska identifies this film as the point at which ‘(o)ntological and epistemological ambiguity, which was Polanski’s trademark, gradually evaporates from his films and the kingdom of fantasy shrinks’ (2007: 88). We can add to Mazierska’s discussion by examining Polanski’s work in the context of perception theory, in which her classification of these two periods remains useful, in that it identifies a relevant aesthetic change from films that attempt to represent the subjective psychological experience of a character from the ‘inside’, to films in which access to these cognitive experiences remains elusive, keeping us ‘outside’ the psychological sphere. We can nuance this shift a step further. The psyches to which we are granted ‘access’ in these earlier films tend to be in a state of crisis in which these characters’ perceptual acuity is seriously questionable. Contrariwise, the crises faced in the later films are not portrayed as the result of psychosis. In other words, when Polanski’s penetrates the psyches of his characters, these tend to be diseased, or at least *possibly* diseased, as I shall discuss.

Polanski’s cinema demonstrates a strong preference for keeping the camera closely connected to the subjective narrative reach of a single character – what I will later refer to as the ‘tethered camera’. Whilst this style is not totally ubiquitous, there are very few examples in Polanski’s work in which the camera strays between subjects.
The three most notable examples are his ‘divided’ narratives, *Knife in the Water*, *Cul-de-sac* and *Death and the Maiden*, in which the camera does split its allegiance between several characters. In all three of these films, however, the camera remains limited to the same confined geographical space (the boat, the island, the cabin) as the main characters of the story. But these are the exceptions; far more representative are the major case studies examined in this thesis, in which the camera remains firmly aligned to a single character. There is, as I have just discussed, a shift that occurs regarding the level of psychological space to which the camera is given access, and it is along this axis that I have divided my study into two parts: the group of films in which the camera is able to penetrate the psychological sphere of the characters to which it is connected, and those in which it maintains a more observational stance, ‘outside’ the subjective perceptual experiences of these characters.

Whilst this stylistic shift corresponds to what Mazierska has identified as the two ‘halves’ of Polanski’s cinema, it must be noted that this is a crude distinction. In several films of the ‘early’ period, the camera remains well outside the psychological realm of the characters it follows; *Chinatown*, for example, is more indicative of the ‘later’ style, even though it was made before *The Tenant*, which is arguably the most psychologically- (or ‘fantasy’, as Mazierska puts it) focused of all of Polanski’s films. Nevertheless, with the exceptions noted, the conditions that define this ‘divide’ prove particularly relevant to my discussion. The most important distinction that needs to be made between these two groups of films lies in the locus of conflict. Where the psychological films actively represent inner conflicts, what I argue to be perceptual crises, the later group keeps this type of conflict concealed from the spectator and instead focuses on inter-personal (‘outside’) conflict. The particular films I discuss,
however, do indeed conceal a perceptual crisis of sorts, but to which we are not
granted direct access.

Whilst Gregory’s research is perhaps most directly (and visually) relevant to the films
that include psychological penetration, it is also a useful means of addressing many of
the thematic elements present in Polanski’s later films as well. Where Polanski’s
‘psychological’ films are primarily concerned with demonstrating the complexity and
fallibility of subjective perception, that is to say, that which is behind the eyes, these
later films also take a look at the complicated situations that occur in front of them – a
shift in focus from how we observe (‘inside’) to what we observe (‘out there’). Where
films like Rosemary’s Baby, The Tenant, Repulsion, and even Macbeth try to
demonstrate the effect that heightened emotions and mental illness can have on one’s
perception of reality (and in turn, drawing attention to how one’s reality is
constructed), films like Tess, Frantic, The Ninth Gate, The Pianist, Oliver Twist
(2005), and The Ghost position us as observers to the bizarre, capricious and wholly
unpredictable twists and turns the events of life can take, challenging the conceptual
frameworks upon which the perceptual mechanisms of the characters in these films
rely on to perceive effectively. The overall theme of uncertainty, of our inability to
master the world either through observation or participation, is a binding thread in all
these films.

Starting with the next chapter, the rest of this thesis will focus on two ‘sets’ of films,
which I will (crudely) refer to as the ‘Apartment Trilogy’ of Repulsion, Rosemary’s
Baby, and The Tenant, and the ‘Investigation Trilogy’ of Chinatown, Frantic, and The
Ninth Gate. In addition, Death and the Maiden will be discussed in concert with Frantic as a means of further exploring some of the fundamental concerns raised in all of these films. Whilst my analyses will be primarily informed by what I have argued is the influence of perceptual psychology and its philosophical implications on Polanski’s cinema, these will also incorporate what I consider to be the key ‘satellite’ issues that stems from this basic concern, namely the formation and mutation of identity, which in turn includes Polanski’s often polemical representation of gender and nationhood.

Each of the Apartment Trilogy films presents a scenario in which the possibility of mental illness serves as chief cause of conflict. Notably, in each of Repulsion, Rosemary’s Baby, and The Tenant, we are presented with foreign bodies taking up dwellings in large, Western, urban centres (London, New York, and Paris respectively). In Repulsion, Belgian émigré Carole Ledoux lives in her sister’s flat in London; we are told Rosemary Woodhouse in Rosemary’s Baby is from the Midwestern United States (Omaha, Nebraska) and has moved to New York; and in The Tenant, Trelkovsky is a Polish-born, but recently-naturalised French citizen, living in Paris. Urbanity proves to be a major motif in Polanski’s cinema, often serving as a means of associating cognitive decay with city life by mapping mental landscapes onto urban landscapes.

The spectre of urbanity makes its first appearance in Polanski’s short film The Fat and the Lean (1961), a master-and-servant scenario. The film concludes with an image of the liberated manservant, played by Polanski himself, dancing off into the
frame towards Paris, the city to which Polanski’s cinema most often returns. In *The Tenant*, Paris is portrayed as a city in which housing shortages compel a young man to assume the flat of a hospitalised (suicidal) woman in hopes that she will soon perish; and in *Frantic*, for American Richard Walker, Paris turns from romantic tourist Haven to a stand-in for Hades as its Orphian narrative unfolds. In *The Ninth Gate*, however, Paris is asserted as a global/capitalist space in which America and Europe overlap seamlessly.

In each of *Repulsion*, *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Tenant*, the apartment that is assumed by the protagonist as a dwelling space becomes the site of this character’s perceptual breakdown. As I shall argue, Polanski’s interest in perceptual psychology and its direct application to his cinematic style is increasingly evident in each of these films. Whilst *Chinatown*, *Frantic*, and *The Ninth Gate*, on the other hand, do not penetrate the inner sphere to create the kind of psychological realism seen in *Repulsion*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *The Tenant*, they remain concerned with the same sort of cognitive processes. But rather than examining the perceptual mechanism ‘up close’ through a depiction of its breakdown, these investigation stories take a step back to observe a high-functioning perceiver encounter perceptual challenges that initiate a series of epistemological crises, often paralleled by moments of serious physical peril. The key difference in these two groups of films is the presence of madness, or a ‘malfunction’ in the perceptual apparatus. Where Carole Ledoux, Rosemary Woodhouse and Trelkovsky all display psychotic behaviour patterns, there is no indication that Walker, Gittes (Jack Nicholson), or Corso (Johnny Depp) are suffering from mental illness in any way. Just the opposite – all three of these men (as I shall later discuss, there is a relevant, and rather polemical, gender distinction between
these two ‘trilogies’) are clearly delineated as highly rational. Instead of struggling with mental illness, these ‘sane’ minds experience cognitive dissonance as they are forced to confront a reality that does not match their concept of the way the world should work.

But before starting these case studies, allow me to briefly outline a few more key terms and constructs that inform the conceptual framework upon which my overall approach is based.

1.6. The Tethered Camera

A notion to which I will often make reference to is that which I refer to as Polanski’s ‘tethered camera’. I use this expression for variety of reasons, the foremost of which is to indicate a visual style in which we, as spectators, are connected to a single character within the diegesis, rather than roaming through diegetic space to watch action taking place between a variety of characters. I borrow the concept of the ‘tether’ from falconry, so as to evoke the image of a lead (albeit, an imaginary one) that connects the camera to this character, but which, like the falcon, allows the camera to move freely within the limits set by its length. By using this metaphor, we can account for the manner in which the camera’s narrative, or ‘perceptual’, reach can sometimes be slightly greater than the character to whom we are tethered, a trope often credited to Hitchcock, but which Polanski also frequently employs to dramatic effect.
My use of the term ‘tether’ may also be evocative to those familiar with the cinema of F.W. Murnau, a serendipitous coincidence, as a useful contrast can be made between Polanski’s and Murnau’s approach to visual aesthetics. Whilst Murnau (and his cinematographer Karl Freund) is much acclaimed for his ‘unchaining’ of the camera in films like *The Last Laugh* (1924) (see Kracauer, 1947: 104, and Eisner, 1964: 31), a radical technical breakthrough at the time, Polanski seemingly ‘re-tethers’ the camera to set useful limits to his camera’s ability to traverse diegetic space. Sometimes, this moment of tethering is actually shown as a means of opening the film, in which a camera ‘floating’ through space, often above urban spaces, is reeled in like a falcon (or a fish) to a more limited spatial envelope that shifts only with the movement of the character from whom the tether originates. The establishing of this limit is by no means a hindrance, however, for it is this connection that allows the camera to become part of the narrative trajectory. Examples of this effect are seen at the start of *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Tenant*, and *The Ninth Gate*, all of which I will discuss in due course.

The first example of a tethered camera is seen early in Polanski’s cinema, in the short *Toothy Grin* (1957), where the camera’s superior ‘reach’ creates dramatic tension by making the spectator aware (just before the protagonist) that the space a man has been spying into is no longer occupied by a naked woman, but another man brushing his teeth, who then returns the voyeur’s gaze with a ‘toothy grin’ as he peers over the door. Similar moments are played out in Polanski’s features. In *Rosemary’s Baby*, for example, just as Rosemary secures her door to block her neighbours from entering her flat, we (before her) see a group of them ‘creeping’ across the hall, already in her home. Another example occurs in *Chinatown*, when we are forced to watch Jake
Gittes tells his colleagues a racist, highly-sexualised joke as his new client, Mrs. Mulwray (Faye Dunaway), lurks, unbeknownst to Jake, just behind him; the ‘pain’ we experience in this moment nicely parallels what Jake must feel when he turns around.

A related concept worth introducing here is that of the ‘notional observer’, an imaginary persona who crosses the gap between diegetic and extra-diegetic (or *afilmic*, see below) space and through whom our spectatorial gaze is controlled. This ‘body’ observes the action of the film not from an extra-diegetic point of privilege (i.e. behind the fourth wall), but from somewhere *within* the diegetic space. Our vantage point is most often that of a super-voyeur, who, unlike the voyeur in *Toothy Grin*, is (somehow) able to conceal his or her identity from the diegetic characters. It is indeed Polanski’s ‘voyeuristic’ approach that forms the basis of Wexman’s (1985) study of Polanski’s cinema (*Roman Polanski: The Filmmaker as Voyeur*), but I will refrain from engaging in an analysis of Polanski himself as a perceiving force in this discussion, and instead focus on the experience of spectatorship.

Although above I have referred to this notional observer as a ‘body’, I hasten to point out my use of inverted commas around the term. Unlike Sobchack, my reference to this observer’s ‘body’ is purely metaphorical. The only ‘body’ under consideration in this discussion is that of the spectator him- or herself, whose perceptual apparatus forms the final cog the greater cinematic apparatus. Polanski’s meticulous placement of the camera and choice of lens is not tantamount to the creation of a *visual* entity, but rather a means of constructing a *visible* artefact (albeit, an ephemeral one) designed to provoke a specific perceptual effect in the spectator. For the most part,
Polanski’s cinematography aims to enhance sensorial engagement with the cinematic image through the use of naturalistic perspective, but at times this perspective is distorted so as to simulate the perceptual experience of psychologically disturbed subjects whose perceptual mechanisms are becoming increasingly unreliable.

Polanski varies his lenses as needed to create subtle variations in perspective for the spectator. Whilst favouring wide angles for the most part, he carefully avoids the distortion the use of these lenses can cause through calculated camera placement that match the position of his nominal observer for a given scene. The distance between the lens and the actor is crucial to create this type of subtle perceptual effect, which can easily be ruined, for example, by opting for a slightly longer lens and moving the camera closer to the action (a trick often employed by filmmakers for convenience) (Pizello, 2000: 40). By the same token, grotesque distortion is not something Polanski completely avoids; but even when such distortion is employed, great care goes into the construction of the shot (in terms of camera placement, choice of lens, and mise-en-scène) in order to create the exact type of perceptual experience being sought. I will return to the issue of distortion on several occasions, but it is in my case study of The Tenant that I will explore it most fully, as it is in this film that Polanski uses both distortion and illusion most effectively.

Polanski employs a variety of means to create perceptual engagement, creating sensorially rich spaces for us to experience. Polanski pays great attention not only to the visible elements of his cinema, but also to the sound design to heighten the sense of ‘depth’ created by his mise-en-scène. By ‘depth’ I refer not exclusively to the type
of perspective achieved by depth of field and/or deep focus, but the sense that the
diegetic space far exceeds the space that is contained by the frame. Polanski uses a
rich tapestry of off-screen sound to extend our understanding of the diegetic space
beyond what we see on-screen. In *Rosemary’s Baby*, the use of off-screen sound (i.e.
the murmuring of the neighbours) is put to direct narrative relevance, but in most
cases, traffic noise, the sound of lifts, and (Polanski’s favourite) the sound of a distant
piano, all create a richer understanding of the nature of the fictional world, effectively
extending the limits of diegetic space. This ‘extension’ is particularly relevant in the
Apartment Trilogy, in which the barriers that compartmentalise domestic spaces
become compromised, and the distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ space is
violated to dramatic effect. But even through such use of sound, our access to the
stimuli tends to be strictly limited to the perceptual (in this case, aural) reach of the
nominal observer ‘tethered’ to the film’s protagonist.

1.7. **Polanski and Postmodernism**

Considering Polanski’s cinema in terms of the critical discourse regarding the
concepts of ‘modernism’ and ‘postmodernism’ provides another useful framework
through which to explore Polanski’s cinema, and one that helps us reflect on the
aforementioned ‘philosophical implications’ of the theory of indirect perception
alluded to by Gregory.

Writing of Polanski’s cinema in 1985, Wexman sets up a qualified framework within
which to discuss Polanski in terms of ‘modernism’: ‘To speak of Polanski,’ she starts
her discussion, ‘is to speak of modernism. It is also to speak of the limits of modernism, for having embraced modernist principles, he has drawn back from them’ (1985: 13). Using Polanski’s work to try to identify what, exactly, these ‘limits of modernism’ are can be a fruitful exercise that helps us come to grips with the meaning of modernism as a theoretical construct, as well as eventually leading us towards the concept of ‘postmodernism’ in Polanski’s work.

Although the term ‘postmodern’ certainly had theoretical currency at the time Wexman was writing (1985), she is wary of employing this term directly. She instead makes mention of it only in footnote, preferring not to engage in what she calls the ‘continuing debate’ (128) regarding the term. Notwithstanding Wexman’s resistance to using the word ‘postmodern’ directly in her main text, her reference to the fact that Polanski’s cinema seems to ‘draw back’ from modernism suggests that ‘postmodernism’ may well be the best term in this context.18

Wexman is not alone in her hesitation to use the term ‘postmodern’; many others theorists have also treated the term with much suspicion, such as Orr (1993), who makes the point that much of what is referred to as ‘postmodern’, in particular its use of irony, self-reflection and pastiche, was already present in modernism (2). Orr

18 Rather than distinguishing between modernism and postmodernism, Wexman instead focuses on the influence of the better-understood artistic movements of absurdism and surrealism on Polanski’s cinema, a useful approach as Polanski’s forays into absurdism in his early silent cinema foreshadow his shift towards examinations of psychosis and perception. As Wexman notes, a clinical study by Litowitz and Newman (1967) relates the ‘despair’ of the absurdist world-view to ‘the minimally developed character structures found in borderline schizophrenics’ (Wexman, 1985: 16), a point that greatly informs my first group of case studies. (It is worth noting here that at this time the American Psychiatric Association considered Borderline Personality Disorder a sub-category of schizophrenia, but this is no longer the case.)
warns that the prefix ‘post’ can be used as a type of intellectual ‘shortcut’ (1), a label that is used to ‘patch over gaps in thinking’ (1) or serve as a ‘stand in for concept that have yet to be invented’ (1). It seems that for both Orr and Wexman, by embracing the ‘postness’ of ‘postmodernism’, we risk failing to appreciate the nuances of modernism as a concept. For this reason I use the term here guardedly, and tend to adhere to Calinescu’s line of thinking in which the ‘postmodern’ is addressed as a one amongst the many ‘faces of modernity’ (1987: 279), not something separate from it. But my intention here is not to discuss the modernism/postmodernism distinction in great detail (although I make frequent reference to theorists who do). I instead hope simply to access some of the concepts that have arisen from this discourse as a means of informing my reading of Polanski’s films.

Jameson (1984) associates the very notion of the auteur whose hallmarks create inter-film connections with a fundamental impulse of high modernism (54, 64-65). If we follow this line of thought, the extraordinary control Polanski exerts over the details of his cinema and the identifiable inter-film discourse that binds his opus are traits that are arguably incompatible with a conceptualisation of his cinema as postmodern. Indeed, a close reading of his work (especially his films from the 1960s to 1980s) could mark him out as a high modernist auteur. But we must resist conceptualisations of the modern and postmodern in such rigid terms, as it is through an examination of the slippages between the concepts of modernism and postmodernism that ideas emerge which help us deal with the complexity of Polanski’s cinema, much of which seems to reside on the ‘cusp’ of modernism and postmodernism, and at times includes cinematic manifestations of the transition between these two conditions. An example of the interplay of modernism and postmodernism in Polanski’s cinema can be seen in
Trelkovsky’s scream at the end of *The Tenant*. The moment is a pastiche of Munch’s *The Scream*, a work Jameson associates with the anxiety of high modernism (1984: 61); but the moment is embedded in a film that embraces and celebrates the campiness of grotesque generic hallmarks of the horror film, a trait more associated with postmodernism. Furthermore, the notion that the sort of anxiety expressed in *The Scream* is exclusively the domain of high modernism is challenged by Huyssen (1990), who argues there is an ‘apocalyptic desperate strain’ (242) of postmodernism as well. Perhaps what is most relevant to my overall analysis of Polanski’s cinema is that exploring the shift from the ‘modern’ to the ‘postmodern’ condition allows me to clarify what I believe to be the scope of the ‘philosophical implications’ of both the theory of indirect perception and Polanski’s own perceptual discourse; I argue this to be the same philosophical territory of postmodernism, specifically the strain of existentialism that emerged in the wake of the startling discoveries of quantum physics – an important issue to which I will soon return.

I shall follow Calinescu’s (1987) lead and address postmodernism not in terms of an artistic tradition or ‘world view’ in its own right, but rather as a perspective, a way of looking at things that allows us to reflect on modernity and query its multitude of incarnations. Jameson describes the inherent complexity of what he conceptualises as postmodernism as ‘not a style, but rather a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features’ (1984: 56). As Calinescu highlights, postmodernism has an ‘explicitly interrogative nature … among the faces of modernity postmodernism is perhaps the most quizzical: self-sceptical yet curious, unbelieving yet searching, benevolent yet
ironic’ (279) – a fitting description for Polanski’s cinema, as I shall often highlight in the forthcoming case studies.

Whilst the continuing overlap of modernism and postmodernism must be acknowledged – there are no clean binaries here – the year 1972 does stand out as a symbolic point of transition. As discussed by Harvey (1989), Charles Jencks, somewhat humorously, marks the exact moment of the transition of modernism to postmodern as 15.32 on 15 July 1972, ‘when the Pruitt – Igloo housing development in St. Louis (a prize-winning version of Le Corbusier’s “machine for modern living”) was dynamited as an uninhabitable environment for the low-income people it housed’ (39). This was also the year that Venturi, Brown and Izenour’s *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) was first published, which insisted that ‘architects had more to learn from the study of popular and vernacular landscapes … than from the pursuit of some abstract, theoretical, and doctrinal ideals’ (40). He identifies the ‘waning or extinction of the hundred-year-old modernist movement … the final flowering of a high modernist principle’ (53) as somewhat earlier than Jencks’s (symbolic) date, occurring in the 1950s or early 1960s, at which time the concept of postmodernism begins to serve as the dominant means of theorising cultural behaviour as it moves towards the era of late capitalism. It is impossible, of course, to define an exact barrier between modernism and postmodernism, and the significant overlapping of these ‘conditions’ both chronologically and in their conceptualisation must be acknowledged; nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Polanski’s departure from Poland in the early 1960s parallels the shift identified by Jameson from modernism to postmodernism, a shift that is evident in Polanski’s cinema when we compare *Knife in the Water* and *Repulsion*. 
According to Jameson, the ‘supreme formal feature’ of a postmodern work is its ‘flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense’, comparing the Van Gogh’s (high modernist) ‘Peasant Shoes’ to Andy Warhol’s (postmodernist) ‘Diamond Dust Shoes’ (60) to illustrate his point. The reference to ‘superficiality’, however, does not necessarily entail that postmodern works are inherently devoid of meaning, for this for this idea of ‘flatness’ is also connected to the philosophically complex Platonic notion of the simulacrum, ‘the identical copy for which no original has ever existed’ (66). Baudrillard picks up on this notion, suggesting that in postmodern culture the object of representation and the representation itself become muddled:

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal … Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory. (Baudrillard, 1983: 2)

I will return to this discussion of Baudrillard, simulacra and the hyperreal in my case study of The Tenant, in which I argue that the calculated use of simulacra in the form of filmophanic illusions uses such ‘superficiality’ (in the literal sense) as a means of both manipulating the perceptual experience of the spectator and, as I will argue, to cinematically theorise perception as well.
Whilst Polanski’s meticulous approach to the craft of filmmaking, an attitude he inherited from the Polish School, aligns him with what Huyssen calls the ‘austere’ version of ‘high modernism’ (1990: 242), he also tends to eschews high modernism’s paranoiac fear of ‘bad taste’ by embracing popular forms, even Camp aesthetics, but creating these works with the meticulous attention to detail of an ‘old master’. In this sense Polanski also echoes Calinescu’s call for a ‘change of the Manichaean definition of aesthetic quality’ (1987: 292). A key ‘goal’ of postmodernism is to render futile the epic battle between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture (‘good’ vs ‘bad’ taste) and to imbue this aesthetic dispute with healthy scepticism. Jameson identifies the erosion of this distinction as an important condition of postmodernity (1983: 112), and looks towards aesthetic shifts in architecture as a means of describing his conceptualisation of postmodernism (1984: 54), citing Learning from Las Vegas to illustrate the rise of populist aesthetics and the ‘effacement … of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high and low culture’ (54). Jameson (1984) identifies postmodern architecture as ‘grounded in the patronage of multinational business’ (57), a parallel he elaborates on in his connection between postmodern cultural behaviour and the rise of the ‘late’ version of capitalism (1983: 125), a point that I shall soon return to. The changes in architecture permeated other forms of culture as well, as the postmodernists embraced the ‘low culture’ of the Hollywood B movie, the paperback romance, murder mysteries and science fiction as ‘materials they no longer simply “quote”, as [modernists] Joyce or Mahler might have done, but incorporate into the very substance [of their works]’ (55). Polanski’s work has consistently straddled the domain of ‘high’ and ‘low’, fusing popular (generic) forms, the use of star-bodies and commercial ambitions with ‘deep’ existential concerns more often associated with ‘high art’.
Another key element that informs our understanding of postmodernism is the concept of ‘pastiche’. Hayward (2000) refers to two modes of postmodernism, a ‘mainstream mode’, in which pastiche evokes past works, and an ‘oppositional mode’ that employs parody and irony to express the ‘despair at the nothingness of the abyss’ (277). In the distinction between these modes there lies the subtle, but relevant, distinction between pastiche and parody, both of which need also to be distinguished from the mockery of the ‘spooof’. Where pastiche literally refers to the ‘pasting’ together of various elements, parody takes the act of imitation a step further and introduces the concept of exaggeration. But whilst imitation in parody may well be, and usually is, for the purpose of ironic effect, it need not descend into outright mockery, where the intent is to demean the source material.

Polanski’s more readily identifiable ‘genre films’, such as *Rosemary’s Baby, The Tenant, Dance of the Vampires* (1967), *Chinatown*, and *The Ninth Gate*, tend to teeter on that fine line between pastiche and parody, seeming to lapse at times into comedy, but never allowing parody to undo the effect of horror or suspense these genres are designed to provide. But these films do not seem to ridicule their sources; rather than demonstrating how ridiculous some generic conventions may be, Polanski tends to amplify these conventions to extract maximum amounts of pleasure from them - a highly postmodern notion. *Dance of the Vampires*, for example, is not so much a spoof of the Hammer horror, but a ‘high quality’ Hammer-style horror with the ‘volume’ turned way up.
This emphasis on the importance of pleasure further aligns Polanski’s work with the postmodern. As Calinescu suggests, ‘enjoyment and complexity go together well in postmodernism’ (284), pointing to Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1983) as a prime example of a postmodern text that contains its complex philosophical and semiotic discourse within a popular form, without sacrificing the pleasures of genre. I would add that Annaud’s cinematic adaptation of *The Name of the Rose* (1986) - a film to which Polanski’s own *The Ninth Gate* is clearly greatly indebted to - is also an example of postmodern cinema due to the manner in which Annaud translates Eco’s ‘pulpy’ thriller to the screen.

Here Sontag’s 1961 discussion of ‘Camp aesthetics’ and its ‘love of … artifice and exaggeration’ (see Sontag, 1994: 96) and inherent antagonism to ‘high modernism’ proves especially useful, in particular when we consider Polanski’s celebratory (as opposed to mockingly antagonistic) use of generic ‘stylistic twitches’ (as Jameson terms it, 1983: 113). Sontag describes the Camp sensibility as one that ‘converts the serious into the frivolous’ (1994: 97), and indeed Polanski often conceals deep existential concerns, such as those that emerge from the perceptual discourse that guides my analysis of his work, behind Camp theatrics. It is important to acknowledge that Polanski’s version of Camp is most definitely ‘deliberate’, as opposed to what Sontag calls the ‘purer’ form of ‘naïve’ Camp. In this light, part of my approach to Polanski is to ‘unmask’ his cinema, first through an appreciation of the ‘campiness’ his work, but then to penetrate this surface to reveal the more ‘serious’ concerns it conceals. By the same token, this apparent contradiction does not undo the underlying discourse these works contain, for it is the mastery with which these films deliver Camp pleasure that draws us towards them, and which sustains the
multiple viewings of these films the engagement with their philosophical discourse requires.

Earlier, I discussed Mazierska’s description of Polanski’s nomadic eclecticism, in which she describes the director as a ‘cultured traveller’. Lyotard discusses such eclecticism in a the context of postmodernity, referring to it as ‘the degree zero of contemporary general culture’, wherein ‘one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and retro clothes in Hong Kong’ (1984: 76). It is this sort of eclecticism, namely Polanski’s disregard for the invented barriers that partition and ascribe ‘genetic’ proprietorship to culture in combination with his equal passion for both Camp and ‘high’ culture, that further aligns Polanski with the postmodern.

Polanski’s depictions of the *loss* of personal agency, the ‘death’ of the subject through the fragmentation of the psyche and perceptual crises, is also highly indicative of the shift towards the postmodern condition, described by Jameson as the ‘death of the older bourgeois individual subject’ (115). Indirect perception, with its rejection of the notion of the ‘pictures-in-the-brain’ model adamantly spurns the concept of the mind’s eye, or a secondary homuncular perceiving self that resides in the mind, bringing into question where the ‘I’ actually resides (and thusly indirect perception stumbles across a ‘philosophical implication’ in drawing attention to both the ‘eye’ and the ‘I’). The cult of the individual is closely associated with the rise of modernism, what Jameson identifies as a ‘bourgeois’ notion, which he associates with the ‘age of competitive capitalism … the heyday of the nuclear family and the
emergence of the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic social class’ (115). Jameson discusses
the death of the bourgeois subject and the emergence of postmodernism as ‘closely
related to the emergence of this new moment of late, consumer or multinational
capitalism’ (1983: 125), an age of ‘corporate capitalism, of the so-called
organisational man, of bureaucracies in business as well as in the state’ (116).

Notably, Jameson differentiates between two versions of capitalism, the former he
calls the ‘competitive’ version, the ‘do it yourself’ capitalist spirit that he associates
with modernism, and the latter ‘corporate’ version in which the spirit of individual
agency is eroded by the domination of large corporations, even over the authority of
the government. It is this ‘new’ version of capitalism in particular within which the
postmodern condition resides. The shift in what is regarded as ‘capitalism’ and its
impact on the concept of individualism seems to find its way into the subtext of
Polanski’s cinema, symbolically depicted as the struggle of an individual to assert his
or her personal identity as distinct from a swarm of people who seem intent on
suppressing it. This struggle is of course most amplified in Rosemary’s Baby and The
Tenant, in which the depiction of this battle closely resembles psychosis, leaving open
the question as to whether the conflict is truly inter-personal, located entirely within a
(fragmented) psyche, or a combination of both.

In Chinatown, on the other hand, this shift in forms of capitalism is more directly
apparent. The film moves back in time to explore an early example of corporate theft
of public resources, with businessman Noah Cross’s (John Huston) domination of the
public water supply reflecting the real-life Owen’s Valley ‘Water Wars’. As Walton
(2001) warns, however, we must be careful not to overestimate the historical accuracy of the Chinatown. The construction of the Los Angeles aqueduct was initiated in 1905 and completed in 1912, designed as a means of transferring water from the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the water-needy residents and farmers of the Los Angeles area. The means by which this water was divided was a matter of great controversy, which led to unrest amongst farmers, which came to a head in 1924 with the bombing of the aqueduct itself.

Chinatown is only loosely based on these events, taking them as inspiration for the greater setting of its plot, but making no claim, directly or indirectly, to be a work that represents this ‘water war’ (one of many in California’s history) faithfully. As Walton notes, Chinatown is by no means historically accurate:

The site of the conflict was moved 200 miles closer to the city, the events were advanced by thirty years to the depression era LA of Raymond Chandler and the story was reconstructed as a murder mystery revolving around conspiratorial land speculation. (Walton, 2001: 47)

As Walton examines, notwithstanding Chinatown’s merely inspirational connection to historic events, over time public opinion regarding the history of the events of the Owen’s Valley Water War became highly influenced by Polanski’s film, especially the opinion of those that continued to dispute water rights in Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s (see Walton, 2001: 47-8)
The figure of Cross serves as an apt embodiment of the unbridled greed of this ‘late’ form of corporate capitalism Jameson associates with postmodernism, where Gittes, in contrast, is an example of the competitive capitalism Jameson connects to modernism; having left the police force in favour of setting up his own private investigation service for his personal financial gain (i.e. Gittes is paid in direct proportion to the work he does, rather than a salary), only to find himself facing a much more complex reality than his epistemological framework can contain.

So this shift in Polanski’s cinema from the focus on the individual psyche (in films that themselves depict the destruction of the psyche) towards more ‘distant’ films in which the camera is no longer granted access to this realm seems representative of the shift from early to late capitalism, from the modern to the postmodern condition. We can look at Chinatown and The Tenant as the key ‘moment’ (for the sake of this present argument alone, I refer to these films as a single ‘moment’) in Polanski’s cinema that marks the shift most dramatically. Chinatown’s moral ambivalence, generic ‘ riffing’, existential subtext and political double entendre (if we accept the Watergate connection argued by Zimmerman [1974], for example) are all indicative of the film’s postmodernity. The Tenant, Polanski’s next release after Chinatown, takes a step ‘back’ to the style of Repulsion and Rosemary’s Baby, a cinema that attempts to depict subjective perceptual experiences; but in its tearing to shreds of the protagonist’s psyche and its extinguishing of his personal agency, it also represents the last ‘gasp’ (or ‘scream’) of psychologically-penetrative, individually-centred cinema for Polanski.

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I do not intend to draw a line here between Polanski’s ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’
cinema, but simply to indicate the evolutionary process towards postmodernity that
actually began very early in Polanski career. Repulsion, Rosemary’s Baby, and The
Tenant can also be viewed in a postmodern light when we consider the existential
paradoxes they present: whilst affirming individual psychology, these films also
deconstruct and destroy the psyche, which is finally ‘absorbed’ by an external social
order. I would go a step further to suggest that Polanski’s early cinema already bears
signs of the shift towards postmodernism, especially in these films’ combination of
‘high’ and ‘low’ art, and the nearly-ubiquitous ambivalence with which both ideology
and morality are treated.

Only two of Polanski’s feature films, Knife in the Water and Cul-de-sac, really stand
out as ‘high’ art (as much as narrative cinema is ever considered as such, that is). But
in retrospect, both of these films can be reappraised as ‘intermediary’ works, early
examples of postmodernism in Polanski’s cinema, especially considering the high
levels of both existential despair and ideological ambivalence each of these films
contains. As I discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis, Knife in the Water was
much criticised by Poland’s communist government for its ‘lack of social
commitment’ and its foregrounding of individual concerns. In this sense, Knife in the
Water can be argued (as Wexman does) to represent a form of modernism. But when
we consider the film as a sociological study which deconstructs ideologies and rejects
moral didacticism, the ‘openness’ with which we are left is actually more indicative
of the film’s postmodernity. In a similar vein, much like Beckett’s work, the absurdist
colouring of Cul-de-sac, as well as Polanski’s early silent shorts, also leads to a re-evaluation of these works as postmodern.

So looking back at the development of Polanski’s cinema, we can see played out a trajectory that seems to adhere to Sontag’s ‘licensing’ of ‘the flight from the lofty horizons of high culture into the netherlands of pop and camp’ (as Huysсен paraphrases Sontag, 1990: 262). Whilst Polanski’s cinema seems to start in the realm of ‘high’ art (the silent shorts, Knife in the Water, Cul-de-sac) it tends to move towards pop and Camp, as if through his forced foray into genre cinema with Repulsion - a project originally treated simply as a means to fund Cul-de-sac - Polanski was able to realise his skill at delivering the Camp pleasures of genre. Of Polanski’s early cinema, it is in fact Repulsion, and not Knife in the Water or Cul-de-sac, that best predicts the aesthetic direction of his cinematic career. But embedded within these celebrations of decadence and Camp there often remains the more ‘serious’ philosophical concerns more associated with ‘high’ culture, which is a reason why the concept of the postmodern proves so useful as a means of unpicking Polanski’s cinema. But we must also note that as popular tastes changed over the years, Polanski’s fondness for certain generic styles caused a shift towards a ‘nostalgic mode’ as a means by which his cinema is appreciated. Although this was already the case with Chinatown, the ‘nostalgic mode’ of appreciation is particularly true of his later works like The Ninth Gate and The Ghost (and we could add Pirates, Frantic, and even Oliver Twist to this list), a point to which I will return in the forthcoming case studies.
I often refer to Polanski’s ‘moral ambivalence’ or ‘anti-didacticism’, and it is this feature, in parallel with his erosion of the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture that perhaps best qualifies his work as postmodern, as well as being the feature that I identify as most revealing of the ‘philosophical implications’ of both Polanski’s cinema and the theory of indirect perception. But we should be careful here to distinguish between the various ‘modes’ of postmodernity, in particular that of postmodernity in its ‘mainstream’, or ‘anything goes’ mode in which pastiche serves to empty works of meaning, and the ‘oppositional’ or ‘subversive’ mode that is more interested in examining this ‘emptiness’ itself as it frets in the face of ‘the nothingness of the abyss’ (as Hayward puts it, 2000: 277). As Huysen (1990) argues, the ‘apocalyptic desperate strain’ (242) of postmodernism already existed within the modernist movement.

Where the Enlightenment project ‘took it as axiomatic that there was only one possible answer to any question … that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if we could only picture and represent it rightly’ (Harvey, 1989: 27), as Calinescu (1987) discusses, this axiom was challenged in the post-war period by the indeterminacy of quantum theory, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle in particular, which lead to the displacement of the ‘clockwork’ model of the universe (269), and forced a merger between epistemology and hermeneutics (Calinescu citing Rorty, 271). Harvey identifies the connection of modernity and Enlightenment thought, which ‘embraces the idea of progress, and actively sought that break with history and tradition which modernity espoused’ (1989: 12). It was this sort of ‘optimism’ that
came under threat in the twentieth century, ‘with its death camps and death squads, its militarism and two world wars, its threat of nuclear annihilation and its experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki’ (13), what Harvey calls a choice to ‘abandon the Enlightenment project entirely’ (14). As Huysen points out, the ‘universal existential angst’ that emerged in the wake of World War II ‘helped block out and suppress the realities of the fascist past’ (1990: 243). It is this angst, in combination with the growing resistance to the strictures of modernism and a growing suspicion of the certitudes of the Enlightenment project, which gave rise to the condition identified as ‘postmodernism’. But Huysen also warns not to consider postmodernism simply as an opposition to modernism (lest we should entangle ourselves once again in a futile binary ‘quarrel’), but more so a movement, or condition, ‘against a certain austere image of “high modernism”’ (1990: 242).20

It is important not to mistake Polanski’s anti-didacticism or moral ambivalence for the ‘anything goes’ strain of postmodernism, for it is specifically in this ambivalence that the subversiveness of these films lies. In one sense, due to his cinema’s emphasis on diegetic ‘seamlessness’, the highly detailed *mise-en-scène*, and the attention paid to micro-details, Polanski presents what Baudry (1992) might refer to as ‘complete’ or ‘closed’ worlds through which we are guided by our tethered camera, and so can be argued to be a form of perceptual didacticism; but within these worlds our perceptual abilities are challenged and our conceptual frameworks put under threat, even those

20 It is worth noting here as well that this resistance to the ‘austere’ effectively differentiates what I am referring to as Polanski’s ‘postmodernism’ from Orr’s concept of the ‘neo-modernist’ strain of cinema that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s from filmmakers such as Godard, Antonioni and Bergman, which Orr sees as a return to the ‘high modernism’ typified by the silent cinema of Murnau, Lang, Dreyer, and Eisenstein (see Orr, 1993: 1-34).
that are constructed ‘on the go’ as we engage the diegesis. So on one hand, Polanski’s
 cinema tries to perceptually ‘seduce’ us, but on the other, the reality of the diegesis
 we are ‘seduced’ into engaging with becomes destabilised. Polanski’s fondness for
 undoing binaries and infusing his diegeses with ambiguity is highly visible, for
 example, in the nebulous portrayal of madness in *Rosemary’s Baby* and the slippages
 of gender in *The Tenant*. Ultimately, Polanski’s cinema is *open*.

I must also distinguish my identification of Polanski’s cinema as postmodern from the
critique of postmodernism as a ‘relaxation’ of artistic standards. By this I mean to
differentiate between ‘relaxation’ (the ‘anything goes’ variety of postmodernism) and
the value of ambivalence, openness and question-raising to philosophical discourse.
The ambiguity that runs through Polanski’s cinema is a counter to ideological
didacticism, even that which is hegemonically subversive. Lyotard (1984) expressly
defines postmodernism as ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ (xxiv), a deep
scepticism towards the possibility of identifying universal truths and perhaps their
very existence. Such relativism destabilises ideology. As Hayward (2000) observes,
‘postmodernism rejects meaning in the sense of believing that the world exists as
something to be understood and that there is some unifying reality. Ideology becomes
distinctively unstable in this environment’ (282).

In his examinations of schizophrenic behaviour in particular, Polanski’s portrayal of
the workings of the perceptual mechanism serves to destabilise the very frameworks
within which ideological absolutes are established, namely the way in which we
structure our sense of reality. But even his films in which perceiving bodies are
portrayed as highly sane individuals, the nature of reality remains elusive. It is this sort of ‘pushing’ of epistemological questions towards ever more basic queries that McHale suggests causes epistemology to ‘tip over’ into the domain of ontology (1986: 60), a philosophical transition highly indicative of the shift from the ‘modern’ to the ‘postmodern’ condition. To put it another way, pushed to the limit, the ambiguity that envelops Polanski’s cinema is that which nudges epistemological concerns into ontological uncertainty or angst.

1.8. Polanski as Author, Polanski as Auteur

Throughout my discussion of Polanski’s cinema I often attribute the various aesthetic elements (normally visual, but not exclusively) directly to the person of Polanski himself, which seems to suggest that I am assuming that it is Polanski who fills the frame in a manner tantamount to a painter filling a canvas. Such an approach raises (at least) two problematic issues, the first being that it papers-over the vast amount of collaboration that must take place on any endeavour as grandiose as feature filmmaking, and the second being that by continuously referring to the person of the director himself I risk lapsing into the type of biographical reading of Polanski’s cinema I hope to avoid.

Earlier in this chapter, I made reference to need to justify my approach to Polanski cinema, which often refers to the director as if he were an absolute authorial force. Such an unqualified assertion is, of course, an exaggeration; however, as I will now
explain, it is not without a certain level of validity. By discussing Polanski in terms of
the discourse of auteurism that originally emerged from the pages of *Cahiers* in the
1950s, I can qualify what I actually intend when I refer to ‘Polanski’ in the
forthcoming case studies.

In his discussion of auteur theory, Wollen examines the manner in which the concept
of the auteur is divided into two ‘types’. First, there is the ‘total’ auteur, that is, the
director of his own text unhindered by the pressures of commission. The works of
such an auteur possess a semantic dimension that can exist in lieu of a technical one,
as core meaning is revealed though the virtue of the director having written the text
upon which a film based, and thus he or she is claimed to be ‘font’ of this meaning.
The work of the *metteur en scène*, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the
transposition of an existing text to the screen; but there is still scope for the
meaningfulness of works produced in the way to be attributed to the director if he or
she is able to exercise complete agency in the realisation of these works. In this case,
what is required of the critic is a deductive, inter-textual approach in the reading of a
director’s cinema (1992, 601-603); as Wollen also highlights, the consideration of a
*body* of work by a single director is critical, for ‘it is only the analysis of the whole
*corpus* which permits the moment of synthesis when the critic returns to the
individual film’ (1992: 600, emphasis in original).

My approach to Polanski’s cinema indeed assumes his status as an auteur, a title
Polanski merits whatever ‘type’ of auteur one has in mind, encompassing all three
‘concentric circles’ of ‘technique … personal style … and interior meaning’ Sarris
uses to describe his multi-facetted conceptualisation of the auteur (1992: 587). At times, much like Vigo, Fassbinder, Jarmusch or Lynch, Polanski has been the ‘total’ auteur: director, writer, and ‘dominant’ aesthetic manipulator; but on many other occasions, he has worked from pre-existing sources, but has given cinematic life to these stories through his own particular filmmaking style, and thus can be considered along the lines of Bazin’s *metteur en scène* (1971: 61), alongside director’s celebrated by the *Cahiers* group like Ford, Hitchcock and Hawks.

But such a partitioning of auteur ‘types’ risks creating an oversimplified image of the filmmaking process, which is always a complex web of collaboration between directors and cinematographers, actors, producers, set designers, etc. The extent of this collaboration varies wildly from director to director; where some directors may be crediting as both writer and director, their contributions to onscreen performance, editing and cinematography may be limited. On the other hand, a director who takes on a pre-made script may exert high levels of control over even the smallest details of production, and even marketing. In other words, there is no specific criteria that must be met in order for someone to be credited as ‘director’. In the case of Polanski, the personal care taken in the choice of text for adaptation (as I will later argue, choices he seems to make with specific intent), the remarkable amount of control he exerts over his productions, and the level of restrictions he places on his collaborators are the primary reasons it is justifiable, and very nearly completely accurate, to refer to ‘Polanski’ as the controlling agent of the variety of aesthetic and thematic issues discussed herein, an issue I will return to on several occasions throughout the forthcoming case studies.
Earlier in his career, Polanski normally served as both director and originator of the script, on which he usually worked with Gérard Brach. Beginning with *Rosemary’s Baby*, however, Polanski began favouring novels as source material (with some exceptions, such as *What?* and *Frantic*, which he wrote himself), but even when a film is based on an existing novel, Polanski is normally involved in the script-writing process. Sarris, himself citing a comment by Godard, notes ‘that Visconti had evolved from a metteur en scène to an auteur; whereas Rossellini has evolved from an auteur to a metteur en scène’ (1992: 587); Polanski can be seen to have followed a similar trajectory as Rosellini, but we must also consider the important intertextual connections between the source material of many of Polanski’s adaptation choices and Polanski’s own cinema, a point which I address in greater detail below and return to in my discussions of *Rosemary’s Baby*, *Death and the Maiden*, and *The Ghost*.

Any approach to film criticism that positions the director as a sort of ‘quasi-Picasso’, that is to say, the exact inverse of the ‘quasi-chimpanzee’ Sarris (1992: 587) refers to in his discussion of auteur theory, is inherently problematic given the army of human beings who collaborate on a motion picture; this group of highly skilled people simply cannot rightly be compared to blobs of paint on a palette. But in cases such as Polanski’s, where there is ample evidence to suggest a high degree of control over even the smallest details of the films’ construction at all levels of production, it is not misleading to discuss elements such as cinematography in terms of directorial intent. By the same token, Polanski has used many high-profile cinematographers as collaborators, including Gilbert Taylor (*Repulsion, Cul-de-sac, Macbeth*), William A.
Fraker (Rosemary’s Baby), Sven Nykvist (The Tenant) and Darius Khondji (The Ninth Gate), all known for cultivating their own distinct aesthetic styles.

A key assumption of auteur theory is that of the agency of a director to create a sense of purposefulness, a ‘meaningful coherence’, both within a film and even intertextually across a body of work. As Sarris asserts, ‘this meaningful coherence is more likely when the director dominates the proceedings with skill and purpose’ (1976: 246). Polanski’s ‘domination of proceeding’ is remarkable amongst directors, and is much cited by his collaborators. Many of Polanski’s actors, including Jack Nicholson, Cathrine Deneuve, Johnny Depp and Ewan McGregor, have testified in interviews to Polanski’s meticulous directorial style, often highlighting Polanski’s tendency to ‘act out’ scenes as to furnish actors with a model to imitate. In an interview with Francine Stock on BBC Radio 4’s ‘The Film Programme’, Christoph Waltz, much awarded for his acting ability in Tarantino’s Inglourious Basterds (2009) and who stars in Polanski’s Carnage (2011), articulates what it like for an actor to work with the Polanski:

Christoph Waltz: He is a perfectionist in everything. To have a perfectionist call the shots - literally, call the shots - is, in a way, a very restricting experience…

Francine Stock: So that kind of disciple, those sorts of restrictions… is more apparent when Polanski is directing than other directors?

Christoph Waltz: Yes, because he names every single one of them and nothing escapes him in that respect; or maybe nothing escapes him at all. He lets certain things go
because he understands that you cannot impose on everything, but very few things escape his grip. And at the same time he is charming and funny, so you succumb to that, you do not resist it.  

Cinematographer Darius Khondji also testifies as to the degree of Polanski’s control over the aesthetics of his films. Tellingly, Khondji, one of the most revolutionary cinematographers of modern times (lauded for his work on *Delicatessen* [1991], *Seven* [1995], and *Alien: Resurrection* [1997]) credits Polanski as an influence on his shooting style, calling attention to Polanski’s meticulous method of using precise camera angles, lenses, and focus to achieve his aesthetic goal:

I’m somehow different since working with Roman … It’s not even very clear what I learned from working with him, but I find that I don’t line up shots the same way I used to! Roman has very acute, very sharp eyes in terms of things like camera angles ... Roman has a very methodical, scrupulous way of filming things - every single detail in the frame is equally important to him… There would be a reason why that particular magazine is over there in that particular place. Everything has not only a visual reason, but a narrative reason… (Khondji, as quoted in Pizzello, 2000: 39)

A further semantic complication arises in the attribution of narrative content to a film’s director when a film has been based on an existing work. Throughout my discussion I will not distinguish between authors of these works and Polanski himself, except for a few cases in which I highlight significant changes Polanski has made from the original texts. I justify any insinuation of Polanski’s ‘ownership’ of these

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21 Broadcast on 06.05.2011.
works in the context of this analysis of his films due to the inter-textual nature of my discussion. As I am addressing a group (or groups) of Polanski’s films, and at times discussing his cinema as a whole, it is relevant to attribute the repetition of motifs and narrative content to Polanski himself simply as the result of his agency in having chosen these particular texts to adapt.

Although there is some suggestion that Polanski has been ‘encouraged’ to take on certain projects, he has never been a ‘hired hand’. He has enjoyed the rare luxury of having personally structured his own opus, a claim few directors can make. There is even strong indication of ‘cross pollination’ between Polanski’s cinema and some of the works he has adapted, in which these texts show signs of having been influenced by Polanski’s previous work. Polanski has suggested, for example, that Ira Levin’s novel *Rosemary’s Baby* was itself influenced by *Repulsion*, which is what attracted him to the idea of adapting the book (Cronin, 2005: 23). More recently, Robert Harris’s novel *Pompeii*, which Polanski intended to film in 2007, seemed to be strongly influenced by *Chinatown*. Likewise, Harris’s next novel, *The Ghost*, which was written during his collaboration with Polanski on *Pompeii* and was actually filmed by Polanski in 2009 (released in 2010), was equally (if not more so) ‘Polanskian’ in its subject matter, style and themes. A similar occurrence of possible cross-pollination occurs in *Death and Maiden*, which I later discuss as part of my case study of *Frantic*.

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22 Even Stanley Kubrick, whose control over his own career was very similar to Polanski’s, was more-or-less compelled to direct *Spartacus*, a film often omitted from critical analysis of his work as a whole. Polanski has no such film to ‘pollute’ his opus.
Polanski has explained his approach to adaptations as follows:

When you choose to adapt a novel you find truly interesting, it’s vital that you know what you’re committing yourself to … Unless … you choose a story that you’re not really interested in, one that only serves as a pretext to constructing something completely different onscreen. Shakespeare started with mediocre stories and turned them into something extraordinary. (Delahaye & Narboni, 2005: 26)

There are examples of both of these types of adaptations in Polanski’s opus. There are those films in which he seems to use what is often rather ‘pulpy’ source material, like Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* and Roland Topor’s *The Tenant*, to engage some of his personal concerns (such as the perception theories I am discussing here); and then there are other films that are based on more epic or serious works, like Wladyslaw Szpilman’s *The Pianist* or Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*, in which the inherent value of text’s subject is itself perhaps more a focus, rather than serving primarily as a springboard for Polanski’s inter-textual philosophical discourse (although these films clearly do both).

Over half of Polanski’s films are in fact based on pre-existing novels or plays\(^\text{23}\), and whilst all of these adaptations stray in some capacity from their origins, for the most part Polanski’s adaptations remain faithful to source material. In *Rosemary’s Baby*  

and *The Tenant*, for example, much of the spoken dialogue in the films is taken directly from the novels. A notable exception is *The Ninth Gate*, which is a radically truncated and re-envisioned version of Arturo Pérez-Reverte’s novel *The Dumas Club* (1996), reflected by the fact that it is the only adaptation that does not share its name with the source material.

So whilst it is clear that Polanski’s absolute domain over the cinematic artefacts under investigation here should not be overestimated (directing is, of course, famously the art of concession), given the remarkable control that we know Polanski does exert over his productions at all levels, it is useful, and very nearly accurate, to refer to ‘Polanski’ as shorthand for the authorial entity responsible for all the details discussed herein.

1.9. **Planes of Reality**

Given this thesis’s focus on perception, both as represented onscreen and as engaged in by the spectator, throughout the forthcoming discussion it will be necessary to distinguish between various ‘planes’ of reality. For the sake of expediency, I will employ some of the terminology used by Souriau (1953, as translated in Buckland, 2000: 47-48) to establish a hierarchy of these various ‘types’ of reality. At the two ends of the spectrum we have *afilmic* reality, which refers to the reality outside of the cinematic experience (i.e. the reality of the ‘real world’ as we know it), and *diegetic* reality, which refers to the reality of the fiction, complete with its internal sense of
what is verifiably true and false (which may or may not equate to afilmic distinctions).

I will include three more ‘planes’ of reality nuance these distinctions further. *Profilmic* reality refers to the production of the film; that is, the reality of that which is actually photographed. Discussing the construction of a prop gun, for example, is to examine its profilmic nature, whereas the same object is ‘real’ diegetically speaking. *Filmophanic* reality refers specifically to the image itself, as it is projected onto the screen, whereas the next plane, *spectatorial* reality, refers to the audience’s perceptual experience of engaging this image - the moment where afilmic reality (i.e. the physical experience of watching the screen and our awareness of doing it) and diegetic reality meet and the former is (normally) concealed.

As this discussion begins to engage in ‘close readings’ of specific films through a conceptual framework heavily informed by perceptual psychology, the experience of the spectator as a perceiving force will be discussed with roughly equal weight to Polanski’s diegetic representation of acts of perception. Therefore, both spectatorial and profilmic realities will be considered alongside what are purely diegetic forms of reality. Furthermore, given the fact that many of the films under investigation here are heavily concerned with schizophrenic forms of perception, the ‘realities’ created by the hallucinations and delusions of diseased perceptual mechanisms have to be considered in relation to the ‘stable’ diegetic reality within which they are nestled – a juxtaposition that is often difficult to maintain when these two ‘realities’ overlap. For the sake of clarity in my analyses, I will often use the term ‘diegetically real’ to refer
to the reality that the film establishes as objective, as a means of contrasting it with that which is hallucinated. As will become evident, however, Polanski creates situations in which this distinction becomes severally muddled.

1.10. Case Studies: The Two ‘Trilogies’

As I discussed earlier, I will be looking at Polanski’s cinema in terms of two distinct ‘trilogies’ as my means of engaging the perceptual discourse at work in Polanski’s films, specifically those that I have identified as the ‘Apartment Trilogy’, made up of *Repulsion, Rosemary’s Baby*, and *The Tenant*, and the ‘Investigation Trilogy’ of *Chinatown, Frantic*, and *The Ninth Gate*. Several other of Polanski’s films will be addressed within these discussions, but these six films will be the primary case studies, with an additional minor case study of *Death of the Maiden* forming part of my analysis of *Frantic*.

This approach is not intended to suggest that these groups of films are true trilogies in the sense of being continuous stories divided into three parts, and nor do I believe there is any deliberate attempt on Polanski’s part that these films be considered thematic trilogies in the way intended by Kieslowski in his *Trois Couleurs* (*Bleu, Blanc, Rouge* [1993]) or Von Trier’s *Europe Trilogy* (*The Element of Crime* [1984], *Epidemic* [1987], *Europa* [1991]). The formation of these trilogies is more the result of a specific form of critical reading; the term ‘trilogy’ is itself merely a term of convenience resulting from the fact that there happen to be three films that share a
common trait (a type of setting or narrative thrust, in these cases) that forms the focus of said reading.

Given that Polanski tends to use a series of repeated motifs, what Cappabianca (1997) and Leaming (1981) like to call his ‘obsessions’, many studies have addressed Polanski’s work via other groupings, such as the water films (Knife in the Water, Cul-de-sac, Chinatown) or the doppelganger films, an often recurrent motif in Polanski’s cinema, which is highly pronounced in his latest film, The Ghost. My own focus on Polanski’s over-arching perceptual discourse is best served through the ‘apartment’ and ‘investigation’ groupings, which both through their narrative content and aesthetic construction reflect and challenge various aspects of perceptual psychology.

In the final chapter of this thesis, rather than attempting to delineate a robust or ‘conclusive’ reading of Polanski’s work, I will use an analysis of Polanski’s most recent film, The Ghost, as a means of encouraging extrapolations of my own perception-based approach towards novel means of engaging with Polanski’s cinema (an oeuvre, I stress, that is still a work in progress).

As I discussed earlier, Polanski’s auteuristic tendencies are not incompatible with his desire to create commercially successful cinema, hence his propensity to gravitate towards genre cinema. For the most part, his cinema has indeed been both commercially and critically successful, popular with both mainstream audiences and at the ‘art house’ cinema; but his work has endured its share of negative reactions as
well, not all of which are related to the various scandals that have plagued his career. In order to put the works being discussed in the following set of case studies into context regarding their critical and popular reception, it is worth briefly reviewing some facts and figures associated with these films. Whilst my specific methodology is not informed by the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of Polanski cinema with critics, but my analyses do involve much discussion regarding the spectatorial experience of watching these films, thus it is worth keeping more general considerations regarding these films’ reception in mind, especially those films that were less appreciated with audiences, such as The Ninth Gate, whose problematic reception I discuss in more detail in its case study.

After an initial conflict with the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), which I shall discuss in more detail further on, Repulsion was received well by critics, especially in regard to its technical achievements, although, as summarised by Meikle, many were ‘disturbed by its clinical approach to its subject and its lack of emotional resonances’ (2006: 85). Repulsion garnered several prestigious nominations and awards, most notably a BAFTA for Best British Black and White Cinematography, an International Federation of Film Critics’ Award and the Silver Bear (Directing) at Berlin. Rosemary’s Baby was also much awarded. Ruth Gordon earned both an Oscar and a Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Supporting Role and Mia Farrow won a BAFTA for Best Actress. Polanski also won Best Foreign Director at the David di Donatello Awards in Italy and an award from the French Syndicate of Cinema Critics. In the US, Rosemary’s Baby grossed in excess of $30 million24,

24 Box-Office statistics are approximations, and are obtained from boxofficemojo.com, a site that
making it Polanski’s most successful film to that point. Likely due to this success, *Rosemary’s Baby* was also the centre of a massive ‘moral controversy’ and was condemned by The National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures and the Board of Film Censors (amongst others, see Leaming, 1981: 88).

In 1974, *Chinatown* marked a return to box-office success for Polanski, again grossing more than $30 million worldwide. It was also nominated for eleven categories at the Academy Awards, but gained only one Oscar (Original Screenplay). At both the BAFTAs and Golden Globes it won Best Director, Best Screenplay and Best Actor. To this day, *Chinatown* continues to be heralded by film scholars, and is likely Polanski’s most scrutinised film. Wexman’s sentiments are indicative of *Chinatown’s* multi-faceted success: ‘In no other film has he so successfully fused his diverse creative and cultural influences’ (1985: 91). *The Tenant* was released two years after *Chinatown* and was significantly less successful, grossing under $2 million in the US. It was most critically appreciated in France, receiving a nomination for the Palme D’Or at Cannes; but even so, Polanski complained that the French critics ‘were reviewing him, not his movie’ (Leaming, 1981: 154), a trend that would worsen considerably as the result of the sexual misconduct scandal he would be involved in within the next year.

*Frantic* performed fairly in the US in 1988, grossing just over $20 million, although it was not nominated for any major awards. *Death and the Maiden* was not a hit, furnishes box-office data to major news sources in the US, such as *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*. 
earning only $3 million in 1994. *The Ninth Gate*, released in 1999, did not break $20 million in the US, but grossed nearly $60 million worldwide. It was not, however, in the US top 100 for that year and critical reaction was mixed at best. Roger Ebert’s rather negative review of the film aptly sums up the ‘dissatisfaction’ critics felt about this film: ‘...while at the end I didn’t yearn for spectacular special effects, I did wish for spectacular information - something awesome, not just a fade to white.’

Polanski achieved his highest degree of both critical acclaim and success very late in his career. *The Pianist* earned in excess of $120 worldwide and won the Academy Award for Best Director and Best Actor in 2003, as well as taking the Best Film and Best Director awards at the BAFTAS and winning the Palme D’Or at Cannes. In 2010, *The Ghost* also found box-office success, in spite of renewed discussion in the media regarding the ‘unlawful sex’ case of 1977 due to Polanski’s arrest at the Zurich Film Festival. *The Ghost* earned over $70 worldwide, and earned Polanski his second Silver Bear (Directing) at Berlin, as well as winning Best Actor, Best Director, Best Screenwriter and Best Film at the European Film Awards.

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THE APARTMENT TRILOGY
2. SCHIZOPHRENIA AND THE CITY

2.1. Psychosis and the Censors

It is a rare event for the BBFC to pass an ‘X’ rated film without the producers having to make a single cut to the movie, but this is precisely what happened when BBFC-employed psychiatrist Dr. Stephen Black intervened on Repulsion’s behalf in 1965. Black insisted to the censors that due to the remarkable accuracy of the film’s portrayal of schizophrenia, the film should be considered as a serious work dealing with a very real condition, and therefore should be regarded as a clinical document that would improve public understanding of the condition (Polanski, 1984: 210). Although Polanski denies having performed extensive research on schizophrenia (Polanski, 1984: 211), what he ‘imagined’ would be the experience of the condition was based on an acute, intuitive understanding of the human perceptual apparatus and what can happen when higher cognitive functions fail. As detailed in the previous chapter, we do know that Polanski actively investigated the perception-based research of the time and discovered that his own ideas on the subject were reflected by the work of neuropsychologist R.L. Gregory, whose Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing not only gave scientific confirmation to Polanski’s understanding of perception, but indirectly provided further evidence to back up Dr. Black’s support of the film. A film dealing with schizophrenia is, in fact, a good example of how Gregory’s theory could be applied to cinema, for the cardinal aspect of this mental illness is a breakdown of the higher cognitive functions indirect perception insists are required for the perceptual apparatus to function.
The release of both the film *Repulsion* and the book *Eye and Brain* in the mid-1960s came on the cusp of a growing anti-psychiatric movement that challenged not only the diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia, but the condition’s very existence. In his account of the history of schizophrenia, McKenna highlights examples of this movement’s many attacks on psychiatry, the most tenacious being those made by Laing (1964, 1965, 1967) and Szasz (1960, 1971), who maintained that the types of behaviour so often diagnosed as schizophrenic were ‘better understood in social or cultural terms’ (in McKenna, 1997: 75). *Repulsion* is not merely of interest because it deals with a schizophrenic subject during this timeframe (it is certainly not alone in this respect), but more so due to Black’s public backing of it as a serious (i.e. not exploitative) work. It is interesting that Black’s testimony to the BBFC defending *Repulsion* should occur at this time; it was an act that would certainly have carried great political significance in medical circles, and which could well have nudged the debate in the public sphere.

