PaRDeS and Film

Interpretation

Multiple Levels of Cinematic Meaning

Vicky Johann Schinkel

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ABSTRACT

This thesis establishes the traditional Jewish interpretative model PaRDeS as the foundation of a new film interpretation method, and suggests a PaRDeS interpretative process that can be used as a guide by other analysts, critics and scholars. PaRDeS is a sophisticated method of analysis that reflects millennia of Judaic explorations of narrative structures, stories, interpretations and commentaries.

Maimonides’ blending of Aristotelian and Jewish philosophy led to the development of different kinds of interpretative frameworks, including PaRDeS. PaRDeS is a map of meaning that articulates Jewish philosophy and reflects a Jewish history of emphasising the importance of interpretation.

PaRDeS interpretation encourages dialogues about cinema, and the meaning of films. The PaRDeS method responds to other film analyses in its own interpretative mission to coordinate and integrate multiple levels of meaning.

Using PaRDeS in this original way to interpret contemporary films is significant to both Jewish Studies and Film Studies. This thesis extends the investigations of contemporary uses of PaRDeS in Jewish Studies and introduces the method to Film Studies, responding to existing issues of film interpretation in doing so. A multi-level framework of different kinds of meaning differentiates PaRDeS from its contemporary counterparts, and from a tradition of film interpretation that narrows the scope of interpretative interest to ideological perspectives.

The originality of the PaRDeS conceptualisation of film meaning, the unique assumptions of the model, and its coordination and synthesis of different interpretative strategies differentiates PaRDeS from contemporary critical perspectives. PaRDeS film interpretation develops important insights about film meaning, and describes specific ways cinema reflects the world that creates and interprets films.

Since this is the first time the PaRDeS method has been used to produce formal interpretations of films, there is as yet no established process for doing so. This thesis develops a PaRDeS model of interpretation (Chapter Two) and uses it to generate new insights during the various investigations of different elements of film in the chapters that follow. PaRDeS has never been adapted for use as a modern tool of cinematic investigation before now, and this thesis is necessarily exploratory in its evolution of a new PaRDeS approach to film interpretation.

The PaRDeS method is developed in various multi-level interpretations of the following films: The Matrix (Larry and Andy Wachowski, 1999), Clueless (Amy Heckerling, 1995), Josie and the Pussycats (Harry Elfont & Deborah Kaplan, 2001), Taxi Driver (Martin Scorsese, 1976), and Black Swan (Darren Aronofsky, 2010).
The new PaRDeS film interpretation method that this thesis produces is used to explore how film genre and structure (Chapter 3), critical responses (Chapter 4), cinematic expressions of theme (Chapter 5), filmmakers’ cinematic choices (Chapter 6), multi-level scene analysis (Chapter 7), film character and function (Chapter 8), film score and music (Chapter 9) can be defined, and investigated using the PaRDeS framework of multi-level meaning. Chapter 10’s exploration of the relatively novel concept of Cinematic Midrash further extends the interpretative territory of PaRDeS in its response to film as commentary, parable, and philosophical statement, as well as its response to existing interpretations (previously discussed in Chapter 4).

Chapter 11 concludes that using the PaRDeS film interpretative method is a pragmatic approach to narrative structures that recognises that stories function in multiple ways to make meanings, and sometimes produce transcendent effects. Using PaRDeS to analyse films generates sets of unique questions about films, about their themes and about broader social and cultural issues that impact on interpretation. Finally, in attempting to identify the effects of interactions between different kinds of meaning, PaRDeS introduces new conceptualisations of film meaning to Film Criticism and Interpretation.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that

(i) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface.
(ii) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
(iii) The thesis is 84,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliographies, and appendices.