Far from intending to influence a global debate on mental health, for Polanski and Gérard Brach, *Repulsion* was originally conceived as no more than a means to an end: a sexy horror film that would ensure funding from film producers Michael Klinger and Tony Tenser, noted for their exploitation films such as *Naked as Nature Intended* (1961), *London in the Raw* (1964), and *The Black Torment* (1964). It was hoped that the profits from *Repulsion* would enable them to finance the film they really wanted to make, the artistically ambitious *If Katelbach Comes* (which they would go on to make as their next film, re-titled to the slightly less Beckettian *Cul-de-sac*). Although
the pitch for Repulsion was pure horror cliché (‘a homicidal schizophrenic running amok in her sister’s deserted London apartment’ [Polanski, 1984: 197]), Polanski was intent on at least investing the cinematic realisation of the story with as much psychological realism as possible (Polanski, 1984: 197).

The notion of a film centred on mental illness was of course not new at the time. Repulsion was released in the shadow of both Psycho (Hitchcock, 1960) and Peeping Tom (Powell, 1960), both films that use intra-diegetic exposition to cast a serious light on their treatment of mental illness. What is unique about Polanski’s depiction of psychosis, however, is precisely the lack of psychoanalysis and his attempt to represent, rather than merely include, the perceptual crises experienced by the film’s protagonist – a goal it inherits from Buñuel’s Un chien andalou (1929), to which Repulsion makes direct reference to in its opening credits.26

2.2. Illusions, Hallucinations and Delusions

As a means of priming my discussion of the first of Polanski’s ‘trilogies’ under investigation here, I shall provide a basic overview of the history of and current clinical thinking regarding the illness called schizophrenia, a condition which features prominently (although never explicitly nominated) in a number of Polanski’s films. It is beyond the scope of this work to give a detailed account of the research that informs the clinical understanding of schizophrenia, but multiple references are made to seminal volumes that are devoted to the subject. What is outlined below is intended

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26 In the opening of Repulsion a giant eye fills the screen as the credits run across it. The last credit, Polanski’s name, ‘cuts’ across the eye much like Buñuel himself cuts the eye in Un chien andalou.
to facilitate a discussion of Polanski’s cinema based on the history of the clinical recognition of the illness, the development of its diagnostic criteria, and the ‘philosophical implications’ that result from the clinical understanding of the illness and how this relates to the theory of indirect perception.

It is appropriate at this point to distinguish between a number of often colloquially confused terms that we will need to carry on this discussion, namely illusion, hallucination and delusion. Both illusions and hallucinations are non-veridical (‘not true’) perceptions in that both are perceptions that do not coincide with the reality (i.e. as objectively measurable) of the stimuli from the outside world that reaches the sense organs. A quick and easy definition that distinguished these terms, however, carries its own difficulties. As Gregory notes, to simply define illusion as a perception that does not correspond to a concrete physical reality is to assume the existence of an independent, antecedent truth from which a given perception has departed. ‘But how do we know the truth?’ Gregory rightfully challenges himself (1997a: 194). But such logic becomes quickly self-defeating, as Gregory also hastens to point out:

To say that all appearances of objects are illusions is no more helpful than to say all experience is a dream. Although logically irrefutable, this drains useful meaning from ‘dream’ and from ‘illusion’. (Similarly, there is little point in saying that everything is beautiful or everything is ugly: perception and language need contrasts to have meaning.) (Gregory, 1997a: 194)

The ‘truth’ of the independent existence of objects is not a philosophical conundrum Gregory spends much time wrestling with, and nor will I. And nor does Gregory
allow the apparent contradictions of quantum physics (i.e. Heisenburg’s Uncertainty Principle) and relativity sway the argument: the issue at hand is the functioning of the human perceptual system within the perceivable world as determined by the limits of our sense organs (such as the small band of visible light that the eye is able to see); we are not discussing perception within the quantum sphere nor at the speed the light, but at the level of ‘kitchen physics’. There is plenty to observe, test and discuss within these limits without resorting to philosophies that dismiss the discussion *ab initio*.

Where *illusion* is used to refer to a misinterpretation of a physical reality, a *hallucination* is instead a perception that is auto-generated and not (or only tenuously) linked to external stimuli. Another way of putting it is to consider a hallucination to be a ‘perception without an object’, as referred to by McKenna (1997: 6), himself citing Esquirol’s 1832 definition. McKenna mentions ‘abnormal perception’ in his list of ‘cardinal’ symptoms of schizophrenia, in which the use of the term ‘abnormal’ allows us to differentiate between illusions and hallucinations. Simply put, to experience an illusion is to experience a perception that departs from the physical reality of the external stimulus due to special properties of said stimuli that cause the brain to react in a certain way. So to experience an illusion is a *normal*, ‘correct’ perception, an appropriate misrepresentation of the stimuli. On the other hand, a hallucination, which is also a perception that departs from the physical reality of the stimuli, can be entirely self-generated (i.e. not linked at all to external stimuli), and is not due to the type of ‘special properties’ considered to cause illusions. These are therefore considered to be *abnormal*, the result of an incorrectly functioning perceptual apparatus. The distinction is of course best illustrated via example.
Gregory provides a number of examples of ‘normal’ illusions that are the result of a combination of special properties in the object of perception and the way the brain reacts to certain stimuli. These include the ‘hollow face’ illusion (Gregory, 1997a: 207), in which the brain seems to simply refuse to see a concave face and thus forces a (false) convex face to be perceived. The ubiquity of this perceptual experience suggests that such a ‘misrepresentation’ of the stimuli is normal; that is, a perceptual effect that is the result of a healthy perceptual apparatus. The predominant theory regarding this particular illusion suggests that the special attention the brain pays to faces for the purposes of survival (such as the need to quickly identify a family member who will likely protect you) causes faces to be processed by the brain in a different way than other stimuli (for animals who rely more on smell for identification, for example, this could be different). Similar evolution-based explanations are offered for most illusions. So normal are such illusions that failure to experience them could actually be a contributing factor to the diagnosis of mental illness. Recently published research shows that there are many optical illusions, including the ‘hollow face’ illusion, that are not experienced by a significant number of patients diagnosed with schizophrenia (see Bonnemann, C., Dietrich, D.E., Dillo, W., Dima, D., Emrich. H.M., Lanfermann, H., & Roiser, J.P. [2009] and Borsutzky, M., Emrich, H.M., Huber, T.J., Leweke, F.M., Schneider, U. & Seifert, J. [2002]).

In contrast to illusions, the nature of hallucinations depends completely on the subjective perceptual mechanism of the person experiencing them. Hallucinations need not be visual; stimulus-less perception can mimic any of the senses. A well-
known symptom of schizophrenia, the hearing of voices, is classified as an auditory hallucination. But McKenna also discusses non-verbal auditory hallucinations, including hearing noises (‘tapping, scuffling, banging, car engines’ 1997: 7) and even music. As the ‘reality’ of these sounds from the subject’s perspective seems as legitimate as a real sound, it is unsurprising that quite logical, albeit incorrect or exaggerated, responses occur. Just as hearing the sound of rainfall through an external door would lead the perceiver to conclude it was raining, so too could hearing footsteps outside a bedroom door in what was thought to be a locked, empty house lead one to conclude a menacing presence was approaching.

Kraeplin and Bleuler (the first to identify schizophrenia) also make note of subjects experiencing Somatic hallucinations (Mckenna, 1997: 9), which are various forms of hallucinatory bodily sensations, including the feeling of being touched (identified as haptic hallucinations, although the sensations described are passive rather than active) and the feeling of movement (kinaesthetic hallucinations). They include sexual sensations in the category of Somatic hallucination, along with a series of other bizarre (often impossible) bodily sensation. Berrios (1982) importantly makes note of the difficulty of determining the ‘relative contributions of hallucination and delusion to the bizarre bodily complaints of schizophrenic patients’ (in McKenna, 1997: 9), in which beliefs (such as believing one is pregnant) and somatic hallucination (feeling something ‘kicking’ from inside one’s body) are completely intertwined.

Delusions need to be distinguished from both illusions and hallucinations. A delusion is not a perception linked to the physical senses, but an erroneous belief, ‘held with
fixed, intense conviction; which is incorrigible to argument; and which is out of keeping with the individual’s social educational, and cultural background’ (McKenna, 1997: 2). McKenna describes delusions as ‘fantastic, patently absurd, or at least inherently unlikely’ and, as Simms (1988) describes it, are ‘justified by the patient in a peculiarly illogical way’ (in McKenna, 1997: 2). Whilst DSM IV TR\footnote{The American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (‘DSM’) is the definitive authority for the clinical diagnosis of abnormal behaviour. It is the tool with which diagnoses of mental illness can be made, with each condition being defined by a list of symptoms, a minimum of which must be present to qualify a set of behaviours for a given diagnosis. The manual is in constant evolution. The version I make reference to here is the fourth edition, text revision (‘TR’) released in 2000. A new edition, DSM-5, is set for release in 2013.}, does not define delusion, its use of the term is consistent with this definition. McKenna extends the definition to include a number of sub-types as well as several examples of case studies taken from various studies. Amongst these, McKenna highlights delusions of persecution, hypochondriacal delusions, delusions of misidentifications, and, of special interest to the films in question here, Sexual Delusions:

Sexual Delusions are by no means uncommon in schizophrenics. Sometimes they are intimately bound up to hallucinatory sensation, for example in genitals; in other cases, however, there are beliefs – of pregnancy, in a fantasy lover, that one’s sex is changing – which cannot be attributed to abnormal perceptions. (McKenna, 1997: 4, emphasis my own)

Also of great relevance to this discussion are Grandiose delusions, defined as beliefs in irrationally high levels of certain talents (grandiose ability), elevated sense of importance (grandiose identity), and delusions of a particularly religious nature, such as a patient’s belief that he or she is on a special religious mission, or that the patient is indeed a ‘divine’/supernatural being him- or herself (often times God or the Devil).
Interestingly, although McKenna never breaches the subject directly, there is no mention of the type of beliefs held by many considered to be strongly religious; millions worldwide profess to believe in virgin-birth, transubstantiation, and resurrection, for example. Instead such beliefs seem covered by the caveat of the deluded subject’s ‘erroneous beliefs’ needing to be ‘out of keeping with the individual’s social educational, and cultural background’ (1997: 2).

In the act of diagnosing cardinal symptoms of schizophrenia, drawing a distinction between delusional thought and religious belief is indeed challenging. Nevertheless, in McKenna’s summary of the research there are several descriptions of case studies in which religiously coloured behaviours have been classified as delusional. In each case, the references to religious subject matter (the god, prophet, or action) is consistent with, or stems from, the religious practices the patient was closely familiar with; there are no reported cases, for example, of a patient who was a practicing Hindu, brought up in a Hindu family, and living in a Hindu community who claims the Virgin Mary has asked him to build a shrine to her. Grandiose religious delusions tend to be consistent with the religious experience of the patient in question.

So regardless of how irrational a belief may be, as long as it is in keeping with cultural norms, it cannot be classified as ‘delusional’. The difficulty in the case of religious delusions is then identifying a precise point where a belief ceases to be a ‘normal’ religious expression; the democratisation of what is a ‘correct’ belief renders the situation infinity more complicated. Knowledge of the specifics of religious doctrines is therefore of great importance in the diagnosis of schizophrenia. One
patient may claim to be the reincarnation of a Prince, another believes that her car is occupied by evil spirits, and yet another insists that some wine and bread wafers have literally been transformed into the blood and flesh of a god born to a virgin two thousand years ago; none of these beliefs can be diagnosed as delusions if the subject in question holds them within a framework of a recognised religious doctrine (Hinduism, Animism and Catholicism respectively in these cases).

2.3. Schizophrenia

Where illusions such as the hollow face reveal the extent to which learning can influence perception in a healthy brain, the delusions and hallucinations indicative in mental illnesses, especially schizophrenia, reveal just how powerful the brain can be in its creation of subjective realities unrelated to external stimuli. Where the healthy brain acts as judge to sort out the meaning of the evidence (stimuli) it has presented to it, it can often be fooled. In cases of schizophrenia, however, the brain not only misjudges stimuli, but generates it outright, causing the sufferer to mistake purely imagined perceptions for those that are based on stimuli actually being received by the sense organs.

In Gregory's discussion of the nature of perception in *Eye and Brain*, the issue of 'malfunctions' in the perceptual mechanism is often raised; and it is through examinations of these malfunctions that much can be learned about how we should define 'correct' functioning of the perceptual apparatus. To re-affirm a basic point, in
this conceptual framework, ‘correct’ perception does indeed exist; such terminology is merely a matter of semantics for Gregory, who rejects philosophical viewpoints that position indirect perception as tantamount to the world-as-dream hypothesis. For Gregory, the proposition that perception is an active cognitive process (as opposed to perception as passive reception) does not inherently suggest the absence of an antecedent reality, nor does it suggest a perpetual dream state; to do so, to identify reality as an illusion, is to render terms such as ‘illusion’ or ‘dream’ useless. Instead, Gregory focuses on examining and qualitatively distinguishing between different forms of perception: those that are signalled from external cues (and interpreted), and those that are not. Schizophrenia is one of the ‘malfunctions’ Gregory expresses particular interest in, specifically due to the fact that the behaviour associated with this illness highlights the critical tenets of indirect perception.

At the risk of oversimplifying DSM’s diagnostic guide, we can at least begin to define schizophrenia as a condition in which the subject is dissociated from the outside world, for whom the usefulness of the perceptual mechanism (‘usefulness’ being defined, perhaps narrowly, in terms of survival) is lost. Consistent with the DSM criteria for diagnosis, McKenna summarises the ‘cardinal’ symptoms of schizophrenia as being divided into the following categories: abnormal ideas (i.e. delusions); abnormal perception (i.e. hallucination); formal thought disorder; motor, volititional and behavioural disorders; and emotional disorders (1997: 1).

As stated in the DSM diagnostic criteria, symptoms must appear in sufficient numbers or degree to qualify for diagnosis; determining this can of course be a great challenge
for even the most experienced clinician. Schneider (1958) established a series of ‘first rank’ symptoms to distinguish the relative importance of various observed or reported behaviours. These ‘first rank’ symptoms are: somatic passivity experiences (‘the experience of influences playing on the body’); ‘all feelings, impulses (drives), and volitional acts experienced by the patient as the work or influence of others’; thought withdrawal; diffusion of thought; and delusional perception (in McKenna 1997: 26). For Schneider, a diagnosis of schizophrenia can be made if any one of these symptoms are determined to be manifest in a subject. As Schneider notes, what all of these first rank symptoms have in common is their “lowering of the barrier between the self and the surrounding world”’ (27).

In common with Schneider, Keefe (1998) similarly refers to a collapse of the barrier between the neurological sphere and the outside world, which seem to overlap to the extent that the schizophrenic subject is unable to determine the difference between perceptions that are imagined and those which are connected to external stimuli (142). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Gregory describes the condition from a different perspective, as one in which the sufferer loses contact with the outside world ‘so that he or she is effectively isolated’ (1997a: 199). Although apparently contradictory, Gregory, Schneider and Keefe are all simply using metaphor to describe the same thing – the subject’s inability to differentiate veridical perceptions that are based on external stimuli and non-veridical perceptions that are self-generated, independent of actually-present stimuli. There is a relevant connection here between this concept of ‘barrier collapse’ and the idea of the cinematic ‘wraparound effect’, which will become increasingly relevant as we examine Polanski’s attempts to achieve perceptual realism in his representations of the disturbed perceptions of his
protagonists. Polanski seeks to cause a similar ‘collapse’ on the spectatorial plane, applying a concerted effort to muddle the spectators’ sense of the border between a filmic and diegetic reality through active manipulation of their perceptual mechanisms.

It should be noted that hallucinogenic states similar to what are thought of as symptomatic of schizophrenia can be generated in subjects through the ingestion of certain drugs, which in turn has caused much research to be conducted that attempts to identify a biochemical explanation for the illness. McKenna (1997) identifies the synthesis and use of LSD is the late 1940s as a key starting point for such research, which eventually led to ‘dopamine hypothesis’ (135), a theory that suggests that the hallucinations typical of schizophrenia are the result of excess brain dopamine. Essentially, such research showed only that the use of drugs known to increase dopamine levels could indeed cause schizophrenia-like psychosis; but the conclusion that excess dopamine is the cause of schizophrenia does not necessarily follow. What is important to note is that whilst certain drug-induced states may resemble schizophrenia, this is not to say that they are causes of schizophrenia, nor that these states are in and of themselves schizophrenia. In fact, the clinical definition of schizophrenia specifically precludes the influence of such drugs. It is therefore relevant to distinguish Polanski’s representation of schizophrenic behaviour from other films in which hallucinated, or ‘parallel’, realities are induced by drug use, as is the case in films such as Naked Lunch (Cronenberg, 1991), A Scanner Darkly (Linklater, 2006), and Jacob’s Ladder (Lyne, 1990). None of Polanski’s cinematic portrayals of mental illness include reference to drug use, except for when it is
(possibly) forced, as in the case of *Rosemary’s Baby*, a film in which the diagnosis of the protagonist as mentally ill is highly problematised.

To avoid confusion, I would also like to point out here that whilst at times I will engage Lacan in my discussion of Polanski’s cinema, my use of the term ‘schizophrenia’ is not predominately intended to reflect Lacan’s use of the term in his discussion of language acquisition. For clarity’s sake, I will restrict my use of the term to its clinical (psychiatric) definition, so whilst at times I will return to Lacan, I do not completely subscribe to his understanding of the condition of schizophrenia, which he seems to attribute to retardation of language development, justifying this stance on psychoanalytic terms. That being said, there is value in the connection Lacan makes between language articulation and the subject’s lack of the concept of ‘I’ to this discussion of schizophrenia as a condition in which the interconnectedness of signifiers becomes fragmented. For Lacan, the schizophrenic state is entered due to a subject’s inability to assert his or her autonomous existence, caught between the Imaginary and the Symbolic order due to a failure to achieve a robust sense of ‘I’ or ‘me’. In Polanski’s cinema, this scenario is played out most dramatically in *The Tenant*, in which Trelkovsky’s sense of self (and time) becomes completely fragmented as his identity crisis morphs into an even more terrifying epistemological (and ultimately ontological) crisis.
2.4. Deterritorialising Mental Health

Whilst there is some variation in the way Polanski deals with mental illness across his films, these also differ significantly from many other well-known films that deal with the issue, such as *A Beautiful Mind* (Howard, 2001), *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999), *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom*. This results from Polanski’s avoidance of denouements designed to deliver satisfaction through the ‘re-stitching’ of ‘torn’ diegetic realities, or exposition in which the causes of mental illness are neatly delineated by experts.

It is worth accessing Martin-Jones’s (2006) application of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘deterritorialisation’ and ‘reterritorialisation’ (see Deleuze, 1986 & 1989, Deleuze & Guattari, 2004) in his discussion of national cinemas, and extending this notion to Polanski’s own (as I would suggest) connected method of dealing with perception through representations of mental illness. Martin-Jones introduces his discussion of the national narrative by addressing the early twenty-first century trend towards non-linear narrative structures (films like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* [2004] and *Memento* [2000], for example), highlighting that whilst these narratives are indeed labyrinthine, they are *not* examples of the crystalline time-images discussed by Deleuze due to their ‘reterritorialisation’ of time at the spectatorial level. In other words, whilst these films seem to ‘unstitch’ time, great pains are taken so that it is ‘re-stitched’ in the mind of the spectator as part of the ‘gestalt’ of the film experience. Time is fragmented, but the pieces are put ‘in order’ during the experience of spectatorship; so time is effectively *reterritorialised*, and these films remain within the realm of the movement image.
Polanski’s narrative time structures tend be extremely linear, unrelenting movement-images (the only possible exception worth mentioning is *The Tenant*, which I will come back to in its case study), but a similar logic can be applied to Polanski’s treatment of mental illness, and, as I shall discuss in terms of the second set of films I look at, with regard to national identity. Both *Peeping Tom* and *Psycho*, for example, seem \(^{28}\) to *reterritorialise* mental health through the discovery of a home movie or the exposition of a doctor who ‘explains’ the cause of the psychosis. Those moments of ‘revelation’ (for the spectator) in *A Beautiful Mind* and *Fight Club* serve a similar purpose; that is, to reterritorialise diegetic realities in which the boundaries between what is and what is not real has become muddled (deterritorialised). The attribution of distorted perception to the taking of drugs similarly reterritorialises mental health. What is delivered in all these cases is *satisfaction* through the message that these worlds’ departure from order is still framed within a greater order that governs even such aberrations from normality. Polanski is far less generous, for he tends to deny us such satisfaction, leaving the causes of mental disorders, and even the question of their very existence, unresolved. The complexity of this form of deterritorialisation markedly increases in both *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Tenant*, but is already present in *Repulsion*, in which, although teased, no satisfactory aetiology is offered for Carole’s perceptual breakdown and resulting actions. In these films, psychosis is presented with varying levels of diegetic certainty, ranging from the more clearly defined hallucinations of *Repulsion*, to the ambiguous nature of the neighbours in *The Tenant*, who may or may not be responsible for Trelkovsky’s fears and eventual suicide attempt, to the utter uncertainty of the events of *Rosemary’s Baby*, in which it is never

\(^{28}\) I use the term ‘seem’ here in acceptance that there are likely many interpretations of these films’ epilogues that may well undermine my arguably superficial reading of them.
made clear the extent to which, if at all, Rosemary is imagining the Satanic plot against her.

2.5. Apartments, the Brain and the City

*Repulsion*, *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Tenant* can be conveniently grouped and identified as the ‘Apartment Trilogy’; whilst not diegetically linked in any way, their settings, thematic content, and use of generic convention overlap to such an extent that it is extremely useful to address them concurrently. These films are all primarily concerned with, and derive their horror from, their central character’s struggle to interpret the world around him or her and the events that take place therein. So it is in these three films that Gregory’s influence on Polanski’s cinema is most evident, either reflected in or directly informing many elements of these narratives and their aesthetics. In fact, Gregory himself reports that Polanski often carried his book on-set (Gregory, 2003), evidence of which I will discuss in the following case studies.

In addition to using the vocabulary provided by Gregory, my intention is utilise DSM’s diagnostic criteria and the clinical case studies I have discussed above to enlighten my discussion of these films, especially as to how Polanski uses the representation of schizophrenic behaviour to initiate discourse on perception. By doing so, I hope to illustrate the manner in which Polanski uses profilmic elements to realistically convey the schizophrenic condition, as well as open up the possibility of novel readings of these films, *Rosemary’s Baby* in particular. Whilst these films share
the objective of exposing the malleable nature of perception (and in turn of subjective concepts of reality) with ‘trip’ films like *Naked Lunch* (Cronenberg, 1991), *A Scanner Darkly* (Linklater, 2006), and *Jacob’s Ladder* (Lyne, 1990) (to name but a few). Polanski instead opts, for the most part, to stay within the confines of the non-toxic body, whose perceptions nevertheless go astray (the clear exception being a highly ambiguous scene in *Rosemary’s Baby*, which I will deal with in detail in its case study). Polanski’s camera also keeps the spectator close to the schizophrenic characters, not only making the spectator witness this character’s suffering, but also allowing (often forcing) the spectator to experience the same sort of distorted perceptions.

Polanski once commented that *Repulsion* was ‘not a Polish subject’ (in Ostrowska, 2006: 63), making reference to the fact that the environment that would cultivate the type of solitude needed for such a story did not exist in Poland, or at least, the concept of ‘Poland’ as he understood it at the time. It is unclear if Polanski believed *Repulsion* to be a specifically ‘London’ or ‘British’ subject, but when considering it in the context of the other two films, it becomes evident that it is the urban, possibly Western, space he was most likely referring to. As my primary focus is on the way in which these films add to an ongoing, inter-film perceptual discourse, a brief discussion on the role of urbanity in these films is certainly warranted here, especially in regards to the concerns of perceptual psychology with both urban space and the cinema; as Fitzmaurice and Shiel observe, the joint-study of cinema and the city is ‘archetypal ground for examination of visual and sensory experience, form and style, perception, cognition, and the meaning of the filmic image and the filmic text’ (2003: 1).
Cinema and the modern city will forever be co-considered by theorists and historians due to their concurrent emergence in the late nineteenth century. But the connection between cinema and the city is not simply a chronological overlap. It is true that cities provide the milieu for diegeses and that cinemas themselves become integral parts of the architecture of the city; but the intersections run deeper than this. As conceptualised by Virilo, the screen indeed becomes the ‘city square’ (1991: 25); or as Bruno puts it, ‘the machine of modernity that fabricated the city is also the “fabric” of the film’ (21). For Bruno, cinema and the architecture of the modern city are intimately connected in a ‘fluid exchange’, each informing the other. As Shiel discusses, society and culture are interlinked and ‘can only be properly understood … in their relation to each other’ (2001: 4); this concept can then be applied to the unity of cinema – ‘the most important cultural form’ – and the city – ‘the most important form of social organisation’ (Shiel, 2001: 1). In addition to functioning in relation to each other, Shiel also recognises that both cinema and the modern city are best understood in terms of the organisation of space, the city as a planned or organically developed (or both) physically-partitioned space, and cinema as a spatial (as opposed to exclusively textual, as it is often perceived) form of culture (2001: 5).

The 1960s and 1970s marked an era of increased location shooting, in which mainstream cinema, echoing the Neorealists, became increasingly interested in ‘a realist examination of contemporary urban environments’ (Fitzmaurice & Shiel, 2003: 6). Polanski’s ‘city films’ of this era reflect this trend, in which he uses the actual streets and landmarks of Paris (The Tenant, Frantic, Bitter Moon, The Ninth Gate),
New York City (Rosemary’s Baby), and London (Repulsion), but also combines these with intricate, meticulously realistic interiors completely created in the Épinay studio.

In The Tenant, Polanski collaborates with cinematographer Sven Nykvist and set designer Pierre Guffroy to create a seamless overlap between ‘authentic’ locations and highly convincing sets to create Trelkovsky’s flat on Rue la Bruyère in Paris’s Pigalle district; even many of the externals, in particular the courtyard of the building itself, were completely created in the studio in order to permit for the film’s often complex camera movements.29

All three films of the Apartment Trilogy take place in a major urban centre, arguably the capitals of Western civilisation. In each case, the film’s protagonist faces a psychological crisis that is played out, for the most part, in a centrally located flat: Repulsion in South Kensington, Rosemary’s Baby in Manhattan’s Dakota Building (corner of 72nd and Central Park West, renamed ‘The Bramford’), and The Tenant in the Pigalle district of Paris.

In his discussion of the ‘Chicago School’ style of architecture, Strathausen describes the conceptualisation of the city in terms of it being not only a unified space, but also a space of ‘startling complexity’ (2003:22) for the individual who resides in it. In cinematic terms, we can juxtapose Strathausen’s description of the ‘unity’ of the ‘translucent, organising gaze from above the city’ utilised by the floating, ‘untethered’ camera at the start of The Tenant and Rosemary’s Baby, with ‘complexity’ of “the

29 Bibliothèque du Film Archival reference: BAUDROT-GU253-B85.
multiplicity of conflicting perspectives experienced down below’ (22). In both films, this ‘conflict’ and ‘multiplicity’ is played out through the perceptual crises of a single individual.

Linking the stimuli of the big city to emerging forms of mental distress, Neidich (2003) discusses the ‘new perceptual challenges imposed by the new urban environment’ (52) - indeed, in this context we can truly refer to a form of ‘bourgeois’ perception. The fact that all of the films in Polanski’s Apartment Trilogy/schizophrenia cycle take place in major urban centres, with each of its protagonists identifiably ‘other’ to the city in which he or she resides, seems to reflect Neidich’s notion of the ‘perceptual challenges’ of these vertical, heavily peopled environments as being possibly complicit in these characters’ perceptual breakdowns. In a related vein, Strathausen (2003: 28) examines Man with a Movie Camera (Vetrov, 1929) and Berlin, The Symphony of a Great City (Ruttmann, 1927) to discuss both the new mode of perception that evolved in modern urban spaces and the experience of specifically urban forms of crisis with which it co-exists. As Strathausen expresses it, ‘the camera literally enables the modern uncanny to come to life in the form of a new cyborg-like being – the metropolis, which threatens to absorb and ultimately replace the very humanity it was meant to benefit’ (2003: 20). The idea of urban (‘bourgeois’) psychosis is actually rooted in evolutionary biology, the suggestion being that this very new way of living (relative to the time span of human evolution) requires a perceptually-evolved being to deal with the flurry of stimuli one finds in city life. So whilst these city-settings may or may not be a trigger to these characters’ breakdown, they at least provide an environment that nurtures, as well as reflects, perceptual crises.
Whilst I do not give much weight to the relevance of these particular cities, neither do I argue that these settings are quite Deleuzian ‘any-space-whatevers’. Unlike Deleuze’s description of depersonalised, discontinuous, and transitional any-spaces, the cavities in the building that our surrogate bodies occupy in these films become highly personalised. The densely urban environments in which these apartment stories are set must indeed be considered, at the very least, as ‘urban-any-spaces’. Moreover, the way in which these flats are nestled within larger structures, and the manner in which inside and outside (external as well as neighbouring) space interacts is also relevant, as I shall later address.

In all three films, the flats not only become the site of the protagonists’ decent into mental illness (with many of the hallucinations based on the flats’ own architecture), but the structures themselves become expressionistic manifestations of the characters’ interiority. The distinction between the body (and what it contains) and the mise-en-scène becomes muddled – indeed, the body and its mind themselves form the mise-en-scène. And so these flats become not just projections of these (intangible) psyches, but material parallels to their degenerating cognitive functions. The flats become not only psyche, but brain – a parallel that is meticulously constructed in each film.

Within the skull (of primates), the brain is further protected by three layers of connective tissue membranes (the meninges) that separate it from the bone of the cranium. Penetrating these layers are the arteries that supply the brain with nutrient-
rich blood, the veins that remove depleted blood, and the various links to the central 
and peripheral nervous system. These connections allow us to receive stimuli from the 
sense organs and to perform motor functions. The eye is special amongst these organs 
in its direct connection to the brain, with the retina and optic nerve in particular 
arguably an extension of the brain itself. It is this detail of the eye and brain anatomy 
that is most relevant considering the role apartments play in these films; serving, as I 
claim they do, as projections of intra-cranial space. Reflecting this ‘cranial’ theme, 
both Repulsion and The Tenant include scenes in which the protagonist accidentally 
bumps his or her head with another character whilst reaching to pick something up. In 
both cases (in fact, there are three such occurrences, as the scene is repeated in The 
Tenant), there is an audible ‘crack’ that accompanies the contact, stressing the bone-
on-bone contact. The image is suggestive of the psychic ‘overlap’ that occurs in these 
films, in which both Trelkovsky and Carole suffer interrelated identity and perceptual 
crises.

Although meant to be protected cavities within larger bodies (like the skull), the 
apartments in these films are often compromised by nosey, sometimes nefarious, 
boys and stimuli from the outside world or adjacent flats. Sometimes these 
invasions are hallucinatory, sometimes they are real, and sometimes this line is 
theroughly blurred. In each film, the borders between apartment- and non-apartment 
space is compromised. Light, for example, enters these cavities not only via windows 
but also through ‘peepholes’, as demonstrated by Polanski’s frequent use of POV 
shots through these (distorting) little lenses. Sound also seems to have little respect 
for the apartments’ confines. In Repulsion, we hear the lift as Michael (Ian Hendry) 
leaves the Ledoux flat, a plane flies overhead as Carole and Hélène talk, the bells
from the Brompton Oratory across the street routinely invade the flat, and Carole is unable to prevent the sound of her sister’s lovemaking from entering her room. Similar auditory invasions are seen in *The Tenant*, where it is Trelkovsky who cannot contain noise within his apartment, to the chagrin of his neighbours (who express their displeasure through the floor/ceiling). In *Rosemary’s Baby*, it is the bickering of the Woodhouse’s geriatric neighbours, and later the sounds of ominous chanting, that not only passes though the (partitioned) walls into Rosemary’s bedroom, but into her dreams as well.

It is not only light and sound to which these apartments are permeable, but solid matter makes its way in as well. The first occurrence in *Repulsion* is the (unwanted) presence of Hélène’s boyfriend in the flat, who leaves personal artefacts (shaving razor, toothbrush, and clothing) lying around. As Carole’s mental faculties begin to deteriorate, hands reach out from the walls to grope her, a construction worker with whom she made eye contact ‘appears’ in her room and rapes her, a courting young man breaks down the door (allowing neighbours to stare into the flat), and an angry landlord lets himself in. Like Carole, both Rosemary and Trelkovsky attempt to keep evil neighbours out by barricading doors with large cupboards (a reoccurring piece of furniture in Polanski’s cinema), but the structure of the flat is unable to keep these bodies out (hallucinatory or otherwise). In Rosemary’s case, hostile bodies enter through a secret door connecting the Woodhouses’ and Castevets’ flats.

In both *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Tenant*, the apartments also demonstrate themselves incapable of containing solid matter: Rosemary’s new friend Terry
(Victoria Vetri) falls to her death from the Castavetes’ flat, and Trelkovsky himself is ejected twice through the window (defenestration being another of Polanski’s great recurring motifs). In each of these films, the flats themselves not only parallel the cognitive degeneration of the characters, but become manifestations of the organ in which cognition resides, the chaos in these spaces reflecting the chaos of the minds (the brains) that occupy them. Just as stimuli from the outside world makes contact with the sense organs, which then send messages to the brain, so too are the flats bombarded with stimuli; and just as illness (schizophrenia) corrupts the brain’s ability to interpret stimuli effectively, so too do these flats become incapable of maintaining order.

Shonfield (2000) discusses the ‘fear of penetration’ in Rosemary’s Baby and Repulsion in both sexual and architectural terms, suggesting that these films employ an ‘analogy between the interior space of their heroine’s bodies, and the interiors of the apartments where they live’ (55). As Shonfield postulates it, both of these films display the ‘vengeance of the interior’ in the aftermath of Brutalism, an architectural movement that attempted to eradicate the distinctiveness of interior space (56). As Shonfield also notes, the physical traumas that occur to the very fabric Carole’s flat have a real-world antecedent, as they are all typical ‘constructional failures’ of buildings in post-war London, namely ‘damp penetration, cracking of internal surfaces, and failure of mastic sealants’, all of which ‘come under the microscopic eye of Carole’s technical inspection’ (2000: 57), fuelled and exaggerated, of course, by her schizophrenia.
In Shonfield’s view, the issue of the perceptual stability of the protagonists of *Repulsion* and *Rosemary’s Baby* is delineated by a clear difference in how each woman engages with her respective interior and exterior spaces. In the context of these films, she defines the ‘sane world’ as ‘the one where … personal edges, bodily and architectural, are firmly in place’ (2000: 65). Where both women suffer similar perceptual crises within their apartments - to be specific, the rape each of them endures (plural in Carole’s case) - Shonfield argues that the different manner in which these women engage with outside space is the true indicator of their respective mental health. Whilst Carole’s hallucinations all take place within the confines of her apartment, her behaviour symptomatic of schizophrenia is evident on the streets of South Kensington as well (68). In contrast with Carole, Shonfield suggest that in Rosemary’s case, the streets of Manhattan outside the Brampton (i.e. the Dakota building) are a safe zone; Manhattan is a ‘benign city’ (70) in which her paranoia subsides, even though she continues to suffer the pain of her difficult pregnancy. For Shonfield, this serves as evidence of Rosemary’s sanity; but it must be acknowledged (as Shonfield does, 70), that the ‘benignness’ of the city does not last, and ultimately Rosemary’s paranoiac behaviour indeed spills out onto the humid streets of the city.

As I will discuss in my case study of *Rosemary’s Baby*, the issue of Rosemary’s mental health is more perplexing than Shonfield estimates; ultimately, I will suggest, the diegetic veracity of Rosemary’s perceptual crisis is fundamentally irresolvable for the persistent close-reader.

Shiel (2003) notes an interesting similarity in the seminal 1970s films *Annie Hall* (1977) and *Taxi Driver* (1976) that is relevant to this discussion. Although radically different in tone and style, both of these films portray New York City as a ‘deep well
of authentic personal experience’ (168). In both these films, internal (personal) and external (social) spaces overlap; Annie and Alvy’s quarrels take place with equal vigour in both their flats (indeed, they argue about their flats) and the streets of Manhattan, and Travis’s delusion-fuelled plots are rehearsed in his room, and then played out for real outside. In Rosemary’s Baby, set some ten years before these films (shot and released in 1968, but the film notably takes place between the summers of 1965 and 1966), an intense personal experience is also played out, both indoors and on many of the same Manhattan streets. Whilst I may question the degree of ‘authenticity’ of Rosemary’s perceptions (as I discuss at length in the film’s dedicated case study), I do not, of course, deny that her personal experience is extremely ‘authentic’ in the sense of it being existentially ‘significant’ (as seems intended by Shiel’s use of the term ‘authentic’).

What is created by this apartment-as-brain paradigm is a representation of the brain as an independent structure; one in which consciousness (including identity) resides; the place where cognition, healthy or unhealthy, occurs. These are disembodied brains, much like the iconic science-fiction image of the still-living brain suspended in cerebrospinal fluid (see, for example, Roald Dahl’s short story ‘William and Mary’). The ability of these characters to effectively associate their material body with their identity is a major issue in each film, a key element of their cognitive breakdown. Such formal thought disorders (associative disturbances) are typical symptoms of schizophrenia. It is difficult to know what to make of the note left behind by Mrs. Gardenia in Rosemary’s and Guy’s flat, where she writes, simply, ‘I can no longer associate myself’, but the crises of identity seen in each film may give us a clue. In both Repulsion and The Tenant, the (respective) identities of Carole and Trelkovsky
are muddled with those of the ‘rightful’ or former tenants of the flats they occupy. Carole is often identified via her link to her sister (Carole being ‘the beautiful younger sister’), or is mistaken outright for her (they, of course, share the name of ‘Miss Ledoux’); Trelkovsky instead invades the home of an attempted suicide victim, Simone Choule (herself an isolated brain trapped in a useless body), and he is quite literally transformed into her. In Rosemary’s case, it is her problematic pregnancy that serves as cause of another quite-literally transformation, as not only is her dwelling space invaded, but so too is her body (first by being raped, and then by the growing child that results from it).

Characters’ efforts to establish and control personal spaces is in fact often a central conflict in Polanski’s cinema; a struggle that quickly assumes existential proportions in the Apartment Trilogy, but is present in other films as well. In Cul-de-sac, George’s Holy Island castle, evoking Rob Roy and Kafka in equal measure, has its extensive ‘moat’ compromised daily by the shifting of the tide, resulting in the invasion of his domain. Macbeth’s usurpation of the throne is essentially an invasion of another’s space (a bedroom), which then, like Trelkovsky’s invasion of Simone Choule’s flat, has its own consequences. Tess’s struggle is also directly determined by her ability, and failure, to establish not only her name but also a structure in which to dwell, a personal space. Similarly, the primary narrative thrust of Oliver Twist is the boy’s attempt to seek and maintain a home.

As I hope to have demonstrated, all three of the Apartment Trilogy films are thematically similar enough to justify a group reading. By the same token, however,
each film addresses the issue of cognitive malfunction differently, complicating the issue further in each successive work. I will now turn my attention towards an analysis of each individual film, and in so doing explore several different aspects of the discourse that binds them.
3. **Apartment Trilogy Case Study 1: Repulsion**

3.1. **Running Amok in ‘Swinging London’**

Desperate to raise the funds for their high-concept project *If Katelbach Comes* (what would later become *Cul-de-sac*), Polanski and his writing partner Brach pitched *Repulsion* to producers Klinger and Tenser as a horror film set in the heart of swinging London (Polanski, 1984: 197). As Brunsdon (2007) notes, the films most often associated with ‘Swinging London’, the major examples of which she identifies as *The Knack ...and How to Get It* (Lester, 1965), *Georgy Girl* (Narizzano, 1966), *Darling* (Schlesinger, 1966), *Alfie* (Gilbert, 1966) and *Blow Up* (Antonioni, 1967), are quite a heterogeneous group, varying greatly in tone and style (35). It is therefore fair to identify *Repulsion* as an early ‘Swinging London’ film.

In the documentary *Hollywood U.K.* (1993), Richard Lester (director of *The Knack...*) highlights the issue of ‘authenticity’ as a means of contrasting the ‘Swinging London’ films from the Northern ‘kitchen sink’ dramas of the British New Wave that preceded them, films like *A Kind of Loving* (Schlesinger, 1962), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Reisz 1960), and *A Taste of Honey* (Richardson, 1961) (see also Brunsdon, 2007: 35). The question of ‘authenticity’ returns us again to the issue of existential ‘significance’ in the city film; where the modernist characters of the British New Wave openly grapple with their angst, the ‘zaniness’ of the London cinema that followed is indicative of a more postmodern sensibility, which is not to say, however,
that a film like *Blow Up* or *Alfie* are any less concerned with ‘serious’ issues than the New Wave films. *Repulsion*’s chronological position directly between the British New Wave and the emergence of Swinging London is also indicative of the film’s hybridity: ‘authentic’ and modernist in its portrayal of an individual’s perceptual crisis (which is an existential crisis as well, as I will later explain), but also visceral and pop in its embracing of the generic tropes of the thriller and the horror film.

Whilst it is not inaccurate to consider *Repulsion* in the greater context of ‘Swinging London’, it is worth noting that the ‘swingingness’ of *Repulsion* is, for the most part, a peripheral feature. Colin’s iconic car, a Sunbeam, does indeed call to mind the emerging consumeristic youth culture of the 1960s, and the clothes worn by the principles, as well as Carole’s bouffant (which takes quite a beating throughout the course of the film) are also highly indicative of the era; but apart from these elements, there is little else in *Repulsion* that ‘swings’. Apart from the use of an extra-diegetic jazz soundtrack, the music heard from the streets of South Kensington is limited to a trio of aging spoon and banjo players and the ringing of the bells from Brompton Oratory. Whilst Carole works in the ‘glamour’ business, her clients are all older women, and the pub frequented by Colin and his friends is teaming with geriatrics. The most sexually ‘liberated’ aspect of the film involves Carole’s sister having an affair with an older, married man, but this is not quite the stuff of sexual revolution. The only cultural references are to Chaplin’s *The Gold Rush* (1925) and the
professional wrestling programme Hélène watches on television. This is hardly the ‘Swinging London’ Polanski himself was so embedded in.

An element that Repulsion does share with many ‘Swinging London’ films, including Darling, The Knack, and Smashing Time (Davis, 1967), is its portrayal of a single, female character who comes to the big city in search of adventure and self-actualisation, which Luckett (2000) contrasts with the ‘stasis and confinement’ (234) of the men in the British New Wave films (a gender contrast that is evident within the New Wave films as well). It is perhaps not so much Carole as it is her older sister that fits this description, but notwithstanding Carole’s ‘difficulties’, we should recall that she too has come to London (from abroad, no less) in search of something. On this note, let us begin the perceptual analysis of Repulsion.

3.2. ‘Luring Us In’

Of all of Polanski’s films, it is the films of the Apartment Trilogy, namely Repulsion, Rosemary’s Baby, and The Tenant, which serve as the most overt expression of his fascination with the functioning of perception. It is in these three films that the two-fold manner in which perceptual psychology has influenced Polanski’s work is most readily identifiable, informing both a) the way in which these films are constructed as objects to be perceived by the spectator, and b) the way in which diegetic acts of

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30 Wrestling in the 1960s was not yet the trendy postmodern ‘entertainment’ it would become in the 1980s.
perception are depicted in these films. As I discussed in Chapter One, Polanski’s interest in perception is evident early in his cinema, as demonstrated in *Knife in the Water*’s shifting ‘eye’ scene. Starting with *Repulsion*, however, Polanski’s depiction of the workings of the perceptual mechanism takes on much greater importance, as he employs this ‘two-fold’ approach to not only depict perceiving bodies, but also to influence the perception of the spectator.

The film combines the use of natural perspective and extended takes, which has the effect of limiting our gaze either to what is being observed from the point of view of a notional (but invisible and ineffectual) observer. With the camera placed at the same distance from the action as this voyeur and by using a lens (50mm) with a principle focal length that corresponds to the human visual field, the perspective of the human eye at that distance is mimicked. The goal is simply to limit as much as possible the work done by the brain to make sense of the image by furnishing it with the type of perspective that it expects. Whilst ‘telephoto’ and ‘wide angle’ lenses (and all other non-‘normal’ long or short focal length lenses) can indeed maintain relative perspective (i.e. the relative sizes of objects are respected), the contention here is that the way in which both shorter and longer lenses (moving towards ‘wide angle’ and ‘telephoto’ respectively) deal with light is sufficiently different from the way we see that the brain is obliged to ‘adjust’ the image (in the next chapter, I will discuss Polanski’s shift to favouring wide-angle lenses, which offer other advantages in terms

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31 When asked a question regarding how he chooses where to place the camera, Polanski replied ‘…that’s where I would watch the action from’ (quoted in Cousins, 2006: 1).

32 For the effect to be complete, ideally, the spectator of the film should be sitting at an appropriate distance from the screen, depending on its size (in a cinema, the ‘footprint’ of this area would include most centrally located seats).
perceptual realism). The brain is more than capable of making such adjustments, but forcing it to do so involves greater effort and may risk compromising engagement. Conversely, by creating images that correspond to the way we naturally see the world, the brain is allowed to relax and thus more readily ‘believe’ what it sees (Gregory, 2008). As Gregory (2003) discusses, in *Repulsion* Polanski sets up a kind of celluloid Venus Fly-Trap: by using natural perspective, the spectator is slowly lured in, and then, when the time is right, *repulsed* through orchestrated distortion.

Augmenting this ‘fly trap’ effect is Polanski’s attention to mundane details that seemingly do nothing to advance the plot. The approach often has a sort of ‘boredom effect’, which is actually one of Polanski’s professed objectives: by lulling the spectator into a kind of bored hypnosis, the moment of shock would be greatly amplified. Polanski also uses sound to heighten both our diegetic engagement and, sometimes, even to increase this ‘boredom effect’ (Polanski, 2003). In *Repulsion*, sound and slowness combine to create a near-soporific state, but concurrently we are being ‘wrapped’ into the diegesis by the soft, engaging sounds of dripping water, a piano being played off screen, and even a potato being peeled. These all serve to draw us in, even though not much is actually happening, and (perceptually) prime us as to achieve the greatest level of shock. The best example of this effect occurs when Carole spots (and we spot) her attacker’s reflection in the bedroom mirror:

… at the first screening I saw people jumping up from their seats. That gave me great satisfaction and I thought ‘it works, we zapped them’. But we can only zap someone
when we have lulled them into some kind of peace, when he (sic) is almost on the verge of boredom. 33 (Polanski: 2003, 00:45:21)

Repulsion’s particular concern with visual perception is evident from the opening credit sequence, where a gigantic eye occupies the screen as the credits roll. By (literally) aggrandising the eye in such an extreme manner, a strong suggestion is made as to the importance that the act of seeing will have in the forthcoming film. In contrast to the cinematic convention of locating a narrative via long shot (an approach Polanski himself often uses, as I shall discuss in other case-studies), Repulsion instead uses an extreme close up to the same effect: this film takes place on the eye of the beholder, and, as I shall discuss, in the organ that lies just behind it. As the camera pulls back, we soon learn that the film centres on Carole Ledoux, a young Belgian émigré living in South Kensington with her older sister, Hélène. She works as a beautician, aiding rich women with their vain attempts to defy the aging process. Carole begins to have trouble at work due to increasingly severe lapses of concentration. Her difficulties continue at home, as she finds the presence of her sister’s (married) boyfriend, Michael, in the flat troublesome. She pleads with her sister to spend more time with her, away from him, but eventually finds herself alone in the flat when Hélène and Michael set off on holiday to Italy. Isolated, Carole’s behaviour becomes increasingly erratic and she eventually departs from reality completely, suffering a number of hallucinogenic episodes that result in the murder of two men: Colin (John Fraser, her suitor), and the landlord of the flat.

33 I can personally affirm this strategy continues to be effective. At a screening of Repulsion at the British Film Institute on April 1st, 2010, I watched an entire audience leap from their seats at this very moment, one of many such occasions.
By depicting perceptual distortions such as those experienced by Carole, Polanski emphasises Gregory’s point about the malleability of one’s subjective perceptual experience of being in the world. There is an aesthetic shift when the film lapses away from diegetic reality to access Carole’s hallucinations; but whilst there is sufficient sensorial evidence to remind the spectator that these sequences are diegetically ‘unreal’, the shift is often so seamless that we find ourselves, at least briefly, being drawn in by film’s depiction of non-veridical perception, which, whilst distorting what is diegetically-established as normal perspective, does so with a high degree of psychological realism. We are positioned as observers of her distorted perceptual experiences, but we are also compelled to experience these distortions ourselves through Polanski’s manipulation of profilmic elements. Even though we, as spectators, are ultimately able to decipher the difference, it becomes increasingly clear that for Carole, the absolute reality of these experiences cannot be denied, as what she experiences has very serious consequences for her and others.

3.3. The Camera and its Subject

The relationship between Carole and Polanski’s camera, and by extension us, is at times complex. For the most part, Polanski’s camera sticks to its observational stance rather than breaking up scenes into medium or close shots, or swapping from shot to counter shot. Although this style seems to contradict the ‘system of suture’ (see Oudart, 1969), Polanski’s aim of increasing spectator engagement is similar to that
professed by Oudart in his application of Lacan’s mirror to the experience of cinema spectatorship. In *Repulsion*, for example, we are ‘sutured’ not so much to an onscreen character but to an invisible voyeur who watches Carole. At times the camera seems to adopt Carole’s exact POV, but normally it retains its observational stance. For the most part, the camera (and thus the spectator) is tethered to Carole’s narrative reach. Here I use the term ‘tethered’ rather ‘bound’ to indicate the fact that whilst, for the most part, we experience the film by way of Carole (including the episodes that we can identify as being hallucinatory), we are not Carole.

*Repulsion*, only Polanski’s second feature, establishes his preference for the ‘tethered’ camera technique that would prove to becomes the norm for the rest of his cinema. It is especially pronounced in the other two ‘apartment’ films, as well as the investigation films I will later discuss. Even so, at times in *Repulsion* the camera does stray from Carole’s narrative reach, following her sister to the door as Carole runs to her room to avoid being seen in her night gown, or even drifting as far as the public house where her friend Colin defends her honour. But these are isolated cases - for most of the film, we are tethered, to varying degrees of intimacy, to her subjective perceptual/narrative reach, and are even allowed to observe the breakdown of her perceptual apparatus. Eventually, however, we are forced to abandon her when it ultimately collapses completely. As Orr (2006) observes, Polanski, even more than Hitchcock, ‘develops the potentialities of the subject camera without ever lapsing into sentimental or melodramatic forms of empathy’ (7). The camera has the ability to watch Carole from various voyeuristic (and male gaze-based) vantage points, and is even privy to what seem to be purely hallucinatory experiences, but it is never
permitted to access her internal dialogue or any ‘insider’ information that might justify her (eventually murderous) behaviour.

The ‘distance’ offered by the tethered camera is particularly noteworthy in social circumstances. In the scene in which Carole has her lunch interrupted by Colin, the camera stays fixed on a medium two-shot; both characters remain in profile as they sit across the table from each other, with us adopting the view of an observer watching them from the next table. Rather than switching to a shot-countershot formula (the more usual shot combination for conversations like this, and one which Polanski is not adverse to using), Polanski instead holds the two-shot, which prevents us from adopting either character’s POV (approximate or otherwise). By doing so, the film avoids the shot-countershot formula as a means of emphasising desire through the close-up. Holding the two-shot allows us to observe rather than being ‘sutured’ to the gazer – in this case Colin, as Carole has little interest in gazing at men. The lack of shot-countershot continues throughout the film, with the camera maintaining its observational stance. There is, however, a notable exception. When Michael gazes outside the window at the nuns of Brompton Oratory below, Polanski does indeed use a shot-countershot, just before he ‘jokes’ about being invited to their ‘wild parties’. Later, the shot structure is repeated as Carole watches the nuns.

Whilst we do spend most of the film tethered to Carole’s narrative reach, we nevertheless remain separate from her. Carole is more the object of our voyeuristic gaze than she is an onscreen surrogate. But there comes a moment where our covert position is compromised, and Carole gazes back at us. After having already killed
both Colin and the landlord, we see Carole in her sister’s room applying make up and admiring herself in the mirror. Fully made up, she lies on the bed, on her tummy, with pillow under her hips. At first, it seems as though we are witnessing an autoerotic moment, but as the camera moves in, Carole turns over and the camera literally mounts her. It is at this moment that Carole looks directly at us, as if she has discovered her voyeur. The camera hovers over her as Carole’s head fills the frame. Surprisingly, she erupts into a giant smile, seemingly welcoming our presence.

The way in which this image is photographed is of particular interest in terms of Polanski’s use of natural perspective. Carole’s nose and lips seem disproportionately large, an effect that comes as the result of using of a ‘normal’ lens at close range, which distorts the dimensions of the face, much like the human eye does at this distance. A more flattering choice, perhaps, would have been to use a 100mm lens shot at double the distance away, which would have filled the frame with Carole’s head equally well, but would have ‘flattened’ her features somewhat, reducing the (quite natural) enlarging effect that occurs with proximity. Polanski’s choice to use the normal lens again reflects his preference for natural perspective as a means of drawing us in, even if that means the camera literally mounting the actress.

3.4. Representing a Perceptual Crisis

In addition to opening itself up to speculation regarding the aetiology of Carole’s mental state, we are invited to closely study her actions and even experience
perceptual distortions similar to those the film suggests she is experiencing; thereby Repulsion invites the spectator to reflect on the workings of perception – the ‘broken’ device shedding light on the nature of the mechanism. It is worth emphasising again the two-fold nature of Polanski’s approach, the manner in which he both realistically portrays various acts of perception on-screen (both sane and insane) and uses the same knowledge to influence the spectator’s own experience of the film. In other words, it is not enough to depict schizophrenia; the audience must also experience what it is like.

In Repulsion, Polanski’s uses both visual and aural aesthetics to draw the distinction between Carole’s imaginary realm and the diegetically real, a distinction that does not contradict Gregory’s view of the constructed nature of our (or Carole’s) perception of reality, as it serves only to stress the difference between hallucinations and healthy perception. It is of great importance to distinguish between what is and what is not diegetically real in Repulsion, and foremost to concede that the film does not prevent us as spectators from establishing this binary. In this regard, Repulsion is not as ambiguous, or ‘difficult’ a film as The Tenant or Rosemary’s Baby, both of which far more severely muddle the distinction between the diegetically real and imagined, as I shall discuss at length in the next two case studies.

Polanski is careful to reveal Carole’s breakdown slowly, with the film’s tension increasing in-line with Carole’s mental deterioration. As a direct result of this patient approach, the film manages to establish a close bond between the spectator and Carole before we confront the film’s darker events. For the first third of the film, we
are unaware of the trajectory the film is to take; instead we, through the inquiring camera, observe the minutia of Carole’s life, exploring, with her, the spaces she occupies: her place of work, her (sister’s) flat, and the streets she walks through to get from one to the other. In the first half of the film, however, rarely are we granted wider views of these spaces, as Carole’s head so often occupies the majority of the frame, particularly when she is outside the flat, wandering the streets of South Kensington.

Some initial signs of Carole’s illness are present from the outset, such as Carole’s vacant gaze in the very first shot, but these are built on so subtly that her descent into madness is nearly seamless. Whilst speaking with her sister, for example, Carole stares off screen, presumably at the kitchen wall or ceiling, and nonchalantly states that they ‘must get this crack mended’. The camera does not comply with our wish to see the crack she is referring to, and nor does her sister seem to register what Carole has said. At that moment, we, like Hélène, do not know what to make of this seemingly random statement. It is only in retrospect that we wonder whether the crack was there at all.

Optical distortions are also introduced early, and at first appear to be rather innocent, such as when Carole catches her elongated reflection on the side of a kettle and the ‘fish-eye’ perspective of the POV shot through the peephole (both shots are repeated in Rosemary’s Baby, and the latter in The Tenant). These distortions can of course be explained by simple physics, but it will not be long before other, more insidious, distortions begin to occupy the frame, generated not by light bouncing off or passing
though curved surfaces, but by Carole’s own brain. As these emerge, the camera is

granted increasing access to Carole’s subjective realm, so that we can both witness

and, to some extent, experience her psychosis.

There is a subtle, but significant, moment early on when Carole, examining herself in

a mirror, attempts to wipe away some invisible dirt from her nightgown. The scene is

immediately preceded by Carole’s accidental discovery of Michael shaving in the

bathroom, a startling moment for both her and the spectator, and a scene in which the

razor and the shirt (two objects that prove to be highly significant later in the film) are

first seen onscreen. From this moment on, the degeneration of Carole’s mental state

begins to accelerate, her strange ‘wiping’ being a somewhat clearer indication that

something more serious is wrong with the way she is interpreting the world, more so

than those merely ‘odd’ moments that precede it (her comment about the crack in the

wall, her vacant gazing, her pondering on her reflection in the kettle). A more startling

example of this behaviour takes place after Carole has comforted co-worker Bridget

(Helen Fraser) in their locker room. Left alone, Carole sits on a bench and stares

aimlessly at the floor as a sunbeam creeps through the small window and casts its

light onto the chair in front of her. When Carole notices the beam, she cautiously tries

to brush the light off the chair, just as she did with the ‘dirt’ on her gown.

If we hadn’t already guessed, the incident with the sunbeam gives us confirmation

that something is wrong with Carole’s ability to interpret stimuli. Here it is prudent to

access Gregory’s discussion of ‘visual semantics’, which allows us to understand the

experience of schizophrenic subjects in terms of a breakdown of their ability to
decode stimuli, a failure that can eventually form a chasm between the patient and the world. To illustrate his point, Gregory (1997a) provides the vivid example of the frog that starves to death whilst surrounded by dead flies, ‘for although they are edible it does not see them, as they do not move’ (8). Gregory is not, or course, suggesting that the frog is ill, but that its perceptual framework for food is determined not only by shape but by movement, and the animal’s steadfast adherence to this framework will result in its death. Possibly picking up on this very example, Polanski later has Carole reverting to a similar state in her flat, where she is surrounded by rotting food but has clearly lost the ability to identify these items or discern what should be done with them, as highlighted by the landlord who promptly throws the decaying rabbit carcass into the bin. Such behaviour becomes increasingly rampant; she writes a letter on a pane of glass, irons Michael’s shirt with an unplugged iron, and accidentally stabs a client in the finger with a nail filer – all indications of the missing connection between objects and how they are to be used.

Gregory discusses the process of correct identification of objects in terms of visual syntax and semantics. Like written language, there are visual rules (grammar) and meaningfulness of symbols, which are learned over time and stored as perceptual frameworks that are in a constant state of development as we accumulate experience with the world: ‘thus we pick up a glass to drink not simply from stimuli, but from knowledge of glasses, and what they may contain’ (Gregory, 1997a: 8). One of the key questions examined by Polanski in Repulsion is what happens when such learning is lost or becomes muddled due to mental illness. Fundamental to the concept of

34 The scene is strangely foreshadowed by Colin’s earlier criticism of Carole’s plate of fish n’ chips (‘You can’t eat stuff like that!’).
sanity is the ability to correctly identify objects according to their use. Our ability to perceive the ‘nature’ of an object is based on our ability to access learned schemas that inform us of what certain shapes represent as well as their particular usefulness. Our ability to access and use these perceptual frameworks largely determines our ability to interact with the world in what is considered to be a sane manner. In the case of schizophrenia, for example, such sensory-motor links often go wrong, leading the subject to misinterpret a given set of visual information, and possibly interpret perfectly harmless objects or situations as threatening (or vice-versa).

In the second part of the film, Carole’s hallucinations become increasingly intense, with the flat into which she has barricaded herself becoming an ever more bizarre place. One way in which Polanski depicts her distorted perception is by altering the dimensions of the flat, sometimes subtly, other times dramatically, to reflect her growing inability to interpret perspective. Besides the uncanny effect the distorted room has on the spectator, Polanski’s choice to depict her mental state in this way is also in-line with a clinically documented symptom of schizophrenia. Chapman and McGhie (1961) identify many schizophrenic patients, especially those in the early stages of the disorder, who experienced perceptual distortions, ‘transient alterations in the size, distance, and shape of objects’ (in McKenna, 1997: 10).

There are several shots of Carole staring at the furniture in her bedroom scattered throughout the film, but these become increasingly distorted as her mental state degenerates. After being groped by the invading hands in the corridor, Carole is seen lying on her bed staring at the chandelier above her. Her perceptual struggle is
punctuated as the perspective of the shot shifts radically, seemingly causing Carole to float upwards towards the ceiling. Here again the relative size of objects is compromised, illustrating the effect of her schizophrenic state on her grasp of perspectival space. Distortions like this are reminiscent of the deliberately constructed illusions described by Gregory, such as the experience of looking into an occupied ‘Ames Room’ (see Gregory, 1997a: 186), or, for that matter, entering one yourself. Polanski in fact constructs one of these rooms in Repulsion, which can be seen in the first occurrence in which the flat takes on altered dimensions.

I analyse Polanski’s use of the Ames Room in detail in my case study of The Tenant (Chapter 5.3 / Figures 5-10), but I will start this discussion here, in reference to Repulsion. Soon after Carole has killed Colin, she wanders through the flat’s corridor, which has now become extremely elongated, towards the bathroom. As she enters the bathroom, we see a severely distorted room in which her body takes on gigantic proportions and the bathtub appears to be much further away than we know it should be. Late in the film, after Carole has killed the landlord, she walks into a now greatly enlarged version of the flat’s living room. The camera is placed just behind her, so that we are allowed to experience the room over her shoulder, a close approximation of her POV that demonstrates her distorted perception. As we watch Carole turn aimlessly in the centre of the room, we too are tasked to try to make sense of this distorted space. Gregory discusses moments like this in terms of the ‘intriguing discrepancies’ that then emerge when natural perspective meets the distorted visions of the schizophrenic; there is a ‘tension between what is signalled to the eye and what you believe should be there’ (2003) that results, for example, from the changing
dimensions of Carol’s flat. The contrast is unnerving, but also philosophically stimulating in its emphasising of the malleability of our perceptions of the world.

Although much of the focus of this discussion centres on Polanski’s exploitation of the eye-brain relationship, his use of sound seems equally informed. Sound is also psychologically relevant in the way it appears to have a conditioning effect of Carole, which is especially notable when she experiences the attack whilst made up as her sister. Just as the camera mounts Carole and her smiling face fills the frame, the sound of bells dominates the soundtrack. In the preceding moments, starting with Carole’s rather childish application of lipstick in front of the mirror, the soundtrack was composed entirely of ambient ‘silence’, punctuated by the barely perceptible sound of a ticking clock. The bells radically shift the mood of the scene, as Carole’s smile swiftly disappears. We are repelled backwards as a hand shoots across the frame, grabbing her torso and marking the beginning of another rape.

We have heard these bells before. Early in the film, Michael and Hélène complain about their incessant clanging, joking about what it is, exactly, the nuns from the nearby Oratory are being called to, and when we first overhear Michael and Hélène making love, the bells accompany Hélène’s cries of pleasure. When Carole imagines being raped by the construction worker, the scene immediately cuts to a ringing phone, whose timber and rhythm closely matches the Oratory bells. When the landlord is attacking Carol, those same bells can again be heard ringing. At one point, Hélène comments that these bells sometimes ring at midnight, which suggests that the sound Carole hears is a veridical (i.e. diegetically real) stimuli, which has been
superimposed and associated with non-veridical stimuli (the hallucinations). The sound of the bells, paired as it is with these sexual attacks, suggests a Pavlovian connection between the two, the bells themselves provoking a conditioned response (Carole’s rape hallucination) by way of stimulus coupling. The fact that the bells are also linked to a Catholic source, a male-free sisterhood at that, possibly adds yet another layer significance. But whether an antecedent Catholic association with the bells themselves triggers Carole’s hallucinations, or whether the link between the bells and the rape is purely coincidental cannot be determined. Nevertheless, the diegetic coupling of these stimuli remains, and is used to connect these horrific scenes not just for Carole, but for the spectators as well.

McKenna (1997) lists a series of typical Affective symptoms related to emotional behaviour, including both negative symptoms (Affective unresponsiveness, Emotional withdrawal, Anhedonia) and positive symptoms (Inappropriate affect). In Carole’s case, her symptoms are greatly ‘negative’, as exemplified by her withdrawn behaviour both at work and in the company of men. So negative are these symptoms, that based on these alone her behaviour could well register on the autistic spectrum. A radical shift eventually occurs when her hallucinations seem to provoke delusions that cause her to overestimate the threat posed by Colin, who then becomes the victim of Carole’s extreme overreaction (a ‘positive’ symptom). Colin, much like Michael, may not be the most sympathetic character, but there is nothing to suggest that he is a legitimate threat to Carole’s safety, notwithstanding his often-aggressive courting technique. In fact, given the mental and physical state we know that Carole has been reduced to, his breaking down of the flat’s door is arguably justified. So whilst we may be ambivalent about Colin, his murder does come as a great shock.
The next murder, however, proves to be far more complicated emotionally, as the landlord is indeed positioned as a real threat to Carole.\textsuperscript{35} It is at this point when Carole’s delusion that men are attempting to break into the flat to rape her meets a veridical stimulus that confirms this belief. The emotional challenge of this scene, however, is entirely directed at the spectator; we must remember that for Carole, the line that separates the veridical from the non-veridical, rational belief from delusions, has collapsed entirely. Consequently, Carole constructs new conceptual frameworks based on these (hallucinated) experiences. Beliefs (delusions) about the world then emerge, which lead to the diegetically real violence she commits against two men.

For Carole, there is no difference between Colin, the landlord, the construction worker, and Michael. Her perception of each of these men is inter-connected, and all are equally real to her. As observers, however, we are afforded a level of distance that allows us to quite clearly distinguish between what is and is not diegetically real based on the specific aesthetics of these sequences, altered by Polanski’s use of visual distortions in the \textit{mise-en-scène} and choice of lenses, as well as the sound design in which an extra-diegetic muting helps distinguish between the (diegetically) veridical and non-veridical.

\textsuperscript{35} A third murder, that of Michael’s wife (who has mistaken Carole for her sister), was cut just before release. Polanski realised that having Carole kill this woman after she discovers the men’s bodies was far too ‘logical’ an act for a sufferer of schizophrenia, as well as being inconsistent with her delusions regarding men and women.
3.5. Deterritorialising Schizophrenia

As the film progresses and Carole’s behaviour becomes increasingly dangerous and bizarre, the temptation to speculate as to the cause of her mental illness grows accordingly. The film seems to encourage such speculation by offering several possible, for the most part psychodynamic, aetiologies for her behaviour. The fact that Carole is a foreign body in London, for example, immediately lends itself to readings that connect her ‘otherness’ to a feeling of victimisation. Whilst she is clearly linguistically accented, her ‘foreignness’ is not actually emphasised; it is explicitly mentioned only once (by Colin’s friend, jokingly, as a cause of Colin’s bad luck romantically), and Carole speaks English without obstacle throughout the film, even with her sister. In other words, the film offers little to allow us to make sense of her madness though an examination of her transnational experience.

The photo upon which the camera twice lingers (and on which the film ends), on the other hand, provides much fodder for close-readers of the film to engage in all manner of psychoanalytic speculation. In Goscilo’s (2006) reading of the image, for example, she affirms that young Carole’s sight-line is fixed on her father (or possibly her uncle), and calls her expression ‘a picture of alienated revulsion’ (30). She concludes her reading by confidently stating that ‘with admirable economy [the photo] establishes her schizophrenia as a result of paternal (or avuncular) rape’ (30) – a ‘diagnosis’ that completely defies clinical diagnostic criteria. Wexman (1985) interprets Carole’s malaise as stemming from the envy she feels in regard to her sister’s ability to both attract men and engage in pleasurable sexual relationships with
them, in combination with her own fear of being rejected due to a history of being compared, unfavourably, to Hélène (48-49). Carole’s odd behaviour regarding Michael’s vest certainly substantiates this reading, oscillating as she does between attraction and repulsion to it. At the peak of her madness, Carole is seen ironing this very vest, with a rather ineffectual (unplugged) iron. At one point, Carole also seems to play-act the role of her sister, by trying on her clothes, and applying her makeup.

It is clear that Carole has strong feeling towards her sister and that her emotional state proves to be heavily reliant on the monopolisation of Hélène’s attention. We know, for example, that Carole has followed her sister to London and relies on her for shelter. We also know that Carole has trouble making friends; try as she might, for instance, to bond with co-worker Bridget, she is unable to secure a social invitation from her, certainly unaided by the fact that Bridget discovers the rotting carcass of a rabbit in Carole’s purse, an occurrence indicating another of Carole’s behaviours strongly symptomatic of schizophrenia.36

At the risk of undermining my own more general argument regarding the pathogenesis of Carole’s condition, I will offer my own psychoanalytic take, itself a variation of Wexman’s. Carole’s malaise does indeed seem to be connected to her sister, and may well be rooted in her inability to become this other ‘Miss Ledoux’ due to her own repressed sexuality. Her desire to be in close proximity to females may well be her means of avoiding conforming to the female mould exemplified by her

36 McKenna discusses Collecting and Hording as symptoms of schizophrenia: ‘useless items like old newspapers, pieces of stale food, grass, stones, and dead insects are stuffed into pockets and handbags’ (1997: 23).
sister, a model of female behaviour that is not just heterosexual, but tailored specifically to fulfil male desire. Importantly, Hélène herself is not portrayed as an ‘acceptable’ woman in a moralistic sense, but her role as ‘other woman’ (or even ‘whore’, from Michael’s wife’s perspective) is still very much a part of the spectrum of the patriarch’s definition of woman; it is Carole’s sexuality, not Hélène’s, which is outside this framework.

Carole already works in an all-female environment, which affords her a kind of ‘protection’ (notwithstanding the irony of what her salon is producing), but even her sorority of beauticians cannot protect her completely from the gazes of men as she walks to work through South Kensington. Her own gazing at nuns emphasises that she is not entirely anhedonic, and that she seems to long to join the nuns behind the walls of Brompton Oratory. Thus Carole, like Trelkovsky in *The Tenant*, is thrust into the role of ‘female impersonator’ when she attempts to become her sister, very much in the same sense that Greer would use this expression a few years later.37

Intertwined with this reading of Carole’s identity crisis is the symbolic role played by her living space. The fact that she occupies a flat that is not her own (Carole even has to knock on the door to enter the flat when her sister is home) parallels this crisis. Just

37 In this regard, *Repulsion* arguably prefigures Germaine Greer’s discussion of the ‘transvestite’ in her now-famous book *The Female Eunuch*:

> I'm sick of peering at the world through false eyelashes, so everything I see is mixed with a shadow of bought hairs ... I'm sick of the Powder Room. I'm sick of pretending that some fatuous male's self-important pronouncements are the objects of my undivided attention ... I'm sick of being a transvestite. I refuse to be a female impersonator. (Greer, 1970: 70)
as she cannot assume her ‘correct’ (prescribed) identity, or even approach the object of her desire (Bridget, her co-worker), she also struggles to establish her ‘right’ to appropriate a dwelling space and lay down rules therein. The chaos that ensues in the flat reflects her inability to join the patriarchal heterosexual framework, to become the other ‘Miss Ledoux’.

For however ‘legitimate’ any of the above readings of *Repulsion* may be, whilst the film certainly offers nothing to contradict readings such as Wexman’s, Goscilo’s, or my own, it does not explicitly confirm them either. *Repulsion* simply does not allow us to reterritorialise Carole’s mental health the way *Psycho*, *Peeping Tom* and even *Shutter Island* (Scorsese, 2010) so neatly do, all ‘neatly’ linking the psychotic behaviour of their protagonists to repressed traumas. It would be difficult to argue that her complex relationship with her sister, or anyone else, was the *cause* of Carole’s schizophrenia. As is typical in Polanski’s work, truth is elusive. The possibility that Carole is dealing with her own repressed homosexual desire may well be legitimate, but rather than considering this to be the *cause* of her hallucinations, delusions and subsequent actions, the ambiguity of her condition’s aetiology prevents us from establishing a reterritorialised view of the illness.

Much in line with the emerging thinking about schizophrenia, Carole’s condition is *deterritorialised*, a much grimmer prospect as it prevents the condition from being linked to an identifiable and reliable cause. So rather than considering the above ‘analyses’ as pathogenetic, it is more useful to consider them as possible crises through which her illness finds expression. I would take this argument a step further:
far from being a cause of schizophrenia, if we accept the possibility that Carole is struggling with her sexuality, specifically in her interactions with Bridget, are those in which her behaviour appears most healthy.

Whilst the film does render the pathogenetic readings of Carole’s illness problematic, *Repulsion* puts on-screen a number of behaviours consistent with clinically agreed behavioural symptoms of schizophrenia. But as McKenna clearly establishes, this is a condition that ‘shows no obvious signs of having an underlying physical pathology… (n)or has there ever been much to suggest that it is connected in any very direct way with emotional trauma, childhood deprivation, or any of the other vicissitudes of life’ (McKenna, 1997: 98). Although a popular theory in the 1940s, the claim that schizophrenia could be linked to abnormal parent-child relations has been widely discredited, as summarised by Hirsch and Leff (1975). That being said, at the time of *Repulsion*’s release, these theories still had some currency (see, for example, Singer & Wynne [1963] and Laing [1964]). But *Repulsion*’s inclusion of an ambiguous familial back-story seems to reflect the conflict surrounding the aetiology of schizophrenia at the time, rather than take a position itself.

Let us consider again the mysterious photo in this light. Whilst the photo is not proof-positive of childhood abuse, it may at least provide some evidence that Carole’s mental illness could stretch back to her childhood. The camera twice lingers on this photo because, mirroring our own desire to reterritorialise the aberrant behaviour we have just witnessed, it seeks to both diagnose Carole’s illness and establish a cause. The camera’s lingering on the photo indeed encourages us to ‘read’ this image, but
just as in the afilmic psychiatric world, this is never as neat as it is in the movies; these few shreds of ‘evidence’ can just as easily be misleading. The photo, after all, is not an ‘action’ shot but a clearly orchestrated family portrait in which even the dog is forced to pose for the camera. Young Carole is clearly not interested in posing, and looks away, out of frame, wearing the vacant expression matched by Carole throughout the film. It must be added, however, that Carole is not alone in this behaviour. The photo also features an elderly woman who, like Carole, stares off-screen; her expressionless gaze shooting in the opposite direction as Carole’s.

Without wishing to stray into gratuitous over-analysis, but simply to demonstrate the ambiguous nature of this photo, I will offer another alternative reading of this image. The most noticeable aspect of this photo, and upon which the camera clearly does draw our attention, is the young girl’s diverted gaze. I, for one, do not see the ‘revulsion’ in young Carole’s face that Goscilo makes unquestioning reference to, nor I am sure that her gaze is fixed on the man to her left. Instead, I find the distractedness (i.e. from the task of posing for the camera) of the girl most interesting. Such lack of affect is indeed a cardinal symptom of schizophrenia (as well as autism), as is the onset of symptoms in young adulthood. Judging by Carole’s age in the photo, it is likely that she was entering puberty at this time. Although the dramatic events of the film take place over a relatively short period (a week or two, certainly shorter than the one-month period prescribed by the DSM for diagnosis of schizophrenia), the photo suggests Carole’s more subtle symptoms may have existed for some time prior to the starting point of the film, as far back as her childhood.
The inclusion of the elderly woman with an equally distracted gaze also suggests that Carole may not be the lone sufferer in the family, reflecting the genetic component of the disorder’s aetiology; and unlike psychodynamic theories, genetic predisposition to schizophrenia has indeed been scientifically substantiated, as originally demonstrated by Kallman (1938) and Slater (1968). Gottesman (1991) provides the most conclusive evidence of the genetic component of schizophrenia by pooling many gene studies and demonstrating a linear growth in the occurrence of schizophrenia when compared to levels of genetic commonalities, identical twins being the highest with near 50% co-occurrence. However, as the twin results most clearly demonstrate, genetics alone are not the total cause of the emergence of the condition. Similarly, we cannot deduce from the photo alone that there is an elaborate back-story to Carole’s behaviour; but it is worth noting that when Hélène is confronted by Michael’s suggestion that Carole should see a doctor, she is extremely sensitive about the topic – it seems as though she has heard this before (shame and denial are, of course, well-known behaviours associated with relatives of sufferers of mental illness).

3.6. Towards Even More Uncertainty

As the theory of indirect perception stresses, all perceptions, no matter how ‘sane’, are constructed; and whilst our brains interpret the stimuli from the outside world, there is no artefact of this representation, no reproduction of reality per se. In other words, our perception of reality is not reality itself – it is never complete, and always flawed. The depiction of Carole’s perceptual crisis illustrates the fact that it is the brain, not the eye, which identifies the elements of the external world; in other words,
it is the brain, not the eye, which ‘sees’. ‘Truth’, therefore, remains elusive to those who attempt to grasp it through their senses alone. The ramifications of this situation resonate throughout Polanski’s work, which, whilst using perception-based research to help decide where best to position the camera and which lens to use, is equally concerned with the philosophical, ultimately existential, conundrum Gregory highlights in his writing on indirect perception, which finds its expression both on the narrative and aesthetic plane.

Polanski’s attention to realistic detail in his representation of schizophrenic behaviour (perceptual and otherwise) in Repulsion becomes even more relevant when we consider the (afilmic) social and political realities that surround the fiction, namely the challenges being levied at the very existence of the condition by the anti-psychiatric movement. However, the film never lapses into academic didacticism, and nor does the work demand to be studied, as it functions extremely well as a ‘low art’ psychological thriller. It does not appear that Polanski’s aim in Repulsion is to educate us, but rather that he is taking full advantage of what is known about the brain to embroil the spectator into the work in an attempt to find the best way to create a truly unnerving cinematic experience.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Repulsion does seem to actively encourage psychoanalytic readings, especially through the camera’s enigmatic dwelling on the Ledoux family portrait. But it also subverts such readings by making everything

38 See Laing (1964, 1965, 1967) and Szasz (1960, 1971), as discussed in the last chapter.
potentially ‘readable’ but rewarding none of these readings outright, frustrating any would-be Freudian pathogenesis. There is nothing curative in Repulsion, nothing to act as a ‘warning’ for the rest of us. Schizophrenia remains a degenerative illness with no certain aetiology, and for which the ‘talking cure’ helps little. Ultimately, whilst Repulsion does explore the nature of perception, ‘clean’ psychoanalytic readings are severely obstructed. The more the film is unpicked, the more the final image of the photo seems to mock the very idea that Carole’s behaviour could ever be reterritorialised through explanation; by extension, Repulsion arguably also draws a parallel between cinematic close-readings of the film that attempt to delineate its absolute ‘meaning’ and psychoanalytic attempts to ‘solve’ severe forms of mental illness such as schizophrenia (and many others) by allocating blame to the past actions of the sufferers or those close to them.

In Repulsion, the deepest source of horror is not the violence perpetrated on or by Carole, but our empathy with her growing alienation from the world. This horror comes from the fear not only that such a thing could happen to us, but the realisation that it may not be something that can be cured or even explained. The same horror is present in both The Tenant and Rosemary’s Baby, where it is not so much the spectre of the supernatural that terrifies (which remains, in any case, unresolved in both films), but rather the characters’ inability to ‘grasp’ the world. Augmenting this horror are the enigmatic endings of the other two ‘apartment’ films, which serve to similarly upset the spectator’s own ability to ‘grasp’ a stable diegetic reality. In contrast to the next two films under investigation, whilst Repulsion shrouds the cause of Carol’s condition in mystery, it at least allows us to conclude that Carole was indeed afflicted with something, thus permitting us to breathe a (slight) sigh of relief that we are
(hopefully) different. Neither The Tenant nor Rosemary’s Baby is so generous, both of which set up even more severe epistemological crises for both the films’ protagonists and the viewer.
4. **Apartment Trilogy Case Study 2: Rosemary’s Baby**

4.1. **Embracing Ambiguity**

In *Rosemary’s Baby*, the perceptual discourse Polanski initiated with *Repulsion* is continued, leading ever towards deeper explorations of what Gregory suggests are the ‘philosophical implications’ of the theory of indirect perception, which I believe to be essentially existential in nature. In the process, *Rosemary’s Baby* also touches on a variety of relevant psychological and societal issues, most evidently the influence of gender and religious affiliation on identity formation. As in *Repulsion*, Polanski utilises visual aesthetics to both heighten the spectator’s engagement with the cinematic image through a careful combination of lenses (this time wider than those used in *Repulsion*) and camera distance, and then provokes in the spectator perceptual effects that simulate the perceptual crises undergone by Rosemary herself by distorting the perspectives that have thus far seduced our brain’s sense of diegetic space. *Rosemary’s Baby* also takes this strategy a step further than *Repulsion* by creating a diegesis in which the line between what we are to believe is real and that which is imagined, dreamed or hallucinated by Rosemary becomes so blurred that our concept of diegetic reality becomes destabilised. We are therefore forced to speculate in order to re-stabilise our personal understanding of the diegesis, but the closer one looks, the more ambiguous it seems to become.
It is this sense of disorientation created in *Rosemary’s Baby* that most markedly differentiates it from *Repulsion*, and in turn establishes *Rosemary’s Baby* as an evolution in Polanski’s perceptual discourse. I consider *Rosemary’s Baby* to be a more ambitious film than *Repulsion* due to its more complex and ambiguous treatment of mental health. Both the complexity and the length of this case study reflect the ‘difficult’ nature of this film compared to *Repulsion*. Notwithstanding having revisited *Rosemary’s Baby* on a multitude of occasions over several years, I must admit that I have yet to establish a satisfactory or stable reading; I have therefore elected to give up trying to ‘de-code’ it, but instead embrace its ambiguity and the multiple strains of thoughts that emerge from engaging with this film.

There is, however, what I believe to be a valuable mode of reading *Rosemary’s Baby* that is in-line with Gregory’s description of the theory of indirect perception and which warrants a brief introduction. The phenomenon discussed by Gregory that I suggest is most relevant to this discussion of *Rosemary’s Baby* (and looking, forward, to *Death and the Maiden* as well) is that of the ‘visual ambiguity’ (1997a: 205); that is, the carefully constructed optical illusions that highlight the brain’s inability to simultaneously see contradictory images within the visual field. Famous examples of ‘shifting’ visual ambiguities include B.G. Boring’s ambiguous figure of the old/young woman (see *Appendix: Figure 4*), or the ‘duck-rabbit’ illusion, as well as many basic shapes in which the brain, faced with identical retinal images, is forced to oscillate its perception of said image, perpetually incapable of settling on one as its ‘true’ representation.
Any attempt to reconcile the two images is both futile and uncomfortable. What I am suggesting by bringing up this phenomenon is not that *Rosemary’s Baby* literally contains such ‘trickery’ (although pro-filmic illusions are indeed employed by Polanski at times, as I shall discuss in my case study of *The Tenant*), but that the film as a whole operates as an ‘ambiguity’ in which competing ‘realities’, especially those that delineate the difference between the diegetically real and the diegetically hallucinated, perpetually clash in the mind of the spectator, especially the ‘close reader’. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that this ‘clashing’ of realities is also highly reminiscent of many works identified as ‘postmodern’, a label that I believe helps our understanding of *Rosemary’s Baby*. As Calinescu puts it, ‘in the postmodern view, there simply is no “reality” that might validate … hypotheses, even under ideal conditions’ (1987: 305).

I propose that the most interesting, perhaps most ‘fruitful’ way to approach *Rosemary’s Baby*, is to follow the Deleuzian ethos of not speaking about the film, but rather speaking with the film (see Deleuze, 1989: 268). So what I attempt here is not so much a reading of *Rosemary’s Baby*, but rather to present an analysis that seeks to map the various conflicting ideas that the film provokes. The result is a case study of *Rosemary’s Baby* that at times may appear ‘muddled’, as my intention here, above all, is to explore the deep ambiguity of this film by often countering my own (and others’) readings in the process of discussing them. On this note, I shall begin this case study *Rosemary’s Baby*. 
4.2. The Outsiders Come In

One of Polanski’s most repeated motifs is that of the ‘insider’ versus ‘outsider’, often expressed in the form of a character’s perceived national otherness. But nationality is rarely an absolute factor in this determination. In Repulsion, for example, I have suggested that it is not Carole’s Belgian identity that establishes her as an outsider as much as it is her inability to cope with heterosexual social interactions. I will return to this issue in my case studies of The Tenant, Frantic and The Ninth Gate, but it is worth highlighting now that, like Repulsion, in each of these films the protagonist is positioned as national other in the context in which ‘he’ (a problematic pronoun in reference to Trelkovsky) finds himself. But whilst both The Tenant’s Trelkovsky and Frantic’s Dr. Walker are portrayed as ‘outsiders’, in The Ninth Gate, although Corso is an American in Europe, he maintains an ‘insider’ status, and eventually becomes the ultimate insider; but more on that later.

In Rosemary’s Baby the notion of the national other is nuanced somewhat by the fact that Rosemary and Guy are both immigrants to New York, not from other countries, but from other American cities. Early in the film, they visit their new neighbours, Roman and Minnie Castevet (Sidney Blackmer and Ruth Gordon) for dinner, in which the pleasantries of initial conversation reveal that Guy and Rosemary are from Baltimore and Omaha respectively. Their hosts, on the other hand, are ‘authentic’ New Yorkers. So Rosemary and Guy, whilst both American, are nevertheless positioned as outsiders in the process of becoming insiders as they carve out a life for themselves in the city. Their task is made more difficult due to the lack of support from greater familial structures in this area, a conspicuous absence that conveniently
allows the Castevets to take up this role. For Rosemary, these new ‘parents’ serve to usurp the place of another surrogate parent, Hutch (Maurice Evans), Rosemary’s former landlord.

So in their attempt to achieve ‘insider’ status, first and foremost, Rosemary and Guy secure an extremely centrally located flat, within walking distance of the theatres in which Guy hopes to work. For Rosemary, the task is now to conform to her role as young wife, with a view towards motherhood (hence the size of the flat). For Guy, the task is to achieve success in the city as an actor, an occupation with a highly uncertain earning potential. Without some ‘initial breaks’ (as Roman puts it), Guy will not be able to live up to his ‘role’ as rent payer for this flat, which Guy is well aware is outside their price range - a fact Rosemary seems blissfully (or wilfully) unaware of.

In lieu of parental support, Guy initiates his trajectory towards ‘insiderness’ by adopting the Castevets as parental figures, through whom there seems to be a chance he can get these ‘breaks’ given Roman’s connections in the theatre world. In the process, Hutch is expelled from his role as counsellor to the young couple, and thus Rosemary becomes fully divorced from both her own parents and adopted father figure in order to fully join Guy’s new ‘family’ (further symbolised, of course, by her customary assumption of her husband’s surname). But whilst Guy become more and more an ‘insider’, Rosemary’s ‘outsiderness’ becomes increasingly pronounced. It is her Catholic upbringing that proves most relevant in this regard. This religious element of her identity is first highlighted over dinner with the Castevets, when Roman, Minnie and Guy all openly criticise the Pope, who is currently visiting New
York. There is also a reference to Guy having played a role in *Luther*, a subtle indication of her husband’s protestant affiliation (a possible explanation for Rosemary’s alienation from her family - an element of the novel Polanski leaves ambiguous in the film), but most importantly it is Guy’s lack of a dominant religious framework that differentiates Rosemary from her husband, as well as from the Castevets who show no respect for ‘her’ Pope. Even though she claims not be a practicing member, she is unable to shed the psychological baggage that sustains her (parentally-imposed) Catholic identity – an identity crisis that seems to greatly inform the perceptual crisis that ensues later in the film.

Rosemary’s double status as Catholic out-of-towner indeed contributes to her being an ‘outsider’, but both of these elements seem subservient to the more fundamental issue of her *gender* as determinant of her ‘outsiderness’. Rosemary is granted opportunities to become an ‘insider’ through the acceptance of her identity as Guy’s wife and by conforming to the framework of behaviours he prescribes, but her struggle to establish her own self-actualised identity seems incompatible with this role. I suggest that Rosemary’s perceptual breakdown can be read along the lines of Lacan’s much-cited provocation ‘*la femme n’existe pas*’ (1975: 68), which suggests that she is a ‘symptom’ rather than a being in and of herself. Rosemary’s crisis can be seen as a manifestation of this very identity struggle, with her attempt to become a self-actualised woman in a patriarchal framework being portrayed in this film as a form of madness. But like *Repulsion*, there seems to be such great care taken in the realistic portrayal of Rosemary’s psychosis, that upon ever-closer analysis one begins

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39 ‘Woman does not exist.’
to wonder whether such a reading is itself overly superficial. The possibility that these repressed ‘stressors’ are simply informing, rather than causing, schizophrenic behaviour in Rosemary must also be considered in parallel; and whilst I will discuss the various conflicting readings that emerge from my own close reading, I can promise no ‘resolution’.

4.3. Setting the Fly Trap

In earlier chapters I have discussed Polanski strategy of enhancing the spectator’s engagement in terms of visual and aural techniques aimed at creating a ‘wraparound’ effect. In *Rosemary’s Baby*, Polanski also plays with generic expectations as a means of heightening engagement, but ever towards that same goal of ‘luring’ us in so as to make the shocking moments to come that much more effective. Catering to generic convention through colour palate, musical score, performance style, and dialogue type serves as an effective ‘lure’ by establishing a diegetic framework that, at first, meets spectator’s expectations. Thus, in a manner analogous to the perceptual verisimilitude sought through the use of natural perspective, by setting up particular aesthetic parameters in line with the conventions of a certain genre, the brain can be put at ease.

The initial ‘generic lure’ in *Rosemary’s Baby* does not come by way of the horror genre, but rather by an opening act that is more suggestive of a Hollywood romantic comedy. To help achieve this goal, Polanski originally sought to cast Robert Redford to play the role of Guy Woodhouse (see Polanski, 1984: 251), in what would have been a fundamentally against-type choice. Redford’s own star persona (which still
persists) would have undoubtedly greatly informed spectators’ reading of his character, making his betrayal of Rosemary even more shocking due to the ‘betrayal’ of spectators’ expectations as well. John Cassavetes instead brought no star baggage to the role⁴⁰, and so the impact that Redford would have had was somewhat diluted.

Mia Farrow, on the other hand, did indeed possess some star power of her own, known at the time for her role on the TV series ‘Peyton Place’, as well as being as the young bride of American institution Frank Sinatra. The opening exchange between Guy and Rosemary and Farrow’s general ‘bubbly’ innocence are all suggestive of a city-bound comedy along the lines of Wilder’s *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) or *The Apartment* (1960), not quite a satanic nativity play or the story of a young woman’s psychotic breakdown. So we are ‘seduced’ not only by the painstaking details of the *mise-en-scène*, but the film’s (initial) adherence to misleading generic tropes. Granted, the effect of this strategy is greatly enhanced by a combination of time and place of first viewing and ignorance of the story arch. Given the infamy of the film and its marketing strategy at the time of its release, a spectator without a basic idea of the narrative trajectory would have been rare indeed, but this does not necessarily undo the effect completely, as these opening scenes still maintain an aura of innocence and fun that greatly impact the shocking nature of the second act and the tension of the third.

At a purely visual level, *Rosemary’s Baby* marks an advance compared to *Repulsion*

⁴⁰ If recognised at all, Cassavetes would have been identified as an *avant guarde* New York director.
both in terms of production value (the ‘quality’ of the mise-en-scène and effects) and cinematography. Having just completed *Dance of the Vampires*, Polanski had direct experience with the wide-screen format and colour stock, but here he moves from ‘Metrocolor’ (aka Eastmancolor) to the more vivid Technicolor, a stock that Andrew (1979) suggests actively promoted ‘a Hollywood notion of colour’, which was ‘purer than reality’ and ‘almost whorish’ (46) in its artificiality. The use of colour further contributes to Polanski’s trick of reinforcing the generic expectation of the Hollywoodian romantic comedy; this is, after all, not only the colour film used by most Hammer films, but the palate of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hawkes, 1953). Eventually, however, these same hyperreal tones would be put to a far more disturbing use, as the colour become disturbingly saturated, even ‘bleeding’, during the various ‘dream’ sequences.\(^41\)

Polanski also widens the screen compared to *Repulsion*. Whilst not quite the 2.33:1 of *Dance of the Vampires*, in *Rosemary’s Baby*, Polanski opts for a 1.85:1 ratio (compared to *Repulsion*’s more boxy 1.66:1), a format that allows for the extension of the horizontal visual field, but without overly inhibiting the need to convey the ‘verticalness’ of the urban environment in which the film takes place.

Even more so than *Repulsion*, *Rosemary’s Baby*’s tethered camera keeps us close to its protagonist through the use of wide-angle lenses that help create a sense of intimate proximity. Pizzello (2000) argues that the ‘primal grip’ exerted by Polanski on the audience in his thrillers in particular is greatly down to the director’s

\(^{41}\) There is an interesting effect worth pointing out here regarding the rape sequence’s use of colour. There is a point at which the colour distorts completely, seemingly separating into green, blue and red, as if the three layers of the Technicolor stock have come unglued.
‘insistence on visual consistency throughout a film’ (40). Whilst this is largely the case, Polanski does sometimes intentionally compromise this ‘consistency’ for dramatic effect. As I have already discussed in reference to Repulsion, Polanski mixes natural and distorted perspective to create a ‘Venus fly trap’ effect. Richard L. Gregory himself praises Polanski’s use of natural perspective in Repulsion as a means ‘drawing’ the brain into the diegesis (2003), which then allows him to amplify the shock value of the distortions that follow. In Rosemary’s Baby, Polanski takes advantage of the heightened depth of focus afforded by the wide-angle, using a 25mm lens for most of the film to simultaneously keep us close to Rosemary and to create a sense of depth around her. When distortion is called for, Polanski switches to a more extreme 18mm lens (Pizzello, 2000: 40) to heighten that ‘tension’ between the eye and brain that occurs when the stimuli that strike the retina differ from what the brain expects to see (Gregory, 2003).

In light of Gregory’s comments regarding Polanski’s use of natural perspective in Repulsion, it is pertinent to stress that Polanski’s method of achieving perceptual verisimilitude is not limited to the use of a ‘normal’ (50mm) lens. But the use of the wide-angle lens carries with it the risk of distortion that could compromise this very aim of verisimilitude (even a 25mm lens, which falls well short of causing the ‘fish eye’ effect). Polanski mitigates this risk through informed camera placements, thus allowing for a heightened depth effect without compromising perceptual engagement. As Polanski himself explains it to an interviewer:
A wide angle distorts only inasmuch as you put the three-dimensional world onto the two-dimensional screen ... At a distance of two metres, your face would not be distorted. So it’s not the angle that changes the perspective, but the distance. (Polanski in Thomson, 1995:9)

So the creation of a sense of onscreen ‘depth’ is yet another manner in which Polanski attempts to increase perceptual verisimilitude and heighten the ‘wraparound’ effect. Whilst his use of wide-angle lenses serves to augment the depth effect by provoking awareness of the area surrounding the subject, Polanski also uses shot structures and set architecture to create a realistic 3-D effect for which no special glasses are required. A subtle, but effective, example of Polanski’s calculated use of depth is his frequent visual references to intra-frame concealed space. In order to access this space, we are encouraged to want to move ‘into’ the frame; sometimes the camera complies, sometimes not. In Rosemary’s Baby, an interesting example of this effect occurs in a scene where Polanski uses cigarette smoke to beckon us into this concealed space. After dining with their new neighbours, Rosemary’s husband Guy retreats to the parlour with Roman whilst Minnie and Rosemary (of course) wash up in the kitchen. Rosemary is distracted and peers into the next room whilst Minnie carries on with the dishes. We are granted a countershot to observe what she gazes at, but rather than being shown the source of her interest, we, like her, see only smoke drifting in from the other side of a doorway. What results is a sort of ‘negative’ effect – the desire to penetrate the space we know is there (i.e. the desire to look around the corner) is augmented by the denial of access to it. Furthermore, this denial of access serves to heighten our sense of the extent of diegetic space by encouraging us to think
about concealed or out-of-frame space, rather than present a diegesis that is completely contained (and visible) within the frame.

Whilst far less technologically complex than using a stereoscopic camera, a 3-D effect is achieved nonetheless, and without the use of distracting gimmickry or special glasses that risk undoing the totalising experience that the film sets out to deliver. Polanski returns to this method several times in this film and others, but sometimes to differing effect. In the sequence where Guy receives a phone call in which he is offered a starring a role in a theatre production (due, of course, to the original star having come down with an unfortunate bout of spontaneous blindness), Rosemary carefully approaches the room to which he has retreated to take the call. Rather than staring at the doorway, this time the camera seems to obey our desire to look around the doorframe and get a better look (or perhaps just hear better) at what is going on in the room. The camera pans across the hallway to let us look in, as if the cinema audience had changed the angle by collectively tilting their heads to the right. Rosemary then enters frame, reinforcing the fact that the ‘view’ we are experiencing is not that of Rosemary herself, but still that of our nominal observer to ‘whom’ she is tethered. She moves directly to the door, her mastery of the space finally allowing us to look in as well.

More than just strengthening the spectator’s ‘suture’ to the film, these types of shots (and there are many - the ‘doorway shot’ in particular being one of Polanski’s favourites) demonstrate the strong bond between visual style and narrative content in Polanski’s cinema, where style sometimes becomes a form of content. In Rosemary’s
Baby, off-screen space is of the utmost relevance, for it is these spaces that hold the answer to the question of whether Rosemary’s perceptions are veridical or non-veridical – the issue from which the film’s tension is largely derived. As we, with only marginally more information than Rosemary herself, try to put the pieces of the puzzle together, it is these above-mentioned off-screen moments that inform our understanding of what has transpired: it must have been at dinner party that Roman Castevet planted the seed of the ‘unholy pact’ in Guy’s mind, and it must be to this apartment that Guy so often retreats and where the decisions are made as to Rosemary’s fate.

It is only when Rosemary penetrates the wall between the two flats that she has her worst fears confirmed. In other words, the appropriation of knowledge, understanding, and above all safety, is linked to the appropriation of space and the overcoming of physical obstacles (walls, doorways). In line with my introductory discussion of the flats in this trilogy serving to represent ‘cranial’ spaces, we can interpret these barriers not only as physical impediments to perception (we cannot see through them and sound is heavily muffled), but also as symbols of the insurmountable gap between the subjective, personal (neurological) sphere of perception and the true nature of the external physical reality with which we, and these characters, engage. But whilst we may struggle to overcome this gap, to embrace reality, to do so risks sacrificing the borders of selfhood. To do so also risks entering the territory of schizophrenia, where the ability to distinguish between veridical perceptions and self-generated non-veridical perceptions becomes compromised.
4.4. Trading Places and the Oneiric Image

Just as in *Repulsion* before it, in *Rosemary’s Baby* a flat nestled in a large urban centre, this time the Dakota building in Manhattan, serves as the setting for a perceptual crisis. *Rosemary’s Baby* also germinates the seed planted in *Repulsion* regarding psychosis and the appropriation of living space. Where it is Carole’s sister, Hélène (and her boyfriend), whose presence dominates *Repulsion*’s South Kensington flat, in *Rosemary’s Baby* it is the lingering presence of a recently deceased former tenant, the aged Mrs Gardenia, that must be removed from the flat as a first priority in order for Guy and Rosemary to truly claim the space for themselves.

The task of redecorating falls to Rosemary, who gives the flat a makeover so extreme that it is no longer recognisable to Mrs Gardenia’s old friend Minnie. But notwithstanding the changes made to the look of the flat, Rosemary’s assumption of Gardenia’s space seems to carry with it an assumption of some aspects of her identity as well. The film first establishes a connection, superficially at least, between these two women through the horticultural allusions in their names, ‘Gardenia’ and ‘Rosemary’, as if the latter has been cultivated in the former. Rosemary is in fact initiated into the geriatric community of the Bramford (as the Dakota is renamed) by neighbours Minnie and Laura-Louis (Patsy Kelly), who almost literally push their way into Rosemary’s living room and establish a knitting circle as if it was still their old friend’s flat, sending Rosemary a clear signal of the ‘vacant’ position she is expected to fill, in spite of her young age.
But it is not only the late Mrs Gardenia to whom Rosemary is connected. Early on Rosemary meets Terry, a young woman of about her age who lives with the Castevets, who claims they ‘picked [her] up off the sidewalk, literally’. In a scene horribly reminiscent of Terry’s comment, soon after Rosemary and Guy find her body splattered on the pavement outside the Bramford. It is at this point that they meet the Castevets for the first time, which initiates their relationship with the old couple.

When Minnie and her friend Laura-Louis later come to visit Rosemary (the ‘knitting circle’ visit), not only is Rosemary positioned to take the role of Mrs Gardenia in their social group, but she is also ‘nudged’ into the role of Terry when Minnie gives Rosemary the same piece of jewellery that she had previously given to Terry, a necklace with an unusual charm filled with ‘Tanis root’.

Rosemary’s connection to Terry is emphasised on the night of Terry’s death in a sequence that establishes the confusing role the oneiric image will play in this film. As Rosemary lies in bed, the camera glides across her face, her eyes wide open, and drifts onto the wall behind her. The wall turns red and morphs into an image of Terry in a pool of blood, her eyes also wide open. We then start to hear murmurs. It has already been established that Rosemary and Guy can hear across this partitioned wall, particularly Minnie with her rather loud voice, whom they have heard bickering with Roman (and even asking him to get her a ‘root beer’). Breaking the silence (a ‘silence’ punctuated by Guy’s heavy breathing and the sound of a ticking clock), we hear Minnie say the rather ambiguous phrase ‘sometimes I wonder how come you’re the leader of anything’. But the stimuli become muddled here, for it does not appear
to be Minnie saying these words, but rather an old nun. We return to the bedroom, where we see (and hear) Guy asleep and Rosemary beginning to drift off. There is a thump, and we hear Minnie again:

MINNIE

Please don’t tell me what Laura-Louis said because I’m not interested! If you'd listened to me we wouldn't have had to do this! We'd have been set to go now instead of having to start all over from scratch! I told you not to tell her in advance! I told you she wouldn’t be open-minded!

But again, it is the nun speaking with Minnie’s voice, pointing to a group of men blocking up a window, the damage to which Rosemary seems to know something about.

Here we have the first example in *Rosemary’s Baby* of the film’s attempt to represent Rosemary’s subjective perceptual experiences in a manner that gives our surrogate observer access to diegetically unreal (oneiric, at this point) images. What is particularly noteworthy here is the way in which oneiric imagery (the nuns, the bricklayers – both, interestingly, reminiscent of *Repulsion*), recent memories (Terry’s body), and what are likely diegetically veridical stimuli (the murmuring across the wall) mix to such an extent that it is difficult to distinguish between them. The scenario is subsequently repeated (but in a far more extreme manner) in the film’s infamous rape scene, the event upon which any interpretation of *Rosemary’s Baby* hinges.
4.5. ‘This is no dream; this is really happening!’

In order to best appreciate the complexity of the rape sequence, I propose to address it along several different, but interrelated, axes. Firstly, in line with the primary focus of the rest of this analysis, the sequence shall be examined structurally and aesthetically, with special attention paid to the psychological/perceptual effect of the cinematic techniques employed and the possible readings that emerge from this approach. Secondly, it is useful to acknowledge the possible psychoanalytical (as opposed to psychological) readings offered by this sequence, and how these issues may actually inform the above-mentioned ‘perceptual effect’. Thirdly, and again, following on directly from the previous points, it is important to consider the ideological issues raised in this sequence, specifically in the context of the feminist concerns surrounding the film (and for that matter, much of Polanski’s work). Although the primary focus of this discussion remains the two-fold nature of perception in Polanski’s cinema (i.e. the way in which Polanski represents acts of perception and the way the films themselves serve as objects of perception for the spectator) the issue of gender in this film simply cannot be dodged, even in the specific context I propose here. So I must take account of some of the feminist criticism of this sequence and the film as a whole; in turn, I will also offer another take on the gender issue in this film.

The step forward that Polanski’s perceptual discourse takes in *Rosemary’s Baby* is perhaps best exemplified through a comparison of its rape sequence with those in *Repulsion*. My basic contention is that the manner in which *Repulsion* portrays the violation of Carole slightly *reduces* the horror of the rape as it is anchored in a
hallucinatory context. The horror is instead mostly derived from witnessing the
character to whom we are tethered experience such horrific *hallucinations* due to her
increasingly tenuous grasp of reality. In other words, it is the details of her breakdown
that are most disturbing, not the rapes themselves; due to the aesthetics of these
scenes, as disturbing as they are, we remain quite certain that these events are not
really happening.

It is significant that in *Repulsion*, the first time we witness Carole being attacked by
the construction worker the linearity of time is maintained. There is no indication, for
example, that this is a memory, or even a nightmare derived from a memory. It
happens in the film’s actual-moment, not in flashback, but is nevertheless
aesthetically divorced from the diegesis; there is a stylistic shift that signals a ‘non-
reality’ or hallucinatory moment. At a visual level, the lighting is more
expressionistic, the close-ups more extreme, and the angles more bizarre than usual.
Perhaps even more dramatic in its difference to the film’s established aesthetics,
however, is the use of sound in these sequences. The overlapping of on- and off-
screen diegetic sound, such as that of the church bells, appears to serve as a trigger to
Carole’s hallucinatory moments, and the radical aesthetic shift that signals them.
What is immediately striking about this shift is the lack of coordination between
sound and image. Carole’s scream, for example, goes unheard; it is replaced instead
by a bizarre wailing that is not readily identifiable, but certainly not of human origin.
The normally ubiquitous ambient sounds of the room, the flat and surrounding area
(piano lessons from neighbouring flats, the muffled sound of the lift, traffic, planes
flying overhead, etc.) are completely absent and the soundtrack is instead dominated
by seemingly extra-diegetic noise.
It is precisely this lack of logical (i.e. in-line with sensory expectations) diegetic sound (on- or off-screen) that allows us to comfortably identify these moments as ‘non-realities’ or hallucinations within Repulsion’s diegetic reality. That is not to say, however, that these scenes are not still repulsive. The fact that we are provoked to process the image and fill-in the sound may well be the very reason these scenes are so disturbing, but due to the inherent safety-net offered by the hallucinatory-image, I propose that the deepest horror of Repulsion lies not in these horrific images, but the realistic portrayal of the way in which Carole has ‘lost touch’ with reality, and the more basic horror this evokes, namely the idea that such a condition is even possible.

The narrative tension of Rosemary’s Baby, as the title suggests, hinges entirely on the rape that takes place in the second act and the strong suggestion that this event is directly responsible for Rosemary’s pregnancy. The conventional reading of this scene is that this is a diegetically-real event, which indeed causes Rosemary to become pregnant with no less than the Antichrist himself. On closer analysis, however, competing readings emerge that destabilise one’s understanding of the diegesis. Where Repulsion makes it quite clear that Carole is suffering from some kind of serious mental illness, Rosemary’s Baby offers no such certainties, whilst at the same time offering just as robust, if not more so, a reflection of the cardinal symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. The key difference is that in Rosemary’s Baby we are tethered more firmly to Rosemary than we are to Carole in Repulsion, and as a

42 A reading reflected by the hundreds of plot summaries of Rosemary’s Baby readily available online and in most of the Polanski-based literature.
result *Rosemary’s Baby* offers little to counter what reason dictates should be a hallucinatory-image, such as being raped by the Devil. As spectators we are encouraged to accept these events, however bizarre, as part of the diegesis just as Rosemary does. The fact that the horrors of *Rosemary’s Baby* are virtuoso riffs on horror genre conventions, in which we *must* accept the existence of the supernatural (or at least deeply evil characters) as diegetically-real, muddles matters even more.

The rape sequence in *Rosemary’s Baby* immediately distinguishes itself from the one in *Repulsion* in that it is preceded by a scene in which Rosemary is clearly intoxicated and collapses into bed. ‘You didn’t fall asleep, you passed out! Next time cocktails or wine,’ says Guy the next morning. But Rosemary *does not* pass out, not right away at least. What follows is an account of this scene, the details to which I will refer to several times as my discussion progresses.

In this sequence we are presented with a variety of images – some of which logic tells us must be diegetically non-veridical (i.e. representations of Rosemary’s perceptual experiences that are not based on diegetic stimuli), but others of which are more ambiguous. Just as she closes her eyes, there is a cut to an image of Rosemary, still lying on her mattress, floating on water (a lake, or perhaps the ocean). The camera is placed just behind Rosemary’s head, approximating her POV without actually adopting it, so that we too can look over her prone body as it undulates on the water. The impact of such a shot not only mimics that sense of nausea that accompanies both seasickness and drunkenness (the ‘floating mattress’ is no doubt a familiar experience to many of us), but also serves to set up a sensory-motor logic that will be echoed in
the events to come. Paralysed by her alcoholic stupor and/or the toxic ‘chocolate mouse’, she is unable to physically stabilise herself (vividly demonstrated by her fall in the corridor), and so her perceptual mechanism seems to generate an image that matches her physical state.

The scene returns to the bedroom with the camera hovering over Rosemary as she discusses the failure of ‘baby night’ with Guy. As usual, we remain very closely tethered to Rosemary, with the shot-countershot between her and Guy coming close to, but never matching, either POV directly. What is more significant here, though, is the fact that the camera continues the undulating motion of the previous shot, subtly moving in and out and in turn triggering in the spectator a minor version of that sense of nausea Rosemary is feeling.

The scene, visually but not aurally, then abruptly cuts to Rosemary, new drink in hand, on a yacht mingling with who appear to be the Kennedys. Penetrating Rosemary’s psyche further, the camera reveals what seems to be a clear-cut representation of an oneiric-image, one in which our notional observer (Polanski’s ubiquitous ‘inquiring camera’) seems to have infiltrated her dream space. At this point, there is no difficulty for the spectator to distinguish between the oneiric and the diegetically real. The camera hovers on its tether around the boat, exploring its surroundings. The image of water is momentary superimposed in the frame, but fades

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43 I borrow the term sensory-motor from Behaviourism to refer to the way the brain matches up information from the senses to what it deems an ‘appropriate’ motor response. In the example of Rosemary ‘floating’ on her bed, the situation is reversed, with the response (nausea) dictating the ‘logical’ perception (the floating mattress).
out quickly as the camera (and what we believe to be a close approximation of Rosemary’s oneiric gaze) moves across a map and rests upon the captain, a Kennedy look-alike. As he puts his Captain’s hat on, however, he seamlessly (in the cut) ‘becomes’ Rosemary’s friend Hutch in a moment of corporal transposition reminiscent of dream scenarios discussed by Freud (1952: 46). So thus far, the details of this sequence seem to indicate that Rosemary is not hallucinating, like Carole, but dreaming. Such a judgement, however, is greatly based on the fact that the narrative suggests that Rosemary is falling asleep (or passing out), but the matter is heavily complicated by Rosemary’s level of intoxication and the fact that she may even have been drugged, the latter in particular a possible cause of hallucinatory perceptions.

A minor digression is in order here to address the difference between hallucinating and dreaming, and furthermore, how this difference is relevant to the discussion at hand. Both dreams and hallucinations share the definition of being non-veridical, objectless-perceptions that masquerade as objective representations of antecedent reality, and in cinema both should be considered as diegetically-non-veridical. As the dream perception is ‘believed’ in the oneiric-moment, the body is placed into a state of paralysis during REM sleep, so as to avoid what would otherwise be appropriate sensory-motor responses (precisely what ‘goes wrong’ in sleepwalkers). Upon waking, the dream is either quickly forgotten or recognised for what it was – a non-veridical perception. As a result, the dream does not normally become part of future a priori judgements of reality. A hallucination, on the other hand, remains indistinguishable from reality in the perceiver and thus influences his or her judgement of veridical stimuli, which can in turn lead to the formation of delusions.
In terms of its effect on the spectators’ understanding of a diegetic time structure, a dream sequence need not cause a perceptual crisis \textit{per se} (nor, for that matter, does a flashback); when a dream is clearly delineated, or ‘framed’, as spectators we have little trouble accommodating these types of sequences into the diegesis, as we can, with little effort, categorise what is real, dreamed, hallucinated, flashback, etc. when the film provides a structural or aesthetic means of distinction. In other words, crisis is averted when we know what’s what, and when what Deleuze calls the ‘actual-image’ remains intact.

In \textit{Rosemary’s Baby}’s rape sequence, Polanski manages to blur the dividing line not only between hallucination and reality, but the three-way junction that connects non-veridical and veridical stimuli, namely the dream, the hallucination and reality. The notional observer that guides our gaze becomes so embroiled in this oneiric moment that we are not able (not now, not ever) to satisfactorily determine a sense of diegetic reality that is not directly linked to Rosemary’s perceptions. We can be no more sure than Rosemary herself if she is dreaming, hallucinating, or whether these perceptions are based on external stimuli - an uncertainty that remains until the end of the film.

After the JFK-Hutch body swap, we move below deck where the diegetically-real and oneiric again mingle, where Guy begins to remove Rosemary’s body suit as she leans back on the lower deck ladder (i.e. her bed). The scene again returns to the bedroom as Guy continues to remove Rosemary’s clothes, finally yanking the garment off on
the deck of the yacht, our view again positioned at a low angle, closely matching what could be Rosemary’s own POV. We now watch Rosemary at very close proximity, still on the yacht, where she tries to cover her nakedness with her arms. The dream mechanism complies with her wish for clothing; Rosemary is now one of a number of bikini-clad women on deck, all of whom surround the ship’s captain, the JFK simulacrum. We then see Hutch walking away from the ship, corporeally separated now from the JFK persona, who explains to Rosemary that the ship is for ‘Catholics only’, an explanation she seems to accept.

At this point the sequence begins to even more severely muddle the veridical and non-veridical, as we lose the ability to distinguish between what is real, dreamed, or hallucinated. The image of Rosemary having her wedding ring removed, for example, is ambiguous, as it could be diegetically real, although we are not sure for what reason it would occur. The image of her being hoisted up to the roof of the Sistine Chapel, on the other hand, cannot be diegetically-real, so we accept it as dreamed. Likewise, Hutch’s cry of ‘Typhoon!’ is a dream-image, but what of the seemingly random ‘Easy, easy. You’re holding her too high’ that we hear just as Rosemary passes (we pass) under a doorway arch? The images become increasingly bizarre: Rosemary is now warned by a ship-hand steering the yacht (‘played’ by the Bramford’s lift operator) to move below deck, where she finds herself in a dark room in which a large building, what looks like a church, burns in the background. She walks towards a bed, where she lies down, naked, and is surrounded by a number of nude chanting geriatrics.
Amongst the group are a number of characters we recognise. Neighbour Roman Castevet, clad in a black robe and a rather Papal looking black hat, applies red paint to Rosemary’s body. We recognise another neighbour, Laura-Louis, chanting with the crowd, and then Minnie Castevet and Guy, also naked and chanting. At this point there is a verbal exchange between Guy and Minnie that again confounds our diegetic understanding of the scene. ‘She’s awake, she sees,’ says Guy to Minnie, who replies ‘She don’t see. As long as she ate the mouse she can’t see nor hear, she’s like dead.’ (The ‘mouse’ is question seems to be a reference to Minnie’s mispronunciation of ‘mousse’ in the scene before.) Such a blatant reference to the question of Rosemary’s consciousness now seriously compromises our reading this image as ‘unreal’, and so the horror of the scene becomes accentuated. As if to counter this sentiment, however, Rosemary is then visited by a woman (who can only be Jackie Kennedy) who counsels Rosemary and recommends that she is tied down due to the possibility of convulsions brought on by her ‘mouse bite’. Rosemary is then bound and raped by Guy, whose face and body, in a manner similar to the dream/reality shifts that occurred at the start of this sequence, are interchanged with that of a monstrous beast. It is here that Rosemary makes the statement that she, and we, will have to grapple with for the remainder of the film: ‘This is no dream,’ she screams, ‘This is really happening!’ Rosemary’s head is then covered by a hood. She is approached by the Pope, who also consoles her about her ‘mouse bite’. During this conversation, we can see by Rosemary’s upper torso movement that the rape continues, until the scene fades completely to black.

The detailed structural analysis of the dream/rape sequence I provide above raises several (ultimately unresolved) questions regarding the diegetic reality of the
narrative. I have outlined the basic visual (and to a lesser extent, aural) structure of the sequence in an attempt to detail the manner in which the sequence is presented to the spectator, who is cajoled out of his or her (leaving gender aside, for the moment) ‘passive’ engagement with the unfolding diegesis, towards the more ‘active’ role needed to decipher the stimuli. I keep the terms ‘passive’ and ‘active’ in quotes here to differentiate them from the manner in which the theory of indirect perception (to which this discussion is wedded) uses these terms, keeping ever mindful of the fact that in its presenting of such ambiguous imagery, the sequence is highly evocative of this model of perception in its call for active engagement, reflecting indirect perception’s insistence that perception, all perception, is a cognitively active act of hypothesisation and judgement. In contrast, cinema in which diegetic reality is portrayed unambiguously, and indeed Polanski’s own attempt to create a perceptual ‘wraparound’ effect, tries to create in the spectator a more ‘passive’ state, in which the brain relaxes so that the screen image is more readily accepted. Here again we return to the concept of the ‘fly trap’, in which the perceptual mechanism is lured into a more relaxed state, but only to set up a startling reminder that this mechanism is actually never passive.

4.6. Reverence, Rape and Religion

In the scene that follows the rape sequence, we see Rosemary asleep in her bed being woken up by Guy. Our real-time analysis of the previous sequence spills over into this scene when we notice that Rosemary is covered by scratch marks, just as she makes reference to ‘the dreams [she’s] had’. For a moment we are compelled to conclude that whilst much of what we have witnessed was dreamed, some of it must have
indeed ‘really happen’. So at this point the situation seems relatively clear – Rosemary has been raped by the Devil – until, that is, Guy struts back into the room, and jests, ‘Don’t yell, I already filed ‘em down [referring to his nails]. I didn’t want to miss baby night.’ Rosemary accepts the explanation and speaks no more of her ‘dream’. Whilst Guy’s statement reintroduces ambiguity, it also furnishes an extremely unambiguous element of the diegetic reality - there is no doubt about whether or not Rosemary was raped, merely how, and by whom (or what).

Rosemary offers a rather weak protestation to Guy (‘You could have waited!’), but quickly moves on, seemingly accepting the rape as a structural component of their marriage. It is Rosemary’s acceptance of marital rape that has earned the film (and Polanski himself) some well-founded accusations of misogyny, such as Haskel’s description of Rosemary as ‘lobotomised’ (Haskell, 1987: 346–7). Mazierska, who ultimately offers a feminist take on Polanski’s cinema, concedes that Polanski’s portrayal of feminism (and feminists) can be seen to have ‘an infantilising effect on men while at the same time failing to empower women’ (2007: 129). Throughout the next set of case studies, I shall endeavour to nuance this argument slightly by emphasising that both men and woman are infantilised in equal measure, and there is little empowerment on offer for anyone in Polanski’s cinema, as mastery is that which remains most elusive, including for the spectator.

I also propose an alternative take on this sequence and, in turn, of the film, which opens up a more complex reading of Rosemary’s Baby in terms of its treatment of gender. As a whole, the film echoes some of the most fundamental concerns of the
feminist movement of the time, and even some that continue to resonate today. But as is normally the case with Polanski, instead of resorting to reductive didacticism, these issues are presented in all their frustrating complexity. I do not claim that Polanski’s cinema is either pro-feminist or misogynist, but rather that both misogyny and feminist concerns add to what is an even greater meditation on the perceptual mechanism and how this informs concepts of identity. That being said, I do hope to demonstrate that whilst *Rosemary’s Baby* and other of Polanski’s films (*Death and the Maiden* in particular, which I will discuss in a later case study) portray misogyny, this does not make the works inherently misogynistic.

A key point that is often confused by close-readers of *Rosemary’s Baby* concerns the ambiguity regarding the diegetic reality of the rape. Whilst I argue repeatedly that *Rosemary’s Baby* in a highly ambiguous film diegetically-speaking, this is one of the few elements that is actually crystal clear. Even critics who have re-evaluated this film in a pro-feminist light have ‘fallen’ for the trick played by the film and have overlooked a key detail; I believe Mazierska, for example, over-estimates the parallel between *Repulsion* and *Rosemary’s Baby* in her suggestion that in both of these films the ‘rape might only have taken place in the woman’s imagination’ (2007: 131). Fischer, who devotes her entire article to contextualising *Rosemary’s Baby*’s depiction of pregnancy in a feminist framework, refers to the event as a ‘warped rape fantasy’ that ‘mocks woman’s “designated” coital stance: passive and undemanding’ (1992: 9). She does not, however, put much emphasis on the impact of the rape (and its repression) on Rosemary’s mental state, but rather shifts her discussion to addressing Rosemary’s own ‘fantasy’, which Fischer suggests ‘evokes the primitive belief that human males are removed from procreation’ (9).
Rosemary is distracted from the situation by Guy, who immediately normalises the fact that he has had sex with her whilst she was unconscious. A similarly distracting event takes place with us as spectators. We are so preoccupied with resolving whether or not Rosemary, like Carole, has imagined the sexual attack, that our thoughts are deflected (surprisingly easily) away from the issue of marital rape. The important difference between Rosemary and Carole is that where in Repulsion we are reasonably sure that Carole has not actually been raped (in the course of the film, at any rate), in Rosemary’s Baby it is only the details of the rape that are ambiguous, for it is diegetically certain that she has been raped by someone and this has likely resulted in her pregnancy.

It is worth allowing for a temporary lapse into some amateur psychoanalysis here in order to highlight the various means by which the sequence can be interpreted in a feminist context. As a way of dealing with the fact that she has been raped by her husband (which she accepts as true at the time) and his subsequent attempt to normalise the event, Rosemary psychologically re-casts Guy in the role of Satan, an extension of her own guilt for having abandoned Catholicism. Rosemary’s religious upbringing is portrayed as a lingering issue, not only in the way that she cannot bring herself to criticise the Pope (notwithstanding her own professed agnosticism) but also

44 The dialogue of this exchange aptly sums up the situation:

Guy: It was fun, in a necrophile sort of way.
Rosemary: I dreamed someone was...raiding me. I don't know, someone inhuman.
Guy: Thanks a lot! What's the matter?
Rosemary: Nothing.
in the way that her residual Catholic sense of identity is oneirically emphasised in the images of the nuns who educated Rosemary as a child, as well as the various images of the Vatican and the Pope. Also relevant is the presence of the Kennedys, who include Rosemary as an ‘insider’ who belongs with them on their yacht (‘Catholics only’). It is also worth noting that the rape sequence and the suggestion that it results in the impregnation of Rosemary is itself an aggressive critique of the ‘immaculate conception’, the absolute reality of which is so heavily emphasised in Catholicism. (Mary, of course, is not asked for her consent to being impregnated, but is simply informed of it.)