Name: Vicky Schinkel
Signature: _________________________________
Date: _________________________________
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Chapter 1 THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis uses the PaRDeS model as the foundation of a new way of interpreting films. PaRDeS is a medieval Jewish method of interpreting and commenting on the meaning of the Torah, the Talmud and other sacred texts. The name of the model is an acronym that refers to the Hebrew names of the four levels of meaning PaRDeS synthesises – Peshat, (Plain), Remez (Hint), Derash (Search) and Sod (Secret). Each kind of meaning requires a different interpretative strategy. In this thesis PaRDeS is used as a way of responding to contemporary issues of film interpretation.

The PaRDeS method is accurate, has an expansive definition of meaning, and responds to other types of cinema analysis. PaRDeS corresponds to other systems (philosophical and interpretative), endowing the method with an appealing universality. Contrary to the combative conversations that characterise cinematic discourse, PaRDeS conversations about cinema embrace the body of existing commentary (Midrash). The research question that this thesis responds to is, “How can the PaRDeS method be used to interpret cinematic meaning?”

The major theme of the thesis relates to the interpretative activity of Midrash, traditionally used by Rabbis as a way of sharing insights and commentaries with others. The PaRDeS method responds to other film analyses in its own interpretative mission to coordinate and integrate multiple levels of meaning. How do filmmakers express ideas, ideologies, philosophies and theologies in movies? How do viewers engage with these ideas? Answering these questions using PaRDeS is the central activity of this dissertation.

The second major theme of the thesis is linked to the way PaRDeS conceptualises film meaning differently to existing methods of cinema analysis. The study of film is characterised by periods of alternating preoccupations with film meaning and how it can be interpreted. Early filmmakers like Eisenstein and theorists like Hugo Münsterberg wrote in the 1920’s specifically about film as a unique ‘text.’ By the 1940’s studies of film meaning relied on theories from other fields. PaRDeS responds to the unique properties of cinema based on alternative assumptions about what cinematic meaning is, how it is made, who makes it and how it can be interpreted. As a consequence, using PaRDeS to interpret films yields new and original insights into films, and addresses existing problems of interpretation.

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An important twin theme of the thesis links the quality of analyses produced with the different kinds of questions asked during the PaRDeS interpretative process. The assumptions of the PaRDeS Model frame an interpretative process that finds the method uniquely placed to respond to contemporary conceptualisations of film meaning. Fredrik Sunnemark notes the now common acceptance that films communicate ideological meaning and asks, “What does it mean to say that a film carries and transmits ideological notions?” When analyses of film concentrate on interpretation through the lens of a single ideological perspective, interpreters are in effect holding all other meanings in the film ‘constant.’ The interpretative process is guided by questions yielded by a singular perspective (usually ideological). Film meaning, course, is not made in this singular way. Viewers respond to the multitude of meanings in the film. Unlike interpreters, most viewers do not concentrate on a single interpretative perspective. Rather, meaning evolves as a result of the ways viewers, through the lens of their personal responses, coordinate multiple interpretative possibilities. PaRDeS tracks this development by analysing individual levels of meaning and their interactions, and synthesising these within a single interpretation. Cinema communicates multiple perspectives – it makes sense to approach film interpretation in the same way.

Relevance, Originality & Timeliness

Using PaRDeS in this original way to interpret contemporary films is significant to both Jewish Studies and Film Studies. Critical models have not kept up with a rapidly changing multi-media platform. Theories of cinema interpretation and criticism are linked to broader literary, semiotic, linguistic and psychoanalytic battles from other fields. The theoretical preoccupations of Cinema Studies are to be expected in what is a relatively young field. They have however, served to obstruct the development of realistic and accurate models of film meaning and interpretation. Using PaRDeS to address this gap represents a significant step forward in the understanding of cinema meaning and film interpretation as a distinct and separate field of inquiry. This thesis extends the investigations of contemporary uses of PaRDeS in Jewish Studies and introduces the method to Film Studies.