It is along these lines that much of the film can (alternatively) be understood. It is her repression of both her marital rape and the greater identity crisis in which she finds herself that fuel Rosemary’s hallucinations and delusion, in which the element that contribute to her crisis is re-interpreted (‘re-cast’) by way of Catholic mythology, and in turn represent a regression back to her childhood frameworks of reality. The (protestant) husband who rapes her in her sleep is re-cast as the Devil, the ‘big city’ neighbours and their friends as witches – all the sort of extreme ‘Catholicised’ distorted beliefs and perceptions indicative of grandiose delusions. It must be emphasised, however, that whilst the attribution of the content of Rosemary’s hallucinations and resulting delusions are tied to her upbringing, this is not meant to imply causation. The cause of her psychosis remains ambiguous, but the ‘colouring’ of her crisis does seem to be informed by these childhood experiences and her gendered identity, the frameworks into which her distorted perceptual mechanism seems to have retreated as the result of her psychosis.
There are actually an abundance of small ‘clues’ scattered throughout the film that either effectively counter Rosemary’s beliefs (suggesting that she is in fact, delusional) or can be argued to have served as ‘source’ material for her non-veridical (hallucinatory or oneiric) perceptions and subsequent delusions. Occurrences like the quip that Guy makes when he gets a role due to another actor’s tragic ailment - ‘Hell of a way to get it’ – and the discussion between Guy and Roman about ‘initial breaks’ subconsciously unite to suggest a Faustian pact. The name of the root (or mould) in Rosemary’s charm, ‘Tanis’, is a phonetic anagram for Satan. The herbs grown by Mrs Gardenia and Minnie, and even Minnie’s jocular rhyme, ‘Snips and Snails and Puppy Dog Tail’, are all evocative of antiquated notions of witchcraft.

There are many more such tiny examples that could all be argued to ‘colour’ Rosemary’s delusions and non-veridical perceptions, but most significant perhaps is the influence of Hutch, a writer of boys’ adventure stories, who seems to relish in sharing with Rosemary his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Bramford’s grizzly past, which seems to be the information that feeds Rosemary’s delusions above all. But what are we to make of the appearance of a young Roman Castevet in the witchcraft book Hutch gives Rosemary? In the book, Roman is called Steven Marcato, son of the notorious Bramford witch, Adrian Marcato, killed by a mob outside the building. Rosemary’s de-codification of ‘Roman Castevet’ as being an anagram for ‘Steven

45 All of them Witches – a title that sounds like a pronouncement from the Spanish Inquisition or Salem witch hunters.
46 ‘Outside the Bramford’ was also where Terry’s body was found. (Twenty-two years after the film’s release, this is also where John Lennon was murdered.)
Marcato’ certainly seems to resolve the issue of Rosemary’s sanity, but again this ‘certainty’ does not last long; as both Guy and Dr. Sapirstein (Ralph Bellamy) quite reasonably point out, Roman’s father may well have been a ‘nut’, and thus his desire to change his name.

Rosemary’s crisis of self-actualisation is essentially that of the transition from childhood to adulthood, in which the dependence on others to define one’s identity is meant to be replaced by autonomous identification. Embroiled in this struggle is of course that of her role as Guy’s wife, which itself entails a prescribed identity to which she must conform – a variation on the conceptual framework with which she was brought up, but still consistent with the idea of a framework being imposed on her rather than self-generated, positioning the role of wife as similar to that of a child. This element of Rosemary’s crisis is actually two-fold. On one hand, she is forced to reject many of the conceptual frameworks imposed on her by her parents, most obviously that of her Catholic identity, not only in order to meet her husband’s ‘requirements’, but also those of her new environment (as represented by the Castevets). On the other hand, Rosemary is also struggling with her own desire for self-actualisation, a framework of being-in-the-world that is self-determined, not one imposed by either her parents or her husband. Rosemary’s own ‘schizoid’ sense of identity is reflected in the names she considers giving her unborn child. Whilst the ‘boy’ name remains consistent (‘Andy’), there is a new ‘girl’ name every time she mentions it, changing from Susan to Sara to Jenny.
Notably, Rosemary is supported in this struggle by her group of female friends, who gather around her as her crisis takes hold and physically block her husband from intervening. The scene, which takes place in Rosemary’s kitchen, is a reminiscent of (or arguably foreshadowed by) the knitting circle we saw earlier, but with a group of younger women replacing the geriatrics. The scene occurs during their party for Rosemary and Guy’s ‘young’ friends, and seems, at least with the luxury of retrospect, to be an allusion to the late-sixties feminist movement.

Although made in 1968, a year in which New York City saw a series of anti-war protests, there is no indication of these events in *Rosemary’s Baby*, as it is notably set two years prior to the time of its release, taking place from the summer of 1965 to the summer of 1966. Notwithstanding the chronological proximity of the time of its setting and the time of its filming and release, Polanski claims to have taken great care to ‘re-create the specific mood and atmosphere of the year in which the action took place’ (1984: 249), ensuring that costume design and hair styles (Rosemary’s Vidal Sassoon haircut in particular) were all in keeping with the trends of 1965 and 1966. Another touch, the iconic cover of *Time Magazine* that read ‘Is God is Dead?’ (published in April, 1966, the exact time Rosemary visits her doctor) heightens the sense of chronological verisimilitude as well as adding a ‘highly topical allusion’ (249) to the film. The most relevant historical reference, of course, is the mention of Pope Paul VI’s appearance at Yankee Stadium in October 1965, which Rosemary and Guy watch on TV, and which later greatly colours Rosemary’s hallucinations. The inclusion of details such as these would leave no doubt in the mind of first-run audiences that the diegesis was not intended to be contemporary, but was deliberately set in the recent past.
Whilst there is no direct mention of politics in the film, the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy, a fellow Catholic, is still very much on Rosemary’s mind, coming to the fore in her dreams and/or hallucinations (depending on how these perceptions are interpreted). Even more apparent is Rosemary’s Baby’s focus on the psychological struggle of a young woman, which is also very reflective of the mid-1960s, the short era just after the release of Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystic (1963), but before her founding of the National Organisation of Woman (NOW). In fact, the birth of the child in Rosemary’s Baby actually takes place on the eve on the official founding of NOW at the end of June, 1966.

A key issue that women such as Friedan were championing at this time was the battle against a patriarchal order that ‘forced them into home-bound vicarious lives’ (Cullen-DuPont, 93), arguably the very predicament that Rosemary finds herself in. In contrast to many of the women of the Swinging London films I discussed earlier, Rosemary is not a ‘single girl’ finding her way (herself) in the big city; she has already been there for some time, has found a husband and is now ‘settling down’ in an aspirational (family) home. Rosemary seems quite contented with her role as a ‘house-wife’ (with an eye towards motherhood) at the start of the film, but this serenity is soon threatened. Her trajectory towards despair and even psychosis can be read to parallel the psychological stress, even cognitive dissonance, many women of her age must have felt; raised to become a mother and wife, women like Rosemary were now hearing from increasingly vocal social critics like Friedan, who were evolving the agenda put forth by the suffragettes of the generation before (and others).
and very publicly denouncing the very framework of the family, as it was conceived, for its inherent subjugation of women. As I discuss below, Rosemary becomes increasingly aware, but perhaps only subconsciously, of a pressure to become self-actualised, an identity crisis that is played out in the form of an inter-connected perceptual crisis.

Also highly relevant here is the criticism of the chauvinist birthing industry offered by Rosemary’s friends, an issue that persists to this day. When Rosemary re-states these criticisms to Guy, he takes the side of Dr. Sapirstein, echoing the misogynistic system of male collusion in the birthing industry – a criticism often raised by the midwifery movement. As Fischer (1992) discusses, it is Minnie Castevet who caricatures the traditional role of the midwife – a figure that is itself historically associated with witchcraft, but which has now been ‘reclaimed’ by feminists. ‘Like the ancient midwife,’ writes Fischer, ‘she must transfer her power to the male physician … who, nonetheless, relies on her expertise’ (8).

The events of the film prove to further emphasise his critique, especially evident in the scene of forced injection (another rape), and the coarse manner in which Guy and Sapirstein deliver the news of the death of the baby to Rosemary. Sapirstein even echoes the birthing industry’s condemnation of home births (‘At the hospital I would have been able to do something about it - but you wouldn’t listen’), and thus places the blame on Rosemary for the death of the child. Guy’s treatment of Rosemary seems remarkably ‘old school’, especially from a 21st-century perspective, but also when framed in the popular historical-mythology that surrounds the 1960s, but Guy’s
behaviour would not have been incongruent with the mores of America in the mid-1960s, as at this time neither feminism nor the greater liberal movement had taken hold of America to the extent that popular mythologies of ‘the sixties’ might lead us to believe. Whilst musicians like Hendrix, Joplin and The Grateful Dead, and books such as *The Feminine Mystique*, Leary’s *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964) and Masters and Johnson’s *Human Sexual Response* (1966) may be well remembered today, the ‘silent majority’, as Nixon famously referred to it in 1969 (Heineman, 2009: 79), was becoming increasingly intolerant of radical new attitudes towards race, war, drugs, sex and women’s rights. So whilst America in the 1960s may be remembered for its ‘flower power’, race-riots, feminism and the anti-war movement, there was also a growing backlash against liberalism because of the increased public awareness of ghetto rioting, marijuana use, and violent protesting, which the liberals were perceived to be soft on (Matusow, 2009: xv). The tenacity of this conservative attitude is embedded in the subtext of *Rosemary’s Baby*. There is no question whatsoever of Rosemary finding a job, for example, and both her and Guy’s roles are clearly delineated by gender. Even the morning after the rape, Guy ‘playfully’ commands Rosemary to make him breakfast, but there is no doubt that he means it; and when the decision is made to have a baby, it is Guy who allows (indeed, *commands*) Rosemary to get pregnant.

But Rosemary mounts a subtle but significant resistance to her prescribed identity, again reflecting the embryonic women’s movement. There is a covert power struggle between Rosemary and Guy in which she tends to exert her will in whatever small ways she can. The scene at the dinner table where they bicker over Minnie’s chocolate mousse is a good example of this struggle, where Rosemary ‘tricks’ Guy
into thinking he is getting his way. (It is interesting that the mousse, or ‘mouse’, would figure so significantly in the following sequence.) The most explicit example of Rosemary’s resistance to Guy’s control is her Vidal Sassoon haircut, which she gets in her second trimester. Her new look simultaneously serves as an act of resistance and a visual manifestation of her post-adolescent identity struggle. The haircut is as much androgenizing in its rejection of her role as female impersonator as it is infantilising in its reflection of her stunted self-actualisation.

Rosemary’s more minor acts of resistance to Guy are eventually replaced by the seemingly impossible task of resisting a much larger version of the patriarchal order. Significantly, Rosemary is completely isolated in this task. She attempts to find support from Dr. Hill (Charles Grodin), but is betrayed by another act of male collusion. She tries to call her friend Elise (Emmaline Henry), but her effort is stymied. The image of a heavily pregnant Rosemary walking down a New York street holding a suitcase in the middle of a heat wave punctuates this isolation. Rosemary is forced to utilise whatever weapons she has left in her arsenal. Once captured by Guy and Sapirstein, Rosemary resorts to dropping her bag in the lobby of the Bramford, causing the men to scramble to collect the mess. She dashes for the lift and takes hold of the old-fashioned lift controls. The image of the diminutive, although heavily pregnant, Rosemary wrestling with this giant machine, just as the image of her on street, is highly symbolic of her lone (pre-NOW) struggle against the patriarchy.

Having been both invaded and now impregnated, Rosemary has completely lost dominion over her own body to men, including to the ‘man’ growing inside her. We
can push this corporeal motif further: just as we consider the flats she and her fellow Apartment Trilogy protagonists occupy as manifestations of these characters’ neurological (or cranial) space, we can also reverse the scenario and consider Rosemary’s own body as an occupied living space that is being taken over by a new tenant (an issue I will return to in the next case study, in which Trelkovsky also believes himself to be pregnant).

One possible feminist reading of the film’s portrayal of Rosemary’s psychosis emerges through an exploration of the way in which the film establishes her desire for a self-actualised identity as equivalent to psychosis. In order to assume the role imposed on her, Rosemary is forced into a schizophrenic state; highly elaborate and bizarre hallucinations and delusions are induced by the imposed nature of her identity and her inability to face or even understand her emotional reaction to marital rape. It is possible that Rosemary’s inability to rationally face this appropriation of her body is due greatly to the lack of an established linguistic or conceptual framework to deal with such trauma at the time - the term ‘spousal rape’ itself historically considered as oxymoronic. It is therefore both unfair and unfounded to judge Rosemary’s failure to overcome patriarchal control by today’s standards, or even those of the year of its release. Lacking a greater framework through which she can comprehend the ills done to her, her conflicted emotions instead find expression through these bizarre delusions. In this sense, Rosemary’s experiences in the film serve as manifestation of the truly radical departure from the widely accepted conceptual frameworks that her

47 ‘Spousal rape’ was not considered to be a crime in any part of the US until 1976, and it was not until 1993 that it was criminalised in all states. To this day, there are several states that still consider ‘spousal rape’ to be a lesser form of rape.
desire for self-actualisation (even the idea of self-actualisation) represents. What *Rosemary's Baby* explores is the idea that within the greater patriarchal conceptual framework, a woman’s desire for an identity independent of this order is schizophrenic, the desire for self-actualisation being so dissonant with the established ‘reality’ that the subject is diagnosed as delusional.

Rosemary’s religious crisis also serves as social critique as it connects pre-self-actualised modes of thought with religious belief. The ambiguity surrounding whether or not Rosemary is delusional results in a provocative metaphor for the difficulty in shedding the conceptual frameworks imposed in childhood, especially those that are connected with one’s personal sense of identity. Where certain mythical beliefs, such the belief in Father Christmas or the Tooth Fairy, are relatively easy to shed due to the inherent incompatibility of these myths with more dominant conceptual frameworks that are learned both didactically and through direct personal experience (with the laws of physics, for example), the often equally irrational beliefs associated with religious narratives are not as easily shed due greatly to the strongly imposed notion that one’s religious affiliation is somehow *genetically* prescribed. So powerful is this notion that irrational belief structures, most of which would certainly qualify as delusions in any other context, are maintained both in the face of a multi-faith world in which religious narratives openly contradict each other, as well as overwhelming evidence that religious myths are just as spurious as our childhood belief in Father Christmas. The portrayal of Satanists in *Rosemary's Baby*, and again later in *The Ninth Gate*, is an unapologetic mockery of religion. Catholicism seems to be the prime target here, especially when we consider this witches’ coven as a caricature of the Church itself, which in turn reflects the Catholic binary that locks all notions of
good and evil within its own narrative. The fact that Rosemary is unable to truly rid herself of this parentally imposed religious conceptual framework runs parallel to her inability to become a self-actualised personality, to ‘grow up’.

4.7. Reading and Re-Reading the Finale

The line between sanity and insanity can be defined as having been crossed when a subject is unable to correctly interpret or appropriately react to stimuli from the external sphere, but in Rosemary’s Baby diegetic reality and hallucination are muddled to such an extreme that at times it becomes impossible for either the troubled protagonist or the confused spectator to distinguish between the two. Ultimately, these represented acts of perception serve to challenge the very concept of attaining ‘certainty’ through the senses, as they demonstrate the complex nature of perception in both the insane and sane subject, as competing perceptual hypotheses of what is, and what is not, clash without resolution.

According to horror movie convention, the finale of Rosemary’s Baby should be the moment in the film where the various ambiguities are resolved and that the diegetic stability is re-established, a process which the horror genre tends to exploit to maximise shock value. This is the moment where the killer’s identity is revealed, where the protagonist’s worst fears are realised, and where her ‘crazy’ ideas are proven right. Whilst Rosemary’s Baby does indeed seem to follow this pattern, there are many ‘clues’ scattered throughout the film and in this scene that suggest such a straightforward reading is in fact not as stable as it might first appear. The film’s
finale in fact lends itself to an abundance of readings, all of which fall into two basic ‘high-level’ categories: either Rosemary is delusional or she is not - with several more detailed readings emerging on each side. But however the finale is read, it is unlikely to yield much satisfaction in terms of re-stabilising the diegesis.

In fact, so unsatisfied was writer Ray Bradbury with *Rosemary’s Baby*’s ending (‘I simply do not believe or accept the ending … Nonsense. Also: balderdash’ [Bradbury, 1972: 149]) that he actually felt compelled to publish a new one. Bradbury, an undisputed master of the horror genre, re-imagines the film’s ending in which Rosemary flees with the child and takes refuge in a Cathedral, where she begs God to take His ‘son’ back (reminding us that Satan, too, is God’s son). Let us compare this to not only Polanski’s ending, but Levin’s as well. Levin is far less ambiguous than Polanski regarding the ‘nature’ of the child, whom he describes in great detail. Levin also describes Rosemary’s thoughts when she sees the baby; she contemplates grabbing the child and fleeing, or even jumping through the window with him. Bradbury would allow her to do so, fulfilling the religiously antagonistic narrative thread but removing the psychological ambiguity in the process. Polanski takes the exact opposite strategy, both denying us direct visual access to the child (in contrast with Levin, whose text ‘visualises’ the child for us) and having Rosemary ‘betray’ our expectations of her. Where Levin seemingly confirms that the child is a supernatural monster, Polanski denies this certainty. Where Bradbury insists that Rosemary should champion the Christian cause, Polanski has her (either diegetically or as part of an elaborate wish-fulfilling delusion, depending on one’s reading of the scene) dismiss what remain of her religious convictions in favour of her natural instinct to mother the child come what may.
The vitriolic nature of Bradbury’s reaction to the ending of the film highlights the subversive nature of the way Polanski tends to end his films. Generic expectations are toyed with, but, as we see in *Rosemary’s Baby*, are ultimately subverted by narrative swerves that empty the films of ‘meaning’. Satisfaction is indeed denied, and in its stead comes a hunger to explore the minutia of these works (these *worlds*) and in the process engage with the existential discourse that these films put forth. We do not simply take on board what Polanski’s cinema has to say, but are encouraged, to return to Deleuze’s notion, to ‘speak along with’ these films, not (just) ‘about’ them. (Deleuze, 1989: 268). It is with this attitude that I approach *Rosemary’s Baby*, especially the final scene.

The most common way of understanding this sequence is that which is most generically based. Here we assume that our protagonist cannot possibly be delusional, as convention dictates, and the ending simply confirms that she was right all along, irrespective of how insane her beliefs were. Two more possibilities stem from the ‘high-level’ assumption regarding the presence of the supernatural. It is of course possible, as Dr. Hill himself suggests, that these are ‘witches’ in name only, but ‘witches’ who believe so strongly that they do indeed pose a legitimate threat. The film actually offers no opposition to this reading, for there is no explicit moment in which the supernatural becomes a diegetic reality. Even the rape scene, in which we see what looks like a beast molesting Rosemary, can be explained by the same logic through which the image is profilmically understood, i.e. it is a person dressed as the Devil. Similarly, the question of the appearance of the baby, which we are never
shown (the eyes that the scene briefly cuts to are actually an image from the rape scene, not an image of what is in the cot), may well be the result of what these ‘witches’ have literally ‘done to him’, precisely the words Rosemary cries out when she first sees him. In this reading it is of course the ‘witches’ who are delusional (unless, that is, their religious beliefs are officially ‘recognised’), not Rosemary.

But there is a further possibility here, in which the presence of the supernatural is an established diegetic reality. In this case, neither Rosemary nor the witches are mad. The ‘supernatural’ scenario is actually the most simplistic, even most re-territorialising in that the presence of a supernatural force (in this case, the Devil) takes the blame for the disruption to what we hold (hope) to be the natural order. In this reading, mental health and perception are re-established as robust elements, which whilst susceptible to interference from supernatural forces, can be protected from this through homage to the ‘right’ supernatural being. But even following this line, Rosemary’s Baby does not provide any salvation through exorcism. Sides are chosen, and (departing radically from generic conventions) the Devil wins.

The second basic manner through which the scene can be understood is one more in line with the perceptual discourse that most greatly informs these case studies. If we take up the film’s challenge of ‘diagnosing’ Rosemary’s behaviour, we need not be psychiatrists to see that there is much evidence to support an interpretation of her mental state as psychotic, her beliefs as delusional, and the various bizarre images we are presented with throughout the film as manifestations of her hallucinations. Polanski provides little evidence in the film to diegetically confirm the reality of these
events, and in fact provides many indications of the opposite, at every step offering alternative, logical explanations to counter Rosemary’s ‘paranoid’ ideas. In terms of the final scene, however, the situation becomes even more complex, for it certainly does appear that these ideas are being diegetically confirmed. The counter-reading here is that at this point the camera, our notional observer, has become so closely connected to Rosemary’s own ailing perceptual mechanism that it now ‘sees’ only through the filter of her psychosis.

Heightening the ambiguity of the film’s diegetic reality is the fact that whilst Rosemary’s behaviour is indeed highly ‘diagnosable’ as schizophrenic, the film also presents much evidence to the contrary. Rather than being consistently portrayed as suffering from a distorted perceptual mechanism, Rosemary is often presented as a highly effective perceiver, even a ‘hyper perceiver’ (a concept that figures greatly in my discussion of the second trilogy). Rosemary often notices small details missed by the other (male) characters. It is she that first notices the closet hidden behind Mrs Gardenia’s wardrobe (a piece of furniture that figures prominently in many Polanski films, starting with Two Men and a Wardrobe [1958]), what would eventually prove to be a ‘secret passageway’ to the Castevets flat; or, as is also explained, the point at which these two flats used to be connected as a single home in a previous layout of the building. She also notices that Roman’s ears are pierced, and that the Castevets seem to have taken down the painting from their walls when Rosemary and Guy first visit them, which duly re-appear in the form of Goya’s ‘Witches’ Sabbath’ and an image of a burning Church when Rosemary eventually manages to penetrate the membrane that divides the flats.
Whilst I do argue that embedded in *Rosemary's Baby* is evidence that supports a robust reading that suggests Rosemary is indeed experiencing a perceptual breakdown, it is admittedly difficult to ‘diagnose’ the nature of her mental illness with any degree of precision. Attempting too detailed a level of categorisation of her condition is in any case inappropriate given the limited information the fiction provides, and for this reason, I will limit my own ‘diagnosis’ to the cardinal symptoms of schizophrenia and the more general term ‘psychosis’ without attempting to establish the exact ‘sub type’ of her condition. Nevertheless, there are several details worth noting in Rosemary’s behaviour that substantiate a more clinical attempt to ‘stabilise’ the film’s diegetic reality.

As Fischer (1992) points out, Rosemary’s psychosis can be understood as an exaggerated version of the protective stance adopted by women during pregnancy. Here Fischer is citing Leifer’s findings that pregnant women often feel a pronounced sense of ‘emotional liability’ (9) and a resulting increased anxiety regarding the safety of the child. Whilst such anxiousness was dismissed as hysterical in the past, Leifer suggests that this heightened emotional state serves an evolutionary purpose in the development of the maternal bond (9). It becomes difficult to determine, however, at what point this ‘useful’ anxiety crosses the line of psychosis, which is precisely the line upon which *Rosemary’s Baby* dances.

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48 The study Fischer is citing is Myra Leifer’s *Psychological Effects of Motherhood: A Study of First Pregnancy* (1980).
For the men of *Rosemary’s Baby*, however, diagnoses come easily, much like the psychoanalytical authoritative voices that re-territorialise psychosis in *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom*. But given what we have seen and our uncertainty as to the veridical nature of these bizarre images, we are not as trusting of these men. Rosemary’s husband, Guy, tells her that Dr. Sapirstein (her second obstetrician) believes her behaviour and delusions to be the result of ‘pre-partum hysteria’ (or ‘pre-partum crazies’, as Guy resorts to calling it). ‘Hysteria’ is itself a problematic term, as in the 1960s it was considered by some to be a purely female condition (e.g. Guze and Perley, 1963: 960). Whilst the temptation to ‘demonise’ Sapirstein and dismiss his chauvinist diagnoses outright, it is worth noting that they are not without substance. Incidents of pre-partum psychosis had indeed been recorded around the time of the novel/film (e.g. Cross, Gee & Seymour-Shove, 1968: 686). Rosemary’s behaviour is certainly diagnosable as that of a paranoid schizophrenic who takes what she believes to be quite rational action based on irrational beliefs. The fact that Rosemary’s delusions have a religious colouring is also consistent with McKenna’s (1997) identification of *grandiose religious delusions* (3) as symptomatic of schizophrenia (all the more relevant when one considers the very Catholic portrayal of urban Satanists encountered by Rosemary and her troubled relationship with her religious upbringing) as well as several *sexual delusions* (4), in which both pregnancy and the belief in a ‘fantasy lover’ are common features.

One possible way of understanding the finale along these lines (which the film seems to support) is by interpreting it as a sort of *Wunschtraum* (‘wish-fulfilment dream’) hallucination, which is heavily informed by the delusional conceptual framework Rosemary has cultivated over the course of the film, and which serves as a means for
her to reverse the death of her child. Just before Rosemary ventures across to the Castevets’ flat, she indeed experiences a ‘classic’ *Wunschtraum* in which she and her baby are surrounded by friends, and what is possibly Rosemary’s family. The paler tones and muted sound in this image are strongly indicative of its non-veridical nature, and we have little trouble accepting it as oneiric.

The scene that follows this oneiric moment, in which Rosemary ‘invades’ the Castevets’ flat, can be interpreted as a hallucinatory image that serves a similar function, but is essentially a wish-fulfilment scenario nestled within the logic of a greater delusion. We should also take note that in the days leading up to this ‘invasion’, Rosemary deliberately refused to take the pills prescribed to her by Sapirstein, hiding them between the cinder blocks beside her bed. Here we have an inversion of the ‘chocolate mouse’ scenario; i.e. is the fact that Rosemary refuses to take her pills responsible for her ‘clear’ vision, or is it her refusal to take these pills that causes more hallucinations? This query is difficult to answer, but it is important to remember that Rosemary had originally believed that these ‘witches’ intended to use her baby as a sacrifice in a satanic ritual; identifying this fact allows for a non-conventional reading of the final scene. By recalling the repressed (non-veridical) memory of being raped by the Devil, Rosemary is able to alter this reality by elevating her child from sacrificial lamb to the Antichrist himself – a scenario highly reminiscent of Catholic lore in its direct inversion of the Nativity. The result in this ‘altering’ of reality is the fact that the baby is at least *alive*. This sequence has strong symbolic value as well, especially in the context of feminist discourse. To bring her baby back to life, Rosemary must join the patriarchal order represented here not by her husband, but more so by Roman Castevet, who replaces the Pope as highest
patriarch. But whilst Rosemary exacts a small degree revenge on Guy by spitting in his face, she ultimately does yield to his whim. Seemingly unable to reconcile her role of mother and her resistance to patriarchical control, her maternal instincts force her to succumb to the will of the order.

4.8. The Trauma of Pregnancy or Just Post-Traumatic?

My intention here is not to negate a reading of *Rosemary’s Baby* that focuses on the trauma of pregnancy, which, as Fischer demonstrates, is ‘fecund’ ground for discourse. Having taken such readings into consideration, I wish to suggest that *Rosemary’s Baby* may be even more polemical than many have realised. As I have attempted here, through a close-reading of *Rosemary’s Baby* that accepts the possibility of Rosemary’s psychosis we can interpret the film’s trauma not only in the context of the complex psychology of childbearing, but also by reading the film in terms of its exploration of female identity crises and the aftermath of sexual abuse, in which case the pregnancy and its associated paranoid behaviour serve as manifestation of the repressed impact of spousal rape. However, if we identify Rosemary’s delusions and hallucinations as being the direct result of a repressed personal trauma, we must reconsider the diagnosis of Rosemary’s behaviour as *schizophrenic*, and instead consider the possibility that she is experiencing a (schizophrenia-like) *post-traumatic* psychosis.

As discussed by Boehnlein and Kinzie (1989), for example, the diagnosis of ‘schizophrenia’ to those also diagnosed as sufferers of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
is complex and controversial. In such cases, as well as drug-related psychosis, which is also relevant here, expressions such as ‘schizophrenia-like’ or ‘reactive psychosis’ are often employed, as to distinguish these conditions from schizophrenia in which a ‘cause’ is not so readily identifiable. The important distinction in relation to my overall discussion again relates back to the notion of ‘re-territorialising’ mental illness through constructing robust economies of cause-and-effect. My own ‘post-traumatic’ reading outlined above falls into this category. The chief problem presented by *Rosemary’s Baby* is that whilst it furnishes many possible reading, it also subverts attempts to stabilise the diegesis by ‘proving’ either the veridicality of Rosemary’s perceptions, or even establish a pathogenesis with any degree of certainty if these perceptions are accepted as non-veridical.

Whilst I have outlined the various readings of *Rosemary’s Baby* that emerge from a close consideration of the film in the context of the perceptual discourse at play in the Apartment Trilogy, try as I might, I am unable to provide anything resembling a conclusive reading of this complex film. Instead, as I have alluded to above, I believe the highest form of appreciation of *Rosemary’s Baby* comes by way of befuddlement, by embracing its ambiguity and the frustration it entails. In the next case study I will explore the third of Polanski’s apartment/schizophrenia-based films, *The Tenant*, a film whose presentation of psychosis is slightly less ambiguous than *Rosemary’s Baby*, but which presents many other puzzling diegetic ambiguities. Looking forward, I will return to the ‘unstable’ philosophical territory of *Rosemary’s Baby* in my discussion of *Death and the Maiden*, which is addressed later as part of the case study of *Frantic*. 
A Brief Note on the Period Between *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Macbeth*

The more sensationalistic aspects of Polanski life, by which I am referring specifically to the murder of his wife in 1969 and the sexual abuse case of 1977, are not issues that are specifically dealt with in this analysis of his work. Whilst many, such as Leaming (1981), Wexman (1985) and Kiernan (1980), have found great value in directly combining their analysis of Polanski’s cinema with biographical aspects of his life, I do not believe this type of psychoanalytic interpretation of his cinema is a particularly valid approach, especially in regards to the specific sort of methodology employed in the present analysis of his cinema. It must be acknowledged, however, that these two aspects of his life have coloured public and critical reception of his work; so much so, as I suggested earlier, that many of the important contributions he has made to cinema have been overlooked, a fact this analysis of his films is attempting to redress. Nevertheless, a brief historic note on the tragic period between *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Macbeth* is warranted here.

In August of 1969, just over a year after the release of *Rosemary’s Baby*, Polanski’s wife, Sharon Tate, who was pregnant with Polanski’s child, was murdered by ‘disciples’ of the notorious 1960s cult leader Charles Manson. The motive for the murder remains a mystery, but was likely either a random act of violence or a horrific ‘accident’, the result of Manson targeting the former resident of Tate and Polanski’s
Los Angeles home, unaware of the new occupants (see Leaming, 1981: 114-115, Meikle, 2006: 166 and Polanski, 1984: 306). Although there had been no connection whatsoever between Manson and either Polanski or Tate before this time, the murder would forever unite them, and the event escapes few critical analyses of his work. Horsley (2009) discusses the accusatory reaction of journalists at the time, many of whom labelled the event as ‘karma’ (131) for Polanski’s cinematic fascination with Satanism, namely the witchcraft and child ‘sacrifices’ of *Rosemary’s Baby*, which may well have still been playing in some cinemas at the time of the murder. According to both Leaming (1981, 114-117) and Polanski (1984: 116), this attitude informed public and critical reactions to Polanski’s next feature, *Macbeth*, which marked the director’s return to filmmaking in 1971. Polanski adamantly denies that *Macbeth* served any ‘cathartic purpose’, claiming that he had deliberately chosen such a classic work by Shakespeare as a means to ‘preserve [his] motives from suspicion’ (1984: 324). Discussing the critical reaction to *Macbeth*, Leaming notes that whatever film Polanski made at this time would have been ‘received in terms of the crime that infected him’ (1981: 116), and Polanski agrees. ‘If I had made a comedy,’ Polanski writes, ‘the charge would have been one of callousness’ (Polanski, 1984: 324).

Whilst I believe the link between Polanski and Manson, forged in a real-life tragedy so great that it is impossible to articulate, should be greatly de-emphasised in terms of its actual significance to Polanski’s cinema, when discussing audiences’ reactions to Polanski’s films, specifically audiences well-acquainted with the Tate murder, there is arguably scope to theorise on the spectatorial experience of watching *Macbeth*, released in the wake of the tragedy, and perhaps even *Rosemary’s Baby*, which preceded the event, in the context of the murder. It is my contention, however, that
such an ‘effect’ is greatly reduced with the passage of time and an increased appreciation of these films in the context of Polanski’s overall filmography.
5. **Apartment Trilogy Case Study 3: The Tenant**

5.1. **Paranoid in Paris**

*The Tenant* is not only the last of Polanski’s ‘Apartment Trilogy’, but it is also the last of Polanski’s films in which an attempt is made to represent the subjective psychological realm of an individual onscreen. Although released after *Chinatown*, a film that I will later discuss in terms of Polanski’s shift towards a more ‘distant’ form of realism, *The Tenant* marks the end of his cinema’s more direct form of psychological realism. As in both *Repulsion* and *Rosemary’s Baby*, here Polanski employs the use of a camera closely tethered to a single subject. The camera follows the inquiring gaze of a nominal (invisible and ineffectual) observer, which (‘who’) guides the gaze of the spectator through the course of the film. And again, as in both *Repulsion* and *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Tenant*’s observer manages to penetrate the psyche of its subject to the extent that it even seems to inherent some his perceptual defects.

*The Tenant* established the Apartment Trilogy as a ‘tale of three cities’, moving the story of urban psychosis from London (*Repulsion*) and New York (*Rosemary’s Baby*) to a third major Western metropolis, Paris. It tells the story of Trelkovsky, a Polish born, but naturalised French citizen, who in his desperation to find a living space finds himself occupying a flat in which the former tenant has left strong traces, or ‘haunting signifiers’ (as Marciniak puts it, 2000: 6) of her identity. Like Carole in
*Repulsion*, Trelkovsky is a more clearly delineated ‘accented’ persona. The character, played by Polanski himself, is a naturalised French citizen of Polish descent (Polanski, on the hand, is a native of Paris); whilst his French is flawless, his Polish heritage is evident in his manner of speech as well as his name.

Just as *Rosemary’s Baby* marks an evolution in Polanski’s cinematic treatment of psychosis, so too does *The Tenant* furnish a variation on this theme. In *Repulsion*, we merely bear witness to Carole’s developing psychosis, a more or less linear trajectory that results in outright negative catatonia (i.e. her state at the end of the film). As I discussed in the last case study, in *Rosemary’s Baby* the very existence of Rosemary’s psychosis is put in doubt and never clarified, so we are robbed of the ‘safety net’ provided by the more straightforward portrayal of Carole’s illness in *Repulsion*. In *The Tenant*, the diegetic reality of Trelkovsky’s illness is not muddled as it is in *Rosemary’s Baby*; instead, it is the pathogenesis of his behaviour that becomes questionable as the ‘neighbours’ are implicated in the trajectory of his illness, although the extent of their tort or ill-intent remains ambiguous. What differentiates *The Tenant* most dramatically from *Repulsion* is the fact that the power of Trelkovsky’s schizophrenia to control his perception and resulting behaviour does not develop entirely linearly, but varies as Trelkovsky puts up a strong fight.

Trelkovsky’s battle with his illness is manifested most clearly in those moments when

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49 *The Tenant* was post-synch dubbed in both French and English, with actors speaking whichever language they were more adept at on set, but seemingly with a preference for English when possible. Polanski, for example, spoke English during the filming, but overdubbed his own voice for both the English and French version, the result being that his delivery comes across equally (albeit, only slightly) ‘accented’ in each version. Considering the Parisian setting, the ‘natural’ language would be French, but as Polanski oversaw both dubs, and most of the film’s original (on-set) performances were delivered in English, either can be considered as ‘original’ language. That being said, Polanski also overdubbed himself in the Italian version, resulting in a similar ‘accented’ effect, but it would be difficult to argue that this too should be considered an ‘original’ language.
he is presented as a double-being – the female/‘Simon Choule’ masquerade representing his growing schizophrenia, and the ‘Trelkovsky’ voice from within this body representing his enduring vestiges of sanity.

As in *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Tenant* begins with its protagonist viewing a flat; this time, however, it is not an aspirational high-end apartment, but a much more humble abode, not much more than a room with a sink and a view of the shared toilet, located inconveniently across the courtyard. But in spite of its meagre facilities, paying for this flat is still an issue for Trelkovsky, who struggles to keep up with the various deposits and bribes needed to secure it. Also much like *Rosemary’s Baby*, the flat becomes available due to the injury and eventual death of its previous tenant, but where Rosemary is assured that Mrs. Gardenia did not die in the apartment, the concierge seems to relish in telling Trelkovsky that Simone Choule, the flat’s former inhabitant, defenestrated herself, even nudging him towards the very window she leapt from to get a better look at the damage her body inflicted on the glass eaves below.

Where *Repulsion* was based on an original script written by Polanski and his collaborator Gérard Brach, *The Tenant*, like *Rosemary’s Baby*, is based on a novel, this time one written by surrealist Roland Topor. As I discussed previously, upon first reading *Rosemary’s Baby*, Polanski believed that Ira Levin had been influenced by *Repulsion* (see Cronin, 2005: 23) – it is possible the same is true in this case. Topor’s *The Tenant* was released just after *Repulsion*, and like Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* contains many details that overlap with Polanski’s film. The major issue of the
exploration of a perceptual crisis in an apartment setting is of course the most apparent similarity, but even smaller details, such as the ‘accented’ protagonist, the nosey neighbours, and even the small dog are all present in *Repulsion*.\(^5\) Granted, it is difficult, even fruitless, to attempt to solve the mystery of ‘who-influenced-who’; it is far more relevant to simply highlight that Polanski, Levin and Topor all seemed to be on the same wavelength - each exploring the territory of urban existential angst. The fact that Polanski chose to adapt these works is therefore unsurprising, as they provided (more-or-less) ready-made stories through which his own ongoing perceptual discourse could find cinematic expression.

As a means of opening the *The Tenant*, Polanski employs the ‘floating’ camera, as used for the final scene in *Repulsion* and at both the start and the end of *Rosemary’s Baby*. The same technique is used at the conclusion of *Chinatown* (discussed in the next case study) as a means disconnecting the nominal observer from protagonist Jake Gittes and recoiling from the carnage it witnesses at the end of the film. Polanski’s ‘observer’ seems now to have made its way to Paris, in search of a new story, a new tethering point. But *The Tenant* begins with the camera exploring not the horizontal plane of a cityscape as it does in *Rosemary’s Baby* (and for that matter, Hitchcock’s *Psycho*), but rather the vertical intricacies of the organically stacked and interwoven living spaces of a Parisian block of flats. Whilst Polanski often uses elaborate forms of cinematography, *The Tenant*’s opening shot is one of his most complex, and

\(^5\) Topor also includes a detailed description in which Trelkovsky alternatively closes each of his eyes and marvels at the way the objects in his room ‘shift’ from left to right (Topor, 2006: 115), which is highly reminiscent of the similar scene in *Knife in the Water* discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Virtually identical moments are used by Clouzot in *La prisonnièrè* (1968) and Obayashi in *Hausu* (1977), although I cannot say for certain if these are direct references to *Knife in the Water*. 
certainly the most self-conscious – a quality that is greatly defused, however, by the fact that it occurs during the opening credits, and therefore still within a diegetically-ambiguous plane of reality. The shot proves to be only one of The Tenant’s several examples of complex cinematography that Polanski created with the help of regular Bergman-collaborator Sven Nykvist. The other shots, however, whilst perhaps equally intricate, are more subtle than the opening scene - insidiously so, as I will discuss further on.

In what is essentially a single, fluid shot, the camera explores the building without regard to gravity, coming across a series of enigmatic images of a man and woman swapping places in various window frames. Upon repeated viewing, it becomes apparent that the camera is actually ‘seeing’ the narrative as a whole, mapping the events of the film, themselves a repetition of the events that take place before the time of the film. The camera finally settles on its tethering point, Trelkovsky, who, much like Guy and Rosemary Woodhouse before him, is house hunting. At this point (i.e. the conclusion of the opening credits), the style shifts to a more conventional form of temporal and spatial unity, as it becomes ‘tied down’ or ‘tethered’ to Trelkovsky, thus establishing our understanding of the film to come as what Deleuze refers to as a stable ‘movement-image’ (Deleuze, 1986: 2). In the end, however, the temporal unity of this image crumbles. As hinted at in the opening credits, the film ultimately gravitates towards a direct representation of time, a ‘crystalline’ narrative structure (Coleman, 2005: 59; Deleuze, 1989: 66) in which the realities of time and place (and person) are superimposed to reflect the infinite loop caused by the film’s corruption of its previously-established ‘movement-image’, arguably propelling it towards what
Deleuze defines as the ‘time-image’ (Deleuze, 1989: 40) and a subsequent ‘crisis’ in spectatorship.

5.2. Reading Ambiguity

Much like Rosemary’s Baby, The Tenant is a rich and complex film-text that lends itself to a wide variety of often-contradictory readings, each of which is as ‘robust’ as the next due to the crafty ambiguity of the film. Whilst my primary objective here is to demonstrate how Polanski uses carefully constructed profilmic elements to distort the spectator’s perception of the screen image, it is useful to draw from Williams’s (1982) and Marciniak’s (2000) compelling psychoanalytical and sociological readings of The Tenant as a means of teasing out my own cognitive/perceptual analysis.

Marciniak (2000) confidently emphasises the relevance of both Trelkovsky and Choule’s status as marginalised figures as a means of reading The Tenant as an exposé of French xenophobia (and possibly Anti-Semitism), calling the film a ‘passionate critique of phobic nationalism’ (3). She argues that Trelkovsky’s belief that he is being transformed has a diegetically-veridical basis due to his frequent association with Simone Choule by other characters. His neighbours do indeed often evoke her name, nudging Trelkovsky (sometimes literally) towards her behaviours. Monsieur Zy (Melvyn Douglas), for example, points out to Trelkovsky that Simone wore slippers after 10pm. ‘It was much more comfortable for her. And for the neighbours,’ he hints to Trelkovsky. The barman across the street is perhaps the worst
offender in the way he consistently serves Trelkovsky Choule’s favourite drink and
cigarettes, irrespective of what Trelkovsky orders.

The problem posed by the film, however, is that such occurrences ultimately do not
stand firm as ‘evidence’ of anything. We must consider two important factors here.
Firstly, the possibility that the close tether established between the camera and
Trelkovsky extends to the montage of the film - not in the sense of the style or pace of
its cutting, but what is and what is not included. I suggest that the frequency of these
‘nudging’ associations is not part of an attempt to objectively represent the greater
diegetic reality, but form a series of highly subjective, selected images that reflect the
preoccupations of the character to whom we are tethered. So the occurrences of what
appear to be ‘nudges’ are read as ‘proof’ of Trelkovsky’s fundamental sanity not due
to their inherent meaningfulness, but because of their tenacity. Marciniak in fact goes
so far as to identify Trelkovsky’s perception not as diseased, but highly attuned,
establishing him as a hyper-perceiver who is punished for recognising and
challenging his marginalisation. She argues that Trelkovsky is effectively ‘blinded by
his own acute perception’ (2000: 12), much in line with that horror movie convention
in which a protagonist’s heightened understanding of the diegetic reality is mistaken
for madness, but is ultimately vindicated as having been ‘right all along’. But there is
no such vindication on offer here.

Based on the complexity and ambiguity of the film, both narratively and visually, we
should also take seriously the possibility that Trelkovsky’s delusions and
hallucinations could in fact be the result of a serious mental illness. If this is accepted,
schizophrenia is the most likely diagnosis given the symptoms we are privy to; a condition that, whilst arguably triggered and fuelled by it, exists irrespective of the actions of a group of xenophobic geriatrics. The likelihood that Trelkovsky is suffering from some form of mental illness is an important factor that should form part of an analysis of The Tenant; especially in the way this portrayal of psychosis confounds straightforward notions of ‘victims’ and ‘villains’.

For Williams (1981), it is Trelkovsky’s guilt over wishing for Choule’s death (68) that causes his behaviour. Although Williams concedes that the film robs the spectator of a rational ‘voice’ within the film that explains the cause of Trelkovsky’s condition (66), her attribution of Trelkovsky’s delusions and hallucinations to his repressed guilt itself proposes a psychodynamic pathogenesis for Trelkovsky’s schizophrenia. Alternatively, if Trelkovsky is indeed diagnosed as schizophrenic, rather than considering the specific details of his delusions and non-veridical perceptions as causes of his diseased perceptual mechanism, the various stressors implicit in the situation in which he finds himself can be argued to be informing agents – ‘loaded’ stimuli there to be distorted, exaggerated or even completely misread. This is not to suggest, however, that Trelkovsky’s guilt (unconscious or otherwise) and the possibility that the neighbours are xenophobic (at least in its etymological sense of fear of difference, rather than its more colloquial use as hatred of difference) are irrelevant.

By allowing the spectators access to information slightly beyond Trelkovsky’s subjective (and distorted) narrative reach, the film avoids establishing a diegetically-
certain causal link between either Trelkovsky’s guilt or his neighbour’s xenophobia and the protagonist’s psychotic behaviour. Consequently, the film encourages us to consider the possibility that it is Trelkovsky’s schizophrenia – a condition without a certain pathogenesis – that causes these delusions, which are only tenuously connected to diegetic reality. I argue that it is the spectator’s (and critic’s) desire to re-territorialise the truly horrific reality of the possible arbitrariness of schizophrenia that provokes us into embracing such psychodynamic readings. Whilst the film does indeed seem to support such readings, there is always doubt and ambiguity embedded in the ‘reasons’ the film furnishes for Trelkovsky’s behaviour, rendering any attempt to stabilise this diegesis problematic.

Notwithstanding my call for a more ‘clinical’ reading of The Tenant, it would be admittedly remiss to conclude that Polanski’s consistent coupling of marginalised bodies (in particular that of the nationally ‘foreign’ or ‘accented’ body, homosexuals, and women) and psychosis is simply arbitrary. As both Williams and Marciniak demonstrate, The Tenant rewards readings that make such connections, in turn establishing The Tenant as part of that rare type of cinema that is able to generate a huge range of valuable discourse through its seemingly infinite ‘readability’. My own argument regarding Polanski’s cinematic presentation of psychosis in this film (and the same holds true of both Repulsion and Rosemary’s Baby) is that any overly conclusive reading risks grafting didactic intent on what is essentially a philosophically (although not entirely visually) open text. With this risk acknowledged, I will not let this stop me from expressing my own understanding of The Tenant, a film that I believe draws its horror from a profound destabilisation of not only the diegesis, but possibly even the spectator’s (and specifically the close-
reader’s) own concepts regarding the antecedent and/or environmental causes of psychosis, as well as how this condition compels us to reflect on the often counter-intuitive workings of healthy perception.

5.3. Using Illusion

In the introductory chapter, I delineated a number of ‘planes’ of cinema-related reality that need to be distinguished from each other in this discussion (afilmic, diegetic, profilmic, filmophanic, spectatorial). Equally, there are also several ‘types’ of cinematic realism that populate film theory, many of which are relevant to this discussion, but none more so than that which can be identified as a cinematic form of psychological, or to be more precise, perceptual realism. Keeping this in mind, I will now turn my attention towards the manner in which Polanski orchestrates mise-en-scène in some of The Tenant’s key scenes so as to render the line between representation and ‘original’ inconsequential. Here I will abandon for a moment my analysis of the diegesis itself and direct my focus specifically to the spectatorial experience of perceiving these scenes.

Helpful in the consideration of perceptual realism and the spectatorial plane of reality is Baudrillard’s concept of ‘weightlessness’ in art, in which each plane of reality upon which a work resides is ‘neutralised’ to leave only ‘pure simulacrum’ (1983: 10). In her discussion of simulacrum and the ‘replicants’ of Blade Runner (Scott, 1982), Bruno (1987) engages with Baudrillard’s notion of the postmodern as an age of ‘simulacra and simulation’ (67), in turn addressing the goal of achieving a perpetually
‘original’ artefact – the ‘hyper-real’, in which the question of representation is rendered completely moot due to the fact that the work itself is not merely a representation of afilmic or profilmic reality, but rather a reality in and of itself (68). Conversely, the reality of imitation also points to the ‘fiction of the real’ (67), compelling us to consider the relationship between reality and our perception of it. I believe that Polanski’s own discussion of his desire to achieve a ‘wraparound effect’ can be understood along these lines, and so the profilmic illusions constructed by Polanski in Repulsion and The Tenant to evoke such a specific spectatorial perceptual effect (not a representation of something, but an original, and purely cinematic effect ‘in the moment’) are also indicative of the postmodern ‘agenda’ in Polanski cinema.

Notwithstanding the inherently illusory nature of cinematic simulacra, the cinematographic image remains an object of perception and so the tenets of indirect perception are still applicable. Gregory’s discussion of the ‘intriguing discrepancies’ (2003) between knowledge of objects and what is actually seen is often reflected in Polanski’s Apartment Trilogy, especially when the nominal observer who directs our gaze seems to be granted ‘access’ to, or perhaps more accurately, mimics the subjective realm of the on-screen perceiver. In The Tenant, Gregory’s influence is evident in Polanski’s use of optical illusion as a means of manifesting Trelkovsky’s distorted sense of perspectival space, and it is through this deliberate creation of filmophanic ‘phenomenal phenomena’ (Gregory, 1997a: 246) that Polanski also manages to introduce non-veridical perceptual experiences into the spectatorial experience (beyond, of course, the inherently non-veridical/illusory nature of cinematic movement) that in turn serve to represent the perceptual distortions experienced by Trelkovsky.
In one scene, the fever-stricken Trelkovsky reaches from his bed for a glass of water, which sits upon a normal looking chair beside the bed. As he does so, his hand is met by a completely flat surface. We realise that the bottle sitting on the chair is not, as we imagined, a three dimensional object, but rather a photo of one. The moment is disturbing not only for Trelkovsky, but for the spectator as well, who has equally been duped. It is important to emphasise that whilst we are ‘tricked’, this is not the same as having a defective perceptual mechanism. Polanski’s use of visual illusion in this scene draws attention to the gap between the way we perceive a thing and its own independent reality. Without breaking the fourth wall, Polanski addresses both the nature of the image and our perception of it. The scene effectively achieves a heightened sense of perceptual realism by moving past the retina and engaging the brain directly through its provoking of a non-veridical perception embedded, as it is, within the even greater illusion of the cinematic image itself. The theory of indirect perception reminds us, however, that we must take care not to muddle our biological perception of an image with the nature of the object; nor should we conclude that due to the limits of our biology that an object’s material nature is negotiable just because our perception of it can vary.

It is worth recalling here my previous mention of Cavell’s comments regarding the photograph and its inability to disguise its own true nature as representation (see opening chapter and Cavell, 1971: 19-20). Polanski seems to be toying with this very concept in this scene through his ‘containing’ of a photograph within another, and thus achieving, rather fiendishly, exactly the illusion of ‘reality’ Cavell claims is so
elusive (specifically compared to the truly convincing nature of sound reproduction). The craftiness of Polanski’s deception here is down to the double-illusion of embedding the photographic illusion within the diegetic plane of reality, thus augmenting the potential for the filmophanic image (i.e. the light as it is reflected off the cinematic screen) to disguise itself, to distract us from our awareness of the greater frame. This is not to claim, however, an absolute victory for the visual ‘wraparound’ effect tantamount to that which can be achieved by sound, but rather to suggest that here Polanski creates a ‘moment’, of perceptual realism through this attempt to engage (manipulate) the perceptual mechanism directly by taking advantage of its limits.

In his discussion of optical illusion, Gregory pays special attention to the Ames Room (see Figures 5-10), pointing to this bizarre structure as evidence of the ease with which the brain can be fooled into misinterpreting the visual stimuli it has presented to it. The Ames Room’s ‘distorted room and trapezoid window’ (Gregory, 1997a: 186) is specifically designed to provide false depth cues to the brain (via the eye, which is itself indifferent) through the use of exaggerated convergent angles and proportionately smaller sized objects to give the impression of much greater depth. Seeing the room straight on, it is impossible to see the correct dimensions of the structure, especially if the proportions of the decorations (wallpaper patterns, shape of the windows) are measured (and distorted) specifically to create the effect. Depending on the design of the room, people in it can be made to look shrunken or gigantic, seriously confusing the perceptual expectations of observers. The theory behind the Ames Room illusion is that the brain’s knowledge of rooms ‘defeats’ its knowledge of what the size of the people in the room should be compared to its fixtures or other
objects (or people) in the room. The effect proves that depth is experienced not entirely due to the distance of objects, but conceptual understanding of them; our *a priori* knowledge of the shape of rooms trumps the ‘misshaped’ structure before us, thus imposing a perception of the structure that corresponds to what we believe a normal room shape should be.

The use of the Ames Room and other forms of perspective tampering in cinema has, of course, a long history. The technique is indeed a hallmark of low budget monster films, where forced perspective provided a means of presenting what appear to be giants onscreen. Even in the digital age of the early twenty-first century, the rather low-tech method of using misshaped rooms to either enlarge or diminish on-screen bodies still perseveres, used frequently, for example, in both the *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* series. But the end towards which Polanski employs this device in *The Tenant* is quite different; rather than attempting to convince the spectator of the strange dimensions of certain mythological beings (monsters, half-giants, hobbits, etc.), Polanski unveils the distortions as a way of highlighting the malleability of perception, in particular the effect of heightened emotions or outright mental illness can have on how the brain interprets external stimuli.

As in *Repulsion*, Polanski uses a type of Ames Room in *The Tenant* to further punctuate Trelkovsky’s disturbed mental state. In *The Tenant*, however, the effect is augmented by the fact that Trelkovsky actually enters the room. The room itself was constructed with meticulous attention to precision in collaboration with Polanski’s set-designer Pierre Guffroy (*see Appendix: Figure 5-10*), based on the specific
measurements needed to achieve this ‘Ames’ effect. In the sequence that immediately follows the ‘chair’ scene, Trelkovsky enters his flat and walks towards the window, the very trajectory of his eventual (double) defenestration. At first, the room appears to be perfectly normal, just as we have seen it previously (just as we know it). Much like the ‘chair effect’ we saw earlier, however, as Trelkovsky begins to penetrate the space its nature becomes distorted, thus compromising our ‘stable’ perception of the room by defying our sensory-motor expectations of the objects contained within it. As Trelkovsky walks forward, so too is the camera drawn forward to follow; but with every step his dimensions reduce compared to the objects that surround him, which seem to grow as Trelkovsky is increasingly ‘dwarfed’ by the room. The time it takes for him to reach the window is likewise extended, reflecting the now-increased length of his path. Considering Trelkovsky’s own delusion of his diminishing identity, the ‘dwarfin’ effect of this scene serves as an apt visual representation of how he is being (or believes he is being) ‘consumed’ by the flat and the residual psychic energy of its former inhabitant.

Before moving on to discuss what the scene may reveal about Trelkovsky’s mental state, I will again draw attention to the (extra-diegetic) effect of these scenes on the spectator. To summarise, what I believe to be of interest in these scenes is the manner in which Polanski creates an illusion, effectively an illusion-within-an-illusion, in order to simulate what appears to be a hallucinatory state in the film’s protagonist. I am speaking here not so much of the representation of psychic perception, but the use of illusion (beyond the inherently illusory nature of the cinematographic image itself, that is) to create a brief moment of perceptual crisis in the spectator, in which our own sensory expectations come under stress.
5.4. **The Difficulty of Diagnosis**

As is typical in Polanski’s cinema, and especially the Apartment Trilogy, the question of what is and what is not diegetically veridical is not clearly delineated, and even those events that are presented as unambiguously non-veridical have an uncertain origin. To reiterate a key point, it is not my intention here to furnish a robust diagnosis of Trelkovsky’s condition, and nor do I hope to ‘solve’ the enigma of the film; by simply *attempting* to diagnose Trelkovsky’s condition, however, I hope to demonstrate just how complex this enigma is, and how close engagement with this film stimulates thought on a variety of planes. Along these lines, let us consider the various complications surrounding Trelkovsky’s (and our own) more bizarre perceptual experiences. These distorted perceptions, whilst indeed a documented symptom of schizophrenia, take place whilst Trelkovsky is in the throws of a high fever, leading us to conclude that Trelkovsky may just be suffering from temporary flu-induced hallucinations rather than a chronic mental illness. The conundrum is similar to that of *Rosemary’s Baby*, where the spectator is left unsure if the rape sequence is a diegetic reality buried within a drug (or alcohol) induced hallucination, an alcohol-fuelled dream, a psychotic hallucination that conceals the rape of Rosemary by her husband, or some combination of the above. As I have argued in the previous case study, the closer one looks at *Rosemary’s Baby* the more difficult this
problem is to resolve. A similar statement can be made of *The Tenant*. There is another way to approach the scenes in *The Tenant*, and that is to forego reading them in terms of diegetic realism and instead interpret them purely symbolically. Rather than wrestle with the issue as to whether these distortions of perception are flu-induced or the result of degenerative schizophrenia, we can see the image of the shivering Trelkovsky as a physical manifestation (*a hint* to the spectator) of a concealed mental illness, his skyrocketing temperature paralleling his increasingly diseased perceptual mechanism. However it is read, diagnosing Trelkovsky’s condition is not straightforward.

Attempts to diagnose Trelkovsky are rendered further problematic due to the camera’s own compromised objectivity in these and other scenes. *The Tenant* not only subverts any reading that leads to a clear explanation for either Trelkovsky’s or the neighbours’ actions, but even causes us to question the reliability of the source of our understanding of this world, namely the accuracy of both Trelkovsky’s narrative reach and our notional observer’s own ability to perceive this world effectively. For the vast majority of the film we are linked to Trelkovsky’s vantage point, not necessarily by direct POV, but by being privileged only to the information that he is privy to. There are some key moments, however, where the camera maximises the limits of its subjective tether and proves itself to be less susceptible to the emotions that seem to cloud Trelkovsky’s perception, establishing that his role as our perceptual guide is not absolute. It is only in these precious few moments in which we can be reasonably sure we are freed from the influence of Trelkovsky’s subjective perceptions that we can hope to gain some understanding of the diegesis, or even entertain the idea of ‘diagnosing’ Trelkovsky’s condition.
A small but significant example of our nominal observer’s ability to ‘out perceive’ Trelkovsky occurs when he attempts to dispose of a vast quantity of rubbish he has collected from his flat the morning after his house-warming party. As he carries the trash down the stairs, several items fall from the overloaded and seeping bag. He glances at them, but seems to decide that it is better to continue to the rubbish bins outside and return to clean up the mess afterwards. When he does return, a mere thirty-seconds of real-time later, the mess has been cleared up. A mortified Trelkovsky looks about helplessly, wondering who has cleaned up after him (clearly the last thing he wanted to happen). A few seconds earlier, Trelkovsky spotted the concierge (who ignored his salutation) in her office, so the most likely conclusion for Trelkovsky at this point is that she must have cleared up the mess on the stairs. For the first time in the film, though, we know better than he. As Trelkovsky was busy stuffing his trash into the bins outside, the camera momentarily pulls away to reveal the concierge glaring at him disapprovingly from her office – indicating to the spectator (but not Trelkovsky) that she could not have cleared up the rubbish; so where he may speculate that the concierge has cleaned up his mess in an act of passive-aggression, this possibility is negated to us. Perhaps another neighbour? But who? Frustratingly, the net effect of ‘out perceiving’ Trelkovsky is that we are left even more puzzled than he is about this incident.

Toles (1995) offers an interesting interpretation of the stairwell scene, and one that compliments my ongoing discussion on the manner in which the urban domestic structures in the Apartment Trilogy often become physical manifestations of
psychological crises. In his analysis of cinematic depictions of humiliation, Toles argues that it is the stairwell itself that has ‘repressed’ the rubbish, ‘so that its final neatness is visually superimposed on a “dirt” that is still there somehow, waiting for a chance to resurface’ (7). The image of the overflowing paper bag that is unable to contain the putridity of its contents similarly reflects Trelkovsky’s own ‘filled-to-bursting inner state’ (8). The fact that M. Zy, the obsessively observant, even totalitarian (from Trelkovsky’s perspective, at any rate) landlord, comments on neither the leaking bag in Trelkovsky’s arms nor the mess Trelkovsky has left on the stairs behind him is truly puzzling. Instead Zy scolds his tenant about the noise that came from his flat the night before; and whilst we may instinctively side with our ‘victimised’ protagonist, upon reflection Zy’s criticism is arguably quite reasonable, as is his manner, considering the bordel Trelkovsky’s friends made the night before, again undoing any straightforward reading that positions Trelkovsky as a specific target of orchestrated oppression.

But what does this seeping bag of rotting food suggest about Trelkovsky’s ‘insides’? Toles offers that the bag itself acts as a ‘surrogate’ for Trelkovsky’s growing inability to contain his aggression behind his otherwise mild-mannered persona (8). The ‘mess’ Trelkovsky leaves on the carpet in fact foreshadows his later encounter with the ostracised Mme. Gaderian (Lila Kedrova), who defecates in front of the doors of all the neighbours who had signed a petition to have her evicted. Gaderian exacts a measure of calculated revenge for which Trelkovsky does not have the courage, or is only able to enact in the full thrusts of psychosis.
The conundrum of the disappearing rubbish and the psychoanalytical readings it opens itself up to also draws attention to the complex connection between delusions and hallucinations. It is a relationship that is explored in *The Tenant* through the interrelatedness of Trelkovsky’s distorted perceptions and his increasingly paranoid and bizarre beliefs, each seemingly informing and fuelling the other. The clinical designation of *delusional perception* as a symptom of schizophrenia refers to a behaviour in which a patient assigns great personal significance to an observed, often banal, event. The term was originated by Schneider (1949, 1958), but was refined by Koehler (1979) who specifies that in such perceptual distortions ‘the significance is somehow contained within the perception itself’ (in McKenna, 1997: 29), suggesting an intertwining of perception and delusion. McKenna cites the efforts of several psychiatrists (Fish [1962], Hamilton [1984], Mellor [1970], Cooper *et al* [1974]) who have, over the years, attempted to clarify this potentially confusing scenario. Critical to the concept of delusional perception is the derivation of meaningfulness from an event by the patient; as McKenna summarises, ‘on perceiving a neutral event, a delusional interpretation of it, which is usually elaborate, suddenly crystallizes, dropping, as it were, fully formed into the patient’s head’ (1997: 29).

In those moments when the camera breaks free from the filter of Trelkovsky’s distorted perceptions (whilst still tethered to his spatial reach) and reveals that what Trelkovsky ‘sees’ is not diegetically veridical, we are reminded of just how dissonant his perceptions have become. As the film progresses and Trelkovsky’s perceptions become increasingly distorted, the contrast between the camera’s alternating ‘vision’ becomes more pronounced. When Trelkovsky takes refuge in Stella’s flat, he sees M. Zy through the peephole (a favourite shot of Polanski’s) and hears his voice across the
door. Here the small distorting lens indeed reflects a distorted perceptual mechanism, as revealed when the camera manages to extend its tether to the limit to show us a diegetic reality beyond Trelkovsky’s – the man outside the door was not M. Zy, but a canvasser of some kind who bears only an extremely superficial resemblance to Trelkovsky’s landlord. Trelkovsky’s hallucination of the stalking M. Zy then triggers a refinement to his delusional conceptual framework; in a moment that echoes Rosemary’s realisation that she has been betrayed by Dr. Sapirstein (‘All of them. All of them witches!’), Trelkovsky concludes that Stella too must be one of ‘them’.

An even more startling departure from Trelkovsky’s perception of the world occurs after he is struck down by a car. Here the camera truly divorces itself from Trelkovsky’s vision by contrasting what the film presents as Trelkovsky’s hallucinations to a more objective view of events, suggesting at this point that not only is Trelkovsky’s perception of events unreliable, but completely fabricated. In the sequence in the pharmacy, the camera alternates between Trelkovsky’s POV in which his neighbours, M. Zy and Mme. Dioz (Jo Van Fleet) are responsible for hitting him, to a shot of the ‘real’ culprits, a frazzled elderly couple who again bear only the most superficial resemblance to the people Trelkovsky sees before him. Here again the camera first adopts Trelkovsky’s POV and then reveals another ‘truth’; this time, the image is not one that is beyond Trelkovsky’s narrative reach, but beyond his perceptual mechanism’s ability to interpret stimuli correctly. It is worth noting here that although this sequence is based on one in Topor’s novel, Polanski’s use of the cinematic medium departs from the text through the inclusion of these ‘double visions’, an effect that Topor does not achieve on the page.
The rapid alternating in this scene between a representation of Trelkovsky’s subjective vision and an objective shot undistorted by the protagonist’s schizophrenic perception predicts the camera’s similar struggle to ‘decide’ between adopting or rejecting Trelkovsky’s filtered vision of events in the film’s climactic scene. As Trelkovsky drags his way back into the building and up the stairs in order to defenestrate himself for the second time (a cruel reminder of the film’s ‘infinite loop’), we are again presented with contradictory images of the neighbours. In one shot we see monsters with forked tongues and beastly eyes who force Trelkovsky to flee back up the stairs and (again) out the window. In the next shot, interrupted only by a reverse shot of the cowering Trelkovsky, we see the same neighbours in a completely different light: they are a certainly quite disgusted at Trelkovsky’s ‘odd’ appearance, but they are nevertheless seriously concerned for his welfare.

But by introducing such a high degree of diegetic uncertainty regarding the extent to which Trelkovsky’s fears are (veridically) justified, and coupling this ambiguity with filmophanic illusions that render the screen image itself (doubly) non-veridical, we are urged to consider not only the nature of schizophrenic perception, but also the fundamental malleability of all perception, regardless of how sane the perceptual mechanism. We are constantly forced to consider the insurmountable gap between our image of the thing and the thing itself - the very essence of all representation and arguably the primary concern of art. Let us recall the scenes of misshapen rooms and

51 The barman can be seen here menacingly waving a pack of Marlboros, Simone Choule’s preferred cigarettes, at Trelkovsky, in what is a truly unnerving blend of horror and absurdist comedy.
flattened chairs discussed earlier. Is it wrong, or ‘insane’, for us to conclude that there is a chair next to Trelkovsky’s bed upon which sits a perfectly normal bottle? Or that Trelkovsky’s room is full of perfectly ordinary furniture? Looking at the seconds before the moments of visual dissonance reveals no clue as to the ‘true’ nature of these objects, nor does it matter to the eye and what is transmitted to the brain - the chair and bottle are as real as any other. They are then revealed not to be what we believed them to be (what they had just been), not through the use of particularly distorting lenses but by the subversion of sensory-motor expectations regarding the negotiation of perspectival space. We can interpret this to be a reference to the artifice of representation, the ‘false reality’ of cinema (not just the use of matte backgrounds, or, more recently, CGI, for example, but the inherent ‘falseness’ of the filmophanic image), but the concept goes much further than this, urging us to consider the effect of how we perceive on what we perceive.

Both the distorted dimensions of the room and ‘flattened’ bedside chair signal Trelkovsky’s decreasing ability to perceive effectively, his diminishing capacity to judge the meaning of situations (or visual ‘semantics’, as Gregory refers to it, 1997a: 6). The increasing frequency of his hallucinations parallels his ever-decaying ability to correctly identify the intentions of those around him. Thinking along these lines, The Tenant is transformed from a horror film in which an innocent is persecuted by monsters on the outside to a film that (like Repulsion and Rosemary’s Baby before it) derives its lingering horror from its central character’s growing isolation from the world. Trelkovsky’s ‘encounters’ with the flattened chair and Ames Room also suggest that he is suffering from hallucinations related to the perception of perspectival space, a behaviour that has been identified as symptomatic of
schizophrenia, which McGhie & Chapman have labelled *perceptual distortions*, in which there are ‘transient alterations in the size, distance, and shape of objects’ (1961:103). The impossibly-shaped room that Trelkovsky enters is not only an effective way of manifesting this symptom on-screen, but, as I discuss above, the manner in which the shot is executed also causes a similar loss of perspective in the spectator, who is initially ‘fooled’ by his or her interpretation of the shape of the room. Both the distorted room and the flattened chair sequences cause ‘tension between what is signalled to the eye and what you believe should be there’ (Gregory, 2003), thus allowing Polanski to utilise optical trickery to mimic a diegetic perceptual crisis; or to put it another way, using *illusions* to represent *hallucinations*.

But Trelkovsky’s perceptual crises are merely symptoms of a serious mental illness. Trelkovsky’s growing paranoia regarding his neighbours, and eventually even Stella (Isabelle Adjani), is indicative of his developing psychosis; but the most notable example of Trelkovsky’s delusional state is his increasingly conspicuous donning of Simon Choule’s clothing. The ‘feminisation’ of Trelkovsky is of immediately interest, as it seems to solidify the connection in Polanski’s cinema between women and mental illness, a symbolic and highly provocative gender association that distinguishes Carole, Rosemary and Trelkovsky from the ‘sane males’ of the Investigation Trilogy. I will discuss this important ‘gender divide’ in more detail in the introduction to the next set of case studies, but it is prudent to first briefly address Trelkovsky’s gender masquerade here, in the specific context of his increasingly pronounced psychosis.
It is important to distinguish Trelkovsky’s behaviour from transvestism, which is not (or no longer) considered to be a form of mental illness, but simply a behaviour from which some derive pleasure (sexual or otherwise). Trelkovsky does not seem to be engaging in this cross-dressing behaviour for mere pleasure or due to a personal preference, but rather as the result of the profound delusion that he is, in fact, ‘becoming’ Simone Choule. In this regard, Trelkovsky is not cross-dressing at all, but simply wearing the clothes appropriate to the person he believes himself to be in these moments when his schizophrenia takes holds. The most pronounced moment of Trelkovsky’s delusional gender shift occurs when he announces (to his mirror image) he believes himself to pregnant; the moment is not only eerily reminiscent of *Rosemary’s Baby*, but represents the most extreme state of ‘feminisation’ imaginable.

5.5. **Crystalline Dissatisfaction**

As I have discussed previously, Polanski’s ardent refusal to provide ‘satisfaction’ in his films’ conclusions is not only a narrative hallmark, but reflective of the theoretical discourse at work in his cinema. Dissatisfaction is amply furnished by *The Tenant*’s denouement in various forms. We are frustrated, for example, by the simple fact that the protagonist to whom we have been so closely tethered has *lost*, a dissatisfaction compounded by his betrayal of our perceptual trust due to his increasingly diseased perceptual mechanism. As Toles (1995) argues, as spectators we instinctively ‘take sides’ with the suffering Trelkovsky. We, perhaps inadvertently, may hope that the film will follow a Hollywoodian trajectory, in which Trelkovsky, once pushed to his ‘breaking point’, like the peace-loving, hesitant gunslinger, will finally retaliate
against the oppressors who are driving him mad, exacting a measured revenge to
‘earn a just, violent reprieve for “goodness”’ (8). In fact, it takes much for us to betray
Trelkovsky and realise that he has greatly overestimated his neighbours’ level of
xenophobia. It is possible that maybe, just maybe, they are merely a part of the
orthodox (and yes, xenophobic) masses, and not quite Trelkovsky’s idea of a group of
organised oppressors who oblige him to conform or die. In other words, it is not easy
to accept that the character to whose perceptual (narrative) reach we have been so
closely tethered is so disconnected from the world that he is rendered effectively
isolated.

It is important to remember that even if Trelkovsky’s diagnosis of schizophrenia is
accepted, it does not necessarily follow that the basis of his delusions is flawed. It is
possible that his delusional disposition only exaggerates a situation that is really there,
in this way exposing a ‘truth’ though psychosis, but simultaneously confounding this
‘truth’ by introducing insurmountable doubt as to its legitimacy, much in line with
Polanski’s general resistance to didacticism. But there is one truth that does manage
to weave its way through this ambiguity, and that is the truth of ambiguity itself,
which compels us to consider the existential crisis we must all keep at bay. This is a
crisis that results from our isolation from the phenomenal world, that which results
from the realisation that our relationship with the world is indirect and all this entails.
But as difficult as this concept is to reconcile with phenomenological experience, we
are not necessarily consigned to solipsism - an acknowledgement of the
epistemological ambiguity concerning our perceptual relationship with the ‘outside’
does not automatically entail a refutation of the independent existence of the world of
things.
Just as Trelkovsky’s perceptual distortions are represented via the creation of non-veridical filmophanic effects, the horror he feels in this last scene is replicated somewhat by the spectator’s own experience of a crisis of the movement-image due to the scene’s undoing of the diegesis’s temporal unity. *The Tenant* does not present a muddled temporal structure that is eventually re-territorialised or mended either by a ‘stitching’ of the fragmented pieces of time in the film’s denouement or even in the spectator’s own mind upon reflection of the film’s temporal structure. Instead, we are violently thrust back to the confusion of the opening credits by the insanity of the ending, a scene that temporally makes no sense at all and deprives us of even the slightest satisfaction upon our exit from the cinema. In *Repulsion*, a similar effect is achieved through the enigmatic shot of Carole as a child, and in *Rosemary’s Baby* it is the utter hopelessness of the ending due to Rosemary’s betrayal of our expectations that serves to deflate all satisfaction, irrespective of how one reads the diegetic ‘veridicalness’ of the scene. (As I shall discuss in the following case studies, Polanski’s preference for bleak and enigmatic endings is not limited to this trilogy.)

In order to further punctuate Trelkovsky’s despair and rob us of the satisfaction that would result from the formation of an inextricable connection between the treatment he receives from his neighbours and his own perceptual breakdown, the film furnishes an ‘ending’ so enigmatic that the very stability of the movement-image is compromised, forcing us to suppress our own scream of frustration as the lights go up. In fact, the way in which each of the Apartment Trilogy films ends represents a variation of the manner in which a perceptual crisis can climax. In *Repulsion*, Carole
is physically overwhelmed by her breakdown and is found unconscious (or possibly
dead) under a bed, completely disconnected from the world. The finale of *Rosemary
Baby*, on the hand, is far more ambiguous, for whilst we see Rosemary’s continued
perceptual and physical agency in the diegesis, it possible to read this scene as being
an entirely hallucinogenic episode within the ‘legitimate’ diegetic reality in which
Rosemary may well be lying in bed. In a moment that is directly paralleled in *The
Tenant*, Rosemary ‘screams’ in horror (actually a silent scream in which an extra-
diegetic horn makes a sound more horrifying than her larynx could ever manage) at
what she sees in the cot, followed soon after by her cry ‘No, it can’t be!’, which is a
rough translation of Trelkovsky’s own guttural wail.

The advantage Rosemary has over Trelkovsky is her continued physical influence on
this plane of reality (and again, it is uncertain just ‘where’ this plane is), and so she is
able to choose to re-set her conceptual frameworks by ‘joining’ the reality in which
she finds herself (i.e. accepting the coven’s invitation to ‘be a mother’ to her baby).
Trelkovsky has no such agency. His physical paralysis and its resulting isolation
effectively positions him as a pure observer, a spectator unable to effect change on the
world. So here a fusion occurs between Trelkovsky, the nominal observer who has
been tethered to him, and us the spectators. As he screams, the camera penetrates his
body, entering the only orifice it can and thus completely nullifying his agency within
the diegesis, taking him out of the world and creating of him a ghost, present but
isolated from the material world.
As Calinescu (1987) argues, there is an inter-locking relationship between the sense of selfhood and time in modernism: ‘the personal, subjective, imaginative durée, the private time created by the unfolding of the “self” … [the] identity of time and self constitutes the foundation of modernist culture’ (5). Polanski causes this bond to come unglued, deconstructing the subject through an exploration of perception. The Munch-esque scream Trelkovsky emits when he encounters ‘himself’ at the end of the film is a visceral reaction to this impossible sight that expresses his horror at the realisation of his isolation from the world. It signals not only a complete collapse of all conceptual frameworks, including the integrity of time and space, but the realisation that this collapse has occurred. It is a worst-case scenario in which Trelkovsky maintains just enough of his rationality to understand the full extent of his predicament. It is implied that he, like Simone, cannot speak, but if he could speak, what would he say upon seeing himself and Stella bump heads and scramble to pick up the oranges ‘he’ has dropped on the floor?

We can consider Trelkovsky’s suicide as an act of epistemological self-correction, much reminiscent of Calinescu’s description of the character Ulrich in Thomas Bernhard’s *Correction*, whose suicide Calinescu describes as an act of ‘(self)correction out of existence’ (1987: 309); but it is not ‘Trelkovsky’ who he is trying to annihilate, but rather the emergent persona of Simone Choule, which has both destabilised his own sense of identity and seriously confounded his ability to interpret the world. We can therefore identify Trelkovsky’s defenestration(s) not as suicide, but a form of homicide. The scream then comes to represent the height of his failure to extinguish Choule, as the result of his actions traps Trelkovsky in her body for ‘eternity’. The scream is a final expression of this horror. It is an echo of
Trelkovsky’s last words before his second defenestration, his great existential affirmation of ‘I’m Trelkovsky! Trelkovsky!’ *I exist.*
THE INVESTIGATION TRILOGY
6. APPROACHING THE INVESTIGATIONS

6.1. A Second ‘Trilogy’

Before shifting my focus to a second set of films, namely what I will be referring to as the ‘Investigation Trilogy’ of Chinatown, Frantic and The Ninth Gate, it would be prudent to first identify and discuss a few of the key issues that will inform my analyses of these works, specifically the manner in which I will contrast this group to the previously discussed Apartment Trilogy. Like the Apartment Trilogy, the issue of ‘indirectness’ of perception continues to inform both the narrative content and aesthetic design of the investigation-based films discussed in the next case studies, but both the approach Polanski takes to the theory and the philosophical implication that arise in these works differ significantly from those that I have previously discussed in regard to Repulsion, Rosemary’s Baby and The Tenant.

The legend of Oedipus underscores much of my discussion of the Investigation Trilogy owing to the many ways in which these films all display clear resonances with the trajectory of the Greek hero. Before beginning these case studies, it is therefore pertinent to first provide a brief overview of the various uses of the term ‘Oedipal’, in which I highlight the fact that reference to the myth itself does not de facto allude to either Freud’s concept of the ‘Oedipus complex’ nor Lacan’s ‘Oedipal trajectory’. In order to introduce this Oedipal discussion into the overall focus of this
thesis on perception, I will locate some of the myth’s central themes within Polanski’s overall perceptual discourse.

Another issue I will address before moving on to the next set of case studies is that of gender in Polanski’s cinema. Although Polanski’s use of gender is not the specific focus of the present discussion (i.e. neither that of this chapter nor this work as a whole) its relevance is such that it cannot be overlooked and deserves at least brief attention here, so included as well is a short analysis of the role of gender in the Investigation Trilogy, in which I shall also refer back to the Apartment Trilogy. Thereafter, my case studies of Chinatown, Frantic and The Ninth Gate, as well as a thematically connected analysis of Death and the Maiden, will follow.

6.2. The Oedipal Detective

The use of the motif of the investigation as a means of representing existential crisis finds its origins in antiquity. Sophocles’s rendering of the legend in Oedipus Rex (and its two sequels) remains the key text that sets the standards for the existential ‘who done it’ in which the investigator becomes embroiled into the investigation. As an adjective, the term ‘Oedipal’ has earned varied connotations, Freud’s use of the myth (the ‘Oedipus complex’) as shorthand for incestuous (maternal) desire being most ubiquitous in the last century. The concept of an ‘Oedipal trajectory’ is derived from Lacan’s description of a subject’s overcoming of parental ties towards autonomy and extra-parental relations. The term has been adopted by film theory as a means of describing a classic (Hollywood) formula in which a male protagonist overcomes
odds and is rewarded by either being reunited with a woman or finding one. Hayward (2000) refers to this trajectory as a movement toward social stability, but points out as well that the crisis may or may not actually be resolved (261). In the Sophoclean sense, the Oedipal trajectory, whilst initiated as a means of re-establishing social stability, ultimately results in further crises, both social and, as I argue, perceptual.

Belton (1991) develops Mulvey’s (1989: 178-200) observation regarding the structural similarity of psychoanalysis and detective fiction, namely the mandate of each to confront and assimilate seemingly irrational stimuli to produce useful knowledge, to discover (or conquer) the truth of what is ‘out there’. In other terms, psychoanalysis and detection each involve the assemblage of clues to achieve epistemological satisfaction. As Belton observes, neither Sophocles nor Chandler aims for such satisfaction, but are both more interested in exploring the profoundly dissatisfying possibility that ‘through the acquisition of knowledge the limitations of knowledge are discovered’ (1991: 937). As the ambiguity with which Polanski typically ends his films demonstrates, he shares with Sophocles and Chandler an aversion to satisfaction as an element of storytelling. As Polanski himself commented in reference to his various ‘hopeless’ endings, ‘(i)f you show your hero triumphant, the audience leaves satisfied. There’s nothing more sterile than a state of satisfaction’ (Polanski in Ciment, Perez & Tailleur, 2005: 44).

The Oedipal investigation refers to a particular type of investigation that is perhaps best described as a narrative in which a detecting subject discovers him- or herself to be the very unknown that is being investigated. According to the myth, unbeknownst
to him, it is Oedipus himself who has caused the plague on the city of Thebes, and so his search for said cause is ultimately a search for himself. Importantly, the myth stresses the fatalistic component of this cause-effect scenario, trapping not only Oedipus but also Laius, his father, in a fatalist paradox. (It was Laius who first tried to escape the prophecy that he would be murdered by his son by ordering the infant killed; it is this very order that initiates a chain of events that would eventually lead to the fulfilment of the prophecy.) Oedipus echoes his own father’s attempt at eluding fate with a similar outcome: it is the act of elusion through investigation that causes the very fate he was trying to avoid - a circularity evocative of Ouroboros, the snake which eats its own tail (an image that figures prominently in The Ninth Gate).

Whilst suggesting the immutability of fate, Oedipus also opens up the question of the ‘self fulfilling prophecy’, namely the fulfilment of a certain fate based on knowledge of its prophecy, irrespective of whether the subject of the prophecy finds its fulfilment desirable. Upon learning that he is destined to bed his own mother and kill his own father, Oedipus flees those whom he believed to be his parents (those who adopted him) and in so doing manages to fulfil the prophecy. Already suspecting that his adopted parents were not his real kin, it could be argued that Oedipus was led by a subconscious instinct to fulfil the very prophecy he tried to avoid, and by so doing finds his true parents (wherein lies the deepest irony of the Oedipus myth).

In a related concept, Oedipus also brings to the fore the issue of observation as an influencing factor on the observed. In Oedipus, the act of investigation itself becomes a variable in what is being observed, somewhat predicting what quantum physics
would eventually discover of the subatomic realm. Heisenberg echoes the Oedipal conundrum in his concept of the observer effect in relation to quantum physics in his notion of the ‘uncertainty principle’, which describes the effect that the act of measuring has on the measurement of the position and speed of subatomic particles, wherein the light used to observe the particles changes their position and speed (i.e. the very qualities that are being measured). The philosophical implications of Heisenberg’s observer effect were tremendous, especially as it applied to what is thought to be the very building blocks of physical reality.

It is important to highlight that whilst the uncertainty principle suggests that the act of observation affects that which is being observed, this is only due to the fact that light needs to be introduced in order to take this measurement. It is this light that affects the measurement being taken, not the mere fact that someone is observing. Likewise, whilst the theory of indirect perception stresses the agency of cognition on perception, this is not to imply that observing an object affects its independent nature; unless, that is, it is somehow aware that it (or he or she) is being observed, in which case, like the effect of light on a subatomic particle described by Heisenberg, there could well be an ‘observer effect’.

Although R.L. Gregory is careful to separate the model of indirect perception from the ‘unobservability’ of subatomic particles in the world of quantum physics, there remains a strong parallel between the uncertainty principle’s cause-effect relationship of observation and observed and the active cerebral component in the construction of perceptions described by Helmholtz and echoed by Gregory. Many of the various
philosophical implications of that emerge from indirect perception’s acknowledgement of the active component of perception and the ‘gap’ between the world and our perception of it also emerge from the uncertainty principle; and, if it is not too laboured a connection, these ‘implications’ are shared by the Oedipus myth as well. In terms of Polanski’s cinema, it is the ongoing fascination with the nature of perception that seems to lead his work towards the Oedipal, best embodied in his film Chinatown, but reflected to varying degrees in his other investigation films, The Ninth Gate, Frantic, and, as I shall discuss later, The Ghost.

Of all of Polanski’s films, Chinatown has most often been considered in an Oedipal framework, normally due to its incestuous subplot; but the structuring principals of Oedipus are in fact much utilised by Polanski, most apparent in what I refer to here as the Investigation Trilogy. The manner in which Chinatown reveals the limits of knowledge stems from the more basic question of perceptual acuity to which Polanski so often returns, but I do not wish to suggest an absolute identity between the limits of perception and the limits of knowledge, for such a connection reduces the concept of knowledge to being inextricably associated with sensory perceptions of world, thus discounting, for example, understanding of the abstract. Nevertheless, perceptual arrogance (be it self imposed or institutionally embedded) creates a natural limit to knowledge, as experienced, for example, by Jake Gittes in Chinatown.
6.3. Perception and Investigations

It is unsurprising that Polanski would gravitate so often to the Oedipal narrative structure as a means of conducting his own perceptual discourse when one considers that the Oedipus legend serves as an early example of perceptual psychology being reflected in the narrative content of fiction, one that continues to resonate with current debates regarding the nature of the perceptual mechanism. When Oedipus learns the identity of his birth parents and the fact that it is he who is responsible for the plague that afflicts Thebes, he is compelled to put out his own eyes as a means of depriving himself of further knowledge, specifically the ability to look at his offspring, whom he now considers monstrous. Like Oedipus, in Chinatown it is Evelyn who quite literally has her sight removed by a bullet through the eye so that she too is no longer able to look upon her ‘monstrous’ offspring. Gittes, on the hand, whilst initially compelled to gaze upon the scene, performs a symbolic act of self-blinding in his befuddled retreat from Chinatown.

Oedipus’s meditation on perception is revealed to be more elaborate, however, when we consider that it is the blind ‘seer’ who has access to knowledge beyond the perceptual abilities of the sighted. The use of the colloquialism ‘I see’ to indicate comprehension reflects the popular (linguistic) tendency to connect sight and knowledge (in English, in any case); but as Polan (2006) points out in his analysis of Polanski’s Chinatown, ‘seeing … is not necessarily the same thing as understanding’ (117). Whilst perhaps not using the same sort of terminology as the neuropsychologists and constructivists, Polan is indeed making reference to the very same ‘eye-brain’ relationship they are concerned with. Polan, for example, makes
reference to understanding as a ‘deeper process than mere sensory perception’ (118),
which more-or-less echoes the conclusions of research like Gregory’s.

As manifested in the Apartment Trilogy discussed previously, Polanski’s concern
with perception is often two-fold, expressed both through the representation of the act
of perception and by presenting images in such away that the spectator’s own
perceptual mechanism is directly manipulated. In Chinatown in particular, this two-
fold approach is continued, but takes a new form, especially in the attention it draws
to mechanical means of representation. Whilst the representations of acts of
perception in the Apartment Trilogy explore the nature of the perceptual mechanism
by introducing pathology (i.e. schizophrenia) into the system, Chinatown, Frantic and
The Ninth Gate instead explores the malleability of sane perception. In these
investigation films, the pathology is not injected into the perceiver, but out into the
world that is being perceived.

Belton makes mention of Chinatown’s self-reflective attitude towards cinema,
specifically the manner in which the film ‘transforms explicit concerns with detection
into implicit concerns with the nature of cinema’ (1991: 943). By ‘the nature of
cinema’, Belton is referring to the school psychoanalytic film theory best represented
by Metz (1982), but I propose that such concerns are equally well suited to explore
the nature of perception and the various philosophical (and psychological)
implications that follow. Where Repulsion, The Tenant, and Rosemary Baby employ
cinematographic methods to represent the subjective distorted visions (hallucinations)
of their respective protagonists, Chinatown instead focuses on a mise-en-scène of
observation – the occupation of the frame of both observing subject and observed object, the former normally concealed from the latter. As spectators, we are positioned behind Gittes, rarely adopting his POV, but rather the POV of a voyeur who remains tethered to (but hidden from) Gittes.

The photos in which Hollis Mulwray (Darrell Zwerling) and Katherine (Belinda Palmer) are ‘caught’ together on the lake in Echo Park are an explicit example of how preconceptions form perceptions (i.e. Gittes’s mistaken reading of the situation as a romantic liaison, in keeping with his role of divorce P.I.). Such incidences also serve as signifiers of the indirect nature of perception at its most basic possible level; that is, the manner in which the brain reads the retinal image. The role that photography plays in the film is as much an indicator of our own ocular camera obscura as it is self-reflective of its own cinematographic nature. But rather than forming a parallel to the ‘directness’ of photographic representation (i.e. photochemical exposure of film), Chinatown stresses that it is biological perception that is mediated, and led astray by, the brain.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, Polanski’s interest in perception, specifically the model of indirect perception delineated by Gregory, finds its most overt expression in the Apartment Trilogy of Repulsion, Rosemary’s Baby and The Tenant. In all three of these films, Polanski uses various aesthetic techniques to attempt to represent the subjective act of perception as engaged in by cinematic subjects to whom we, as spectators, are tethered. What is particularly challenging about these representations is the fact these subjects are undergoing a disturbed,
possibly schizophrenic perceptual experience. Polanski’s attempt to represent these subjective perceptual acts (or, as I have argued, his attempt to evoke similar perceptual states in the viewer) is indeed a type of realism, which I have been referring to as perceptual realism, in which the film is established as ‘pure simulacrum’ through the orchestration of the experience of spectatorship to provoke perceptual or epistemological states in the audience that mirror that of the diegetic subject, such as the manipulation of perspective in The Tenant or the perpetual uncertainty of what is and is not diegetically real in Rosemary’s Baby.

Whilst Chinatown, Frantic, and The Ninth Gate do not penetrate the inner sphere to create the kind of psychological realism seen in the Apartment Trilogy, they remain concerned with the same sort of cognitive process. Rather than examining the perceptual mechanism ‘up close’ through a depiction of its breakdown, these investigation stories take a step back to observe a functioning perceiver encounter perceptual challenges that initiate a series of crises, some physical, but for the most part epistemological. A key difference in these two groups of films is the presence of madness, or a ‘malfunction’ in the perceptual apparatus. Where Carole Ledoux, Rosemary Woodhouse and Trelkovsky all display behavioural symptoms of schizophrenia, there is no indication that Walker (Frantic), Gittes (Chinatown), or Corso (The Ninth Gate) are suffering from mental illness in any way. Just the opposite – all three characters are clearly delineated as highly rational. Instead, these ‘sane’ minds are forced to confront a reality that does not match the way their ‘vision’ (cognitive schema) of the way the world should work.
In the latter ‘half’ of his cinema (i.e. post-\textit{Tess}, but including \textit{Chinatown}) Polanski favours a more distant form realism in which the depiction (or reproduction) of purely subjective psychological states (as seen in the Apartment Trilogy) is excluded. Whilst for the most part remaining closely bound to a single narrative reach, the concern shifts from the subjects’ \textit{perceptual} ability (inhibited by mental illness) to the subjects’ \textit{conceptual} ability, as determined by their higher cognitive functions. But this shift in focus should not be mistaken for a major change in Polanski’s cinema’s overall discourse; as I have discussed, the theory of indirect perception delineates a connection between higher cognitive functioning and perception in its suggestion of ‘judgement’ being utilised in sensory perception. In other words, the cognitive functions involved in perception are wedded to prior understanding, \textit{conceptions}, of what is being perceived.

Consistent with the more distant form of realism indicative of the latter ‘half’ of his films (although, incongruently with the chronological watershed, i.e. \textit{Chinatown} comes before \textit{The Tenant}), Polanski’s inquiring camera makes no attempt to penetrate the psyche of Gittes, Walker or Corso (as opposed to Carole Ledoux, Trelkovsky and Rosemary Woodhouse), and instead focuses on the complexities of the situation in which they find themselves. The drama of the Apartment Trilogy remains, for the most part, confined to the flats occupied by these films’ protagonists. As I have previously discussed, these confined spaces serve as a representation for the brain itself, with the conflicts that form the drama being psychological battles with the self, more so than conflicts with others. In the Investigation Trilogy, on the other hand, we are not granted such intimate psychological access. Instead of suffering in their flats, the investigators venture into the world, with the camera trying to keep up with them
as they move from space to space (and person to person) in pursuit of knowledge. The worlds these films explore, whilst governed by the whims of individual psyches (i.e. those of the protagonists), are dominated by complex interactions of disparate, but nevertheless connected, subjects, each of whom possesses his or her own complex psychological profile (and personal drama).

What Polanski’s investigation films have in common with each other, and indeed with the Oedipal myth from which they borrow, is the presence of an epistemological crisis – not due to unstable perceptual mechanisms, but the employment of normally reliable \textit{a priori} perceptual constructs in novel situations in which they are not applicable. What these characters encounter are realities that are beyond their perceptual abilities, which expose the limits, the \textit{frame}, within which their worlds are constructed and in turn require each of them to either adapt their pre-conceptions or suppress elements of what they perceive.

Although the Investigation Trilogy films do not deal with the issue of mental illness, the perceptual discourse initiated by Polanski in the Apartment Trilogy is expanded upon in this set of films. In a manner similar to Mulvey’s investigation-psychoanalysis parity (1989: 178), Polanski uses the investigation as a means of further representing the workings, and especially the fallibility, of perception and, in turn, reality-construction. The investigators’ collection and deciphering of evidence as a means of knowledge acquisition is indeed analogous to the act of perception (and involves perception) due to the various obstacles that the investigators encounter, as well as the intellectual effort with which these must be overcome. Information is
never simply ‘picked up’ from the world, but needs to be deciphered. In fact, the notion that ‘all is not what it seems’ is equally applicable to both the model of indirect perception and Polanski’s investigators themselves, who whilst forced to overcome perceptual biases (i.e. a priori schemas of the world) are also objects for the spectator to perceive and comprehend.

Whilst Gregory’s influence is most pronounced in films in which the camera penetrates the psyche of its characters, the principles outlined in Eye and Brain (and elsewhere) nonetheless continue to inform Polanski’s work. The events of the Investigation Trilogy films reflect the central proposition of indirect perception (i.e. the agency of cognition in perception and the resulting ‘unreliability’ of perception to accurately represent the world of things) not through intimate dissections of subjective perceptual experiences, but by ‘acting out’ the basics of the perceptual process in the diegetic conflicts of these films, in which diverse characters present competing hypotheses of reality for us to judge. Also heavily in play in these films is the issue of the ‘observer effect’, a concept that requires a careful distinction to be established between how this term is intended in quantum physics and what it means in the context of the theory of indirect perception. Where Heisenberg’s ‘uncertainty principle’ refers to the manner in which the act of applying light to (sub-atomic) objects of observation changes the measurable qualities of said objects, indirect perception is more concerned with the manner in which the brain’s evolution (both inter-generational and in terms of its development over one’s life) establishes cognitive frameworks that greatly influence how we perceive the world. In the latter case, there is no implication that the object of perception is literally changed, but rather that our perception of it (and, in turn, its reality to us) is mutable.
Both meanings of the ‘observer effect’ are relevant to this discussion, in particular in relation to the Oedipal aspects of Polanski’s works. In *Oedipus*, an investigation (Oedipus’s search for his real parents) brings on the plague. In *Chinatown, Frantic*, and *The Ninth Gate*, the effects of investigation are most pronounced by the deaths caused by the investigation itself (most notably in *The Ninth Gate*, where literally everyone connected with the object of investigation, the book, is killed). Like Oedipus, in all three of Polanski’s investigation films, the investigator is forced to rethink, to re-see, the world as the result of uncomfortable discrepancies being presented between the way he thinks the world works and what is happening around him, which in turn causes serious disruption to his concept of personal identity. In *Chinatown*, Jake Gittes is forced to confront deep seeded corruption at the highest level of American business, government, and law enforcement – a crumbling of infrastructure that defines his society. In *Frantic*, Walker not only has a piece of his identity ‘amputated’ with the loss of his wife, but is thrust full-on into the high tension world of global politics. *The Ninth Gate*’s Dean Corso is also forced to look at reality beyond his ‘percentage’ (the answer he gives when he is asked what he ‘believes in’).

Each of these investigation films conceals a psychological subplot of which the spectator is made aware, but nevertheless remains isolated from. Such isolation of the spectator from the protagonist is far more pronounced in this group of films than in the Apartment Trilogy, in which we are granted access to the psychological (subjective) sphere of the protagonist to whom we are tethered. By these
‘psychological subplots’ I am referring specifically (but not exclusively) to Jake Gittes’s Chinatown complex, the taboo sexual tension between Walker and Michelle (Emmanuelle Seigner), and Corso’s shift towards belief in the supernatural, each of which I will discuss in due course. The presence of these concealed ‘subplots’ in combination with the ubiquitous lack of satisfying solutions contribute to the hallmark Polanskian effect of leaving the spectator with more questions than answers at the end of these films. It is precisely this effect that most dramatically marks Polanski’s departure from the Hollywood formula, notwithstanding most of his films’ use of Hollywood star power and his celebratory (although often simultaneously deconstructive) attitude to genre cinema. The ‘goal’ of these films, in as much as this word is even applicable, is not the resolution of problems (i.e. the Hollywood approach), but rather the revelation of the nuances of reality, the exposure of the fallacy of binary moral economies and overly-simplified concepts of so-called benign social structures like government and religious institutions. Such a goal is duly complemented by the exploration of perception that weaves its way through Polanski’s cinema.

6.4. Gender and Perception

When juxtaposing the Apartment and Investigation Trilogies, one cannot overlook the role that gender seems to play in each set of films. In all three investigation films, the protagonist takes the form of a white male in his late-thirties to mid-forties. All three appear to be in the prime of their lives, both physically and intellectually. All three are

52 Although Johnny Depp was slightly younger than this at the time, he was made-up so that his character, Dean Corso, would appear a few years older than Depp himself.
all virile, successful, American men. In contrast, Carole, Rosemary and Trelkovsky are all either women or highly feminised (i.e. Trelkovsky, who is ultimately transformed into a woman), suffer from both physical and mental illness, are either unemployed or have difficulties in the workplace, and are often bullied by friends, family and colleagues.

Such consistent coupling of madness and femininity no doubt opens these films to the accusation of misogyny, as has been observed by critics in the past (see Haskell, 1987: 346–7, for example), but a detailed inter-film analysis of Polanski’s cinema can show such readings to be overly superficial. This is not to say that Polanski does not depict gender stereotypes or indeed portray (unpunished) misogynistic behaviour as a provocative means of exploring gender roles, such as in the rape scene in Rosemary’s Baby. It is rare, in fact, to find either condemnation or celebration of any ideological stance in Polanski’s cinema, which opens his work up to harsh criticism from both the right and left; the right attacking his moral ambivalence and the often graphic use of sex and violence in his films, and the left his lack of social commitment and use of the individualistic (i.e. highly subjectivised, arguably anti-Marxist) narrative form. But, as I have indicated previously, if there is any consistent ideological stance to be distilled from his cinema as a whole, it is that of ambiguity itself, a profound agnosticism that removes certainty from that which should be most certain: our concept of identity and the very means by which knowledge is attained. Nevertheless, Polanski’s cinema is not entirely even-handed - there are ‘enemies’ that are consistently attacked throughout his work, namely those who abuse power, often embodied in the form of wealthy business tycoons, religious leaders, or political officials.
Rather than directly challenging gender stereotypes in the Apartment Trilogy, Polanski seems to employ the stereotype of gender-based otherness as a means of reflecting the otherness of those characters’ perceptual experiences. This is achieved most primitively in *Repulsion*, but is made more complex in *Rosemary’s Baby* by positioning Rosemary as fighting against (but defeated by) a plot against her. The coupling of Trelkovsky’s increasingly pronounced schizophrenic condition and his re-gendering serves to clarify that Polanski’s link of madness and femininity is not a coincidence; in these films they form a parity. Crnković (2004) draws a parallel between Trelkovsky’s perceived ‘foreignness’ and his transformation into a woman, insinuating that his existing marginalisation (as a Pole, as a Jew) was not sufficient, as ‘only by becoming a woman can he reach the bottom of victimization’. Indeed, Polanski’s use of gender seems to follow the stereotype-based logic that women serve as better representatives of the human condition as they are more emotionally expressive (a strategy much employed in cinema, especially by the likes of Hitchcock, and, more recently, Von Trier). In addition, by positioning women in the role of victim, killer, or warrior a greater emotional response is elicited from the audiences due to what stereotypes inform us is the female gender’s ‘inherent’ vulnerability. By the same token, in the Investigation Trilogy it is male impotence that takes centre stage. The effect is similar: by both engaging and deconstructing stereotypes, the filmmaker can manipulate audience’s expectations as a means of increasing engagement.

53 No pagination, see: http://www.kinoeye.org/04/05/crnkovic05.php.
The complex, often absurd manner in which these character’s perceptual distortions are depicted, as well as the role played by those who surround them (their micro-societies) in the provocation of this madness, does not serve to reinforce the ‘place’ of woman as inferior other, but rather to parody such binary gender divisions. In the Investigation Trilogy, Polanski engages in a similar parody, but this time it is the gender stereotype of the male figure as sane (sage) perceiver and effecter of change.

6.5. Investigating the Investigations

Each of Polanski’s investigation films treats the search for knowledge slightly differently. In Chinatown, it is established early on that Gittes typically investigates marital infidelity, a ‘crime’ he seems to understand and is comfortable with. Gittes demonstrates his understanding of the working of infidelity in his initial rejection of the fake Mrs. Mulwray’s request for his services; he seems to feel that it is more appropriate for men, like Curly (Burt Young), to spy on their cheating wives. When Gittes realises he has been duped (first by an impersonator, and then by his own understanding of the nature of the case he has taken on) he experiences an epistemological crisis that he spends the rest of the film trying (and failing) to overcome. Conversely, the more Gittes investigates, the more complex, more incomprehensible his world becomes, leading him back (both figuratively and literally) to Los Angeles’s Chinatown, where he had served as a police officer and where he was advised to do ‘as little as possible’ by his captain based on what was believed to be the futility of any attempt to gain control (to understand) this self-contained world. The expression ‘Chinatown’ (as in ‘Forget it Jake. It’s Chinatown’) thus becomes a byword for the futility of trying to grasp the unknowable. Whilst
*Chinatown* begins with Gittes working confidently in his private agency, we soon learn that this P.I. carries with him the psychological scar of his experience of being a police officer in Chinatown, where he was embedded in a cultural and linguistic milieu in which Gittes was thoroughly ‘other’.

In Walker and Corso we again have characters in a Polanski film for whom the issue of national identity becomes a factor in the narrative, but the manner in which this is manifested varies somewhat. In *Frantic*, Walker is an American in Paris who is forced to deal not only with his total ignorance of the language, but French bureaucracy in a scene that takes us straight back to Trelkovsky’s confrontation with Parisian police in *The Tenant*. But just as in *The Tenant*, Polanski refuses to let the spectator conclude that institutional French bigotry is necessarily an additional obstacle for the protagonist. When Walker complains that he expects the French ‘to take him seriously’, he is informed that not only has he been taken seriously, he is in fact receiving preferential treatment (although this is somewhat disguised by their inappropriately jovial demeanour, in Walker’s eyes at least). Instead, it is the American Embassy that proves to be far less helpful, diffusing any notion that Walker is being discriminated against by the French, which the scene in the Police station initially (seems) to suggest. Nevertheless, whilst Walker’s sense of national identity and displacement indeed emerges as a perceptual obstacle, it remains thoroughly unclear as to whether or not this is the result of discrimination. Like Walker, Dean Corso is also an American abroad; but *The Ninth Gate* presents a very different sort of transnational body than *Frantic*. There is no sense of the tragically displaced foreigner seen in Walker. On the contrary, Corso moves fluidly across both international and European borders (indeed, Europe is politically a different place in *The Ninth Gate’s*
1999 setting than it is in *Frantic*’s 1988), he (unlike Walker) speaks French effortlessly, and even when his limited Portuguese or Spanish proves insufficient, English as *lingua franca* takes over seamlessly. Unlike Walker, Corso is well aware of both local customs and geography.

In presenting such unclear portrayals of the effects of national, cultural, and linguistic otherness, *Frantic*, like *The Tenant* and *Repulsion* in particular, complicates attempts to ‘read’ the extent of the significance of the protagonist’s status as an ‘expatriate’ in Polanski’s cinema. That is not to say that Walker, Carole Ledoux and Trelkovsky are equally disadvantaged – each are anchored to a national identity to varying degrees. Carole is very much a (relatively) recent immigrant to London, but her command of the language diminishes her otherness greatly in comparison to Walker in Paris. Trelkovsky, on the other hand, is a naturalised French citizen, but it is certainly difficult to avoid interpreting his anxiety towards his neighbours as greatly based on his (and our) assumptions of bigotry. In fact, it is arguably Trelkovsky’s identity as oppressed other to which he may be clinging. Walker makes the same assumption, but in both cases, Polanski refuses to let the spectator maintain such notions unchallenged.

Like gender roles and national identity, generic convention is also something Polanski prefers to toy with and deconstruct rather than adhere to. Superficially at least, *Chinatown* is film noir, *Frantic* a thriller, and *The Ninth Gate* a supernatural noir/horror (a subgenre in its own right, with precursors including *The Seventh Victim* [M. Robson, 1943], *Alias Nick Beal* [J. Farrow, 1949], and *Angel Heart* [A. Parker,
In Chinatown, marital infidelity specialist P.I. Jake Gittes finds himself embroiled in a murder case connected to mass corruption in the control of Los Angeles’s water supply. Frantic is the story of the American doctor Richard Walker’s attempt to find his wife, who has been abducted in Paris as the result of mistaken identity. Not taken seriously by either the French police or the American embassy, Walker is tasked with finding his wife himself in a city whose geography and language are both unknown to him. In The Ninth Gate, New York ‘book detective’ Dean Corso is hired by the wealthy and eccentric publishing tycoon Boris Balkan to go to Europe and track down the two remaining copies of an ancient and extremely rare volume, The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows (three of which exist, including Balkan’s copy), with which he (Balkan) is convinced he will be able to contact the Devil and attain supernatural powers. A shrewd capitalist himself, Corso accepts Balkan’s generous remuneration offer notwithstanding what he considers to be an absurd reason for collecting the books.

In all three of these films, the task taken on by the protagonist-cum-detective turns out to be far more difficult than it initially appeared. A simple case of marital infidelity turns into murder and political corruption at the highest level. Rather than a kidnapping for money, Sondra Walker’s (Betty Buckley) abductors demand a tiny, but highly sophisticated nuclear triggering device of which Walker is inadvertently (and for the majority of film, unknowingly) in possession. Corso’s exploitation of a man with more money than sense results in a multiple body count, which nearly includes his own, as he tracks down a couple of antique books. In each of these films, the men are forced to take on new perceptual challenges and reconsider the realities in which they comfortably reside. Walker is an apolitical American doctor forced to deal
with a global nuclear crisis in order to save his wife, and both Corso and Gittes, although already detectives of sorts, are likewise thrust into cases (into realities) in which they are not used to operating.

I will now turn my attention to dedicated case studies of each of these films, but this inter-textual discourse will continue as these discussions develop.
7. Investigation Trilogy Case Study 1: Chinatown

In the previous case studies I have referred several times to the ‘perceptual crises’ experienced by the protagonists of these films. I have suggested that these films lend themselves to readings that suggest that these crises could be symptoms of neurological pathologies that affected the characters’ ability to perceive the world effectively and caused their cognitive frameworks to become destabilised. In Chinatown, there is little to suggest that the protagonist to whom the spectator is so closely connected (‘tethered’) is suffering from any such malady, but crises do emerge nonetheless.

The basis of the crisis endured by Chinatown’s Jake Gittes is his failure to coalesce sense data into a form that corresponds to his a priori conceptual frameworks. Simply put, he cannot force what he encounters into a Gittes-world-view shaped box. Such perceptual challenges can arouse epistemological crises, and eventually lead to even greater existential crises. This philosophical trajectory closely matches that which Gregory describes as the ‘philosophical implications’ of the model of indirect perception, in which the highly subjective, malleable and often unreliable nature of perception it describes highlights the gap between a) our perception of the world, and b) the world’s ontology. The challenge that faces Gittes is to address this gap, a task that forms the basic impetus for all investigations. What he discovers is that the gap he believed he had overcome in his role as marital infidelity detective remains, and
thus he is returned to Chinatown, a place where it is better to not take action, to do ‘as little as possible’, rather than risk consequences that are beyond his perceptual mechanism’s predictive abilities.

7.1. Mediated Perception

Mechanical means of representation play a role in several of Polanski’s films; the exact tool of representation used depends on the historic setting of the diegesis. In *Death and the Maiden*, a video camera is employed as a means of validating Miranda’s (Ben Kingsley) ‘confession’. In *Frantic*, difficulty with understanding a series of messages on an answer phone serves to connect Michelle and Walker. It is seventeenth-century (printed) engravings that are studied and ultimately direct Corso’s plight in *The Ninth Gate*, and digitally recorded interviews are utilised by the ghostwriter (Ewan McGregor) in *The Ghost* to write his client’s ‘autobiography’. In *Chinatown*, technologically mediated forms of perception are ubiquitous, specifically the use of lenses as aids to vision in the form of binoculars, eyeglasses, and cameras. The capacity of these devices - and in the case of cameras, *their artefacts* - to facilitate perception and, in turn, the acquisition of knowledge, is one of *Chinatown*’s principle areas of scrutiny. It is the role of these artefacts, namely photographs, in *Chinatown* that I will examine first.

The relevance of the mechanically/chemically produced representative image in *Chinatown* is made apparent by the film’s first post-credit sequence, in which Gittes (although he is yet to be identified by name) creates a primitive cinematic device for
his client, Curly, consisting of a series of still photos of a man and woman caught on camera. The sexually explicit nature of the photos is certainly evocative of the scopophilic aspect of imagery geared towards the satisfaction of the male gaze; but what follows quickly undoes such assumptions, as it is not pleasure that is delivered to the spectator – the diegetic spectator, that is - but rather a painful revelation that his wife is cheating on him. Ironically, perhaps, in the context of Chinatown’s overall emphasis on epistemological uncertainty, this opening scene demonstrates the power, indeed the reliability of the image (i.e. a representation, an ‘index’ - not the thing itself) to reveal truth through the camera’s capacity to play proxy to a set of eyes and allow the transmission of sight (of knowledge) from one individual to the next. The cuckold’s uncertainty is now lifted; no doubt remains that his wife is sleeping with another man. Here the pictures do not lie. All that remains is for him to address the situation, to ‘correct’ her actions and put his world to right. For Curly, this is accomplished by physically beating his wife into submission.

The simplicity of cases like Curly’s, where pictures do not lie, is in sharp contrast to what Jake Gittes deals with for the rest of the film, where the relationship between stimuli and reality becomes increasingly difficult to interpret. Later, Gittes will use his camera, a tool of the trade, to snap shots of Hollis Mulwray in seemingly compromising extra-marital situations. But it becomes apparent that these mechanically mediated images (photographic or by way of mirrors or binoculars) do not tell the ‘full story’, and that Jake has overlooked pertinent details that are right under his nose. In fact, it is only when Jake has his nose cut that he begins to gain some appreciation of both the complexity of the case into which he himself has now
become embroiled and the fact that his fidelity to his conceptual frameworks may well be compromising his ability to perceive effectively.

So, whilst *Chinatown* initially puts an emphasis on photography as method of constructing (or framing) meaning, the validity of representation as a reliable means of interpreting the world soon comes into question. The same seems true for the extra-diegetic camera’s ability to convey reliable, complete information to the spectator. Just as Gittes’s own recorded images fail to convey the myriad of complexities of the diegetic world, so too do the images by which Jake Gittes’s plight is communicated to the spectator fail to ‘contain’ the story, and we are soon aware that there is far more occurring off screen than on.

It is worth emphasising that the form of ‘troubled’ perception experienced by Gittes is not tantamount to the type of perception I have previously associated with psychosis. *Chinatown* instead demonstrates that a conflict can arise between what the stimuli being perceived (veridically) signal and the conclusions drawn by the perceiver. As Gregory is fond of repeating, perception is a process of hypothesising. The generation of hypotheses, however, presupposes knowledge of plausibility (i.e. what can possibly ‘be’). Although inter-personal conflict abounds in *Chinatown*, the film’s main crisis remains, as with the Apartment Trilogy, a psychological conflict. The conflict is an intra-personal schism between what Gittes is equipped (or willing) to perceive and what the stimuli that he encounters ‘out there’ are actually signalling.
Soon after the episode in which perceptual certainty is delivered to one client via some photos, Gittes is greeted by another client whose very physicality proves misleading. ‘Mrs. Mulwray’ arrives and sets Gittes off on the type of case he is all too familiar with. We later learn that this woman was not Mrs. Mulwray at all, but an impersonator – a fleshy representation of the real Mrs. Mulwray. The ontology of both the fake Mrs. Mulwray and the case Gittes ‘solves’ prove to be illusory; the perceptual game is afoot.

Jake Gittes’s first action once he has accepted the Mulwray ‘case’ is to track down his client’s husband, Hollis Mulwray, whom he finds giving evidence in the Los Angeles council chambers. Our first image of Mulwray is that of a diminished figure in the bottom right hand corner of the screen, whose size is dwarfed by a flattening of focus in which he attains the dimensions of the comic strip characters that dominate the left half of the frame. I refer to this as ‘our’ first image, as the camera here demonstrates that whilst it may be tethered to Gittes, its narrative (‘perceptual’) reach is slightly greater than his. We see that Gittes is sitting on the other side of the room, not looking over the shoulder of the man reading the comics as the first shot and the next might suggest. The camera attempts to appropriate Gittes’s gaze, but since he continues to avoid paying attention to the speaker, the camera is torn between respecting Gittes’s (distracted) gaze and the official proceedings. The camera and Gittes are re-aligned when Mulwray assumes the floor. Mulwray protests the construction of a damn that he believes to be unsafe (and thus creating an obstacle for those who would profit from it), but Gittes seems bored. It is not only Gittes’s expression, but the juxtaposition and construction of these shots that suggests that Gittes is paying little
attention to the courtroom discourse, which he does not see as relevant; his perceptual focus still completely informed by his role as infidelity P.I.

As Gittes tracks Hollis Mulwray, hoping to catch him in the act of committing adultery, he often watches him through a lens, but rather than learning anything, the images conveyed by these devices prove perplexing. He watches Hollis Mulwray walk into a (dry) floodway and discuss something with a small boy on a horse. He then sees him walk on the beach, perhaps to meet his lover? No. He seems more interested in a large pipe. The photographs taken by one of Gittes’s employees reveal Hollis Mulwray and another, older, man in heated debate. But their faces are obscured, and the topic of conversation is indiscernible other than a reference to an ‘apple core’. Finally, Mulwray is spotted at Echo Park, with who appears to be his lover. ‘Echo park … Water again,’ says Gittes, a prophetic statement of the importance that water will play in this case, and reinforcing a film noir cliché labelled by Schrader as a ‘Freudian attachment to water’ (1986: 236). Gittes manages to shoot a series of photos of Mulwray and the woman, which seem to put his world to right since the situation he is investigating seems to be conforming nicely to the type of infidelity narrative with which Gittes is accustomed. Such conformity is comforting to Gittes, and he is lulled into complacency until he is confronted with the fact that everything he has witnessed, even the original impetus for the investigation, is not what it seemed. The scene in which Gittes first encounters the real Mrs. Mulwray, in which she looms behind him as he is telling his colleagues a highly ‘inappropriate’ joke, neatly foreshadows the uncomfortable revelations to come. It is also one of the few moments in which the camera is afforded a greater narrative reach than Gittes
himself, serving to provoke unease in the spectators in anticipation of his (pending) embarrassment.

After realising that he has been duped by an imitation Mrs. Mulwray (an event which seems to have been well beyond Gittes’s limits of possibility) and once Hollis Mulwray turns up dead, Gittes returns to the original locations to where he tracked Mulwray in order to re-evaluate, re-see, what he had previously observed. The key difference being not the locations themselves, which remain the same (aside from the obvious absence of Mulwray), but Gittes’s own mental state – he must now approach the stimuli with an adjusted set of conceptual frameworks. But this proves difficult for Gittes.

As the film progresses and Gittes becomes evermore aware that the situation in which he finds himself is not simply another divorce case, he also becomes increasingly frustrated with the way in which the epistemological certainty of his world is degenerating. He is no longer master of his domain, and the sights (and sounds) that now surround him are no longer informative, but perplexing. Taking a cue from Curly’s ‘curative’ technique, Gittes eventually makes attempts to reclaim mastery through violence. When confronted with information from Evelyn Mulwray that he is unable to reconcile with his established conceptual frameworks – i.e. the Oedipal ‘shock’ Gittes experiences when he is confronted with the ‘daughter/sister’ paradox - he resorts to the primitive technique of slapping her and throwing her across the room in an attempt, quite literally, to beat the truth out of her. Although the violence does seem to extract information, rather than re-establishing Gittes’s mastery, the new
information in fact highlights the limits of Gittes’s understanding and complete lack of mastery.

As Gittes begins to track Hollis Mulwray, he employs the usual tools of the trade (camera, mirrors, binoculars) to augment and record what he is able to see. Indeed, Jake Gittes’s emphasis on the sense of sight as a means to construct meaning is greatly emphasised. That being said, the information that Gittes lacks is often aural, not visual; and the silent, distant images he collects do more to perplex than inform, but this is sometimes due to his inability to discern what is being said (not done). Unlike the rather un-coded images Gittes is used to dealing with, the Mulwray case becomes a struggle to decode an abstract order whose semantics Gittes is not privy to. The investigation therefore moves from the concrete (actions) to the symbolic (linguistic representation of actions) - a shift to a sphere in which the reach of the visual is insufficient.

The perceptual discourse in Chinatown is also manifested via the physical displacement of the protagonist. Each of the investigation films deals with the issue of displacement, specifically the link between mastery and familiarity with (or ‘belonging’ to) occupied space, but each is unique in the way in which the effects of displacement are manifested. In Chinatown, it is through frequent reference to Gittes’s former job as a police officer stationed in Los Angeles’s Chinatown that we locate Gittes in a space of ‘non belonging’. It is not until the final few minutes of the film that we are actually transported there, but until that point Chinatown remains a potent off-screen space, as relevant to diegesis as anything we see in the frame.
During Gittes’s time in Chinatown, he led a futile existence, completely impotent to effect change and embedded in an abstract order that he was unable to decode. Consequently, he did ‘as little as possible’ in order to do the least amount of harm.

Through his conversation with Evelyn Mulwray, Gittes reveals that there was indeed a situation in which his inability to take correct and timely action led to the death of a woman he loved.

In order to ‘correct’ his perceptual abilities, Gittes does not learn to decode the abstract order of L.A.’s Chinatown (although he does learn some Chinese, it did not help him penetrate this world - an indicator that his lack of linguistic skills is only part of the problem), but rather leaves this environment to return to the more familiar world of (private) marital infidelity investigation, where he thrives to the point of epistemological and perceptual arrogance. In this light, Jake begins the narrative in a different place than either Walker or Corso (based on what we are privy to, that is); he has already experienced his identity crisis and believes he has overcome it, only to have to face it once again; thus the allegorical use of ‘Chinatown’ throughout the film.

7.2. The Body and Perception

Having learned that water is being dumped nightly into different sections of the (dry) Los Angeles riverbed, Gittes, under the cover of night, investigates the water works in hope of discovering the mysterious water’s origin. The scene begins with Gittes’s negotiation of a fence marked ‘No Trespassing’ and ‘Keep Out’. Almost immediately,
a shot rings out and Gittes is forced to take cover in one of the plant’s dry drainage canals. As if on cue, water comes rushing from the plant, slamming Gittes’s body ignobly into another fence. Soaked and now missing a shoe, Gittes climbs his way out of the water and tries to retreat back to his car. Before he can, however, he is met with a punch to the gut by Cross’s henchman, Claude Mulvihill (Roy Jenson). Another man, dressed in white and small in stature (Gittes calls him a ‘midget’), produces a knife and lectures Gittes menacingly about his ‘nosiness’. To stress his point, the man inserts the knife onto Gittes’s nose as Mulvihill holds him in place. As the man in white informs Gittes that ‘nosey fellows … get their noses cut off’, he quickly and almost casually flicks the knife to the right, tearing Gittes’s nose open. The ramifications of the incident resonate for the remainder of the film. Gittes is forced to wear a large bandage at first, which (neatly marking the passage of time) is replaced by a smaller one and eventually an exposed (but quite gruesome) scar.

Bodily trauma is, of course, a ubiquitous motif seen throughout Polanski’s work; these images often serve to dramatically underscore his frequent meditations on the body and identity. In *The Tenant*, Trelkovsky has his entire body traumatised, with the exception of the eyes, which are left intact as to allow for one last cruel visual trauma. Gittes is also not alone in having his nose violated. In *Cul-de-sac*, Dickie is also cut just beneath the nose, as is Oscar by Mimi in *Bitter Moon*. In *Two Men and a Wardrobe*, one of the men has his nose punched (a scene mirrored in *Chinatown*, with Polanski again playing the aggressor), and in *The Ninth Gate*, Green Eyes (Emmanuelle Seigner) also receives a bloodied nose, not from an adversary, but an unintentional elbow from Corso, in a scene that is itself evocative of the unintentional
‘injury’ caused to Evelyn by Gittes’s wildly swinging arm in the last few moments of Chinatown.

The nose-cutting in Chinatown lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading in its allusion to castration, a common motif in film noir in which female forces often threaten to emasculate the (male) protagonist. But in this scene, it is not an underhanded femme fatale that threatens Gittes’s male-mastery, but rather a diminutive, nameless man, played of course by Polanski himself. Rather than focusing on the nose-cutting as symbolic of castration, however, I propose a far more superficial reading in the context of my overall discussion. Considering Chinatown’s discourse on perception, it is not the phallus that is of towering importance, but the sense organs. By molesting Gittes’s nose, the threat to perception is even more menacing than that of castration; next time, it is threatened, it will be removal of the entire organ, leaving Gittes not sexually impotent, but perceptually limited.

The violence here is not threatened or implied; it is literal and only compounded by the further threat of total nasal amputation. Notwithstanding the man-with-knife’s (as he is credited) seemingly metaphorical threat relating to ‘nosiness’, there remains a strongly literal aspect in his assault on a sense organ. As it turns out, it is sight, not smell, which proves most deadly in Chinatown, as manifested by the bullet that permanently does away with Evelyn’s (‘flawed’) eye. Just as in Oedipus, eyes are the body parts that are most violently assaulted. When Hollis Mulwray’s corpse is discovered, his eyes bulge unnaturally from their sockets, emphasising a connection between his perceptual acuity and his death. Most severe, however, is the way Evelyn
is killed, having her eye shot out completely, as if the flaw on her iris noticed by Gittes served as a homing device for the stray bullet. Katherine Cross’s eyes also ‘bulge’ as she takes in the horrific image of her mutilated mother/sister’s cycloptic death mask, and are promptly covered by her father/grandfather’s (monstrous) hand; a hand that at first seems to protect Katherine, but transforms into a grasping talon as he pulls her towards him.

7.3. Hearing and Understanding

One of the means by which Chinatown elaborates Polanski’s ongoing concern with perception is by introducing the complexities of language into the discourse. It is not only Gittes’s perception of visual stimuli that proves challenging, but his ability to comprehend abstract linguistic stimuli. When conversations are monitored, words become muddled and nonsensical due to interference; the highly relevant name of Cross’s secret society, ‘Albecore’, for example, is (over)heard as the irrelevant ‘apple core’. Straightforward language barriers also cause problems, but unexpectedly prove revelatory in the end.

Gittes several encounters with Evelyn Mulwray’s entirely Chinese staff are also somewhat suggestive that he is returning to the sphere of uncertainty referred to as ‘Chinatown’. It is Gittes’s seemingly banal exchange of pleasantries with Mulwray’s gardener that proves the most revealing. Whilst tending to the garden’s fishpond, the gardener (casually) tells Gittes that the salt water is ‘very bad for the “glass”’. What at first seems to be a silly phonetic joke that highlights the difficulties many non-native
English speakers have with the pronunciation of ‘L’ and ‘R’, turns out to be a key moment of revelation for Gittes, pointing not only to a possible reason for the presence of salt water in Hollis Mulwray’s lungs, but also nudges Gittes towards the discovery of Hollis Mulwray’s (broken) glasses in the pond (indeed, the pond is ‘bad for the glass’).

Jake Gittes’s verbal exchange with the gardener unifies a series of key elements not only related to the case that Gittes is working on, but the issues the film is itself confronting. In particular, it manages to encompass the interplay between the auditory and visual sensory systems. Importantly, both what is heard (what the gardener says) and what is seen (the broken glasses) is a symbolic indicator of meaning. The words uttered by the gardener are not only inherently part of the symbolic order in the sense that all spoken language is, but the way in which they are heard by Gittes gives them a significance beyond what seems to be intended by the object itself (i.e. the words, sound waves, produced by the gardener). Gittes hears these words (sound waves) and de-codifies one at first as ‘glass’, then translates this to the more probable ‘grass’, but then back again to ‘glass’. The glasses themselves are also metonymic in that they serve as indicators, ‘pointing’ towards murder. But even so, the glasses must be interpreted, for they are not representations of an absent ‘thing’, but rather an abstract means of representing, or an abstract signpost for murder; they are visual objects whose ‘meaning’ must be decoded by way of higher cognitive functions.

In one of the most interesting visual metaphors in Chinatown, the gardener reaches into the pond whilst de-weeding it, which leads to Gittes’s discovery of this pair of
glasses that the pond conceals. Galperin describes the moment as a literally ‘breaking of the plane of reflection’ (1987: 1158), but the image also conveys the more nuanced concept with which indirect perception deals, namely that of the insurmountable gap between object and perception. Gittes will eventually reach through the light-refracting medium (the water) within which the object is concealed to literally grasp the case’s most important clue, a symbol of sight itself. But the object’s importance is not obvious at the time of its discovery. Whilst Gittes’s reaching into the pond and grasping of the glasses may trigger thoughts of reaching across the ‘perceptual gap’ for those so inclined, the image is not inherently clear. The glasses may be an important clue, but Gittes has not quite grasped the proverbial apple of knowledge. The glasses are, after all, broken.

As Jake Gittes discovers, the glasses are bifocals, an apt symbol for the multiple layering of ‘realities’ in Chinatown. This is, after all, a world in which a man drowns in a drought. The plague of Chinatown is not just a lack of water, it can also be identified as the wave of incongruent stimuli with which the perceiver, namely Gittes, must grapple. The bifocals also call to mind the various constructed illusions, those ‘visual ambiguities’ (Gregory, 1997a: 205) I discussed in my case study of Rosemary’s Baby, that highlight the brain’s inability to simultaneously see contradictory images that defy well-established perceptual frameworks, notwithstanding their co-existence in the visual field. The linguistic equivalent of visual ambiguity is manifested dramatically when Evelyn reveals Katherine’s ‘nature’ to Gittes in another key scene.
One of the most disturbing images in any Polanski film occurs when Gittes, imitating the cuckolded Curly’s method of ‘putting things right’, beats Evelyn as means of getting the ‘truth’ out of her. The scene is highly problematic, as would be the case for any scene in which a male protagonist, with whom we are meant to sympathise, inflicts violence on a woman. The fact that the genre and era is permissive of such violence hardly seems relevant, and certainly does not make the act forgivable.

Polanski’s use of inter-gender violence is of course nothing new; but such violence normally takes the form rape-revenge scenarios (real and/or imagined) like Repulsion, Rosemary’s Baby, Tess, and Death and the Maiden. Unlike these films, however, Chinatown runs the risk of normalising Gittes’s actions (in spite of the period setting). As offensive as the scene may be, it remains a powerful manifestation of Gittes’s growing perceptual crisis.

The scene in which Gittes beats Evelyn is preceded by another scene in which Gittes and Evelyn share a different sort of physical exchange. After making love, it is Gittes who reveals to Evelyn details of his past, specifically his experience as a police officer stationed in Chinatown, in which he inadvertently caused someone’s death. The scene concludes, however, with Evelyn denying a reciprocal self-revelation when questioned about a distressing call that causes her to dash away. Gittes follows her and learns that Evelyn is attending to the very woman his team of investigators had identified as Hollis Mulwray’s mistress. Believing Evelyn to be holding her captive, Gittes demands information from Evelyn, who refuses. He resorts to beating her into submission, which results in her blurting out the phrase that, like the cracked bifocals, proves to be a highly revelatory element in the case. ‘She is my daughter and my
sister’, a seemingly contradictory statement, or linguistic ambiguity, is in fact true and represents (at least) half of the motivation behind Hollis Mulwray’s murder.

Just as Gittes is forced to re-evaluate the visual and aural stimuli he encounters beyond his (self-imposed) conceptual framework, so too is he challenged semantically. The seeming paradox with which Gittes is now faced presents a direct affront to these frameworks; this time, however, the challenge does not take place in the type of sensory context I have discussed thus far, but at the level of the higher cognitive function involved in semantic comprehension, where one’s ‘daughter’ and ‘sister’ cannot be the same person. When Gittes attacks Evelyn, he is attempting to bridge a perceptual gap by physically striking Evelyn, the object that holds the knowledge he needs; but rather than forcing Evelyn to admit what his ‘divorce PI’ conceptual framework is telling him must be true, he is faced with a series of words that highlights the limits of the framework into which he retreated after his personal ‘Chinatown’ tragedy, and thus the limits of his ability to perceive and comprehend the world. As Coates (2006) discusses, there is indeed a connection in Chinatown between the moments of linguistic misunderstandings and those of cognitive revelation: ‘In Chinatown, key words are knotted with others to create a hallucination of clues to a hidden trauma’ (106). Gittes’s own struggle to piece together the now shattered reality into which he has retreated is confounded, as reflected by his difficulty with accessing what seem to be simplistic units of (linguistic/symbolic)

54 Gittes’s constant failing to comprehend (master) the elements of this case position him as what Belton describes as a ‘burnt out Marlowe’ (1991: 942) figure. The fact that Gittes resorts to violence also betrays a lack of ‘cool’ seen in Marlowe, whose own perceptual abilities are well honed. Even Gittes’s role as a divorce P.I. evokes thoughts of Marlowe, namely his disdain for the type of divorce work that Gittes has been forced to take on.
meaning, such as the overlap of ‘grass’ and ‘glass’, or the novel unity of the normally exclusive terms ‘daughter’ and ‘sister’.

7.4. Perception and the Oedipus Myth

Just as Sophocles is assumed to have utilised the ancient Oedipal myth as a means of conducting social criticism through drama, so too has Chinatown been read as a postmodern generic homage to the hardboiled films of the 1940s in which the depiction of corruption reflects not only the era the film evokes, but also the era in which it was made. Zimmerman, for example, himself writing in 1974, calls Chinatown a ‘Watergate with real water’ (74). Whilst Polanski’s themes tend to be philosophically ‘grand’ in their evocation of existential conundrums (as I have suggested, through engagement with perceptual psychology), this is not to imply that his work is immune from direct, contemporary commentary hidden within genre cinema. But the film’s enduring relevance suggests that the significance of its focus on perception in both the institutional and personal/familial sphere is greater than its function as critique of a specific political event.

The interpretation of Chinatown as an Oedipal text has taken various forms, but whilst many readings of the films have made the parallel, there is also risk of exaggerating the parity. Morrison (2007) rightly encourages us to reconsider the adjective ‘Oedipal’ in Chinatown beyond the Freudian connotation, particularly because the film mirrors the Sophoclean text’s emphasis on the ‘destructive, not
curative’ (81) investigation into Los Angeles’s ‘diseased polity’ (79). Where Freud emphasizes the exposure of incestuous desire as a means of healing a fractured psychology, neither *Oedipus Rex* nor *Chinatown* provides such solace in their complex, pessimistically fatalistic narratives. Nevertheless, whilst not quite a retelling of the myth, variations on elements of the *Oedipus* story are indeed present throughout *Chinatown’s* narrative, identifiably scattered amongst its characters.

McGinnis (1975) emphasises *Chinatown’s* debt to Sophocles’s adaptation of the *Oedipus* myth primarily in terms of its shared political concern and ‘wasteland motif’ (249). Like the Theban plague, the cause of Los Angeles’s drought is due to its incest-committing ‘ruler’, Noah Cross. But where Oedipus is impotent in the face of fate, Noah Cross’s infliction of a drought on his people is quite calculated. In *Chinatown*, ‘fate’ comes as the result of wielding power. Reflecting this reversal is the nature of Cross’s incestuous crime: rather than unknowingly (or subconsciously) bedding his mother, Cross intentionally mates with his daughter to produce another daughter (not sons, as in *Oedipus Rex*), with whom, it is insinuated, he will continue his incestuous congress. In *Chinatown*, it is the act of investigation that eventually results in the death of Evelyn Mulwray and the delivery of her sister/daughter into the hands of the monster (the ‘plague’) from which she was being protected. Furthermore, it is not only the physical presence of Noah Cross from which Katherine Cross is being guarded, but the knowledge of her genetic aetiology.

The connection between perceptual acuity, knowledge and power is embodied in Noah Cross, whose character revisits the territory of *Citizen Kane* in its exploration of
corrupt power structures and the authorities’ ability to manipulate perception - as Kane himself puts it, people will believe what he ‘tells them to believe’. The character of Charles Foster Kane is itself a pastiche of publisher William Randolph Hearst, who, like Kane, uses his control of the media to seek election. A sceptical, or at least complex, treatment of authority figures is also common feature in post-war film noir. The move toward doubtful, ‘dark cinema’ was already present before and during the war in films such as *You Only Live Once* (Lang, 1937) and *The Roaring Twenties* (Walsh, 1939), and the first cinema that would be identified as noir also emerged in the midst of the war, including *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941), *The Glass Key* (Heisler, 1942), *Laura* (Heisler), and, near the end of the war, *Farewell My Lovely* (aka *Murder, My Sweet*, Dmytryk, 1944), *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944); but the ‘dark’ world view presented in these works contradicted the Allied Forces’ need to encourage patriotism and binary thinking (Schrader, 1986: 231).

Above all, Allied propaganda needed to encourage the absolute belief in the inherent ‘goodness’ of the Forces and the ‘evil’ of the Axis. Thus, during the war, the fledgling cinema movement that would later be identified by the French as film noir was stifled, but not extinguish. As Schrader highlights, the nuance of post-war noir challenged the absolutes of wartime propaganda, reflecting a ‘delayed reaction to the [depression of the] thirties’ (230) put on hold by the war, and the ‘disillusionment of many soldiers, small businessmen and housewife/factory employees’ (231-232), which in turn resulted in a critical eye being cast upon the very fabric of American society. Popular post-war noir such as *Cornered* (Dmytryk, 1945), *Dead Reckoning* (Cromwell, 1947) and *The Blue Dahlia* (Marshall, 1946) both reflected and encouraged America’s renewed scepticism.
*Chinatown* joins a list of sceptical, arguably even cynical American conspiracy thrillers made in the 1970s, including *Klute* (Pakula, 1971), *Night Moves* (Penn, 1975), and *The Parallax View* (Pakula, 1974), and *noir* remakes like *The Long Goodbye* (Altman, 1973), *Farewell, My Lovely* (Richards, 1975). In the spirit of this revival of cinematic scepticism, *Chinatown* sheds doubt on the assumed benevolence of authority in the Watergate era, and through its explicit focus on the perceptual mechanism and representational devices (the photograph), the film calls attention to the *institutionalisation of perception*, i.e. the manner in which authoritative structures (religion, the government, media) use tenacity to ‘shape’ our perception through the construction of conceptual frameworks, such as the inherent benevolence of those in power. In this respect, Gittes’s investigation (like Oedipus’s) becomes a form of phenomenological research in that Gittes is forced to reflect on those aspects of his lived (*perceptual*) experience ‘lost to our reflective knowledge through habituation and/or institutionalization’ (Sobchack, 1992: 28). The ‘lost’, or overlooked, element is not only knowledge of facts, but the understanding of the process and structures involved in perception, including the role of institutions in the construction of conceptual frameworks. Hollis Mulwray’s opposition to Cross’s plan to build what is clearly a highly dangerous damn is essentially an informed challenge to a flawed, even immoral, conceptual framework; he is denouncing the naked emperor, for which he is killed.

As wielder of knowledge (/power), Cross has nothing to investigate, unlike Oedipus, who yields power in name but is ignorant of his own nature. The task of investigation
falls on private detective Jake Gittes, a (late-arriving) spectator to the Cross-Mulwray scenario, who must, through the use of his sense organs and higher cognitive functions, engage with this world. The investigation leads not to understanding in the curative (Freudian) sense, however, but rather highlights Jake’s impotence, ignorance and arrogance. The influence his investigation does have on the world is in fact to make it worse by delivering Katherine Cross into the eager hands of her father/grandfather by causing the death of the mother/sister who was trying to protect her.

As per the Oedipus myth, in Chinatown, the very act of investigation influences that which is being investigated. But where the Oedipus myth presents a fatalistic paradox, Chinatown does not so much ponder the existence of free will as confront the fact that the battle against evil is often futile. Polanski’s cinema rarely partitions the world into ‘good’ and ‘evil’, and normally when his films appear to do so the these distinctions are either deconstructed or their diegetic reality becomes questionable (as seen in The Tenant and Rosemary’s Baby, in which the ‘evil’ nature of the neighbours remains uncertain). Instead, one of the most dominant trends in Polanski’s cinema is the exploration of moral ambiguity, laying challenges to notions of certainty whenever possible, often by way of the sort of perceptual crises under investigation here. Whilst Cross is indeed given the chance to defend himself (‘most people never have to face the fact that at the right time and right place, they're capable of anything’), he is one
of the few unambiguously ‘evil’ characters in Polanski’s cinema (joined only by Bill Sykes\textsuperscript{55} in *Oliver Twist* and most of the Nazis in *The Pianist*).

McGinnis relates Gittes to the portrayal of Oedipus as a man blinded by success, forced against his will to face up to a reality that does not match his pre-conceptions (1975: 250). But ‘success’ is probably not the best descriptor for Jake Gittes, P.I., for it is profound failure on Gittes’s part that provokes his (perceptual) retreat into the more reliable world of private detection, a role which hardboiled lore informs us is not quite the height of P.I. success. McGinnis also cites Heilman’s reading of Oedipus as a man who has been failed by recourse to ‘pure reason’ (1975: 250); for Gittes this is equally the case if the notion of ‘pure reason’ is strictly confined to that which is compliant with his own conceptual frameworks.

7.5. Back to Chinatown

It is in *Chinatown’s* troubling final scene that the film’s narrative threads and most profound philosophical discourse most dramatically collide. The sequence takes place in Los Angeles’s Chinatown, which although providing the film’s title remains up to this point an off-screen space. For the majority of the film, ‘Chinatown’ is indeed more a word than place; it is an utterance that represents a tragic episode in Jake Gittes’s life in which he inadvertently caused the death of a woman he loved. In the film’s finale, the word is made material/spatial when Gittes is forced back to

\textsuperscript{55} sic, spelled ‘Sikes’ by Dickens.
Chinatown in all its actuality. This final sequence is worth examining in detail; for it is through a close reading of the finale that key elements emerge that underline (I will stop short of saying ‘clarify’) the overall philosophical discourse of the film. I will address this sequence by both describing the various events that actually take place (which are more complex than many critics have noticed) and addressing its particular aesthetics.

The Chinatown finale (by ‘Chinatown’ I am referring here to the diegetic place, as opposed to the name of the film) is immediately preceded by Jake’s confrontation with Noah Cross, in which his suspicions regarding Cross’s complicity in Mulwray’s death are confirmed and the perversity of Cross’s overall ‘game plan’ are hinted at. For the second time in the film, Gittes has a sense organ threatened; not his nose this time, but his ear, as Cross’s henchman Claude Mulvihill inserts his pistol into Gittes’s auricle, forcing him to lead Cross to Evelyn. The sequence then begins with Gittes’s arrival in Chinatown, Cross and Mulvihill in tow, the latter of whom keeps his right hand firmly gripped on the gun in his jacket pocket. Gittes find his two ‘associates’, Walsh and Duffy, to have already been handcuffed by police lieutenant Escobar (Perry Lopez), Gittes’s former colleague on the force, who promptly places Gittes under arrest as well. Escobar is unmoved by Gittes’s denouncement of Cross, and proceeds to have Gittes handcuffed to the other officer.

The above scene is filmed in a single shot, with a handheld camera held in close proximity to the actors using a wide-angle lens (as per the rest of the film) and a short focal length. At the moment in which Gittes is handcuffed to the police officer, the
camera disconnects from Gittes and shifts its focus to Cross’s gaze. The camera quickly appropriates Cross’s line of sight, which reveals Katherine Mulwray (his daughter/granddaughter) being accompanied to a car. As Evelyn rushes in to block his approach, the camera shifts its attention to her. Unlike the majority of the film thus far, in which the camera remains firmly tethered to Gittes, the camera seems no longer able to maintain its connection to a single character and has some difficulty containing its subjects in the frame; the chaos that is ensuing onscreen is further accentuated by the movement of the handheld camera. As Evelyn draws her pistol and points it at her father the camera momentarily adopts her POV, but is unable to maintain it as she climbs into the car and finally shoots her father in the arm. As she drives off with Katherine (her daughter/sister), we are left behind.

The camera then jumps one hundred and eighty degrees to reveal Escobar firing two shots straight into the air. Next to Escobar is Gittes, still handcuffed to the other police officer. Evelyn ignores the warnings and continues to drive away. As the camera frames him in a medium shot, Escobar fires a shot towards the car, clearly aiming at its tyres. Before he can fire another shot, however, Gittes grabs Escobar’s arm, blocking him from firing again. As a result, the officer to whom Jake is handcuffed is forced to draw his own gun in Escobar’s stead. He shoots three times, quickly, but the angle at which he fires is significantly higher than Escobar’s – he does not seem to be aiming at the tyres as Escobar had been. It is the third of these bullets, it seems, that manages to make contact with the car, or rather, its driver. As Gittes, Cross and the police (followed by the camera) race to see what has happened they are met by the image of a screaming Katherine and Evelyn Mulwray, draped
over the steering wheel. As Jake opens the car door, Evelyn’s now-cycloptic visage is revealed.

Unsure where to focus its attention, the camera sways back and forth struggling to maintain a subject in the frame. It momentarily rests on Cross, who wraps his arm around Katherine and covers her eyes, urging her not to look. The camera swings back to Jake, whose own facial scar, which had in the sequence thus far been concealed by shadows, is now highly visible. With the death of Evelyn, Gittes finds history repeating itself in Chinatown. When Jake realises what has just happened, the expression on his face is not so much one of horror (which the situation would certainly merit), but one of blank befuddlement; it is an expression that does ‘as little as possible’. As Gittes mutters this Chinatown mantra, the camera rapidly swings back to Escobar – a quick sweep that allows for a truly seamless cut to another shot, taken by a camera perched on a crane. As Walsh tells Jake to ‘forget it… it’s Chinatown’ and the men walk away, the camera itself retreats in the other direction and ascends above the street, above Chinatown, and away from the subject to whom it has thus far been tethered.

I am compelled to highlight, especially as it is so often overlooked in critical analyses of this scene, the fact that Gittes is positioned as complicit in the death of Evelyn Mulwray due to his own actions, as well-intentioned as they might have been. By blocking Escobar, who seems to be aiming for the car’s tyres, Gittes causes the second officer to fire far less precisely than Escobar (the senior officer) had been. The fact that Gittes is himself physically connected (handcuffed) to the man who kills
Evelyn aptly symbolises Gittes’s complicity in her death. In fact, Evelyn’s fate is actually the culmination of a series of events that lead her to Chinatown, which are arguably initiated by Gittes’s decision to stray from his perceptual comfort zone into the intricate and overwhelmingly complex world of corrupt politics and taboo sexuality.

7.6. **Retreating from Chinatown**

Although as spectators of *Chinatown* we (with very few exceptions) are consistently bound to Gittes’s subjective reach, the film does not opt for the sort of extreme (visual) subjectivity found in films like *Lady in the Lake* (Montgomery, 1947) and *Dark Passage* (Davies, 1947). Likewise, we are never granted access to Gittes via the type of voice-over narration often used in *film noir*; in fact, the few shots in *Chinatown* that can be considered as POVs are all mediated by way of instrumentation such as cameras (and the photographs they produce), binoculars, and mirrors. As I have discussed in all of the previous case studies, representing (and replicating) intimate cognitive experience is certainly not something Polanski is adverse to, and has in fact devoted much attention to the exploration of subjective mental states. Although it was released before *The Tenant*, in which the depiction of purely subjective perceptions is central, *Chinatown* predicts a shift in his cinema towards a more distant form of realism in which perceptual processes remain concealed.
Whilst adhering to some generic conventions, *Chinatown* also eschews just as many, something that is consistent with Polanski’s typical approach to genre. What is most readily apparent about *Chinatown*, of course, is the fact that it is shot in colour (Technicolour), but I do not mean to suggest that this fact is inherently against the *noir* grain, as countless neo-noir’s shot in colour have proved. What most dramatically differs *Chinatown* from much of *film noir* is its lack of camera angles or lighting indicative of the expressionist influence on the *noir* aesthetic. Although there is very little ‘noir’ in *Chinatown*, its sense of ambiguity remains rich. Where the dark corners of *film noir* remind us that our perception of the world is limited, by reflecting on the overlooked (habitualised/institutionalised) aspects of perception, *Chinatown* highlights that it is not only the absence of light that inhibits perception. In fact, it is the most brightly lit scenes in *Chinatown* that are the most misleading.

Davis (1990) collectively describes the ‘hardboiled’ novels and *film noir* set in Los Angeles as the ‘great anti-myth’ (37), identifying these works as counters to the social mythology of the ‘Land of Sunshine’ and the utopian ambitions of its urban planning strategies. The Los Angeles of *noir* (and the novels upon which these films are based) is a place of paradox: it is both Heaven and Hell (18), or a mask of Heaven concealing Hell. Davis summarises this contrast in LA noir as ‘a fantastic convergence of American “tough guy realism”, Weimar expressionism, and existential Marxism – all focuses on unmasking a “bright, guilty place” (Welles) called Los Angeles’ (18). It is this intra-film juxtaposition of sunlight-drenched sequences with scenes that employ more typical, expressionistic use of shadows
through which Los Angeles *noirs* such as *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Garnett, 1946), *Nobody Lives Forever* (Negulesco, 1946) and *Chinatown* both evoke and deconstruct the myth of the Southern California.

‘Knowability’ in *Chinatown* is emphasised in its classic, seamless montage style as well, which encourages the spectator to accept his or her perception of the diegetic realm as complete. Gradually, however, *Chinatown* begins to undo this assumption, mirroring Gittes’s perceptual crisis in the spectator. As Orr (2006) observes, *Chinatown*’s ‘continuity editing presents us with a knowable world even when true knowledge evades us’ (5). *Chinatown* does not present knowledge as something worth having; it is certainly not something that leads to happiness. For Gittes, the greatest obstacle to effective perception (I use the term ‘effective’ in the context of solving the Mulwray case) is not darkness or ambient noise, but a non-reflective attitude toward his conceptual and perceptual frameworks - a sort of arrogance that is mirrored in Gittes’s *faux*-phallic bravado in the first half of the film.

Gittes’s (the film’s) trajectory is not so much towards overcoming these obstacles as it is towards the (moot) realisation that this world is too complex to perceive. The implications of such a proposition are vast, but that which finds greatest resonance with the rest of Polanski’s cinema is the ‘noirish’ realisation that a) either there is no intelligence orchestrating the world, whose machinations can be ‘discovered’ through investigation, or b) if there is such a force, it is not necessarily benevolent, defeatable, or comprehensible.
As is typically the case in Polanski’s cinema, in Chinatown there is no attempt to ‘objectify’ reality beyond the narrative reach of one character. Reality is framed, as it must be, but presented to us (roughly) just as it is presented to Gittes. The ‘clues’ are collected by Gittes, but he has no better understanding of them than the spectator. Neither the revelation of the cause of Mulwray’s death nor the nature of Evelyn’s relationship with her father is something Jake ‘solves’; rather, contrary to what he is accustomed to as private investigator, he has reality thrust upon him. In Chinatown, the ‘real’ is everywhere, right under Gittes’s (damaged) nose; nevertheless, gaining understanding of it is not curative in the psychoanalytic sense.

At the risk of lapsing into a Lacanian digression, by the ‘real’ in Chinatown I am referring not only to the shocking revelations of the story, but rather the allusions to those cognitive functions at work that inhibit us from reflecting on the nature of these very mechanisms. Gittes is challenged to overcome the limits of his perceptual and conceptual frameworks, those both institutionally- and self-imposed. Judging by his expression at the end of the film, it does not seem he is successful. It is difficult indeed to argue in favour of the usefulness of such reflection, for, as Chinatown seems to suggest, engaging in such phenomenological research is not necessarily a path to well-being. When Gittes first faced ‘Chinatown’, his reaction was to eschew his (salaried) life of public service with the police force in favour of self-employment. Gittes auto-‘privatisation’ allowed him to operate within the limited conceptual framework of the more predictable, controllable, reality of infidelity detection. Both Gittes’s facial expression and his retreat from frame at the end of the film suggest that
this time around is no different from the last. He was condemned to repeat this fate and is better off doing ‘as little as possible’. As if sharing Gittes’s sense of complicity, the camera retreats as well, away from *Chinatown* and all its discontent.
8. **Investigation Trilogy Case Study 2: Frantic (Including a Case Study of Death and the Maiden)**

8.1. **A Tale of Two Doctors**

As I discussed in the last case study, in the latter ‘half’ (i.e. post-<i>Tess</i>, but including <i>Chinatown</i>) of Polanski’s cinema, his perceptual discourse shifts from a focus on unhealthy perceptual mechanisms towards more ‘distant’ observations of sane perceivers who nevertheless face both perceptual and conceptual challenges. The change can be described as a shift from a concern with the representation (even attempted replication) of subjective psychological states, what I have referred to previously as *perceptual realism*, toward a more distant, observational stance in the second half of his opus, in which access to individual psyches remains elusive.

By taking this ‘step back’, Polanski expands his ongoing exploration of the philosophical ramifications of perceptual psychology (specifically the theory of indirect perception) to examine the effect of stress, institutionalisation and self-imposed perceptual frameworks on what is considered to be perfectly sane perception. Furthermore, the parallel nature of the higher cognitive functions involved in conceptualisation and those involved in sensory perception is further explored through non-psychologically ‘intrusive’ narratives in which ruptures nevertheless occur to both perceptual and conceptual frameworks. Notably, Polanski also continues his discourse on perception by sometimes playing out the tenets of a theory
of perception through inter-character exchanges, symbolically spreading elements of
the cognitive process of perception amongst different subjects. So, it is not that
Polanski has abandoned his concern with psychological subjectivity in these later
films, but rather that he changes his methodology in order to nuance the overall
discourse.

Both mirroring and furthering this trend toward a more complex exploration of
perception is a more direct approach to the issue of national identity. Where
*Chinatown* explores the effect of a (self-imposed) limited cognitive framework, in
*Frantic*, the framework of national identity comes to the fore in a more explicit
manner than in any other Polanski film to this point. Whilst much of Polanski’s work
includes recognisably transnational characters, in no film before *Frantic* is a
protagonist’s national ‘otherness’ so explicitly depicted as an obstacle.\(^{56}\) In *Repulsion*
and *The Tenant*, xenophobic attitudes towards Carole and Trelkovsky are hinted at,
but these perceptions are so entwined with these characters’ psychoses it is difficult to
identify the diegetic truth of these attitudes. In *Frantic*, Walker’s ‘Americaness’ is a
high-profile element in the film’s narrative progression, as well as an informing agent
in the film’s visual aesthetics. As Polanski has himself remarked, an ‘American gaze’
guides *Frantic* (as quoted in De Baecque & Jousse, 2005: 151) - a comment that begs
the question as to how, exactly, a concept of national identity can inform a ‘gaze’, a
question that I will also attempt to address in this chapter in terms of the theories of
perception I have been discussing thus far.

\(^{56}\) The ‘Americaness’ of Nancy (Sydne Rome) in *What?* is arguably a major obstacle for this character
as well.
Later in this chapter, I will also turn my attention to *Death and the Maiden*. I have chosen to deal with this film in relation to *Frantic*, for there appears to be a direct overlapping of perception-related motifs in these two films, released within a few years of each other (separated only by *Bitter Moon*). Without wishing to overcomplicate the make-shift concept of ‘trilogies’ I (and others) have employed as a means of grouping Polanski’s films in a meaningful way, I will add only that whilst *Frantic* is rightly considered as a ‘quest’ or ‘investigation’ film, there is also a relevant sideways link between it and *Death and the Maiden*, in that they both deal with a husband’s loss and reclaiming of his wife. *Death and the Maiden* can even be read as a sort of sequel to *Frantic*, in that through its own focus on the imprisonment of one character by another it also deals with the psychological impact of kidnapping. Even more relevant to my overall thesis, however, is *Death and the Maiden*’s concern with the reliability of the perceptual mechanism and its role in the creation of memory, especially when the perceiver is deprived of one of the senses (in this case, sight). *Frantic* and *Death and the Maiden* also deal with the influence of emotional states on a subject’s perceptual abilities. The heightened emotional state of both *Frantic*’s Walker and *Death and the Maiden*’s Paulina (Sigourney Weaver) introduces doubt as to the reliability of their respective cognitive ‘readings’ of situations, but the exploration of the effect of emotions on perception is further complicated when we consider, as both of these films suggest, the possibility that it is these heightened emotional states that actually *enable* Walker and Paulina to perceive even more effectively than normal.
8.2. Frantic’s ‘Research Question’ and Establishing a Subjective Tether

*Frantic* begins with the image of Sondra Walker and her husband, Dr. Richard Walker, in the back of a cab making their way into Paris from Roissy. Sondra, jetlagged, rests her head on Richard’s torso, causing their bodies to overlap in the frame. Sondra wakes up and asks her (also exhausted) husband if he ‘knows where [he] is’. ‘No, it’s changed too much’ replies Dr. Walker, who appears to be too jetlagged to recognise anything. With these simple lines of dialog (the film’s first), their identity as Americans and the notion of the perceptual obstacle are swiftly introduced.

After an incident with a flat tyre on the motorway (to which I will shortly return), the Walkers find themselves in a new cab in a more central part of town, where Dr. Richard Walker reluctantly affirms that he does indeed now recognise this place as Paris - not such an astonishing revelation considering that a reverse shot soon reveals the Eiffel Tower just down the road. The taxi drops the Walkers off near Opera Garnier, on rue Scribe, where they check into Le Grand Hotel. They are given a tour of the room’s various facilities, after which they squabble over the fact that Richard has been requested to attend a lunch meeting that day, notwithstanding the fact that the Walkers have intentionally arrived a full day earlier than his conference required. Breakfast is ordered, the children are called (although Richard has some trouble with the phone) and their bags arrive. As Richard speaks to his daughter, Sondra struggles to open a suitcase in the background. The phone is handed over to his wife, and Richard attempts to open the suitcase. The camera now becomes more interested in
Richard’s struggle to open the case and abandons the phone conversation altogether. It is not their suitcase. As Richard calls TWA to report the error, the camera shifts its focus to Sondra in the shower.

The time dedicated to these banal quotidian events is not (just) an embracing of the type of narratively superfluous detail celebrated by Bazin as realism, but rather a generic marker of the thriller, in which the spectator is lulled into a state of near-boredom just as something is about to occur. The formula is in fact already teased in the opening sequence, where after a lingering two-shot on the post-flight pair of somnambulists, the cab that carries them violently veers off the road. It is here that we first expect the narrative trajectory to begin; it seems to be just the type of chance occurrence (a flat tyre) that could initiate a series of events making up the rest of the film. But Polanski subverts the formula; the flat tyre may foreshadow impending doom, but the fact that it becomes a non-event serves more to draw our expectations away from known generic convention until they are later reinstated to maximum effect. In other words, the red herring of the flat tyre impedes assumptions about the significance of the suitcase mix-up. Both the tyre and the initial suitcase sequences are examples of what Gregory (2003) calls the ‘Venus Fly-Trap’ effect in Polanski’s cinema. In these examples, however, the effect is not achieved solely by visual aesthetics intended to create a sense of perceptual realism, but by playing on generic convention as another means of ‘luring’ in the spectator and then manipulating their expectations.
Having already been ‘fooled’ by the tyre incident, when Richard Walker takes his wife’s place in the shower, the spectator cannot be sure what to expect. In fact, like Walker, we do not even know what has occurred when it actually does occur. It is at this point that Polanski’s camera establishes its customary tether to a single subjective narrative reach, namely that of Dr. Richard Walker. To reiterate a point I have made in previous chapters, I use the term ‘tether’ to account for the slight advantage the camera’s (our) view sometimes has over the subject to which it is bound. We are not limited exclusively to Walker’s POV (approximate or direct), but rather to that of a notional observer connected (tethered) to Walker. In this very scene we are seemingly locked in the shower with him. As he concentrates on lathering up, we are able to look past him at the events transpire in the other room. Frustratingly, this slight advantage proves to be of very little epistemological use to us as spectators, as our connection to Walker inhibits our sensory reach. We can see that Sondra is talking on the phone and is attempting to communicate with Walker, but it is difficult to make out what is going on as both Walker’s head and the increasingly foggy shower door impede our sight. She says something to him, but we, like Walker, cannot hear her over the noise of the shower (and his singing).

In what is seemingly an attempt to get a better view of the other room, the camera inches closer to the shower door. It is unable, however, to go any further as it seems to have reached the length of its tether. Seemingly exasperated, we (not Walker, who is now facing the other way) see her pick up an item of clothing from an open suitcase, mutter something, walk out of frame, and then drag the suitcase (the one she has been able to open) out of frame as well. As if desperate to see more, the camera moves closer and closer to Sondra’s previous position but is blocked by the shower
door. It can go no further, regardless of how compelled the spectator may be to see, or at least hear, what is happening around the corner. Both the spectator and Walker will spend the remainder of the film trying to make sense of what has transpired; we are now tasked to derive meaning from what we have just perceived.

8.3. Emotion and Hyper-Perception

Walker’s attempt to find his wife is essentially a perceptual quest, which serves to magnify the basic premise of the theory of indirect perception, specifically in its repeated depiction of competing hypotheses presented to and by Walker and those who are caught up in his investigation (some helpful, some not). The basis for these predictive hypotheses is determined through the employment of a priori concepts in a deductive, ‘top down’ approach, in which the ‘laws’ of the characters’ world view are applied to make sense of a set of stimuli. My contention is that Polanski’s depiction of the malleability of perception finds expression in Frantic not through the representation of diseased cognitive processes (as seen in his cycle of films dealing with psychosis), but through scenarios in which equally probable (and therefore valid) hypotheses presented by various characters compete for acceptance.

In order to accomplish the task of finding his wife, there are several perceptual obstacles with which Walker must deal. First and foremost is the most superficial problem, Walker’s jetlag, which not only causes him to fall asleep at inopportune moments (as he waits for Sondra in their room, and then again in the lobby as the hotel manager is summoned), but may also interfere with his reasoning abilities and
thus his capacity to comprehend stimuli effectively. Offsetting this effect, however, is
the fact that Walker’s increasing desperation and frustration seem to cause a surge of
adrenaline; rather than nodding off, Walker becomes increasingly aggressive. The
initial effect of the jetlag is not only overcome, but the stress of the situation and
Walker’s (quite accurate) sense of isolation may actually serve to sharpen his senses,
thus allowing him to pick up on small details missed by others.

Gregory (1997a) acknowledges the connection of emotional states and perception,
indicating that not only can our emotions be affected by what we perceive, but also
that our very ability to perceive effectively can be influenced by our emotional state.
Gregory does not, however, hypothesise at any length as to how this two-way
connection can best be understood, but he is quick to differentiate the effect of
emotional states on perception from illusions. Gregory clarifies that illusions are
systematic ‘phenomenal phenomena’, which are either physical or cognitive in
nature.\(^5\) In contrast, Gregory points to the non-systematic effect that strong emotional
states can have in the creation of hallucinations - perceptions that are fabricated by
the brain independent of (or inconsistent with) external stimuli (1997a: 244). What
Gregory does not account for, and what Polanski seems to be exploring, is the
possibility that strong emotional states could also heighten perceptual ability. In this
regard, it seems as though in both Frantic and Death and the Maiden Polanski
extends his perceptual discourse beyond explorations of hindered perception and
damaged psyches (in which perception and reality become completely estranged) to
include the concept of hyper-perception.

\(^5\) By physical, Gregory is referring to illusions caused by disruptions to radiant stimuli before reaching
the eye or physiological disruptions that occur on the retina itself. In contrast, cognitive illusions are
caused by the ‘erroneous’ application of knowledge/rules to interpret stimuli (see Gregory, 1997: 248).
Whilst Walker may enter a state of hyper-perception caused by emotional distress, his heightened perceptual abilities are only effective within pre-existing cognitive frameworks, in particular those related to the visual perception of non-abstract sensorial stimuli. In parallel, his ability to apply logic, to judge, the meaning of stimuli is also heightened, in turn increasing the overall acuity of both ‘halves’ of the perceptual mechanism; i.e. the reception of sensorial stimuli and the cognitive functions involved in their comprehension. Walker is not an investigator by choice, but is nevertheless thrust into the role of investigator due to what he considers to be inadequate measures taken by both the French police, who he does not believe are taking him seriously due to his national identity (although they claim otherwise), and the American officials in Paris, who claim they are inhibited from taking action due to international accords. The fact that Walker liaises with authorities, but ultimately works independently of them in the solving of this case positions him, like Gittes, as a private investigator. And like Gittes, the difficult case Walker takes on is based on self-interest rather than remuneration.

It is again worth recalling the detectives of popular culture that have carried on the Oedipal tradition. It is indeed his level of personal engagement that aligns Walker, like Gittes, to the hard-boiled detective. As Žižek argues in his discussion of Marlowe, a defining characteristic of the hard-boiled investigator is that he himself is ‘caught up in the circuit’, his ‘involvement defin[ing] his very subjective position’ (1991: 61, arguably making Oedipus the first of the ‘hard-boiled’). But Walker’s personal involvement not only initiates his investigation, it also triggers his
augmented perception. We can therefore contrast Walker to Holmes, for example, whose perceptual acuity is unlinked to his emotional state. So whilst Walker’s occupation (physician) does position him as a man well-used to the application of deductive reasoning, it is emotional stress that seems most responsible for his hyper-perception, a state that contrasts Walker from what Žižek identifies as Holmes’s ‘bourgeois scientific rational[ism]’ (1991: 49) or omniscient ‘infallibility’ (57).

Cruelly, however, for all of Walker’s new-found ‘super powers’, his perceptual abilities are also stymied by obstacles that he simply cannot overcome alone, namely those issues that pose cognitive challenges beyond the sensorial and cognitive level, and which require knowledge of abstract orders to which he has no access. Whilst Walker’s visual acuity may be high, this does not help him read in French, and nor would fine-tuned hearing help him understand it when spoken. Whilst the issue of Walker’s inability to speak French represents a perceptual obstacle due to his lack of this linguistic framework, the same basic concept holds true when Walker is faced with structures of reality that he is not able to comprehend, namely in his encounters with the authorities, both French and American.

An indicative example of the process of acute sensory information deciphering is played out in Frantic when Walker discovers his wife’s bracelet. Still suffering from jetlag and facing a completely novel set of stimuli (the Parisian alley the ‘Wino’ leads him to), Walker is able to spot a small bracelet amongst the cobbles – a seemingly impossible task, especially as he did not even know it was a bracelet he was looking for. Complicating the scene further is the fact that Walker is being fed information
about his wife by a man whose own sobriety, and by extension the reliability of his perceptual abilities, is seriously questionable. It is also indicated by the ‘Wino’ (as he is credited) that it was not he who witnessed Sondra’s abduction, but some of his friends (likely Winos as well), ‘[qui ont] vu la scène’. A further layer of ambiguity is arguably added by Walker’s complete inability to understand French and the Wino’s limited English, but a more optimistic reading would suggest that Walker is lucky that this vagrant is able to speak English at all, far better in fact than any of the ‘respectable’ Parisians approached by Walker beforehand (as we shall see, it is Paris’s marginals who prove most helpful to Walker), not to mention infinitely superior to Walker’s complete lack of French. Nevertheless, the obstacle is there.

The argument that Walker has with the American authorities is the best example of how Frantic depicts the higher cognitive functioning of personal sensory perception in a social context. The Embassy employees question the validity of Walker’s kidnapping theory, due undoubtedly to much experience with frantic tourists in the past. They, just as the hotel security chief, suggest that Sondra has not been kidnapped, but has simply abandoned her husband for a French lover. This scenario proves to be beyond Walker’s conceptual framework as it challenges what he considers to be the nature (the reality) of his wife, and so the meaning he attributes to the images, both seen and described, differs greatly from the Embassy men. When Walker presents the bracelet to the Embassy officials, its significance is debated – it is judged based on its own physical properties (i.e. it is a bracelet with Sondra’s name on it) and the context in which it was found (i.e. amongst the cobbles, its latch broken). At the risk of inverting a metaphor, it appears that the scenario of the cognitive ‘trial’ described by Gregory (1997a: 112), in which the brain must decide
what the most likely reality of a given set of stimuli is by sorting out conflicting explanations, is played out in *Frantic* between Walker and the embassy men, each standing in for possible (and therefore valid) perceptual conclusions derived from competing cognitive frameworks.

### 8.4. Walker as Orpheus

Where *Chinatown*’s investigation is motivated by Gittes’s desire to put right an epistemological ‘wrong’ (i.e. he has been fooled), *Frantic*’s Dr. Walker has a much more tangible problem in the kidnapping of his wife. In *Frantic*, Polanski provides a physical embodiment of a character’s search for meaning through a portrayal of love unparalleled in the rest of his cinema, which more typically depicts treachery in relation to marriage. I say ‘love’, but for Walker it may be just as valid to speak instead of ‘identity’, as in *Frantic*, these two concepts are literally intertwined. The interconnectedness of Richard and Sondra Walker is established not only through the frequent references to their union by their children, friends and colleagues, but visually in the opening and closing scenes of the film in which they are physically interlocked in the back seat of a taxi cab. What I propose is that Walker’s love crisis is also an identity crisis, which begins with the removal of his wife, like the amputation of a limb, or perhaps even the removal of an organ without which one cannot survive (to echo the sentiment of *The Tenant*’s dismemberment soliloquy). Walker is frantic not just to secure his wife’s safety, but also to maintain his own, now fractured, identity.
As a means of expressing the emotional drive behind Walker’s quest, in addition to including elements of the Oedipal detective-story (complete with the trigger for a nuclear ‘plague’, *unknowingly* in Walker’s possession), Polanski’s also utilises the *Orpheus* myth as a narrative framework (as observed by Feeney, 2006: 133). Like Orpheus, out of pure devotion, Walker is forced to recover his wife from the clutches of devils. Standing in for Hades are Paris’s labyrinthine alleys, nightclubs and even rooftops (a sacred Parisian space); it is a city revered for its beauty, but which is quickly transformed into Hell when Walker is forced out of globalised spaces in search of his wife. At one point, Walker also finds himself in a nightclub called ‘A Touch of Class’, run and populated by members of Paris’s Middle-Eastern community, an alien space even for Parisian Michelle. At this point Walker is located several ‘circles’ (to evoke Dante) beneath the global ‘over-world’. In *Frantic*, Hell is represented not as a place of physical torture, but rather one of displacement and perceptual crisis.

In a role evocative of that played by Virgil in Dante’s *Inferno*, guiding Walker through this Hell is Michelle, who, for her own (financially motivated) reasons is forced to become involved in the search for Sondra. Michelle’s role is complex; she acts as perceptual guide to Walker, helping him to navigate both the Parisian landscape and French language, but she is also a demonic agent in her own right. As Belton (1991) discusses, there is a traditional division of gender in the hard-boiled detective fiction in which the male detective is positioned as a patriarchal force attempting to attain knowledge, which is held by women, through mastery of language, which they also control. ‘From the perspective of patriarchy,’ Belton writes, ‘the source of mystery in the genre – that which defies the rationalizing power of the
detective figure – is woman, who uses language deceitfully’ (1991: 939). We have already seen Polanski’s coupling of women and ambiguous language in *Chinatown*, and again in *Frantic* it is a woman who holds the reins of language. Michelle, however, does not so much ‘defy’ Walker’s quest for knowledge as facilitate it by serving as translator. Nevertheless, Walker is forced to both intimidate and bribe Michelle to compel her to take on this role, and her superior linguistic ability (she is French, but also speaks English without problem) allows her to both adopt (especially through her clothes and make-up) and deconstruct her role as *femme fatale*. Michelle does indeed eventually double-cross Walker with her last minute bargaining for the triggering device, but ultimately it is *she*, not Walker, who (like Evelyn Mulwray in *Chinatown*) takes a bullet and ensures Walker’s reunion with his wife.

A little digression on the use of music in *Frantic* is warranted here. Further complicating Michelle’s role is the manner in which she is associated with Walker’s daughter through their mutual fondness of the Grace Jones’s song ‘Strange’, which we hear playing in the background when Walker speaks to his daughter on the phone, as well as in Michelle’s car. The same song is heard yet again playing in the ‘A Touch of Class’ nightclub. The repetition of this track effectively forms an aural bridge across the Atlantic, as well as managing to unifying the ethnic space of the nightclub with the wider world, something pop music seems able to do so effortlessly (especially transnational artists like Grace Jones). The song itself reflects as well the atmosphere of the film as a whole in its hybrid musical style and its shifting between French and English and *noirish* imagery of a stranger in the night.
It is also worth highlighting the connection drawn between Michelle and Walker’s daughter, which by alluding to the incestuous relationship dealt with in *Chinatown* heightens the taboo of the desire shared by Michelle and Walker. In the last act of the film, starting with their visit to ‘A Touch of Class’, Michelle dons the same red dress Walker’s wife was wearing when she was kidnapped and is transformed, briefly, from guide to temptress. In a purely physical act of communication performed by Michelle to the ubiquitous Grace Jones song, she offers Walker the chance to abandon his wife to the devils and assume her, a much younger and more nubile woman, as his mate in Sondra’s stead. His choice to reject Michelle will eventually lead to a battle of life and death between his wife and this younger woman, only one of whom survives.

### 8.5. *Frantic* in Context

A brief discussion of the historic moment within which *Frantic* takes place (sometime between 1987-1988) may help clarify the very specific tensions this film reflects, in particular those regarding the threat of nuclear proliferation, the challenges to conservatism in the US, and globalisation and postcolonial racial integration in France. The greatest global fear at this time was undoubtedly the threat of nuclear war. So pronounced was this threat in the mid-1980s, that US president Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev were compelled to engage in a series of disarmament talks that resulted in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) of 1987 (see Wittner, 2003: 369-405). However, the INF treaty could not alleviate fear of Arab or Muslim states acquiring materials to create nuclear weapons, a threat particularly felt by Israel after the Palestinian uprising of 1987 (Kam, 2003:...
360), just prior to the time of the film; these are the specific fears that *Frantic* alludes to in its inclusion of a hidden nuclear triggering device and the Arab characters who seek it.

From a specifically French perspective, the presence of Arab characters also reflects the tensions within France related to its colonial and postcolonial relationship with North Africa, in particular its former colony Algeria and the increasing demography in France of French citizens of Algerian descent (by the 1980s, many were third generation French-Algerians). The complexities of (ongoing) Algerian-French tensions, far more intricate than a binary conceptualisation of the situation as a ‘culture clash’ would suggest, cannot be dealt with here; however, it is at least worth noting that by the 1980s France and Algeria had become bound into a ‘postcolonial predicament that unites Algeria and France into a single transpolitical space’ (Silverstein, 2004: 2). In *Frantic*, we see signs of the division of ‘ethnic’ space in Paris: not only in the partitioning of Arab kidnappers with nuclear ambitions from ‘white’ victims, but also woven into the fabric of the city itself, which conceals ‘Arab spaces’ like the nightclub visited (*investigated*) by Walker and Michelle. On the other hand, a more ‘integrated’ version of Paris is portrayed in another nightclub, the ‘Blue Parrot’, in which Walker first spots Michelle.

As discussed by Kellner and Ryan (1988), *Frantic* also takes place in an era that was showing signs of waning ‘conservative hegemony’ in the US, specifically the sway of Ronald Reagan on the American people, due in part to the tarnishing of his reputation at this time by the Iran arms-for-hostages and Contra-supply scandals (263). Kellner
and Ryan highlight the link between Hollywood cinema in 1986 and 1987 and the prevailing political mood, claiming that the weakened status of conservatism and growing suspicion regarding the validity of increased American militarism and what was widely perceived as imperialism contributed to the end of the era of the do-it-all cinematic ‘hero’ typified by *Rambo* (1985) (297). The ‘hero’ of *Frantic* is indicative of this demise; the difference is palpable, for example, when we compare the desperate Dr Richard Walker, who scrambles around Paris looking for his wife, and John Rambo, who puts things right by blasting his way through Vietnam, years after the end of the war, to save American POWs. As Kellner and Ryan suggest, ‘in 1987, more people desired help from the government than ever before’ (297); what we see in Walker is a man in dire need of help, but who does not get it from his own government until they perceive a threat to their own institutions, that is, when the problem of an individual citizen is elevated to the problem of the nation itself. (It should be noted, of course, that Reagan’s vice-president George Bush would go on to win the election in late 1988, gaining 422 electoral seats over Dukakis’s 111; this is a fact which should put Kellner and Ryan’s assertions regarding the extent of the ‘liberalisation’ of the US in 1987-1988 into some perspective.)

Whilst the domination of American conservatism was coming under scrutiny, in 1987-1988 France was not socialist utopia. Whilst Mitterrand and his socialist party maintained power, their reluctance to adopt neo-liberal polices and prioritise the market would result in the loss of the legislative elections in 1986. The gains made in the cabinet by Chirac and his conservative party resulted in a schizophrenic period of ‘cohabitation’ between President Mitterrand and (the prescribed) Prime Minister Chirac between 1986-1988, thus encompassing the time in which *Frantic* is set. As
the result of a more potent conservative voice in government, as well as the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986, the French government was forced to come to terms with globalisation and to somehow reconcile its traditionally republican (more socialist) sensibilities with neo-liberalism (Price, 1993: 389). As I discuss later in this chapter, this shift from socialism to globalism and neo-liberalism forms part of the subtext of *Frantic*, manifested in the character of Michelle and the skills she develops (both financial and linguistic) in her own struggle for survival.

8.6. **Hell and Globalised Spaces**

It is by addressing the concept of ‘globalised space’ that I mentioned earlier that we can perhaps best understand what Polanski intends by his comment that *Frantic* is guided by an ‘American gaze’. In the scene described at the beginning of this chapter, Walker is unable to recognize Paris as he is driven into town from the airport. This is unsurprising, as Paris’s peripheral motorways are hardly part of the tourist trail. Lucky for the Walkers, they are protected by the taxicab, a global space (the back seat of the cab, at any rate) in its own right, which transports them through this alien terrain. The breakdown of the first cab, discussed in different terms above, also signals the fragility of the membrane between global (friendly) and alien (hostile) space, the penetration and negotiation of which serve as the key obstacles that Walker must eventually overcome. It is important to emphasise that Walker is not displaced merely because he is in Paris, but rather because he has found himself in a situation that is incongruent with his personal faculties and the space (and class) he occupies, which takes him to areas of Paris he would never have otherwise visited and forces him into linguistic situations he is ill-prepared to handle. The departure from global
space into (non-touristic) Parisian space both augments and parallels the crisis of the loss of his wife and the many challenges to his perceptual frameworks this entails.

An interesting juxtaposition of spaces takes place early in the film as Walker begins to look for his wife beyond the confines of the quintessentially global space of the five-star hotel. The hotel serves as an oasis for Walker; it is a space where he knows how to operate, and in which people not only speak English but are also incredibly helpful. The hotel is not quite an ‘any-space whatever’ in the Deleuzian sense, but a *global* space (and by this I mean a western/capitalist standard of ‘global’) that stands apart from its physical location. It would be difficult indeed, for example, to determine from the shots of the hotel alone that Walker was in Paris without gazing out of the room’s window. When Walker moves from the hotel to the outside streets, he begins to encounter increasingly severe perceptual challenges, both in his capacity as perceiving subject and his presentation of himself as object for others to perceive. In the flower shop, he cannot make himself understood and is forced to retreat. He enters a café where the noise and hubbub are a sharp contrast to the hotel lobby’s relative calm. By leaving the hotel, Walker takes his first real step into a dimension of foreign stimuli. In his trip thus far, Walker has gone directly from the airport to the hotel, with two taxis (or rather, the *back seat* of two taxis) serving as bridge between the airport (another global space) and the five-star hotel.

As a honeymooning tourist or medical convention attendee in Paris, Walker is perfectly at home, occupying the global spaces of hotels and conference centres. But on this trip to Paris, Walker ends up as neither (second) honeymooner nor convention
goer, and is forced to navigate spaces in which his status, abilities, and (thus) identity, are severely compromised and challenged. On the other hand, Walker does indeed employ some aspects of his personal cognitive frameworks, specifically those derived from the capitalist structures he is accustomed to in which money, above all other factors, motivates people to come to his aid. It is money, of course, that ultimately convinces Michelle to join Walker, without whose support he would have been helpless in finding his wife. Luckily, money is something Walker has a relatively high supply of, notwithstanding his claim to the American authorities that he is not ‘rich’.

There is a certain irony worth pointing out that whilst Walker’s chief perceptual crises are caused by his departure from global space, it is the truly global threat of nuclear annihilation that is behind the abduction of his wife in the first place. But the political element that emerges in the film’s third act proves to be as alien a world to Walker as the back streets of Paris. Whilst the terrorist threat is a serious issue for the American authorities, the threat posed by the triggering device in his possession is not Walker’s primary concern, which remains that of recovering his wife safely, even if that means putting millions of lives at risk.

In its inclusion of such an unlikely grandiose subplot, Frantic portrays yet another type of ‘space’, that of international political conflict; it is not a physical space, but rather a world that operates under a different set of realities than the one occupied by the Walkers, who, as Richard Walker himself points out, ‘don’t even vote anymore’. The world of politics similarly forms the backdrop of Death of the Maiden, to which I will presently turn my attention. In contrast to Frantic, however, Death and the
Maiden’s couple, Paulina and Gerardo Escobar (Stuart Wilson), live in a country where the right to vote has only recently been achieved, due in great part to the efforts of the Escobars and the revolutionary party to which they belong.

8.7. The Aftermath of Abduction: Death and the Maiden

There is an odd narrative overlap worth mentioning that signals a connection between Frantic and the Death and the Maiden. Both films include a situation in which a car journey is interrupted by a flat tyre. On both occasions, the tyre cannot be replaced due to the spare tyre being flat as well. Whilst this particular scenario (the double-flat) may well be present in other works of fiction (although I am not aware of any), it is sufficiently odd an event (compared to running out of petrol, for example) that its repeated presence in Polanski’s cinema is at least conspicuous. As I have already suggested, in Frantic the scene proves not to have any bearing on the narrative thrust of the film, although its inclusion does serve to create a heightened sense of peril (in line with generic expectation) and, as I have argued, hints at the fragility of the borders between what are global and alien spaces for Walker. In Death and the Maiden, on the other hand, the ‘scene’ does not even occur onscreen, but is rather recounted by Gerardo Escobar (Paulina’s husband) upon his late arrival at home. In contrast to Frantic, however, even though we do not witness this scene, it does indeed prove to be highly relevant to Death and the Maiden’s narrative thrust. Remarkably, what seems in Death and the Maiden to be a subtle reference back to Frantic is actually present in Ariel Dorfman’s original stage-play, La Muerte y la Doncella, itself published in 1990, two years after Frantic’s release. Intentional or not, the overlap is there, signalling a connection between the films. We cannot, of course, rule
out the possibility that Dorfman may actually be citing *Frantic*. Polanski has himself suggested (as quoted in Delahaye & Narboni, 2005: 23) that such double-intertexuality has occurred before, in reference to the possible influence of *Repulsion* on Ira Levin’s novel *Rosemary’s Baby*; a similar argument could be made for the influence of the rape scene in *Rosemary’s Baby* on the way Dorfman has Paulina describe her own rape.

Besides the coincidence of both films’ inclusion of (double) flat tyres, *Frantic* and *Death and the Maiden* each employ the Orphean motif of a woman being forcibly removed from her husband. But where *Frantic* deals with the abduction of a wife and her husband’s attempt to recover her, *Death and the Maiden* instead serves to carry on this story in its dealing with not only the abduction’s emotional aftermath, but specifically with the victim’s rape-revenge trajectory from passive victim to active abductor (and perhaps even rapist, as Paulina admits contemplating). Both films also share political overtones related to their respective abductions; for the Walkers it is a case of mistaken identity, but the abduction of Paulina and her subsequent torture is described as a far more targeted political act. The imprisonment (and ‘trial’) of Miranda, on the other hand, which of course drives *Death and the Maiden*’s narrative, is only accidental in as much as it is initiated by a truly incredible coincidence (i.e. Paulina’s former captor stopping to help her husband on the side of the road). Whilst Miranda’s ‘trial’ is indeed thought of as a highly political act by Gerardo, who worries how their actions will be perceived by the outside world and how this might compromise his own political aspirations, Paulina is much less concerned with the ‘movement’, and acts out of a deeply held need for justice (or revenge) that she hopes will recalibrate her unstable emotional state. *Frantic* and *Death and the Maiden* also
differ greatly in their portrayals of their male characters. Richard Walker and Gerardo Escobar are similarly cast as highly competent professionals (a physician and a lawyer respectfully), but where Gerardo’s professional and personal ethics are highly politically charged, Richard is firmly apolitical, caring about nothing besides the preservation of his familial order. Also, where Richard Walker resists the temptations of his guide, it is made explicit in an argument that Gerardo was significantly less ‘Orphean’ in his devotion, abandoning Paulina for another woman whilst she was imprisoned.

8.8. Sensory Deprivation

*Death and the Maiden* marks the return of Polanski’s cinema to the depiction of a woman’s perceptual crisis. Like Carole Ledoux and Rosemary Woodhouse, Paulina Escobar’s ability to perceive effectively is put into doubt by the distinct possibility of the presence of mental illness. Although not directly cited in Polanski’s film, in Dorfman’s stage-play, Dr. Miranda verbally ‘diagnoses’ Paulina as a ‘prototypical schizoid’ (1990: 27). Nevertheless, in the film version, the question of Paulina’s sanity is often (euphemistically) referred to. In this regard, we must separate Paulina from the group of male perceiving subjects I am discussing in the second half of this thesis (Jake Gittes, Richard Walker, and Dean Corso), all of whom encounter some sort of perceptual or conceptual crisis, but none of whom ever has his sanity diegetically questioned. In *Death and the Maiden*, it is also a man, Gerardo, who is positioned as the sane perceiver forced to resolve an ambiguity. Through Paulina, however, *Death and the Maiden* contributes several other layers of complexity to Polanski’s ongoing perceptual discourse, in particular the issues of sensory
deprivation and the long-term effect of torture on a woman’s ability to both perceive effectively during the trauma itself and reliably access what is stored of these perceptions to judge the meaning of stimuli years later. In fact, the font of conflict in *Death and the Maiden*’s narrative is not just Paulina’s exertion of power over Dr. Miranda, but specifically the question of Paulina’s perceptual acuity. Abducted and imprisoned by this unnamed country’s previous political regime, Paulina was bound, tortured and raped (a described image that strongly echoes the rape scene of *Rosemary’s Baby*). Blindfolded, she was never able to see the men who committed these acts. But her other senses were not inhibited: she could feel them, smell them, and hear them; in particular one ‘doctor’ who had a penchant for quoting Nietzsche and playing Schubert whilst torturing her.

Just as in *Frantic*, the possibility of hyper-perception forms an important part of *Death and the Maiden*’s overall discourse, adding to it the concept of sensory deprivation as a means of *augmenting* other forms of sensory perception. As Paulina argues, whilst she was deprived of her sight in the torture chamber, due to her highly receptive state, she received sufficient data from her olfactory and auditory senses to be able to identify Miranda by his scent and voice alone, as positively as if she had seen him. In his film adaptation, Polanski elects to remain faithful to Dorfman’s stage-play by not portraying Paulina’s torture by any means other than diegetic verbal exposition, namely Paulina’s conversations with Gerardo and Miranda in which details of her imprisonment are revealed. So just as Gerardo is forced to pass judgement on testimony alone, so too is the spectator denied any cinematic image that may confirm or deny what Paulina says. And just as Paulina is denied access to the visual stimuli that would have informed her judgement, so too are we as spectators
deprived of a flashback designed to stabilise our own sense of what is and what is not
diegetically true.

Gerardo’s doubtful reaction as to the reliability of Paulina’s perceptual claims
highlights the special privilege humans afford to sight amongst their senses as the
most reliable epistemological tool. At the very least, Paulina’s claim highlights the
dictatorship of visual perception. It may also suggest something more. Her claim that
she is able to recognise the doctor notwithstanding being blindfolded raises the
question of her augmented perceptual abilities, which are not only elevated due to
emotional stress, but perhaps also due to the removal of her sight, allowing the brain
to more effectively identify and decode auditory stimuli specifically because the
senses are not working in concert.

8.9. Competing Hypotheses

In Frantic, our attention seems deliberately deflected away from thoughts about what
Sondra Walker may be enduring during her imprisonment (and considering the nature
of the object her abductors were attempting to recover, we can safely assume her
imprisonment was not pleasant); our engagement with the film instead relies on our
capacity to assume the emotional stress suffered by the character to whom we are so
closely tethered, Dr. Walker. In fact, Frantic does not address Sondra’s plight at all,
remaining firmly tethered to Richard Walker’s subjective reach. Whilst we are not
privy to Sondra personal experience, Paulina’s is recounted in vivid detail. In fact, in
Death and the Maiden it is the minute details of Paulina’s imprisonment (although
never shown) that are more critical to the narrative’s progression (i.e. Miranda’s fate at the hand of the Escobars). Also in contrast to *Frantic*, in *Death and the Maiden*, the camera is not tethered exclusively to any of the film’s three characters; nor, however, does it stray from their collective, overlapping narrative reach. This ‘group tethering’, itself reminiscent of *Knife in the Water*, serves to de-emphasise the type of locked spectator-surrogate relationship Polanski’s cinema almost always encourages. As two of the three characters are presenting radically different versions of the truth, by avoiding a tight subjective connection, the film hinders the spectator’s ability to establish a reliable, *stable*, diegetic truth, especially in terms of that which is related to the past and to which we are not given direct visual access. In other words, Polanski’s camera neither corroborates nor denies Paulina’s memory cinematically; we are left to sort out what is or is not true based solely on the testimony offered by Paulina and Miranda (and to some extent, Gerardo). It is also in this context of ‘competing testimonies’ that I believe *Death and the Maiden* serves to develop Polanski’s cinematic engagement with perceptual psychology.

In Gregory’s article ‘Perception as Hypothesis’ (1980), he delineates not merely an analogous relationship between the process of sensory perception and the cognitive act of hypothesising, but affirms a positive identity between the two; that is to say, to perceive is to hypothesise. The process of hypothesisation begins with the application of deductive reasoning to attribute meaning to observed phenomena. Importantly, we do not speak of ‘truth’ in relation to hypotheses, but rather validity. So where a predictive hypothesis may well have a high degree of (testable) validity, this does not necessarily make it *true* in terms of what is objectively measurable. The problem for perception arises when more than one predictive hypothesis immediately comes to the
fore in relation to a particular stimuli. As I have discussed previously, Gregory is fond
of highlighting ‘visual ambiguities’, special images designed to make the brain
struggle with competing, and (frustratingly so) *equally valid* hypotheses, shifting from
one to the next without resolve. In *Frantic*, Polanski manifests this process in
scenarios in which different characters present competing hypotheses to explain the
bits of evidence compiled by Walker in his investigation, each individual
hypothesising according to personal cognitive frameworks (i.e. those *a priori*
structures that permit deductive reasoning). Ultimately, it was Walker’s hypothesis
that proved most reliable in *Frantic*, resulting in the resolution of the ambiguity. In
*Death and the Maiden*, the task proves to be even more of a challenge.

In Ariel Dorfman’s stage-play, Polanski found a text in which Gregory’s
perception/hypothesis identity is played out to an extreme. Polanski’s film version
respects the enclosed setting of the stage play, utilising the ease of location changes
allowed by cinema only three times: in the short scene in which Paulina steals
Miranda’s car and pushes it over a cliff; the climax in which Miranda finally offers a
convincing confession on the edge of the same cliff; and the bookending scenes that
take place in the concert hall (a scene that is also present in the play). Crucially,
Polanski follows the play’s lead by not resorting to flashbacks to portray Paulina’s
recounting of her torture visually, a directorial choice much in line with Polanski’s
own tendency at this stage in his cinema to avoid portrayals of subjective
psychological states (in contrast with the Apartment Trilogy). So whilst *Death and the
Maiden* shares similar thematic concerns with *Rashômon*, for example, it does not
employ cinematic means to represent competing predictive hypotheses as famously utilised in Kurosawa’s film (itself also a recounting of a rape story).\textsuperscript{58}

Although it does not attempt to visually represent subjective perception, what \textit{Death and the Maiden} does have in common with Polanski’s Apartment Trilogy is its enclosed setting. But this time it is not an apartment nestled amongst other apartments in a major urban setting, but rather a secluded cabin, in which the approach of any foreign body (i.e. anyone but Gerardo and Paulina) is met with extreme suspicion, as demonstrated at the start of the film by Paulina’s reaction to the approach of Miranda’s (instead of Gerardo’s) car. Like the apartments, however, the cabin also serves as a manifestation of the psyche; the cabin itself standing in for the enclosed chamber in which the brain resides, secluded from the world not only by its remote location but also cut off from its electrical means of communication by a storm. Within this chamber, a perceptual crisis is played out, not through the representation of a psychological (cognitive) breakdown as in the apartment films (although Paulina is arguably suffering from one as well), but manifested by the roles played by each character, none of whose own psyche is represented visually.

The moment in which this perceptual scenario is initiated (and, for the spectator, when Paulina’s actions in the film thus far start to make any sense) occurs when Gerardo is awoken by the stereo playing a tape of Schubert’s ‘\textit{Der Tod und das'}

\textsuperscript{58} An interesting twist on the flashback is instead offered in \textit{Bitter Moon}, the film that is sandwiched by \textit{Frantic} and \textit{Death and the Maiden} and in which the bulk of the narrative takes the form of a visualisation of a recounted story. Ultimately, however, doubt is cast onto the validity of the details of this testimony, and thus the diegetic truth of what we have seen in the extended flashbacks.
Mädchen’. As Gerardo enters the living room he is positioned in the centre of the frame, forming a triangle with Paulina screen-right (holding a gun) and Miranda screen-left (gagged and tied to a chair). The scene witnessed by Gerardo is completely ambiguous from his perspective; whilst there is no question of his visual acuity (he wears glasses, but there is no doubt that he sees what is before him as accurately as any sane perceiver would be able to), its meaning is elusive to him. By the same token, it is wrong to assume that he has no framework upon which to reach his own hypothesis; after all, he knows of Paulina’s history, and there have been other occurrences in the past when she has mistakenly ‘identified’ her former captor. Earlier, Gerardo acknowledges Paulina’s potential for instability and erratic behaviour when he attributed her theft of Miranda’s car to her emotional state. The closest thing to a hypothesis for this image from Gerardo’s perspective would be to assume that Paulina is suffering a (post-traumatic) psychotic episode, a hypothesis to which he is initially wed, but which is challenged as more information surfaces. So when Gerardo sees Paulina pointing a gun at a gagged and bound Miranda, he must take all this knowledge into account before judging what the image before him ‘means’.

Although our subjective tether is extended to three characters, irrespective of what we may feel about him, it is the character of Gerardo with whom we are most closely aligned due simply to the fact that we share the role of judge in this make-shift courtroom. It is ultimately he (being promoted, as it were, from lawyer to judge) who has to decide between competing accounts of reality, each of which with its own merits. Initially, it does seem incredible that by sheer chance the very doctor who tortured Paulina would be the one to save Gerardo on the road side and show up at Paulina’s home all those years later. Paulina asks Gerardo (and us) to believe the
hypothesis that this man was her torturer based on the evidence that she is able to recognise his smell and voice. Given the combination of the incredible improbability of her suggestion, the fact that Paulina cannot identify the man visually, and the confounding influence of what he sees to be her unstable emotional state on her perceptual abilities to begin with, the possibility that Paulina might be right is initially dismissed by Gerardo. Paulina’s testimony would have to be convincing indeed to sway his judgement; and as the film progresses, many details do emerge that make Gerardo question what he assumed to be Miranda’s innocence. Throughout the film, the ‘reality’ of Miranda’s guilt and innocence changes, with each possibility assuming the mantle of truth. Like a visual ambiguity, the nature of this truth ‘shifts’ uncomfortably back-and-forth from ‘guilty’ to ‘not guilty’ as new, often small, details emerge. It is only when we leave the cabin and move to the cliff-side that it appears that Gerardo (and we) are delivered conclusive evidence of his guilt. But even then, this evidence is not ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’.

In Death and the Maiden’s climactic scene, Miranda is held over the same cliff Paulina previously used to dispose of his car. Facing what must have appeared to be certain death, Miranda offers one more confession to Paulina in an attempt to save his own life. But this time, his confession is not a rehearsed performance based on information fed to him by her husband. This time, he includes details that Paulina herself did not even know, providing an account of events that finally seems to convince Paulina that he is making a truthful confession. Upon close analysis of Miranda’s speech, however, it becomes apparent that there is still no information offered here that Miranda could not simply have made-up in an attempt to give Paulina what he judged she wanted to hear. There is simply no confirmation,
diegetically or even logically, that what he is saying is necessarily true. What really makes this speech so believable is, in fact, not what he says or even how he says it, but rather the manipulative melodramatic extra-diegetic scoring of the scene, which is especially conspicuous considering that the film predominantly uses an intra-diegetic score. Ultimately then, as is so often the case in Polanski’s cinema, we are denied a sense of stable diegetic truth.

8.10. Circles of Dissatisfaction

Both Frantic and Death and the Maiden are bookended by visual echoes, but the effect is different in each film. At the end of Frantic, we again see the Walkers in the backseat of a taxi as they make their way back to the airport. In contrast to Chinatown, whose ‘full circle’ finale returns Gittes to the location he fled before the start of the film’s timeframe, Frantic’s circularity is visually explicit, right down to the two-shot of the intertwined Walkers in the back seat of the taxi and the POV shot of the Parisian dustmen. But for Walker, the return (literally, a return to America) is most welcome, as it ‘annihilates’ (as Cappabianca’s puts it, 1997: 26) his separation from his wife, parenthesising the events of the film. In Frantic, the ‘Orphean’ Walker survives his journey to Hell and brings his ‘Eurydice’ back from the dead, sacrificing his guide in her stead. So in contrast to the Orpheus myth, Frantic’s full-circle return to the over-world (the world his perceptual mechanism is equipped to deal with) represents the accomplishment of the protagonist’s goal, not its failure – but at a significant price.
In *Death and the Maiden*, the film begins and ends with an image of Paulina and Gerardo Escobar at a Schubert recital. But this return to the concert hall is not a ‘rondo’ in the sense of the scene being a repeated occurrence of an event, which is how the device is used in most of Polanski’s circular films. That is to say, the scene we see at the end of the film is a return to the same moment that started the film (i.e. that the concert we witnessed at the start of the film is the same one we see at the end). Time has been suspended, with the events of the film all taking place before this actual-image. Arguably, then, the events that make up the bulk of the film exist in relation to this framing scene. But can we consider, then, the film as a flashback? Or recollection-image? And if so, whose?

Furthermore, what are we to make of Miranda’s presence (with his family, no less) in the concert hall? Is this a confirmation of his (remorseless) culpability? If his confession at the film’s climax was invented as a last-ditch attempt at survival, why did he not have the Escobars arrested? Beyond confirming that Miranda did not throw himself off the cliff as the shot at the conclusion of the previous scene may have suggested, the inclusion of Miranda’s presence in the concert hall suggests that he did not seek retribution for his imprisonment, as he maintained he would have done. But what does this prove? Is it not also possible he may have had sympathy for Paulina and chosen to not press charges? Could the look on the Escobars faces not be one of fear of being held to account for their actions? In my own experience, the more one revisits this film, the less likely one is able to establish a stable interpretation of the series of glances shot across the hall between Paulina and Miranda, and then Miranda and Gerardo. Truth, for them and for us, remains unstable, like those visual
ambiguities perception theorists are so fond of showing us. *Satisfaction*, yet again, remains elusive.
9. **Investigation Trilogy Case Study 3: The Ninth Gate**

‘You all know me, gentlemen, but hitherto you've known me only on one side.’

- *The Double: A Petersburg Poem* (Dostoevsky, 1950: 156)

9.1. **Breaking Down the Perceptual Wall**

In collaboration with Darius Khondji, celebrated for his use of colour chiaroscuro in *Seven* (1995), Polanski returns to the world of the ‘hardboiled’ detective in the fin-de-siècle supernatural noir called *The Ninth Gate*. More so than *Chinatown*, *The Ninth Gate* is rigorously generic in its visual style, opting not for Technicolor to create its rich palate, but taking advantage of French lab Eclair’s ‘Noir en Colour’ (NEC) printing process to create the subtlety of shading that, in the forties and fifties, could only be achieved with black and white film stock and with meticulous attention to lighting (see Peterson & Place, 2004: 66). According to Khondji (in Pizello, 2000: 39), the use of darkness in *The Ninth Gate* was much inspired by Welles’s *Touch of Evil* (1958), which served as a touchstone for the film’s palette.

As Naremore makes clear, achieving an absolute definition of the ‘style’ of *film noir* is difficult given heterogeneity of the works included in this category (1998: 168), but given the ‘retro’ register I argue is being appealed to in *Chinatown* and *The Ninth Gate*, it must be acknowledged that, stereotypically at least, there are a number of
stylistic characteristics critics agree are indicative of a noir sensibility. Naremore summarises the dominant aesthetic attributes of noir as the use of ‘low key lighting, unbalanced compositions, vertiginous angles, night-for-night exteriors, extreme deep focus, and wide-angle lenses’ (167), but these are not ‘criteria’; it is not obligatory for a film to include all these elements to be considered film noir. For example, The Ninth Gate does not employ deep focus, but instead uses carefully calibrated shallow focus to deny the spectator perceptual access to that which is beyond the perceptual reach of the protagonist, creating a similarly ‘limiting’ perceptual effect as that which is achieved through the use shadows in deep-focused compositions. Whilst the film is not above manipulating light as a means conveying thematic concerns or visually representing the psychology of the on-screen figures, the camera work rarely lapses into the type of stylistic excess that draws attention to its presence. The film does not, for example, contain any unnatural angles (save for the moments at the start and end of the film when we are ‘untethered’). Such conspicuous camera positions are certainly effective in Touch of Evil, which uses an unlikely combination of highly naturalised dialogue and heavily expressionistic lighting and camera placement. Although much indebted to this film in other ways, The Ninth Gate keeps its dialogue crisp and stagy, and whilst its use of perspective is not warped to evoke an emotional effect, the tethered camera is so concerned with representing its falconer’s natural vision that it is actually prone to inheriting his visual impairments as well.

Whilst The Ninth Gate’s performance style and script is greatly out of step with the era of its release (its dialogue, for example, lacks the naturalism to which its contemporary viewers were so accustomed, which may account for its initially cold critical reception), the film sits proudly in the tradition of the ‘supernatural noir’,
alongside films like *Alias Nick Beal* (John Farrow, 1949) and *Angel Heart* (Alan Parker, 1987), as well as bibliophilic thrillers like *Inferno* (Dario Argento, 1980) and *The Saragossa Manuscript* (Wojciech Has, 1965), Polanski’s own *Rosemary’s Baby*, and above-all *The Name of the Rose* (Annaud, 1986), the film to which *The Ninth Gate* is perhaps most directly indebted (unsurprisingly so, considering that Rose’s screenplay was written by regular-Polanski collaborator Gérard Brach).

Like *Chinatown*’s Jake Gittes, and in the great tradition of the noir investigator, the narrative thrust of the film is fuelled by an investigation for which the detective is, at least initially, ill equipped to handle. Corso takes what seems to be a straightforward case by a client who ‘pays well’. Soon enough, however, Corso realises that he, like Gittes, has been duped and has become embroiled in a case far more complex than he had been led to believe. His first reaction is to bail out, but when offered a much larger sum of money (‘Add a zero,’ Balkan tells Corso), Corso is persuaded to carry on. Eventually, however, Corso rejects the cash prize in favour of the very treasure sought out by his employer-cum-adversary.

### 9.2. An Inquiring Camera in Search of a Tether

Throughout the previous case studies, I have often used the concept of the ‘tether’ to describe Polanski’s cinematographic style of keeping the camera closely linked to a single character’s subjective narrative reach, whilst at the same time maintaining its stance as a notional observer, whose own perception is sometimes affected by the psychological state of the character to whom it is ‘tethered’. In *The Ninth Gate*, the
tether is again in place, and is so firmly attached to Corso that it sometimes inherits his myopia.

Polanski’s tendency to both depict acts of perception and mimic these acts in the spectator’s own perceptual experience is again central in *The Ninth Gate*, in which our tether to Corso extends to the natural limits of his (flawed) eyesight. On several occasions, the camera adopts Corso’s direct POV, in turn relying on his corrective lenses – when he loses his glasses, we too lose focus, when he uses a magnifying glass or loupe, we too are privy to a magnified image. Polanski’s preference of framing objects (including people) in medium to close shots and heavy employment of shallow focus also creates a myopic effect that simulates Corso’s own perceptual reach. We are limited to examining only what is readily visible (i.e. in focus), rather than exploring the frame in the manner permitted by greater focal lengths.

It is also worth discussing this notional observer in control of the camera in term of its ‘personality’, since our gaze is so often a slave to its whims. It is important to emphasise, however, that whilst I do risk over-anthropomorphising the camera by such analogies, my reference to an ‘observer’ and its ‘personality’ is intended precisely as an *analogy*, not an identity as delineated by Sobchack’s (1992) discussion of ‘film’s body’ (as I discussed in Chapter 1). One of the most dominant aesthetic tropes of Polanski’s cinema is what can perhaps best be described as his camera’s ‘inquiring’ sensibility, an adjective that Paulus (2007) uses in reference to Renoir and Rossellini to describe a camera ‘that finds dramatic space instead of creating it, that explores instead of orders, that stands along the characters instead of imposing a view
of them’ (64). The inquiring camera does not necessarily master space; it may well struggle to deal with all the stimuli on offer. Polanski’s camera tends to be confident in its stance, but its inquisitiveness is often stymied by doors, walls and corners, and, above all, the subjective narrative reach of the protagonist to whom it is tethered.

It is useful to briefly tap into pedagogical discourse to elaborate the significance of the term ‘inquiry’ in the context of Polanski’s cinema. As an educational technique, ‘Inquiry-Based Learning’ refers to an educational approach that emerged from the constructivist theory of learning espoused by Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky and Dewey, which itself is much in-line with Gregory’s own research findings on the way in which the brain actively interprets stimuli based on prior learning. The aim of the Inquiry Based-Learning method is to develop independent learning skills through the application of its particular approach to education (Bullard et al, 2008), which, in contrast to more conventional didactic methods, focuses more on the development of reasoning skills than the reproduction of facts (and ideology). The extent to which teachers mediate the learning process in the Inquiry Method varies, ranging from open to guided. Where open implies low levels of teacher involvement (the extreme opposite of ‘closed’ didacticism), guided insinuates higher levels of teacher support in the independent learning trajectory.

Discussing education in such terms, the parallels to cinema become increasingly clear. What is normally referred to as the classic Hollywood model is ‘closed’, its structure leaning towards didacticism by way of the close-up and shot-countershot formula, as well as its tendency to minimise moral ambiguity and weaving ideological absolutes
into the narrative. Conversely, the type of realism offered by the *profondeur de champ* style of cinematography championed by Bazin necessitates a greater level of openness – both in the way ideology is presented as well as the way in which the frame is occupied and the camera moved, allowing for independent inquiry into both the space offered onscreen and the nuances of the issues being dealt with. Here lies the most relevant parallel between the Inquiry-Based learning system and Polanski’s cinema; that is, their mutual emphasis on question raising and independent learning.

We can make a further distinction between forms of cinematic inquiry, each of which can enhance realism in its own way. The freedom of the spectator’s eyes to examine the totality of the frame in a long-take in deep-focus is a form of ‘openness’. The roaming camera, on the other hand, can enhance verisimilitude in the revelation of detail and strengthen the spectator’s engagement with the diegetic world - a suture to the film, as opposed to the inherent didacticism of being overly sutured to an on-screen body’s world-view. Both of these types of cinematography can be considered as types of inquiry, be they *open* (deep focus), or *guided* (roaming), the latter of which is closest to the ‘personality’ of Polanski’s ‘inquiring camera’, or perhaps more accurately, the camera that encourages us to inquire. It is also relevant to note here that Bazin, as Williams puts it, succumbs to ‘the lingering misconception that the human eye as a lenticular system possesses extreme depth of field’ (1980: 199). Arguably, then, the deeply focused image with great depth of field is an image in opposition with what the ‘brain would expect to see’ (to again quote Gregory, 2003). With the inquiring camera, on the other hand, focus varies greatly, more in line with the servomechanism of the lens itself – the ‘price’ to be paid, of course, is that we must yield our gaze to that of the nominal observer.
Where the ‘openness’ of the deep-focus/long take aesthetic gives the impression of visual freedom, Polanski tends to prefer establishing perceptual realism through not only the use of illusion (as seen in *The Tenant*) and natural (even myopic) focal lengths, but also through the blatant imposition of perceptual *limits*, seemingly designed to frustrate our gaze. The verisimilitude of these diegetic worlds (i.e. the extent to which we ‘believe’ in them) is heightened not by what we see, but often by what we are denied seeing, emphasising that what we are privy to is not the totality of this plane of reality. Polanski uses a variety of means by which off-screen space is suggested, from framing choices that stimulate us to look around the corner (but denying us the ability to do so) to narrative content that emphasises off-screen action beyond the reach of the camera.

Although our gaze is highly mediated in *The Ninth Gate*, the imagery through which we are guided is most often presented as highly ambiguous, effectively forcing us to take notice of details but leaving it up to us to make sense of them. The images remain steeped in mystery, which both the spectator and Corso are tasked to uncover. For however guided our inquiry is through these diegetic worlds, it remains a question-raising pedagogy rather than ideologically didactic. And whilst Polanski’s carefully constructed shots are often designed to manipulate (or upset) our perceptual mechanism, the overall effect remains that of cultivating doubt in the reliability of our perceptions, rather than creating certainties or delivering simplistic satisfaction.
9.3. The Enigmatic Prologue

An excellent example of this cinematic version of guided inquiry occurs in *The Ninth Gate’*s opening sequence. The first image after the opening titles is a wide shot of the inside of an ornately decorated library/study. In the centre of the frame an elderly man writes at his desk. The shot remains static for the moment. We are permitted to (openly) examine the contents of the frame, complete with the various depth cues suggested by the *mise-en-scène*. But soon the camera begins to move, shifting slowly to the left, revealing a stool that had previously been out of frame. The camera moves towards the stool, creating a medium shot. It slowly tilts up to reveal a noose. The camera then follows the man as he seals his letter and walks towards the stool. It lingers on his slippers, which bear the initials A.T. The man climbs onto the stool and fixes the noose around his neck. The camera remains fixed on his feet as he kicks the stool away, watching them shake wildly and then come to rest, suspended in mid-air (in mid-frame).

Rather than moralising the moment of suicide, the camera simply observes, of all things, the man’s feet. The scene of Andrew Telfer’s (Willy Holt) hanging does not seem designed to evoke the feeling of *being* hanged in the spectator, which could have been more effectively conveyed by focusing on Telfer’s neck and facial expression, but rather accentuates the experience of *watching* someone hang by

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59 Darius Khondji much praises this opening, giving full credit to Polanski for its construction:

> That opening scene is pure Roman … (h)e lined up the whole scene without any [narrative] interference or compromise. For me, that shot is very representative of Roman’s sensibility. His filmmaking is beautiful and classical, but at the same time, it’s twisted!

(Darius Khondji, as quoted in Pizzello, 2000: 38)
focusing on this small detail. The camera is in fact more concerned with the mechanics of the act: it examines the stool-and-noose hanging apparatus, the chandelier to which it is fixed, and the details of the feet and monogrammed slippers, first walking, then kicking away the stool, and then still, accurately conveying the exact moment of death whilst protecting us from its gruesomeness, but at the same time forcing us to form our own image of the ‘upper half’ of the shot. Even though the man’s expression is not shown, attention to such micro-detail increases the realism of the scene, the sense of being present and the strong suggestion of out-of-frame action. It is worth pointing out that the initials on the man’s slippers are also shared with Aristide Torchia, the author (or ‘co-author’) of the book that serves as the film’s MacGuffin. As these initials play such a significant role in the film to come, their inclusion on the slippers appears to be an invitation to consider Telford as a sort of ‘co-author’ of the film itself, his suicide serving to sever the tether between himself and the camera, thus initiating the narrative trajectory of the film. With Telford dead, the camera is obliged to seek out Corso.

After watching Telford hang himself, the camera then moves away, tracking along the floor, over the desk (over the letter, which it is powerless to open), and across rows of packed shelves until homing in on a gap between two books. There is a book missing. The camera continues to move forward, penetrating the gap (eerily reminiscent of the gap in Trelkovsky’s teeth, a space that the camera also penetrates in The Tenant). The rest of the credits roll toward us as the camera moves forward through a series of (nine) doors. After a burst of white light, the frame is filled with a New York cityscape (much like of Rosemary’s Baby’s opening shot). The camera then pulls
back, through a window frame and into a room in which it finds its new tethering point: the film’s protagonist, book-detective Dean Corso.

Once the camera ‘lands’ on Corso, he becomes the means through which our ‘notional observer’ is able to re-unite itself with the missing book – an obsession we inherit not necessarily from Telfer, Balkan or even Corso, but the camera itself. Just as it does to Gittes and Walker, the camera often trails Corso from behind, keeping us limited, within the degree of tolerance allowed by the invisible tether, to Corso’s subjective narrative reach. We are not, however, privy to Corso’s thought process; but we are sometimes connected to Corso’s ability to see. When he receives a blow to the head from Liana Telfer (Lena Olin), the observing eye of the camera is likewise injured; before passing out itself (i.e. fading to black), it goes out of focus and forms an image of a quadruple-eyed Corso more reminiscent of Loony Tunes-style ultraviolence than film noir. Later, when Corso is studying the engravings in Baroness Kessler’s (played by Hammer alumnus Barbara Jefford) copy of The Nine Gates, he receives another blow to the head – this time the camera adopts his direct POV and collapses onto the desk (as it happens, onto the image of man about to be struck from behind with a mace).

To return briefly to my previous point regarding the ‘inquiring camera’, what we see in the opening scene is a form of visually guided diegetic inquiry in which the camera, our notional observer, mediates our gaze to draw our attention to specific diegetic details. But these details remain enigmatic. Rather than simply delineating the meaning of what is shown, the aim seems more to stimulate thought (and provoke
interest) than explain (‘teach’) what is happening onscreen. The technique perseveres for the remainder of the film, although once a new tether is established to Corso, the camera’s independent wandering becomes more limited. We begin to trust Corso to act as our perceptual guide, via the tethered camera that tends to follow his gaze (and thus guides ours). Eventually, however, this trust is broken and the camera is again abandoned.

9.4. Another Sane Male

As I have previously discussed in reference to both Chinatown and Frantic, in Polanski’s cinema the male characters who are positioned as investigators face challenges that create confusion for both their perceptual and (often by extension) the conceptual frameworks that make up their concept of reality. Never, however, is the mental health of these men questioned, in sharp contrast to the way female protagonists are often portrayed in Polanski’s cinema. Both Carole Ledoux’s and Rosemary Woodhouse’s relationship with reality is put into serious doubt in Repulsion and Rosemary’s Baby; as we see in The Tenant, Trelkovsky’s increasingly estranged relationship with reality runs exactly parallel with his gender transformation; and whilst Paulina Escobar’s perceptual acuity in Death and the Maiden is arguably vindicated, the spectator’s uncertainty as to her mental state introduces doubt as to her perceptual judgment, which forms the central ambiguity of the film (an ambiguity, as I argue, which is never resolved).
Polanski’s division of madness and sanity is not, however, as clear-cut as my crude gender division might suggest. It is worth highlighting once again that whilst Polanski presents a series of female (or ‘femalised’) characters whose behaviour seems meticulously designed to fulfil DSM\textsuperscript{60} checklists for schizophrenia, the diegetic truth as to the pathogenesis of their psychoses is always problematic, and in some cases \textit{(Rosemary’s Baby} and \textit{Death and the Maiden} in particular), the accuracy of the diagnosis of mental illness is openly doubted within the diegesis itself. Even in \textit{Repulsion}, the closest thing to a ‘straightforward’ portrayal of mental illness in Polanski’s cinema, there are subtle suggestions that Carole’s mental state may be the result of mistreatment by men rather than an innate psychopathological condition. All the same, it cannot be denied that the spectre of mental illness is always associated with female bodies, most explicitly highlighted in \textit{The Tenant} through the blatant coupling of increasingly schizophrenic behaviour with a male-to-female gender transformation.

In \textit{The Ninth Gate}, Corso joins Gittes and Walker on Polanski’s team of sane male investigators, with Polanski’s gender-sanity divide being even further punctuated by Corso’s general attitude towards woman. In \textit{Chinatown}, in keeping with his era, Gittes’s sexism is quite overt. Although more subtle, Corso also demonstrates a deeply rooted form of sexism that has survived well into the twenty-first century, and which finds expression in the way he deals with the female characters of the film, who are positioned as either perilous sexual objects or maternal, post-sexual forces - both to be managed by Corso’s ‘superior’ intellect. His attempt to swoon Baroness

\textsuperscript{60} Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), as mentioned in Chapter 2.
Kessler is particularly indicative of his condescension, reminiscent of his treatment of the ‘mugs’ he swindles when we first meet him. (In contrast to Kessler, however, Corso does fear her secretary, a highly phallic, imposing woman.) Most revealing is the glaring inconsistency he demonstrates in the revelation of information about his case. Where he openly reveals his employer's identity to Bernie the book-dealer (James Russo) and Nine Gate’s owner Fargas (Jack Taylor), he refuses to do so to either Liana Telfer or Baroness Kessler, who are told this information is ‘confidential’ (it does not take Kessler long, however, to guess it is Balkan).

But Polanski does not allow Corso’s sexism to go unchecked. Like Frantic, The Ninth Gate also includes a female variation of Dante’s Virgil in the form of Green Eyes. (Notably, calling to mind her role as Michelle in Frantic, Green Eyes is played by Emmanuelle Seigner.) Unlike Michelle, however, who is enlisted (nearly by force) by Walker to help him find his wife, it is Green Eyes who follows Corso, guiding him toward his goal, and even helping him redefine the goal itself. And so, ultimately, Corso’s sexist cognitive framework comes under serious stress, as it proves to be a female body, Green Eyes, who both saves Corso through physical intervention and eventually expands the framework in which his perceptual mechanism operates, seemingly allowing him to embrace a novel version of reality outside the confines of his (Holmes-esque) rational materialism.

Notably, in The Ninth Gate, Paris does not stand in for a perceptual Hell the way it does in Frantic, but rather a version of Hell as seen from one of its own dark angels, who is making his way to its inner circle to engage in communion with the Devil.
him(her?)self. In the process, both the very notion of Hell and the persona of Satan, are similarly deconstructed, both materially and in the context of religious mythology. Furthermore, a novel twist is introduced to the concept of the ‘male/sane’ perceiver in the film’s final act, in which the central ambiguity of the film seems to be, for Corso if not for us, resolved.

9.5.  **Forging and Breaking the Tether**

Like Gittes, Corso is already an investigator of sorts, a ‘book detective’, whose job it is to track down valuable collectables for bibliophiles, or, as is the case in *The Ninth Gate*, verify their legitimacy. And like both Walker and Gittes, Corso also finds himself involved in an investigation that stretches his perceptual abilities. He does not, however, face the type of linguistic or cultural obstacles faced by Walker (and to some extent, Gittes). Whilst not quite a polyglot, Corso is far from an English-language monolingual; he speaks French without difficulty and although he speaks neither Spanish nor Portuguese fluently, he manages quite well in both - there is no indication that these languages pose a significant perceptual obstacle to Corso the way that French does to Walker or Chinese (or even a Chinese *accent*) does to Gittes. Corso also moves easily across borders, both those that are politically defined as well the less visible confine that divides the global space of commerce and tourism from more ‘local’, rural spaces.

As Morrison (2001) notes, Corso’s trajectory throughout the film represents the fluidity of national space in the new transnational, borderless, but dying, Europe (44).
But in contrast to Morrison’s identification of *The Ninth Gate*’s representation of ‘multiple identities and shifting forms of contemporary Europe’ (2007: 43), I hasten to highlight that these ‘multiple identities’ are all embedded within a capitalist framework, a status-quo so universally accepted that (as recent market events have shown) any criticism of it immediately relegates one to the political fringe. *The Ninth Gate*’s bibliophiles serve as apt representatives of the death of ‘old’ Europe at the hands of globalisation. As Fargas says of his decrepit home in Sintra, ‘old families are like ancient civilizations: they wither and die’. He has been forced to sell most of his book collection simply to maintain his home at the most basic level, but, as he is unwilling to sell his most prized possession, Torchia’s *Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows* (worth at least one million dollars), he is condemned (literally) to death. Much like Fargas, Liana Telford (née de St. Martin) is a member of a penniless noble (this time French) family. Her solution, however, was to save her château by marrying a rich American and refurbishing her family home with his money (not to mention using it to hold Satanic orgies for millionaires to ‘indulge their jaded sexual appetites’). Even Friede Kessler, owner of the third book, is referred to as ‘Baroness’, suggestive of her own noble (most likely Austrian or German) lineage.

Whilst I will stop short of calling Corso a truly nomadic body, Corso’s ‘anchoring’ in America seems to be only a matter of convenience. His residence (not much of ‘home’, really) is, after all, on that island between America and Europe (to paraphrase Spalding Gray) called Manhattan. Corso represents not a national identity but the lack of relevancy of such a distinction to global bodies in globalised spaces.  

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61 Again, by ‘globalised’ I really mean capitalist.
Furthermore, the seamless manner in which he moves outside of what is normally regarded (including by me in the last chapter) as globalised space is arguably suggestive of the encroachment (or invasion) of the global onto the local, in Europe in particular. After all, it is not so shocking that Corso can move so easily between these worlds in pursuit of what is a purely capitalist venture (or at least starts out to be, as I will move on to later). As a transnational force, Corso is in fact more ‘Coca-Cola’ than ‘Starbucks’ or ‘McDonalds’ due to his ability to blend into even the most ‘local’ of markets, where he is able to gain help from tavern owners and even travel on the back of livestock transport and logging lorries as naturally as he uses first class air and rail travel.

Although the representation of globalisation is not the focus of this present discussion of Polanski’s work, it is worth taking note of the appearances of various brands like Shell and Coca-Cola in the film. Whilst the conspicuous presence of these brands arguably punctuates the increasingly globalised European landscape the film seems to be exploring, the reality is that these brands are present in the film as the result of paid product placement.\(^{62}\) There is a certain irony, then, that even Europe’s auteur cinema is subject to the same effects of globalisation the film weaves into its own discourse. The use of the global star Johnny Depp is also arguably part of this same trend toward globalisation, as it is he, far more than Polanski’s name, which ensures the marketability of the film. That being said, Polanski has never been averse to using stars and has always done so extremely effectively (it would be difficult to argue, for instance, that Depp and Ford are not perfectly cast in their respective roles).

\(^{62}\) As documentation stored in the Polanski archive at the Cinémathèque française Bibliothèque du film reveals. Ref. BAUDROT-GU121 to BAUDROT-GU126.
Comparing *Frantic*’s Richard Walker to *The Ninth Gate*’s Dean Corso is an effective way of exploring Corso’s character, and is worth pursuing a little more here before moving on. Most obviously, of course, both Walker and Corso are American men who find themselves in Paris on business trips, staying at ‘global’ hotels in which they each enlist the help of hotel staff for their investigation. In contrast to Walker, however, Corso’s relationship with the hotel employees is long established and financially lubricated (notably with Francs, a neat time-stamp marking the film’s *fin-de-siècle* setting). Walker, who also has to spread cash around to get what he wants, tends to fumble with the currency and is not always sure when pulling out the cash is appropriate - a mistake Corso never makes. When Corso strays away from English-friendly global spaces, language does not prove to be as much as an obstacle as it does for Walker (who is actually quite lucky so many key players in his quest speak English at all).

Unlike Walker, Corso does not suffer from a sense of national displacement. Whilst he too holds an American passport (both he and Walker flash their passports onscreen, just as Trelkovsky has his identity papers examined), Corso’s legal identity has little bearing on the effectiveness of his attempt to master his environment. It is the nature of the investigation Corso struggles with. Where Walker manages to achieve his primary objective (finding his wife), he makes no attempt to penetrate the ‘bigger’ reality (nuclear warfare) into which he has unwittingly been entangled. Corso, on the other hand, does both. Finally, whilst our impression of Walker’s psychology is unwavering (with only the subtlest hint that he may be considering the
temptation offered by Michelle), Corso’s persona conceals a profound interior shift that permits him to master the world he is investigating in a manner more extreme than we may have believed possible. Like Oedipus, in The Ninth Gate it proves to be the investigator himself who is the key to the resolution of the mystery. Also in contrast to Walker, Corso is not compelled to raise his perceptual game by emotion, but he nevertheless faces the most difficult type of perceptual obstacle possible, namely a set of stimuli that pose a serious affront to his most basic (existential) cognitive framework. It is Corso’s rational belief in materialism that is ultimately most challenged in The Ninth Gate. As he attempts to make sense out of the mystery into which he has become embroiled, his existing cognitive frameworks prove insufficient and require an overhaul more radical than any Polanski has portrayed thus far.

As the embodiment of pure capitalism, Corso never finds himself in the position of ‘other’ as he traverses both the Atlantic and Europe. As such, he does not seem to suffer the perceptual obstacles that might emerge from culturally-specific conceptual frameworks. Corso demonstrates that the capitalist framework, his self-professed fundamental belief (an expression of his overall materialistic cognitive framework), is the greatest asset to true transnationalism. Throughout the film, Corso engages in a number of financial transactions (normally associated with the purchase of alcohol or tipping hotel staff), indicating the ease with which he operates as an inter- (i.e. ‘between’) national body who can function anywhere as long as the laws of commerce are observed. His job, whilst superficially may seem to be that of someone with a great passion for literature and history, actually reflects Corso’s profoundly rooted capitalist ethos, entailing, as it does, the commodification of historic texts.
Corso collects books not for the knowledge they contain, but for their monetary value. He has found his niche in the market; he meets the needs of bibliophiles for money, but he is not a true bibliophile himself.

Whilst Corso is a materialist in the philosophical sense (i.e. subscribing to a matter-based ontology of the world), he is not ‘materialistic’ in the sense of seeking fulfilment through the purchase and consumption goods (he seems perfectly content with cigarettes, alcohol, and the odd microwaveable meal). The question that emerges is whether Corso’s sensibilities, in particular his cognitive frameworks, can be considered as ‘bourgeois’. He is perhaps better understood as an evolution of bourgeois sensibilities in which money itself, that which was intended to represent access to material things, is fetishised over the things themselves. He represents that bizarre strain of pure capitalism that privileges the accumulation of wealth (through trading, not production) above all else. Money for the sake of money, not what it can buy (ironic, given materialism’s emphasis on the reality of the tangible). It is difficult to imagine, for example, what exactly Corso would do with all the money he stands to make from Balkan.

Corso’s highly self-absorbed, self-serving personality is in fact much in line with the description of the ‘true nature of man’ as defined by Anton LaVey (1992) - an unsurprising connection as LaVey is the infamous founder of the Church of Satan, the sect that clearly serves as inspiration for Liana Telfer’s ‘Order of the Silver Serpent’. Notwithstanding the Church of Satan’s penchant for Camp theatrics, LaVey always maintained that the Satan figure to whom they pay homage is purely symbolic; the
core of his ideology is not that begging a supernatural being for gifts, but rather
embracing the true nature of man, becoming self-actualised and doing for oneself.
LaVey’s take on the true nature of man and achieving equality with God in fact
resonates strongly with the events of *The Ninth Gate*:

> Man is a selfish creature. Everything in life is a selfish act. Man is not concerned with helping others, yet he wants others to believe he is! [...] the first rule of the prideful is to make an exhibition of piety and charity, with a Goodguy Badge to pin to his lapel. Man cannot progress one step further towards his own godhood until he removes that Goodguy Badge. (LaVey, 1992: 20)

Don’t advertise. […] Never, under any conditions, go around proclaiming yourself to be the Devil. Others must recognise you as such […] Always harbour some doubt, even about yourself. The booby hatches are filled with megalomaniacs who are cocksure of their own omnipotence. […] Be aware of your own mortality. […] You must be perceptive enough to see things as they really are, not how you might have been taught by others who stand to gain from your ignorance. […] Be merciful […] but cruel if you’re pissed off. (LaVey, 1992: 66-67)

It is indeed Corso, far more than Balkan, Telfer or Kessler, who most embodies LaVey’s ethos.

At times, Corso also comes across as the bibliophile’s version of Indiana Jones (also a transnational presence, played, of course, by Harrison Ford aka Dr Richard Walker), but he is actually more of an Indiana Jones *villain* than Jones himself. His ambitions are far more self-serving than Indy’s honourable pursuit of archaeological artefacts. It
is hard to imagine, for example, Corso proclaiming that *The Nine Gates* ‘belongs in a museum’, as Indy does of an artefact (a *religious* artefact at that) in *The Last Crusade* (1989). He is, nevertheless, our ‘hero’. We witness, and are, in fact, invited to take great pleasure from, Corso’s ‘thoroughly unscrupulous’ (as a fellow book appraiser puts it) swindling of a stroke-victim’s ignorant son and his wife out a first edition *Don Quixote*. There is no pity offered for the silly rich as Corso assumes the role of Capitalist Robin Hood, who steals from the rich and gives to *himself*. We are not invited to pity the victims at all. Quite the opposite; however ruthless, Corso remains endearing. He is a scamp, not a scoundrel, through whom we are encouraged to indulge our own (monetary) fantasies.

Corso is a figure whose feeds his desire for money through the commodification of objects (books) that hold an emotional charge for collectors, but no real inherent value. Corso (initially, at least) does not feel their emotion, but is more than capable of capitalising on it. In terms of the ‘material conditions’ (to cite Marx and Engel, see 1998: 71) of Corso’s job, he does not, of course, produce anything of worth but serves entirely as a middleman, generating currency for himself by taking a percentage of that which is owned by others. The ‘product’ of his labour is the result of imposing what is essentially a type of sales tax on the transfer of property; his specialty happens to be books, his reward is money (‘What else?’ as Corso tells Liana Telfer).

In-line with Corso’s embodiment of pure capitalism is his relentless forward trajectory and his lack of a diegetically-explained personal history. Unlike Jake Gittes, for example, Dean Corso is not an ex-police officer with a back-story. Information
regarding his past is scarce, limited only to what is referred to as his ‘reputation’. But we get to know Corso quickly enough by way of the various comments made about him by other characters. Witkin (Allen Garfield), another book detective, calls him an ‘unscrupulous vulture’ and a ‘double-dealing, money grubbing bastard’. Bernie, a dealer and the closest thing to a friend Corso has, tells us nothing of Corso’s past, and is not spared from Corso’s financial ruthlessness (and nor is Bernie’s death particularly mourned, as the film’s score, Wojciech Kilar’s memorably bouncy ‘Corso’s theme’, punctuates when Corso is forced to negotiate Bernie’s hanged body to get to the ‘stashed’ book). Balkan, a long-time client, awkwardly attempts to get to know Corso better, but is rebuked. He refers to Corso as ‘one of those lean, hungry, restless types that put the wind up Julius Caesar’ (in contrast to Witkin, however, one suspects that Balkan intends this description as a compliment). If Corso is known to anyone else, it is only by reputation.

9.6. Ancients, Moderns, and Postmoderns

The negation of history is not only a modernist concept, for it also informs the postmodern condition, albeit in a different way. Hayward (2000) discusses the postmodern in terms of its ‘lack’: ‘[the postmodern] rejects history, and because it has none of its own – only that of others – the postmodern stands eternally fixed in a series of presents… ahistorical’ (276). It is worth distinguishing here a subtle, but significant difference between what Lukács (1963) discusses as modernism’s ‘negation’ of history and Hayward’s notion of the postmodern’s ‘ahistoricity’. The modern nullifies past aesthetic and philosophical (and ideological) tradition through its emphasis, even fetishisation, of novelty, but it inevitably remains connected to the
past through this very oppositional attitude, trapped in a relative state of being in need of constant updating. As Harvey terms it, ‘modernity … not only entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions, but is characterised by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself’ (1989: 12).

Where modernity simultaneously rejects and claims superiority over the ‘ancients’ (a reference to the Académie Française’s *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*), the postmodern, in contrast, seems to destroy this relativity between the past and present, and so the concept of ‘ancient’ versus ‘modern’, as well as the notion of one being superior over the other, is rendered meaningless. The postmodern is ‘ahistorical’ in the sense that it resides outside history, creating a temporal ‘bubble’ within which the modern notion of the linear trajectory of time becomes fragmented. But even though the postmodern may lack (or ‘reject’) a sense of its own history, it does not negate or nullify the past in the modernist sense; the postmodern continues to engage past traditions and discourse. It resides outside history, but observes it nonetheless.

Lacking modernism’s neophilia, the postmodern is free to utilise fragments of the past at will to form an ahistorical semantic framework in which postmodern works can communicate through various forms of citation (both in the form of pastiche and parody). It is postmodernism’s ahistoricity that allows it the freedom to engage the past without becoming ensnared in the ‘quarrels’ of the relativistic ancient-modern binary.

The distinction I make between modernism’s ‘negation’ of the past and postmodernism’s ahistoricity proves useful in the analysis of *The Ninth Gate*, both in
our appreciation of it as a postmodern work and our understanding of the characters it contains. *The Ninth Gate* includes several embodiments of the ancient-modern conflict; but whilst the film contains *depictions* of modernity, the manner in which it puts this ancient-modern conflict on display (through a religious parody, I argue) ultimately helps establish *The Ninth Gate* as a postmodern work. To begin, the character of Corso can indeed be understood in terms of his ‘modernity’ in the sense intended by Lukács. He is a man with a reputation but not really a past – or at least not one that the diegesis is informed by. Corso’s relentless forward trajectory and apparent lack of retrospection differentiates him from the bibliophiles for whom he works for (and against), many of whom have personal and family histories, and are flawed or even fragile. Corso is instead aligned most tightly with the mysterious Green Eyes, who proves to outdo even Corso in her tunnel vision and what seems to be a complete lack of personal psychology. It is she, after all, who scolds Corso when he engages in even the most minor reflection on Fargas’s death. ‘He’s dead, who cares?’ she tells him. Move on. Move forward.

Corso has no past, embodying not only the ethos of modern capitalism, but also its sub-ethos of frontierism. He is a shark, a relentlessly forward-moving and forward-looking beast, immune to the past. Lukács discusses this sort of character in terms of the ‘negation of history’ in modernist literature, which he explains as taking two forms, firstly in terms of the hero’s trajectory through the narrative, which is tightly bound ‘within the limits of his (sic) own experience’ (1963: 21), uninfluenced by an ‘pre-existing reality’ (21). The other form this ‘negation’ takes is the hero’s own lack of personal history; ‘he’ is a being that is ‘thrown into the world’ (21). Uninformed by a past, this hero’s state of being reflects modernism’s emphasis on novelty, even
neophilia. So in this regard, we can consider Corso (and, as I shall discuss in the conclusion of this dissertation, *The Ghost*’s nameless protagonist) as an embodiment of this specific notion of ‘modernity’, which differentiates him somewhat from Gittes, for example, the effects of whose past is often referenced and is evidently under active suppression in *Chinatown*.

But we cannot overlook the fact that whilst Corso is not given a back-story to ‘deepen’ our understanding of his character, his persona is highly informed by his reputation, at least diegetically to other characters. ‘Reputation’ serves also to inform the spectator’s understanding of Corso if the film connects with the viewer at a ‘retro’ or ‘nostalgic’ level, namely through its evocation of the various cinematic personas that Corso seems to be channelling; hardboiled detectives like Phillip Marlowe and Mike Hammer, as well as (as I argue) being a parody of Indiana Jones; and thus we cross over into a more postmodern conceptualisation of Corso and the film as a whole. Corso’s involvement with antique books is interesting in this regard, as it reflects postmodernism’s ‘lack’ of its own history and tendency to appropriate the history of others (i.e. past movements and aesthetics) for its own use.

In contrast to Gittes and Walker, Corso’s superior perceptual ability is indeed the result of a highly stable, unemotional (‘cool’) psyche whose relationship with reality is beyond reproach, aligning him also to a Holmes-esque model of hyper-perception steeped in bourgeois rationalism. Upon closer analysis, however, it emerges that Corso is really a subtle deconstruction of the noir archetype, but perhaps just short of the sort of an ‘oppositional’ force that Hayward (2000) associates with postmodern
Corso’s lack of psychological ‘entanglements’ also allows him, at least seemingly, to avoid the types of emotional perceptual obstacles faced by Gittes and Walker. The only obstacle in which Corso becomes seriously entangled is that which is posed by his own adherence to certain bourgeois conceptual frameworks, an obstacle that, seemingly, he is eventually able to overcome. Unbeknownst to the spectator, Corso ultimately reconsiders some of his most basic bourgeois rationalist frameworks and enters a truly ‘postmodern condition’, symbolised by his penetration of the frame, thus abandoning both the diegesis and the spectator as he renounces his role as object of our perception.

Polanski’s embedding of an existential discourse within *The Ninth Gate*’s celebration of decadent, even camp, generic fixtures is highly reminiscent of that erosion between ‘high’ art and commercial forms Jameson (1983: 112) points to as a key hallmark of postmodernism. Where *Chinatown* takes place in a world before film noir, *The Ninth Gate* demonstrates a more self-conscious mode of postmodernity, presenting a diegesis in which cinematic citations flow seamlessly in conversation. Where such references remain extra-diegetic in *Chinatown*, the *The Ninth Gate* takes place in a world in which noir has left its mark. When the widowed Liana Telfer visits Corso at home, the scene is a virtual replay of Neff’s encounter with Phyllis Dietrichson, so much so that both Corso and Telfer acknowledge the generic reference, one amongst many peppered throughout the film.63 Rather than ‘breaking the fourth wall’ and

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63 CORSO: This has happened before someplace. LIANA: I know. In the movies. CORSO: And she had an automatic in her stocking. LIANA: No automatic.

Another example is the smouldering cigarette Corso finds in Telfer’s hotel room, a citation from *Kiss Me Deadly*, elements of which are also prominent in both *Chinatown* and *Frantic*. Even Balkan’s self-immolation recalls the disaster that befalls Gabrielle (and the world) in *Kiss Me Deadly*’s final scene, which bestows supernatural overtones onto the destructive power of science.
rendering the scene overly self-conscious, the matter-of-fact manner in which the
*Double Indemnity*-esque encounter is treated actually diffuses what would otherwise
be a highly self-conscious generic riff. But whilst *The Ninth Gate* is at ease with its
postmodernity, its awareness of film noir does not stop it from being one.

Corso’s trajectory through the film can also be seen to parallel the transition from the
modern to the postmodern condition, especially when we look closely at *The Ninth
Gate*’s use of Camp dramatics to observe an ancient-modern quarrel and deconstruct
religious epistemologies. Corso seems to ‘rise above’ the highly Christian-informed
version of Satanism embodied by the ‘Order of the Serpent’, and also moves beyond
Balkan’s still-relativistic criticism of their rituals, towards a postmodern, even post-
religious condition. Calinescu describes part of the Baudelairean notion of modernity
in which the artist is caught up in the exploration of the dichotomy of good and evil
that exists within us all, one side pulling us towards God, the other towards Satan
(1987: 53-54). The parodic nature with which this conflict is presented in both
*Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Ninth Gate*, and the ambivalence with which good and evil
are treated are a step beyond what Baudelaire describes, and are best understood as
indications of a postmodern condition.

The conflict between the Satanists and Christianity, and indeed that between the
Satanists themselves, echoes the battle of ‘ancients’ and ‘moderns’, the latter thinking
themselves superior to the former, but with these terms slipping ever forward in time
to create perpetually updated versions of both ‘modern’ and ‘ancient’. The first battle is played out far before the time of the diegesis, in 1666, by the (co-)author of the film’s McGuffin (the much sought-after book *The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows*), who is burnt at the stake for betraying the ruling Church. His legacy is carried on by the ‘Order of the Silver Serpent’, members of which notably align themselves with the Devil as a means of increasing their wealth. But even within this order, splinters emerge, with both Baroness Kessler (an owner of one of three rare copies of *The Nine Gates*) and Boris Balkan rejecting the group’s approach - Balkan in particular believing his understanding of the text to be superior to that of the order members. Balkan rejects what he sees as an ‘ancient’ version of Devil worship in favour of his more informed, ‘modern’ version, which itself turns out to be hokum.

There is a further comparison to be made here between Corso and Balkan, which further demonstrates the shift away from the modern-ancient divide towards the postmodern condition. As I have discussed above, as a character Corso can be described as ‘modern’ due to his lack of personal history; the same is true of Balkan, who like Corso, is an isolated individual within the diegesis and not connected to an old family, unlike fellow bibliophiles Liana Telfer (St. Martin), Fargas and Baroness Kessler. The connection between Corso and Balkan is emphasised by their growing physical similarity. After his violent struggle with Liana’s henchman on the bank of Seine, Corso replaces his eyeglasses with a new pair with much thicker rims. Whilst we can take this as an indicator of a shift in his way of perceiving (new glasses, ‘new sight’), we should not overlook the fact that these new glasses are very similar to the distinctive glasses worn by Balkan. Corso’s new glasses heightening an already significant resemblance between the two, as does their similar hairstyles, in particular
Corso’s ever-greying temple ‘wings’. It is not so much that Corso has adopted Balkan’s way of seeing, however, but that he *outdoes* him; by operating outside the ancient-modern framework that Balkan is still enslaved by, Corso comes to represent the evolution of modernism to postmodernism as he transcends both his own bourgeois rationalism and Balkan’s misguided desire to win an intra-theological debate. And so, in the end, it is Corso, not Balkan, who becomes the Devil’s favourite.

9.7. **Exposing Cognitive Frameworks**

In spite of Corso’s naturally occurring myopia, he is positioned, as is the tradition for fictional detectives, as a hyper-perceiver. In what is perhaps Polanski’s most basic representations of hyper-perception, Corso plays a game of Satanic spot-the-difference as he compares the three copies of *The Nine Gates*. He soon notices what others have been unable to, even those who have devoted their lives to studying the book. There are subtle variations in the woodcarvings, the different versions being signed not by ‘AT’ (Aristide Torchia, the book’s author), but rather ‘LCF’. Corso initially smirks at the Cenzina brothers’ (both played by José López Rodero, with one brother voiced by Polanski himself) suggestion that LCF stands for none other than Lucifer himself. His reaction aptly reflects Corso’s fundamental rational-materialist cognitive framework, the very framework that is imperilled by the riddle of *The Nine Gates* and is at the root of his perceptual crisis.
A brief note on Corso’s alcohol consumption: although he is constantly drinking, he is never noticeably drunk, a good indication of a lifetime of alcohol abuse. He drinks in literally every scene in the film in which having a drink is physically possible. The very first time we see Corso (in the midst of a swindle), he has a drink in hand. As soon as he arrives at Bernie’s shop, he pours himself a drink. He drinks at home, on planes, on trains, in bars, and in his hotel room. And whilst he never seems intoxicated, it is more likely that he is actually in a constant state of mild inebriation. Like his glasses, his excessive alcohol consumption filters the world and helps maintain Corso’s bourgeois cognitive frameworks, but it is these very frameworks that he eventually transcends when he finally ‘sobers up’.

A self-professed ‘non-believer’, Corso is forced to divorce this cognitive framework from its association with the highly passionate, often silly64 ‘believers’ like Balkan, willing to do anything to resolve the riddle the book contains, as well as those who, like Liana Telfer, have convinced themselves that their success is due to membership in a Satanic order and use their beliefs as an excuse to engage in periodic orgies. The Ninth Gate’s other bibliophiles embody different forms of belief. Whilst Fargas, like Corso, professes himself to be a non-believer, he is not interested in the monetary value of The Nine Gates, as he strongly affirms to Corso. His passion is truly that of the bibliophile, a passion for the physical presence of these special books. Unlike Corso, Fargas does not see dollar signs as he admires an expertly crafted binding. We also learn that Liana’s husband, Andrew Telfer, was a non-believer as well. Baroness Kessler, on the other hand, is a believer, more in-line with Balkan’s sensibilities but

64 Polanski lets us know just how pathetic a figure Balkan really is quite early on. The security for both lift access to his library and the library door itself is ‘666’.
not quite as childish. Like Balkan, the Baroness applies academic rigour as a means of both justifying her belief in the Devil and making profit from it. But like the printing-mogul Balkan, Kessler’s primary concern is with the pursuit of her theology, with the attainment of monetary gain serving primarily to fund this pursuit. When asked about his beliefs, Corso simply responds that he ‘believes in [his] percentage’, a statement that efficiently represents both his steadfast rational materialism and obsession with the accumulation of wealth.

Given Polanski’s concern with the workings of perception and its reliance on cognitive frameworks, it is not surprising that religion so often finds itself a target of criticism in Polanski’s cinema. I follow here Berger’s (1967) conceptualisation of religion as ‘word-building’, or an intellectual infrastructure that provides robust conceptual frameworks through which its devotees can effectively engage the world and live their lives (and afterlives), and suggest that Polanski’s revelation of the truly tenuous nature of what we perceive through his explorations of how we perceive serves, above all, to undo any such ‘robustness’ in favour of ambiguity. By putting on display how we perceive the world, both in madness and sanity, the artificial basis upon which institutions, both religious and political (sometimes both simultaneously) build ‘worlds’ is exposed. Such exposé finds its most playful expression in both Rosemary’s Baby and The Ninth Gate, in which Devil worship is portrayed in a manner to maximise its absurdity. The humour in Rosemary’s Baby as the geriatrics toast the ‘year one’ and shout ‘Hail Satan’ is not unintentional – the scenes are played for both horror and laughs. As is the Satanic sermon in The Ninth Gate, both through Liana Telford’s recitation from The Nine Gates (as a cloaked Corso weaves his way through the crowd) and Balkan’s hypocritical ‘mumbo jumbo’ rant. Balkan’s
strangling of Liana and the subsequent ‘boo’ he delivers to the crowd is again intended as much for humour as it is horror. After all, these scenes are not only satires of Satanism, but all religion (in particular, perhaps, Catholicism, upon which these versions of Satanism seem to be based).

As I have discussed previously, due to the tenacious influence of religion on society, the process of diagnosing schizophrenia can be hindered by the ambiguity surrounding which beliefs can be classified as ‘delusions’ and which beliefs are exempt from this classification due to their concordance with an institutionally acknowledged religious faith. What results is a vicious semantic circle, as both ‘delusion’ and ‘faith’ are defined as non-rational beliefs held in the absence of evidence. A patient who claims to believe (truly believe) in the legitimacy of the Catholic ritual of transubstantiation, i.e. the transformation of wine into blood (one of Catholicism’s defining beliefs) would be treated quite differently, for example, to one who believes in someone’s power to transform blood into wine. What differentiates delusions from religiously based belief, of course, is the confirmation of the latter by ‘infallible’ authority figures, who purport to have ‘inside information’ (as Balkan puts it) that allows them access to knowledge elusive to the masses, a type of figure much lampooned by Polanski through the juxtaposition of ‘ridiculous’ religious belief (Satanism) with ‘legitimate’ religious belief.

For Rosemary, the confrontation with the (big city) Devil worshippers can be read as a manifestation of her deeply rooted Catholic guilt, a conceptual framework she has attempted to reject but which nevertheless finds its expression through dreams,
psychotic hallucinations and paranoia. In *The Ninth Gate* we witness dissention amongst coven’s ranks, Balkan playing the part of a sort of ‘Satanic Luther’ to Liana’s Holy Roman Emperor, only to find that his ‘true’ appreciation of the master’s will to be as full of ‘mumbo jumbo’ as he accused Liana’s ritual of being. Once again, it is Anton LaVey’s brand of atheistic Satanism that proves to be most legitimised by *The Ninth Gate*, as it embraces the etymological definition of ‘Satan’ as ‘adversary’. For LaVey, Satanism is not religion but anti-religion; it is nonconformity and resistance to institutionalised perception (1992: 9); that being said, LaVey and his followers are not above revelling in Camp religious ceremonies, much like Polanski’s own great admiration for Camp aesthetics in his cinema. But the ‘campiness’ of Polanski’s presentation of Satanic cults ultimately serves to mock the institutionalisation of perception so embraced by ‘legitimate’ religions. The followers of Roman Castevet in *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Ninth Gate*’s ‘Order of the Silver Serpent’ are presented as misguided fools. Where Balkan’s vocal criticism of the latter group nicely represents internal theological debate amongst clerics, it is Corso who best embodies LaVey’s ideal Satanist. It is Corso who dismisses the version of reality offered by the believers, and it is he, not them, who is able to circumvent prescriptive conceptual frameworks and penetrate the ‘Ninth Gate’.

But where Polanski cinema normally defuses any straightforward diegetic truth regarding the existence of the supernatural, *The Ninth Gate* joins only *Dance of the Vampires* in the presentation of diegetically-unambiguous supernatural activity. As I have alluded to in previous case studies, the presence of the supernatural in the apartment Trilogy is never diegetically ‘confirmed’, as the supernatural is presented in the context of dreams or hallucinations typical of schizophrenia. Even if the finale
of *Rosemary’s Baby* is accepted as diegetically real (i.e. not a dream or hallucination on Rosemary’s part) there is nothing to suggest that the laws of the natural world have been suspended. The appearance of the baby, which are not privy to, may well be the result of something those ‘maniacs’ have ‘done to him’, as Rosemary famously cries out.

The identification of Green Eyes as an unambiguously supernatural figure is not entirely without obstacle, more so for Corso than the spectator, as he is not privy to what seems to be her uncanny ability to float on air. There are two moments in the film when Green Eyes seems able to fly, or at least briefly suspend the laws of gravity. The first occurs on the bank of the Seine as she rushes to Corso’s aid as Liana Telfer’s henchman is attacking him. Rather than negotiate the steps that allow pedestrian access to the river-level paths (ubiquitous along the various ‘Quai’ streets on the Seine), she is able to glide effortlessly down to the bank side, reminiscent of the type of wire work popular in many Kung Fu films. Later, as Corso is attempting to prevent Balkan from murdering Liana Telfer, Green Eyes again floats down from the hall’s upper balcony just in time to restrain him.

The camera angles and editing in both sequences make clear that Corso’s line of vision is either blocked or he has his back turned to her at these moments, so he does not witness these two seemingly supernatural acts. It is the camera, and by extension us, who see Green Eyes ‘float’, the camera again allowing us access to slightly more information than the protagonist to whom it is tethered. In fact, on the occasions in which the suspension of gravity might be very useful, Green Eyes does not take
advantage of her abilities if Corso is watching. A perfect example of this is the way she scales up the drain pipe to grant Corso access to Fargas’s house; whilst she is certainly amazingly nimble, there is nothing remotely supernatural about her action, which is well within the laws of physics. The same can be said about her fighting abilities; she seems to be highly accomplished martial artist rather than a woman with superhuman powers. And when Corso inadvertently backhands her, her nose bleeds just as anyone’s would. So whilst the spectator may have already judged Green Eyes as a supernatural being, Corso has little evidence to draw the same conclusion; but this ‘advantage’ over Corso proves insignificant when compared to the psychological transformation Corso is undergoing, which is entirely concealed from the spectator.

9.8. Corso’s Perceptual ‘Shift’

In order to draw our attention to the front-line of perception, Polanski often frames characters’ eyes in close-up. Repulsion and Rosemary’s Baby in particular include several memorable close-ups of eyes. The Ninth Gate similarly includes a series of tight shots that draw our attention to Corso’s companion’s piercing emerald eyes. In Chinatown, corrective lenses are utilised to alter the camera’s ‘vision’, as well as serving as highly valuable clues in the investigation. Corso’s eyeglasses take on special significance as well. Unlike Gittes, Corso suffers from myopia, for which he depends on his glasses to correct. His ability to perceive effectively does not appear hampered by any form of mental illness, but rather a simple case of an elongated eyeball that distorts the retinal image.
Polanski’s inquiring camera keeps us closer to Corso not only by limiting itself to Corso’s narrative (perceptual) reach, but also by replicating his gaze through the combination of wide angle lenses and short focal lengths, forgoing the ‘openness’ of depth of field in favour of a more directed visual aesthetic that parallels Corso’s subjective vision. There are times when the camera even adopts his direct POV, notably when he is not wearing his glasses, resulting in an out-of-focus image for both Corso and the spectator, thus emphasising his need for corrective lenses. Although this effect may seem rather primitive in light of the complexities of perception that Polanski seems to be addressing, Corso’s ability to see, or rather, his way of seeing becomes increasingly nuanced as the film progresses.

Just as Jake Gittes is forced to reconsider his interpretation of reality after he meets the ‘real’ Mrs. Mulwray, Corso is also required to re-evaluate his own ‘perspective’ on things, and again, as in Chinatown, a pair of broken glasses becomes an indicator of a shift in the way things are ‘seen’. As in Chinatown, Polanski is semantically playful in his treatment of ‘glass’, foreshadowing Corso’s destruction of his own eyeglasses with an image of a broken drinking glass at Fargas’s home (the same glass Corso earlier called ‘handsome’), upon which Corso also steps. We are well aware of the extent to which Corso relies on these glasses to correct his (physiological) visual impairment, and so the image of Corso in his tattered specs is both absurd and alarming, especially in that it calls to mind Evelyn Mulwray’s ‘cycloptic death mask’ at the end of Chinatown. The image of Corso’s broken glasses also serve as a kind of
extra-diegetic ‘hint’ that his mode of perception, namely the ‘filter’ through which he perceives the world, has to be replaced.

Whilst we are closely tethered to Corso and his narrative reach throughout the film and at times even inherit some of his visual impairments, the psychological processes underpinning his behaviour remain elusive. For most of the film, our inability to ‘read’ Corso’s psychology does not seem to be an obstacle to our engagement with his character. The events of the film to which we are privy conspire to delineate a clear enough description of his persona. We know of his reputation as a ruthless book dealer from his interaction with other characters, and we know that he is an excessive drinker (almost certainly an alcoholic) and chain smoker, so much so that any Marlowe-esque ‘coolness’ is undone by the frequency and fervour of his consumption. Ultimately, however, our key assumptions about Corso are proven wrong. That is not to say these assumptions are unfounded, but rather that Corso undergoes a major transformation to which we are not privy. Unlike Gittes, rather than remaining dumbstruck by the perceptual and conceptual ambiguities he encounters, Corso undergoes a transformation unique in Polanski’s cinema (rivalled, depending on one’s reading, only by Rosemary at the end of Rosemary’s Baby) – he re-invents his entire concept of reality and seems to achieve a level of perceptual acuity that even the camera cannot match.

Orr (2006) discusses The Ninth’s Gate’s ‘double register in the realm of perceiving’ (17), in what is essentially a reference to the spectator’s task to both adopt Corso’s subjective perceptions as well as take on the task of perceiving Corso himself as an
object to be judged. Whilst Orr rightly identifies Corso’s transformation as a ‘slow burn’ (17) (a term I would apply equally to Carole Ledoux and Rosemary Woodhouse, but perhaps less so to Trelkovsky, whose descent into madness is more jarring), there is, as I have mentioned above, at least a subtle hint that Corso’s ‘frameworks’ are changing, literally represented by a pair of broken ‘frames’.

Corso is referred to as a ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’ by Baroness Kessler, an astute observation that predicts Corso’s eventual betrayal of the spectator (our ‘untethering’). Cinematographer Darius Khondji confirms (in Pizello, 2000: 46) that Polanski’s decision to ‘half-light’ Corso throughout the film was a calculated means of subtly expressing his eventual transformation, highlighting the fact that there is much about his character that will remain concealed from us, notwithstanding the tether that connects us to him. And so, Corso is almost always shot from a side angle, with some, if not most, of his face concealed by darkness, a strong visual means of communicating the ‘split’ in his personality.

Corso’s shift eventually destroys the tether that connects the spectator to the protagonist. It is not necessarily the case that we do not understand his motivation, for having followed him so closely over the course of the film, we, as spectators, may well have developed the same obsession. As I have suggested earlier, it is an obsession that we assume from the camera itself and which guides its (our) gaze throughout the film. Our own obsession with solving the enigma of The Nine Gates in fact mirrors the manner in which Corso has inherited the obsession of his employer, as Balkan himself points out to Corso in their final confrontation. In a scene that
elegantly reflects this double-transference, Corso interrupts Balkan just as he is about to initiate what Balkan believes will be a ritual that will put him in contact with the Devil. The two men tussle to gain control of the gun Corso has pointed at Balkan, which results in Corso falling through the loose timber that makes up the flooring in the decrepit castle. Corso becomes trapped from the chest up, producing for Balkan an ideal (diegetic) audience of one. A friend, or rather, the man who Balkan would like to have as his friend; Corso is the one man who can truly appreciate the ‘greatness’ of what Balkan believes he is about to accomplish (‘equality with God’). Balkan creates of Corso an immobilised spectator in front of whom he is able to establish himself as an observed object, in front of whom he can perform.\(^{65}\)

So for a brief moment, we are united with Corso as pure spectators, paralysed perceiving subjects observing Balkan, who in the best tradition of the generic villainous archetype, so desires to impress our ‘hero’. Corso, however, soon realises his ability to affect that which he observers. He convinces Balkan to immolate himself as a demonstration of the success of his ritual. As Corso calculates, Balkan’s bravado backfires. Corso manages to wriggle free (whilst we, of course, remain immobilised in front of the screen) and puts Balkan out of his misery, but not before collecting the much-valued woodcut-prints needed for the ritual. We then watch as Corso seemingly

\(^{65}\) Corso’s paralysis calls to mind the image of the wheelchair bound father we saw at the start of the film. Whilst he is physically incapacitated, his ability to perceive seems unhindered, especially when it comes to the value of his book collection. But his uncooperative body will not let him act, he is a trapped perceiver, a spectator, being acted upon but unable to take action. We have seen this represented before in Polanski’s cinema in the form of the rape scene in *Rosemary’s Baby* and the one recounted in *Death and the Maiden*. 
achieves what Balkan was unable to, resolve the riddle of *The Nine Gates*. Corso, unlike Balkan (or *Chinatown’s Gittes*), wins.

### 9.9. The Enigmatic Denouement: A ‘Shift’ for Polanski?

Just after Balkan’s self-immolation and Corso’s escape from the burning tower, Corso again comes face-to-face with his mysterious ‘guardian angel’, whom he finds waiting for him in Balkan’s Land Rover. She surprises him by removing his glasses and staring deeply into his eyes. Their gazes become rigidly locked, and Corso stares intensely into her ‘green-eyes’. Something is happening between them; exactly what is a mystery to us. Green Eyes had attempted this before with Corso, in the hotel room after the brawl on the Seine, but Corso resisted. This time he does not. Their fixed gaze becomes even more intense, and morphs into copulation outside the still-burning tower. But this is not a love scene – it is a moment of communication. Their eyes remain fixed as their respective gazes shoot directly out of the screen, but whilst their gazes may be directed at us, they are not for us. His act of copulation with Green Eyes is an act of (orgasmic) catharsis, freeing him from the perceptual confines of his most basic conceptual framework. The time has come for Corso to ‘sober up’.

The sex scene is directly evocative of *Rosemary’s Baby*, which also contains a scene of mortal-demonic copulation. In *Rosemary’s Baby*, the scene takes place with a Church burning in the background, in *The Ninth Gate* in front of a burning tower. Corso, like Rosemary, is pinned down by a more powerful being and is filmed in close up, the camera literally mounted on top of both Depp and Farrow respectively.
The reverse shot adopts a POV in both cases, with particular attention focused on the
eyes of the being ‘on top’, whose bizarre hues dominate the image - emerald green in
*The Ninth Gate*, bright red in *Rosemary’s Baby*. In *The Ninth Gate*, however, it is not
a case of the Devil raping a restrained woman (an image also suggested in *Death and
the Maiden*), but a *man* willingly embracing the Devil. And where Rosemary’s
encounter with the Devil *provokes* a perceptual crisis, for Corso, it serves to resolve
one. Thus, *The Ninth Gate* elaborates on both the Biblical ‘apple’ and Milton’s
deconstructive portrayal of Lucifer in ‘Paradise Lost’, simultaneously emphasising
the fallen angel’s ‘humanity’ and association with knowledge. In this regard, the film
is strangely optimistic, as Corso is *saved* by the Devil, not through a Faustian pact,
but by opening his eyes to a reality beyond the material in what is effectively an
inversion of the Eden myth.

In *The Ninth Gate*, it is not that Corso’s perceptual ability is compromised, but rather
that he has attained knowledge of reality superior to that of the spectator, and so we
are abandoned as he enters the ‘Ninth Gate’. At the end of the film, the camera does
not simply drift away as in *Chinatown* and *Rosemary’s Baby*, but, as is the case in *The
Tenant*, is seemingly destroyed. In *The Tenant*, the camera’s penetration of
Trelkovsky’s screaming mouth mirrors the film’s attempt to penetrate the workings of
Trelkovsky’s subjective perceptual mechanism, to *become* Trelkovsky; this proves
fruitless, however, as it only manages to be devoured, destroying the image and
leaving only darkness. In *The Ninth Gate*, on the other hand, it is not darkness that
destroys our tether to Corso, but a flash of bright light that illuminates what for the
most part is such a darkly lit film. But for us, this is a burst of light that wipes the
frame clean, illuminating precisely *nothing*. Corso walks away from the camera,
down the path into the frame, in a shot reminiscent of *Chinatown*’s famous crane-shot closing; this time, however, it is not us who abandon the protagonist, but the protagonist who abandons us.

Such alienation is not new in Polanski’s cinema. It also occurs in *Rosemary’s Baby*, in which the audience is similarly betrayed by what seems to be Rosemary’s acceptance of the deal offered to her by the head of the witches’ coven. But in light of the ambiguity that surrounds the scene (again, owing to Rosemary’s questionable sanity and the dream-like, even absurdist atmosphere of this sequence), it is difficult to resolve the diegetic truth of the event. There is no such ambiguity in *The Ninth Gate*. Corso’s perceptual acuity and mental stability remains beyond reproach. Diegetically speaking, it is more likely that Green Eyes is an emissary of Satan (if not Satan him/herself) than Corso is mad. It is we, not Corso, who are perceptually inhibited at the end of the film due to the inherent limits of our status as spectators.

The image of Corso being devoured by this bright light is perplexing indeed, and alienating not only for spectators who view this film in isolation, but especially so for those of us who attempt to follow the perceptual discourse embedded in Polanski’s cinema. What are we to make of what seems to be a such a diegetically unambiguous supernatural image? Does the fact that Corso’s rational materialism seems to be proved ‘wrong’ undo a strictly materialist reading of Polanski’s cinema? Is this
image, as Kubrick was fond of saying of The Shining\textsuperscript{66}, ‘optimistic’ in that it suggests the possibility of eternal life?

As is so often the case with Polanski’s cinema, the film’s enigmatic final image is open to many interpretations, but I will venture one nonetheless. Corso trajectory towards the resolution (and eventual penetration) of the ‘Ninth Gate’ is not portrayed, even problematically, as a voyage caused by psychological deterioration, but rather a cathartic journey towards intellectual clarity, allowing him to overcome religious ‘mumbo-jumbo’ that does nothing but cloud the truth. In the final image of The Ninth Gate, Corso seems to be rewarded for his efforts. Although he did not know it, Corso is an emissary of Satan returning to the fold. It is a homecoming. As he walks into the frame, he abandons his role as \textit{object} of perception (in particular to us, the spectators) to become \textit{pure subject}, effectively bridging the gap between the (unrepresentable) neurological sphere of perception and that of the world of objects as he penetrates the screen. Unfortunately for us, we are not worthy of such a step and are thus cast aside. ‘You can’t come with me,’ Balkan tells Corso when he first attempts the ritual. In the end, this is what Corso tells \textit{us} as we are left blinded by an explosion of light. In typical Polanskian style, we are rewarded for our investment in Corso by alienation and disappointment. Yet again, Polanski delivers only dissatisfaction – the only type of satisfaction that lasts.

\textsuperscript{66} As reported by Jack Nicholson in the documentary film \textit{Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures} (Jan Harlan, 2001).
10. **A BRIDGE BETWEEN TRIOLOGIES: THE GHOST**

Throughout this thesis I have related my discussion of the indirect theory of perception to the high levels of anti-didacticism, ambiguity and ambivalence nestled within some of Polanski’s most commercial genre cinema, as well as the ‘dissatisfying’ manner in which these films tend to conclude. As a result, finding a way to ‘wrap up’ discussions of these works proves problematic – the same holds true for my analysis as a whole. So rather than trying to be overly conclusive in my closing remarks, I will instead attempt to weave a summary of my key observations of Polanski’s cinema through a series of observations of *The Ghost*, Polanski’s most recent film, and a work that serves as a convenient bridge between the two sets of case studies that I deal with in this thesis.

But first a minor caveat is in order here to auto-critique my own gravitation towards ‘neatness’, especially in my treatment of *The Ghost* as a meta-text in which many scenes, plot devices, and lines of dialogue are evocative of prior Polanski films. Whilst *The Ghost* serves well as means of tying up *my own* discussion of perceptual psychology and Polanski’s cinema, I make no claim that it is a work consciously designed as a means of tying up *Polanski’s* (cinematic) perceptual discourse. Furthermore, I do not mean to imply that what I have furnished here is an entirely new direction for film theory’s enduring perceptual strain of discourse; I hope only to

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67 The film was released worldwide under two English-language titles, *The Ghost* and *The Ghostwriter*, depending on the territory. For the sake of consistency, I use the title of the UK release, *The Ghost.*
have demonstrated how the influence of a particular theory of perception can be used as a means of guiding thought through the greater existential discourse taking place both within these films and inter-textually across Polanski’s cinema.

10.1. A Camera Again in Search of a Tethering Point

I have often employed the notion of a ‘tethered camera’ and the related concept of the ‘nominal observer’ as a means of guiding my analyses of Polanski’s cinema; this approach is again helpful to my analysis of The Ghost, a film that is keenly aware of its use of the Polanskian tether and even seems to encourage us to meditate on our own understanding of our role as spectators. In a manner highly reminiscent of several Polanski films (Rosemary’s Baby, The Tenant and The Ninth Gate in particular), The Ghost starts with a ‘camera in search of a tethering point’. The film opens with a series of maritime images. It is a stormy night on the sea. A giant ferry fills the screen, from which cars drive off when it pulls into dock. There are also a few human beings in this sequence, but they are faceless entities who guide the cars off the ferry; these bodies are as much a part of the machinery as the articulated ‘mouth’ of the ship itself.

The camera finally settles on one vehicle, which remains immobile as the others disembark, forcing them to drive around it. The ferry now empty, this vehicle becomes the centre of the camera’s attention, even ‘vocalising’ (by way of its alarm) as it is forcibly removed by another machine. The camera jumps to the shore and
finds its rightful (human) master, facedown on the dark beach. So just as in *The Ninth Gate*, the camera in *The Ghost* is left abandoned within the opening few minutes, and is forced to seek out a new tethering point. It hops across the Atlantic to find the dead man’s replacement, to whom it attaches itself until it is again abandoned at the end of the film.

In *The Ghost*, the tether is so closely bound to the film’s protagonist that it seems as though the notional observer that has guided our gaze throughout Polanski’s cinema has now become manifest in the form of this ‘ghostwriter’ (as I am forced to the refer to *The Ghost’s* protagonist, played by Ewan McGregor). As we soon realise, the character who most dictates the narrative thrust of the film is not the ghostwriter at all; the story of the film is primarily that of former British Prime Minister Adam Lang (Pierce Brosnan). We access Lang’s story through this ghostwriter whose primary task is to observe Lang, and, in a sense, become him; this is essentially the task of the nominal observer I have so often discussed in my analyses of Polanski’s cinema. The task is also that of the camera itself, whose gaze this observer controls, which in turn guides, and sometimes tricks, the gaze of spectator.

The ghostwriter’s task of penetrating Lang’s psyche is the burden carried by the nominal observer/camera in both the Apartment and Investigation trilogies, a task which it manages more effectively in *Repulsion*, *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Tenant* than it does in *Chinatown*, *Frantic* and *The Ninth Gate*, where it is held at bay. The ghostwriter himself remains a blank slate upon which we can graft our own psychology. He is neither schizophrenic nor is he a hyper-perceiver, but rather a
thoroughly normal perceiver, even quite awkward in the world in which he finds himself, as most of us might be. He is a pure perceptual surrogate for the spectator: appropriately anonymous, virtually psychology-free, and even a bit androgynous (something McGregor himself brings to the role).

10.2. Meta-text, Novelty and Nostalgia

Notwithstanding The Ghost’s contemporary settings and many allusions to real-world political personas and events, it still seems to be an ‘old fashioned’ film (as remarked by numerous critics), its style nostalgic for a certain type of cinema now nearly extinct. The Ghost’s ‘old fashionedness’ is particularly evident in the subtle manner in which the tension slowly builds, a style often referred to as ‘Hitchcockian’, but I would suggest that Polanski is himself also deserving of having his name ‘adjectivized’ in this regard. What is most ‘retro’ about The Ghost is the patience and attention to detail through which the story is cinematically told and the gripping atmosphere it manages to achieve through these means, an approach that is increasingly out of keeping with the current Hollywoodian trend of ever-decreasing average shot lengths and reliance on montage to ‘create’ performances in the editing room (although it should be noted that Polanski’s own ASL has steadily decreased over the years as well).

The Ghost is not only nostalgic for a more patient, ‘classical’ version of the thriller, but, for those who are able to recognise it, the film’s many intertextual references
also elicit nostalgia for Polanski’s own cinema. As I have discussed previously in reference to *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Tenant*, and *Death and the Maiden*, the texts that Polanski has chosen to adapt often seem themselves to be informed by very Polanskian motifs. The same is true of *The Ghost*, a film based on a novel by Robert Harris, but which nevertheless serves as a highly ‘meta’ Polanski film through its catalogue of allusions to Polanski’s oeuvre, as many early criticisms of the film have picked up on (see, for example, Horne, 2010: 39). Harris and Polanski began working together in 2007, collaborating on a screenplay for a big-budget adaptation of Harris’s novel *Pompeii*, which was eventually halted due to complications caused by an actors’ strike at the time, in which many of the stars Polanski had hoped cast were participating. Although Harris had already begun writing *The Ghost*, he finished the thriller whilst working with Polanski on *Pompeii* and offered it to him as an alternative to the shelved project.

It is difficult to determine how much influence Polanski had on Harris’s writing of *The Ghost*, but it is undeniable that, like Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby*, Topor’s *The Tenant*, and even Dorfman’s *Death and the Maiden*, many Polanskian motifs are readily evident in the original text. As Harris himself concedes, ‘the novel is a classic Polanski film … You couldn’t really have put something together that was more Polanski-esque.’* The Ghost* contains several elements already seen in many of the films I have discussed in this thesis, making it an interesting hybridisation of the narrative motifs presented in both those sets of films I have focused on. Its rich set of inter-textual elements proves to be of great use to my present discussion, as *The

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*68* Harris interviewed on BBC Radio 4’s *The Film Programme*, broadcast April 16, 2010.
*Ghost* conveniently serves as a connecting text between the two ‘trilogies’ I have been dealing with, combining as it does the intimate identity crises and existential concerns seen in the Apartment Trilogy with the grandiose political and societal conflicts more prominent in the Investigation Trilogy.

The issue of ‘living space’, for example, is again highly significant to the narrative. Like Walker and Corso, the ghostwriter occupies a series of hotels, although not quite the five-star establishments seen in *Frantic* and *The Ninth Gate*. But he is also forced to move out of his hotel; just as in the Apartment Trilogy, the subject to whom we are tethered finds himself occupying an abode in which traces of the former tenant still seem to ‘haunt’ the space. In a scene directly evocative of *The Tenant*, Amelia Bly (Kim Cattrall), Lang’s assistant, guides the ghostwriter around (the deceased) McAra’s room, informing him that he will now be sleeping there rather than the hotel.

Just as Trelkovsky discovers the remnants of Simone Choule’s clothes scattered about the flat and in the wardrobe, so too does the ghostwriter come across McAra’s personal effects: suits, underwear, and even a pair of slippers (recalling Trelkovsky’s discovery of Choule’s sock), all of which he finds highly unnerving. Demonstrating once again Polanski’s fondness for using large pieces of furniture as key elements of *mise-en-scène*, a wardrobe proves to be a highly relevant object, for it is here, hidden under a drawer, that the ghostwriter discovers the secret message left to him by his predecessor. (It is worth noting that both the discovery of McAra’s slipper and the documents being concealed in wardrobe are details absent from Harris’s novel.) This
‘double occupancy’ theme is pushed a step further in *The Ghost* than it is in *The Tenant*. Not only does the ghostwriter find himself a foreign body occupying another’s ‘rightful’ space, but this space is itself in a greater building that does not belong to those who occupy it, on loan as it is from the head of Rhinehart Publishing. It is a situation that creates a sort of ‘Matryoshka doll’ of occupancy when visualized, an image that reflects the iterations of identity transference and decentralized nature of the subject at play in the film.

Also present in *The Ghost* is a central character who is identified to some degree by his national ‘otherness’. As is typical in Polanski’s cinema, the nature of this ‘otherness’ and its relevance to the conflict in the narrative is a highly nuanced issue. Where *Repulsion*, *The Tenant* and *Frantic* (as well as *What?* and *The Pianist*) emphasise, to varying degrees, the relevance of the national or racial ‘otherness’ of the character to whom we are tethered, nationality in *The Ghost*, whilst often referred to, serves more to emphasise unity than difference. It is the *unity* (although under duress) of the US and the UK that is most greatly stressed, especially in the geography of the film’s primary setting. The island, like that of *Cul-de-sac* and the boats of *Knife in the Water* and *Bitter Moon*, is a liminal space, an ‘interzone’ in which the Langs take refuge. It is a ‘between’ space in which the UK and the US overlap, as exemplified by the fact that the island is quite literally positioned between the US mainland and the UK, accessible only by ferry.

Both the house and the island itself are essentially liminal, ‘nowhere’ spaces in which these characters, particularly ex-Prime Minister Adam Lang, hide. It is a
minimalistic space as well; the island is constantly overcast or rainy, all colours that may be indicative of its own identity are drained away. It is composed of barren roads, non-descript woods, and windy, decidedly grey beaches. The Rhinehart compound, in which the Langs reside, is also minimalist in its own, more orchestrated, way. It is made up of right angles and cold, empty surfaces. The walls are adorned by starkly anti-realist canvasses that challenge perceptual frameworks, punctuating the fact that as restrictive as the island may be, its very liminality also affords it a degree of perceptual freedom, serving as a minimalist void in which conceptual frameworks are laid bare to be re-examined.

The spectre of global capitalism and its impact on the production of art is also shown to be a powerful agent in the creation of Lang’s official memoirs. There is no pretence that the ‘work’ being produced is anything other than a commodity; the ghostwriter wins the contract based exclusively on his appeal to the publisher’s desire for profit. In this light, the ghostwriter comes very much from the mould of *The Ninth Gate*’s Corso: a man without any apparent interiority that needs ‘expressing’ (all traces of the ghostwriter’s own personal history that Harris included in the novel are duly omitted by Polanski), who is motivated entirely by profit (for profit’s sake), and who, whilst working within the world of books, is not a bibliophile.

The character of the ghostwriter immediately seems to slot in with the ‘investigators’ of *Chinatown*, *Frantic*, and *The Ninth Gate*, in that he is yet another ‘sane male’ who is challenged by a reality beyond what his conceptual frameworks are used to dealing
with. As I mentioned above, it is Corso to whom the ghostwriter seems most closely aligned, which is especially evident to those tuned-in to Polanski’s intertextuality. Corso and the ghostwriter do seem to share much in common, such as the nearly identical layout of their flats, the iconic satchels worn by both men, their hard drinking (the ghostwriter, like Corso, drinks in almost every scene in which it is physically possible), their jetlagged state (shared as well by Frantic’s Walker), and, especially, the fetish each develops for a book - the much caressed, leather bound *Nine Gates* for Corso, and McAra’s manuscript for the ghostwriter (it is more a stack of paper than a ‘book’, but it is fetishised nonetheless). We should also include Rosemary in this group, for she too becomes obsessed with a book on witchcraft, given to her by her friend Hutch from beyond the grave. In all three films, ‘the book’ is effectively destroyed, either torn to shreds and burned (*The Ninth Gate*), thrown away (*Rosemary’s Baby*), or exploded into a cloud of scattered paper, floating down a London street (*The Ghost*). And in all three cases, the information ‘officially’ contained in these books becomes secondary to key bits of hidden and highly revelatory information. In *The Ninth Gate* and *The Ghost*, the books are both reduced to a series of pages. In *Rosemary’s Baby*, it is only one page, upon which a name is underlined, that really ‘matters’.

Rosemary, Corso and the ghostwriter are all tasked to solve a riddle buried within the text (and pictures) of a fetishised book – a task each of them takes up reluctantly, but eventually manages to solve. But where Corso conceals the solution from us, the ghostwriter is more generous, ‘publishing’ (much like Rosemary does with her Scrabble tiles) his findings onscreen. But the ghostwriter’s discovery that Rut Lang (Olivia Williams) is a CIA operative is in no way curative; precisely nothing is ‘put
to right’; the moment of (faux) satisfaction that takes place as the ghostwriter rather arrogantly raises his glass to Ruth proves fleeting, and we are again resigned to leave a Polanski film perplexed, dissatisfied. Where Corso penetrates the frame and leaves us behind in a burst of light, the ghostwriter (literally) exits screen right, not only from the frame but the film as well, as we realise his discovery of the secret of McAra’s book was all for nought. This time, we are left not with a burst of light that wipes clean the frame, but a burst of white paper that equally well blocks further access to the diegesis.

Like Gittes, Walker and Corso before him, the ghostwriter is tasked to solve a mystery for which his conceptual frameworks are ill equipped to handle. In my case studies for Chinatown, Frantic and The Ninth Gate, I have discussed such crises in terms of the connection between indirect perception and cognitive dissonance; that is, how the discord between the investigator’s pre-existing conceptual frameworks and the complex realities in which they find themselves parallels the perceptual crises explored in the Apartment Trilogy. All of these crises in turn reflect the theory of indirect perception, which stresses the dissonance (the ‘gap’) between the nature of an object and our perception of it, created due to the manner (the process) by which it is perceived. For the ghostwriter, the challenge is again to perceive in a realm for which his conceptual frameworks are not adequate, to overcome an epistemological crisis in which the societal leader who wielded the wand of power - he who could create laws, wage war, and upon whom an entire society relied for their safety - is revealed to be nothing more than an unremarkable and deeply flawed person, himself a puppet under the control of others, who are themselves deeply flawed.
Whilst I may make much of the ‘Polanskiness’ of The Ghost, it is equally important to highlight a few key features that are completely new to Polanski’s cinema. To start, The Ghost is the first time Polanski has directly explored the artistic process itself as a narrative device, i.e. using the creation of a piece of narrative literature (in the guise of an autobiography) as the primary plot focus of the film itself. Bitter Moon does flirt with this idea in the way its primary narrative is formed through the telling of a story (how much of which is actually true remains ambiguous), but The Ghost deals explicitly with the creation of an artistic artefact, the writing of a book. The particular ‘method of construction’ (considering the approach taken, it is perhaps too generous to refer to it as an ‘artistic process’) used to create this particular book is also of particular interest, especially in its focus on the act of ‘ghosting’ an autobiography, with a surrogate writing in another’s voice.\footnote{A moment of reflection, however, reveals that this is not actually the very first time a Polanski film has features a writing team: although not the focus of the film’s plot, the Cenzina brothers in The Ninth Gate do revel in telling Corso the story about Aristide Torchia’s secret ‘illustrious collaborator’ in the creation of a book that is ghostwritten by Satan himself.} Considering what I argue to be Polanski’s ongoing interest with the workings of perception, it is difficult not to find a parallel between the ‘looseness’ with which reality is treated in the writing of the autobiography and the manner in which reality is constructed through the (cognitive) act of perception. Calinescu’s (1987) sentiment regarding the relationship between the writing of fiction and the ‘fiction’ of reality is pertinent here, especially as it again brings us back to perceptual psychology. He raises the query as to how literature, and to this I would add cinema, can be called a ‘representation of reality’ when ‘reality itself turns out to be shot with fiction through and through’ (Calinescu, 1987: 299).
Another significant novelty for Polanski is The Ghost’s direct focus on a present-day political situation, specifically the role played by the UK government, led by Prime Minister Tony Blair, in the American-led invasions of Iraq in 2003 (‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’) and Afghanistan in 2001 (‘Operation Enduring Freedom’) as retaliation for the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York City of 11 September 2001, as well as the (ongoing) effects of these actions, particularly the emerging evidence of US-sanctioned use of torture and British acquiescence. Notwithstanding its pretence of a ‘veil’, it is nearly impossible, for most Western spectators, at any rate, to miss the Lang-Blair connection. Whilst The Pianist is of course directly concerned with a real historical event, the only other of Polanski’s films to include political commentary so relevant to the time of its release is Chinatown, a film inspired (albeit loosely) by two scandals – the Owen’s Valley ‘Water Wars’ (which actually took place in 1905, nearly thirty-years before the film takes place), and Watergate, which was coming to a climax the very summer of Chinatown’s release. Like Chinatown, The Ghost also deals directly with the political impact of corporate capitalism, but shifts from a concern with corporate control of a critical public amenity to the influence of big-business on war and the use of torture in its unmissable reference to the sway of Halliburton (renamed ‘Hatherton’ in the film) on the Bush administration, and, by extension, the Blair government as well.

*The Ghost* is in fact far bolder and more transparent than Chinatown in its reflection of real-world events. Where Chinatown’s period setting requires of the spectator a certain degree of ‘decoding’ to tune into its political commentary, The Ghost’s veil

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70 As I discussed in its case study, writing in 1974 Zimmerman calls Chinatown a ‘Watergate with real water’ (74).
over its parody of public personas is remarkably thin, not only in its reference to the Blairs, but its symbolic portrayal of the long-standing identity crisis of the UK itself, caught between its allegiance to the US and its position in Europe. But in spite of *Chinatown*’s political relevance at the time of its release, the fundamental ethical conundrums it puts into play continue to resonate, even for a generation for whom ‘Watergate’ (or at least ‘-gate’) has been reduced to nothing more than a suffix denoting scandal, its etymology on the verge of being forgotten from the common consciousness. In a similar vein, *The Ghost*’s application of what at the time of its release appears to be a pointless veil may well prove to ensure the film’s relevance for years to come, with the Blair connection possibly being reduced to a footnote in the criticism that will emerge in the future (much as I have treated the Watergate connection in my analysis of *Chinatown*). In future, it may be interesting to note if *The Ghost* has a similar effect to that discussed by Walton (see 2001: 47) regarding the effect on public memory *Chinatown* had on perceptions of the Owen’s Valley affair it was inspired by. Lang’s speeches could indeed be muddled with Blair’s own various defences of US policy and the ethics of his actions, and the role Cherie Blair played in the her husband’s actions could equally be confused with Ruth Lang’s agency in the film. But given *The Ghost*’s limited success when compared to *Chinatown* (Polanski’s second highest-grossing film, after *The Pianist*, but most likely seen by far more people), it is unlikely to have the same sort of ‘historical’ effect. Nevertheless, its specific reflection of the zeitgeist is undeniable, as is evident in the presence of technology and how it is used (noticeably missing in *The Ninth Gate*, for example), as well as the Homeland Security Advisory System (i.e. the ‘terror’ colour-coded alerts) used by the United States between 2003 and 2011, which is seen on the island and the increased security seen when the ghostwriter
visits the London headquarters of Rhinehart Publishing (in contrast to what we see at Balkan Press in New York, which is visited by Corso in *The Ninth Gate* in 1999).

Notwithstanding *The Ghost*’s multiple references to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the use of government-sanctioned torture (a controversy that continues to the day of writing), as is typical for Polanski’s cinema, the film avoids taking a clear ‘stance’ on these issues; rather than seeking to impose an ideological message, the film opts for nuance and ambiguity as it renders an already ethically-murky scenario even more complex. Lang’s ‘two lines at the airport’ speech, for example, goes unchallenged, destabilising any ‘left leaning’ assumptions regarding the film’s political stance. In fact, it is easy to see how Lang’s speech could lead to accusations of what Huyssen warns to be postmodernism’s ‘assumed total collusion with neo conservatism’ (1990: 252), especially if the scene is looked at in isolation. Equally, however, in the scene immediately preceding Lang’s speech, the assertion given by Rycart (Robert Pugh) that the ghostwriter is now ‘working for the good guys’ also rings hollow.

This lack of resolution in Polanski’s cinema regarding both morality and even the establishment of a stable diegetic reality can be described as ‘schizoid’ in its own right. This ‘schizoid’ state is arguably in line with Orr’s (1993) observation of the ‘danger’ of postmodern cinema, which, through its ideological emptiness, lends itself to contradictory readings that can be adopted by the spectator in line with his or her own ideological stance (12). The same could be argued about the ideological ambivalence in Polanski’s cinema, but I would suggest that Polanski’s manner of
compromising diegetic stability and deconstructing moral certitudes also has the effect of challenging the very frameworks upon which these ideological, and we can extend this to further to *epistemological*, certitudes are based.

What I ultimately mean to suggest is that *The Ghost*’s most important mask is not the one it places over the face of the Blairs, but rather the mask that is created by the grandiose political overtones of the plot, which serves (at the time of its release, at least) to deflect attention away from its more intimate examination of personal epistemologies and their fragility. As in many Polanski films, Orr’s (2006) suggestion of a ‘double register’ (17) is again called for to access what is perhaps the most provocative aspect of *The Ghost*. Through its political criticism, *The Ghost*, like *Chinatown*, raises a set of probing existential questions; it is to this plane of thought to which I will now turn my attention.

10.3. **Encore une fois, ‘la femme n’existe pas’**

‘He was brilliant at making speeches and I’m so terrible.’

- Ruth Lang

The issue of a specifically female identity crisis is returned to in *The Ghost*, in a manner again very reminiscent of the Lacanian quip ‘*la femme n’existe pas*’ (Lacan, 1975: 68) I referred to earlier in my discussion of *Rosemary’s Baby*. Whilst the
ghostwriter suffers from his own crisis as his conceptual frameworks are systematically dismantled, he is not alone. Ruth Lang also suffers an identity crisis, which turns out to be one of the key elements of the ‘mystery’ the ghostwriter wrestles with.

It is indeed worth contrasting Ruth’s crisis to Rosemary’s, for whilst superficially similar in some ways, it also differs significantly and ultimately represents an evolution in Polanski’s treatment of a specifically female form of subjectivity. It is misleading, however, to suggest that this comparison functions directly along gender lines. In fact, Ruth not only represents a fully self-realised (‘actualised’) identity, but a person who wields power over the formation of her husband’s identity (calling to mind the marital power relations of Macbeth). But it proves too simplistic to suggest that Ruth is simply an ‘evil’ or ‘overlooked’ female, forced to the background because of her gender as her husband takes the credit (or blame) for her actions and ideas. After all, we learn that Adam Lang was indeed already a member of the party when he met Ruth. The picture that eventually emerges is not so much a masquerade that positions Adam Lang as merely Ruth’s (and the CIA’s) puppet, but rather a collaboration, a symbiotic relationship in which both contribute to create a third ‘body’; their offspring being Lang’s political persona (the very persona the ghostwriter is tasked to ‘become’).

We can identify (at least) three planes of feminist thought upon which the scenario can be read. The most ‘basic’ feminist reading simply follows the logic of ‘la femme n’existe pas’, in which we attribute Ruth’s consignment to the background as de
facto due to male oppression. The second reading is a more nuanced, but still essentially feminist, version of the first, in which this woman’s ‘non existence’ is not the result of oppression, but one of personal choice; a choice, however, still located within a framework of the fight for gender-equality. Lastly, the film also lends itself to an entirely post-feminist reading, in which the Langs’ genders are completely irrelevant to their inter-personal dynamic. The challenge that is presented to the spectator, then, is to work out if Ruth’s consignment to the background is a calculated decision due to her personal unwillingness (or inability) to present herself as a political figure or whether she is indeed held back by a still-patriarchical system that would not accept her ‘type’ of woman in politics.

I propose a post-feminist approach here; the identity crisis played-out in the film is not necessarily due to Ruth’s suffering at the hands of patriarchal repression, but rather a mutual crisis caused by the formation of this ‘inter-being’ who resides in Adam’s body, but is as much Ruth’s as his - a scenario that is played out again in the relationship between Lang and the ghostwriter, which becomes increasingly muddled when we reflect on the components that make up the persona he is meant to be ‘ghosting’. Such slippages of identity are again highly reminiscent of The Tenant, but in The Ghost the identity crisis is played out within, and between, people who are presented as sane perceiving subjects.
10.4. Ghosting and the Family Drama

An interesting picture emerges when we map the connections that tie the main characters of The Ghost together, the complexity of which comes to the fore when we consider the various incidents of ‘ghosting’ upon which the film is based. First of all, there is a doubling of McAra, Lang’s original ghostwriter, which occurs when the new ghostwriter is selected and is tasked to take McAra’s place. But understanding who-is-ghosting-who becomes increasingly difficult to piece together as we learn more about Lang and those who surround him. We soon realise that the ghostwriter has become entangled in a network of ‘ghosts’ that serves to de-centralise the subject of this book. We learn that Lang himself, the man being ‘played’ by the ghostwriter as he writes his ‘auto’-biography, is himself playing a role, effectively reciting the lines ‘ghostwritten’ by his wife. Furthermore, we learn that even Ruth’s actions are being ‘written’ by the CIA.

The ghostwriter’s attempt to connect with Lang proves futile, as the persona he seeks – the persona he is effectively attempting to become – proves elusive. Like the metaphorical onion (or ‘Matryoshka’, as I referred to earlier), as he peels the layers off ‘Lang’ there proves to be nothing at the centre, a void around which the constituting agents of the Lang persona orbit. The film’s portrayal of the decentralisation and inaccessibility of the ‘real’ Lang is a return to Polanski’s recurrent theme of decentralised, fragmented psyches and slippages of identity, elegantly symbolised by the film’s final image of the pages making up Lang’s memoirs ‘decentralised’ by the wind. But a paradox emerges here, for whilst this ‘void’ is also reminiscent of quantum physics’ existentially-loaded proposition that
the very building blocks of matter may well be ‘nothing’ (whatever that is), the notion of the ‘perceptual gap’ also presupposes an identifiable ‘I’ from which (from whom) the world is separated. In Polanski’s cinema, not only is perception unreliable, but the integrity of the perceiving body’s identity is itself compromised.

So whose story, exactly, is the ghostwriter ghostwriting? Allowing ourselves a momentarily lapse into some amateur psychoanalysis of the quasi-familial unit that emerges in The Ghost proves helpful in unpicking this conundrum (although this also requires an abandonment of the ‘post-feminist’ approach I mention above). The ghostwriter’s relationship with the Langs establishes a sort of impromptu familial structure, in which the ghostwriter becomes intertwined in the Langs’ psychodynamic interplay. Pushing this analogy a bit further, in addition to reading the rapport between the ghostwriter and the Langs as symbolic of the individual family unit, we can also see this ‘unit’ as a representation of greater societal ‘family’ in which we are all embroiled, ‘children’ to the pater familias of government. It is through this structure that an Oedipal scenario is again played out in Polanski’s cinema.

The architecture of the Oedipal unit is established with Ruth and Adam Lang in the parental roles; the ghostwriter’s role is that of the child, his epistemological trajectory being essentially that of the child’s move towards self-actualisation, a journey that depends on the deconstruction of parental figures in which the authoritative persona collapses and is revealed to be fallible, even weak. It was, of course, Ruth’s idea to employ the ghostwriter, and thus she takes responsibility for
his ‘birth’ into the Lang dynamic (aptly confined to the island). And like a new mother, she ‘presents’ him to her husband, who is taken aback when this (younger) man introduces himself as ‘your [Lang’s] ghost’, in effect signalling Lang’s death. And so the Oedipal scenario emerges, with the ghostwriter both confronting the ‘father’ and bedding his wife, the ‘mother’. The ‘father’ is eventually killed, and whilst not directly murdered by the hand of the ‘son’, the ghostwriter is indeed implicated in Lang’s death by the police (‘you’re the prime suspect,’ the detective informs the ghostwriter).

What is also of interest in The Ghost’s Oedipal scenario is the subtext of the overlap between the characters, creating both an image if an inter-personal conflict as well as serving as a manifestation of an intra-personal conflict. As I have discussed above, there is much made of the overlapping of characters within the film, not only between Adam Lang and his ghostwriter (the ghostwriter literally wearing Lang’s clothes at one point), but between Adam and Ruth Lang, and in turn also between Ruth and the ghostwriter, whose bodies merge within the frame on a number of occasions (reminiscent of the intertwined Walkers in Frantic) - on the beach as Ruth guides the ghostwriter back to the compound, in their sexual encounter, and even in their matching brown bathrobes, which creates an image in which it is indeed difficult to separate one body from the other.

Although this discussion of The Ghost’s Oedipal scenario may at first appear tangential to the perceptual discourse that has guided this analysis of Polanski’s cinema, it does lead us back to the issue of the epistemological crisis, the point that I
believe serves as the key connection between perceptual psychology, the Investigation Trilogy, and Polanski’s portrayals of female self-actualisation as a form of mental illness. In all these cases, it is knowledge that proves most threatening to cognitive stability, especially when new knowledge clashes with existing conceptual frameworks. These incidents of cognitive dissonance help expose the manner in which both conceptual frameworks (our beliefs about the world) and perceptual frameworks (the means by which sensory data is made sense of, i.e. how we recognise an object for what it is) are not only interlocking processes, but likely the same process - a process of hypothesis (as Gregory persistently argues).

It is the ‘revelatory moment’, such as that most shocking moment of discovery experienced by Oedipus and his inheritors, that I argue best reflects the most profound philosophical implication of perceptual psychology, in particular the theory of indirect perception. Through its stressing of the powerful role of individual cognitive agency in the creation of perception via hypothesisation (including ‘proprioception’, our perception of our own bodies), the theory of indirect perception ultimately reveals our isolation from the world, but without necessarily advocating outright solipsism. This isolation is highly evident in those who suffer from mental illnesses like schizophrenia, but which is merely concealed (must be concealed) by the healthy perceptual mechanism.
11. **CONCLUSION**

The aim stated at the start of this investigation of Polanski’s cinema was to engage with a set of his films through an exploration of a theory of perception that the filmmaker himself claims to have been greatly influenced by. To do so, my strategy was to prepare both the reader and myself by exploring the theory of active perception as espoused by the now-late neuropsychologist R.L. Gregory, whom Polanski specifically nominates as an influence in his autobiography, and with whom he even collaborated. By then contrasting the theory of indirect (‘active’) perception with the competing, and still tenacious, model of direct (‘passive’) perception, I was able to begin a discussion of Polanski’s cinema guided by this perceptual line of discourse. Rather than attempting to deal with all of Polanski’s films, I elected to address his cinema through case studies grouped, roughly, into two ‘trilogies’ that I believe best embody Polanski’s interest in perceptual psychology, namely the ‘Apartment Trilogy’ of *Repulsion*, *Rosemary’s Baby*, and *The Tenant*, and the ‘Investigation Trilogy’ of *Chinatown*, *Frantic*, and *The Ninth Gate*. Where I argued that this first group of films deals with the workings of perception through explorations of psychosis, the second group marks a shift towards more ‘distant’ studies of highly sane perceivers who are confronted with severe perceptual challenges that spiral into epistemological, and ultimately ontological, crises.
By employing this methodology, I hoped to contribute to the type of scholarship that attempts to move the discussion of Polanski’s cinema beyond biographical analyses obsessed with folding the more sensational aspects of Polanski’s personal life into close-readings of his work; but this is a difficult task, given Polanski’s continuing high profile in the public realm, and on many occasions I have undoubtedly been guilty of associating the persona of the director too closely with the works and the discourse they provoke. At times, I am also undoubtedly guilty of crediting too many aesthetic and narrative details to the sole personal agency of Polanski himself, without clarifying the degree of collaboration at work in such decisions. That being said, given the countless reports from his collaborators regarding the remarkable amount of control exerted by Polanski over even the smallest details of production, if any current filmmaker deserves to be called the absolute ‘author’ of (at least) all things cinematic in the films for which he or she is credited as ‘director’, it is probably Polanski.

The choice to approach Polanski’s cinema with a methodology based in perceptual psychology was not intended as a dismissal of conventional film theory. For example, a perception-based close-reading does not negate the relevance of either psychoanalytical or philosophical approaches; as I have shown, the language of psychoanalysis and philosophical discourse is often used in the case studies presented here. The main advantage of using a perception-based approach as a ‘way in’ to Polanski’s cinema is that it allows for a detailed investigation into the manner in which a particular set of psychological research, which the director has claimed to be influenced by, is manifested in his cinema both diegetically and in the filmmaking technique. Such an approach offers a fruitful means of engaging with Polanski’s
cinema, and is one that compels the close-reader in particular to reflect on the theorisation of perception at play in these films.

On many occasion I have discussed the *malleability* of perception, only to later establish a seeming contradiction by turning my discussion to the *rigidity* of perception. In fact, each of these aspects of perception represents an extreme on the spectrum: from mental illness, such as schizophrenia, in which perceptual frameworks become fragmented and unreliable, to what I have referred to as a sort of perceptual ‘arrogance’, in which conceptual frameworks become so rigid that the basis upon which they were constructed (which is not always sound) is forgotten or ignored, thus causing a different sort of perceptual crisis. It is worth making note as well of active perception’s stressing of the interconnectedness of conceptual and perceptual frameworks, which Polanski’s films often explore. Such reciprocity is reflected in Grodal’s (2009) concept of ‘bioculturalism’, in which he refutes both strong culturalism (the notion that the human mind is a ‘blank slate’ upon which culture is inscribed) and strong biologism (the idea that all human behaviour can be explained in purely biological terms). Gregory does indeed stress the relative malleability of perception, which inevitably leads towards considerations of the source and stability of conceptual frameworks; but like the idea of bioculturalism, the theory of active perception calls for neither strong culturalism nor strong biologism, for it too is greatly concerned with the interplay of (long-term) evolutionary processes and (short-term) learned perceptual behaviour.
As Polanski’s engagement with perceptual psychology develops, it moves beyond a primary concern with the manner in which the perceptual mechanism functions towards an increasing preoccupation with what Gregory identifies as the ‘philosophical implications’ of active perception, which reflect the existential concerns that emerged post-war in the wake of totalitarianism, fascism, mass genocide, the atomic bomb and the entrance of quantum physics’ ever-perplexing ‘uncertainty principle’ into public discourse. It is this Angst that matured and evolved into what is now commonly referred to as the ‘postmodern condition’, in which even the bourgeois notions of the division of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture collapse, the very concept of ‘ideology’ becomes unstable, and perceptual certitudes are so vigorously challenged that questions of epistemology are quickly transformed into ontological crises. It is along these lines that I have argued that Polanski’s films can be appreciated as examples of postmodernism, in which an intersection is established between ‘permanent’ meaning (such as the concern with the nature of perception) and ‘transient’ meaning (such as the specific political and social commentary expressed through pastiche of current events and political figures).  

Whilst it is evident that Polanski is fascinated with the workings of perception, this seems to be symptomatic of a broader concern with the basic issue of identity and its inevitable connection to existential crises. So whilst Polanski’s cinema often draws attention to the perceptual apparatus, either through the representation (and sometimes through the evocation) of disturbed or aberrant perceptual experiences or by ‘playing out’ the perception-as-hypothesis model onscreen through inter-character conflict,

71 I borrow the notion of ‘permanent’ and ‘transient’ forms of meaning from Grodal (2009: 20-21, 205-228), who associates the former with the ambitions of ‘high art’, and the latter with those of ‘low art’.
what is also of great relevance is the question of the ‘location’ of the perceiver him-
or herself. Polanski often renders ambiguous what should be straightforward
certitudes like nationality, profession, (perceived) ethnicity, and even gender; these
are all ‘facts’ that make up one’s concept of identity, but it is the stability of these
‘facts’ that is so often undermined in Polanski’s cinema.

In my analysis of The Ghost, I discussed the concept of the decentralised ‘inter-
being’, a notion that resonates as well in films that I discussed in other chapters. In
Rosemary’s Baby, Guy ‘shifts’ between human and demonic forms; neighbour
‘Roman Castevet’ is also ‘Steven Marcato’; and Rosemary herself becomes a ‘double
being’ as her corporeal space becomes compromised as her baby grows inside her.
More overtly dramatic is the Trelkovsky-Choule overlapping in The Tenant, in which
the two identities become inseparable. Identities become uncertain as the borders
between distinct psyches break down. With these slippages of identity comes the
proposition of the overlapping of diverse psyches, even a challenge to the distinctness
of the psyche itself. But here lies the basest fiction, for such overlapping is pure
fantasy (at best) or pure psychotic delusion (at worse), for ultimately we are locked in
our own psychic cage. As Polanski so often demonstrates, the notion that subjective
synaptic realms of perception can overlap is highly uncanny; it is a source of both
fascination and horror.

I have argued that, to a certain extent, Polanski’s cinema is itself a theorising force as
it serves as a forum for the great perceptual debate. But what has not been much
discussed in this analysis of Polanski’s films are the various changes that have taken
place to the cinematic medium itself and how these have affected Polanski’s work. Whilst it may seem as though Polanski’s cinema has been immune from advances in digital technology – he has yet to, for example, embrace the digital camera - it would be greatly remiss to overlook Polanski’s use of CGI on *Oliver Twist* and *The Ghost*, which is employed so seamlessly in these films that many will undoubtedly be surprised to read they contained any digital effects at all.⁷² Possibilities for new threads of analysis connected to the line of discourse introduced here may indeed emerge depending on the technology Polanski employs on his forthcoming projects. Whilst Polanski once experimented (with Gregory’s help) with 3-D in the 1970s, he has thus far avoided the twenty-first century version of this technology. Perhaps two recent 3-D films by fellow ‘old masters’, Werner Herzog’s *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) and Wim Wenders’ *Pina* (2011), may inspire Polanski to try his hand at achieving the 3-D ‘wraparound’ effect once more.

I have argued that the manner in which Polanski’s cinema actively engages with perceptual psychology positions his films not only as objects that can be examined in general terms regarding the way we perceive them, but also as works that call attention to the higher cognitive functions involved in perception. I have also suggested that these films arguably even participate in the theorising of perception itself, which potentially extends the value of this approach beyond the study of Polanski’s cinema to the wider area of cognitive film studies. Hence, as part of these concluding remarks, it is worth again taking stock of current developments in

⁷² A ‘green screen’ CGI effect was used to create many of the Dickensian backgrounds in *Oliver Twist*, which was shot in the Czech Republic; in *The Ghost*, the same technique is used to create most of the exteriors as seen through the large glass windows of the house on Martha’s Vinyard, recreated on the north German coast.
cognitive approaches to film studies, and address in what way my approach to Polanski’s work could contribute to this area of research.

Writing in 1915, Hugo Münsterberg ventured that cinema (‘photoplay’) would become, above any other art form, ‘the domain of psychologists that analysed the mind’ (quoted in Anderson & Anderson, 1996: 347). Nearly a century on, the incorporation of cognitive research into film theory is becoming increasingly relevant, especially considering recent developments in digital projection and 3-D cinema, in which a strong grasp of perceptual psychology is critical to the creation of novel cinematic technologies that encourage cognitive engagement, but are not mere gimmickry. The Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image (SCSMI) is a strong advocate for such research and continues to argue for the increased incorporation of cognitive psychology into film studies, as demonstrated by the ongoing scholarship of SCSMI members like Bordwell and Grodal. Even more relevant to the present context are the contrasting meta-theories for cinematic spectatorship proposed by some other SCSMI members, namely Anderson and Anderson (1996), who argue for an understanding of cinema based on Gibson’s theory of direct perception, and Berliner and Cohen (2011), who instead base their reasoning on the theory of active perception. Such research demonstrates that the debates of perceptual theorists in the field of psychology can (and should) be the debates of film theorists as well.

It is important to again emphasise that whilst I have engaged with perceptual psychology and psychiatric research throughout my close readings of Polanski’s
cinema, what I have furnished here is not the type of scholarship that is primarily concerned with exploring cognition and cinematic spectatorship in general terms, and nor has this work argued for a particular ontology of cinema itself; I hope only to have demonstrated how the theory of active perception as delineated by R.L. Gregory can be used as a means of guiding thought through the greater philosophical discourse taking place both within Polanski’s films and inter-textually across his cinema. Nevertheless, I believe that my particular approach to Polanski’s work does demonstrates that his cinema is particularly suited to being examined in the context of more general, cognitively-based theorising on spectatorship and cinematic ‘embodiment’, as in Polanski’s cinema we have an example of an authorial force who has quite knowingly mobilised psychological research in a conscious effort to nuance and manipulate the spectatorial experience.

I will conclude this study of Polanski’s cinema with a few more words about pleasure, which is a key concept when considering the value of close-reading and extended (auteuristic) studies that focus on a single filmmaker, both of which this work clearly champions. My exploiting of Gregory’s writings on perception as means of laying a ‘pathway’ through Polanski’s cinema has proved to be a useful way of engaging these works; the primary intent of this approach was not, however, to furnish a definitive reading of these films, but rather to ‘unstitch’ Polanski’s cinema and provoke further thought on a number of different issues. To put in another way, I hope to have nudged Polanskian discourse towards mode of critical analysis that follows Deleuze’s recommendation to talk less about cinema and start talking with cinema (Deleuze, 1989: 268); or, if I can be so bold as to nuance Deleuze’s notion a bit further, to think with cinema. In this respect, we can reflect upon Polanski’s various efforts to utilise
the full potential of cinema and tease from it all the forms of pleasure it can yield. We can appreciate Polanski’s films not just for the ephemeral pleasures granted by the manner in which these stories are so expertly told, but also access the more ‘permanent’ pleasure these works bestow through close-readings and reflection on both the complexities of the diegeses and the philosophical conundrums they challenge us with; this latter type of pleasure is that which is derived from what I have referred to as the ubiquitous ‘dissatisfaction’ delivered by Polanski’s work, which, paradoxically, is probably the only means through which lasting pleasure can be achieved.

In Polanski’s cinema we have a series of films that not only compel us to think about pleasure, but also invite us to take pleasure in thinking; this balance is achieved through the creation of rich diegetic worlds, the amplification and deconstruction of generic conventions, the deliberate employment of Camp, and the use of compelling stories and story-telling techniques. Such qualities are critical, for it is the pleasure that comes from the dissection of these works that sustains the multiple viewing required of the sort of close-readings I have offered here; it is through such detailed inter- and intra-film analysis that the philosophical discourse at play in these works can be fully appreciated. But beyond simply identifying a strain of discourse, such as the perceptual concerns I have based my analyses on, we are also compelled to engage with these issues directly, to struggle with these ideas and their implications just as we struggle with the complex diegetic realities that contain them.
In Polanski’s cinema, as diegeses become destabilised, so do the certitudes of identity and ideology. Generic fixtures lure us in and are milked for pleasure, but we are also betrayed by them when plot swerves deconstruct these narrative frameworks. Mysteries are presented, but Sherlockian trajectories are usurped by the uncertainty principle. The reliability of perception and of our higher cognitive functions ability to reveal the world of things, which is the basis for inquiry and deduction, is challenged. We are left not with solutions or truth, but with clashing hypotheses. Robust realities are not re-stitched, but unravelled; and thus satisfaction is consistently denied. But it is through this dissatisfaction that Polanski’s films transcend their role of delivering visceral pleasure; these are the struggles, I argue, through which an even higher order of pleasure is accessed.
12. **Roman Polanski Filmography**

**Shorts**

*Bicycle* (1955, Poland)

*Toothy Grin* (1957, Poland)

*Break Up the Dance* (1957, Poland)

*Murder* (1957, Poland)

*Two Men and a Wardrobe* (1958, Poland)

*The Lamp* (1959, Poland)

*When Angels Fall* (1959, Poland)

*The Fat and the Lean* (1961, France)

*Mammals* (1962, Poland)

*River of Diamonds*, segment in *The World's Most Beautiful Swindlers* (1964, France, Italy, Japan, Netherlands)

*Cinéma Erotique*, segment in *To Each His Own Cinema* (2007, France)

**Feature Films**

*Knife in the Water* (1962, Poland)

*Repulsion* (1965, UK)

*Cul-de-sac* (1966, UK)

*Dance of the Vampires* (1967, UK, USA)

*Rosemary’s Baby* (1968, USA)

*Macbeth* (1971, UK, USA)
*What?* (1972, Italy, Germany, France)

*Chinatown* (1974, USA)

*The Tenant* (1976, France)

*Tess* (1979, France, UK)

*Pirates* (1986, Tunisia, Spain)

*Frantic* (1988, USA)

*Bitter Moon* (1992, France, USA, UK)

*Death and the Maiden* (1994, UK, USA, France)

*The Ninth Gate* (1999, Spain, France, Germany, USA)

*The Pianist* (2002, France, Poland, Germany, UK, USA, Switzerland)

*Oliver Twist* (2005, UK, Czech Republic, Italy, France)

*The Ghost* (2010, France, Germany, UK)
13. Bibliography


Information attained from the following dossiers held by the Bibliothèque du film (BiFi) in Paris have been referenced herein:

*The Ninth Gate*

BAUDROT-GU121 to BAUDROT-GU126 (inclusive)

*Frantic*


*The Tenant*

14. APPENDIX

Figure 1: Cover of *Time* 20.09.1963

Figure 2: The Muller-Lyer illusion. Which line is longer?

(a)

(b)
Figure 3: The Venus Fly-Trap lures in a meal

Figure 4: E.G. Boring’s famous ‘old-young’ visual ambiguity. It is impossible to see both ‘realities’ simultaneously
Figures 5-8:

Some images of the maquettes constructed by Pierre Guffroy. The models are held by the Bibliothèque du film at the Cinémathèque in Paris.

Figures 5 and 6 are close to representing the final construction of the set. Notice that the Ames illusion is already at work in these models; the ‘room’ seems almost normal from the angle in Figure 5, whereas the true shape is revealed in Figure 6 because of the high angle of the photo. Figure 7 and Figure 8 show a second maquette, unused in the final film.
Figure 9: An example of the Ames room illusion.

Figure 10: A typical Ames Room ‘blueprint’ (Figure 10).