The originality of the PaRDeS treatment of film meaning, the unique assumptions of the model, and its coordination and synthesis of different interpretative strategies

5 Fredrik Sunnemark, "Film and Ideology - Remarks on a Complicated Relationship,” in INTER: A European Cultural Studies Conference in Sweden (Norrköping: Linköping University, 2007). 593
6 This is analogous to the scientific method, where investigations of a single element require an experimental assumption that any feature not being investigated is “unchanging” and therefore does not have an effect on the (particular) research question being posed.
differentiates PaRDeS from contemporary critical perspectives. Responding to gaps in contemporary criticism ensures that this research highly relevant. That PaRDeS responds to these gaps in such an exhaustive and original way makes a significant contribution to expanding contemporary critical and interpretative perspectives. PaRDeS develops important insights about film meaning, and describes specific ways cinema reflects the world that creates and interprets films.

Since this is the first time the PaRDeS method has been used to produce formal interpretations of films, there is as yet no established process for doing so. This thesis develops a PaRDeS model of interpretation (Chapter Two) and uses it to generate new insights during the various investigations of different elements of film in the chapters that follow. This unique method of analysis yields original interpretations – even of films previously subject to intense interpretation, such as The Matrix, as well as ‘classic’ films that have been closely analysed, such as Taxi Driver.

Through the activity of Midrash, a form of commentary that engages with other interpretations and sources, PaRDeS is uniquely positioned to reconcile what are usually considered ‘competing’ film interpretations – and to suggest new areas of analysis worthy of further investigation. The inclusivity of Midrash differentiates PaRDeS film analysis from the combative conversations engaged in by its contemporary interpretative counterparts.

The relevance of this thesis is also linked to the importance of narrative and storytelling. It seems that ‘narrative’ has found its zeitgeist moment. The term has begun to dominate public discussions of how individuals make meaning whether it is in the field of politics, advertising, psychology, sports or journalism, to name a few. Films are a narrative reflection of our world, and reflect the stories we use to organise our sense of self, and of others. PaRDeS describes the complex narratives of cinema in ways that potentially extends to other disciplines.

The timeliness of using PaRDeS to interpret films is connected to a history of interdisciplinary interest in the method. Scholars from other fields, but particularly literary criticism, have for some time noted the potential of PaRDeS to respond to modern interpretative problems. This thesis actualises that potential.

7 See Robert McKee, Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting (London: Menthuen, 1999), for a discussion that concentrates on cinematic story-telling, and film narratives.

**Goals of the Thesis**

PaRDeS is driven by specific motives of interpretation. These are reflected in, and used to frame the goals of the thesis. This thesis seeks to: (a) Participate in, and respond to existing conversations about the secular application of PaRDeS in contemporary society in general, and to film analysis specifically; (b) Develop a workable adaptation of the PaRDeS model suitable for contemporary cinematic interpretation; (c) Provide a set of guidelines on how to use the PaRDeS method to interpret films; and (d) Demonstrate the usefulness of using PaRDeS by producing unique and original film interpretations.

**Scope**

Since PaRDeS has not been previously used to interpret films, there is no established or formalised process for how the method can be used for that purpose. In its original use of PaRDeS as a formal method of film analysis, this thesis is necessarily exploratory.

The new PaRDeS film interpretation method that this thesis produces is used to explore how film genre, structure, character, music and other important elements of film meaning can be defined, and investigated using the PaRDeS framework of multi-level meaning. The proposed method is applied to five Hollywood films that encompass a range of production and authorship modes, genres, filmmakers, and target audiences. Unique insights about each film are uncovered. However, this thesis is concerned first with the development of the PaRDeS method as a way of performing film analysis. The film interpretations are occasionally confined to specific areas of investigation that support the thesis goals. Given PaRDeS has not been previously used in this way, the adaptation and use of the model in film analysis is the prime objective of this thesis.

**Why these Films?**

Films are clearly meaningful cultural products in both socio-economic and personal ways. Cinema is not only economically powerful, but also culturally significant. Clive Marsh links cinema to the construction of modern value systems.\(^9\) Robert Johnston goes so far as to confer a religious status on cinema, asserting that films, “Function as a primary source of

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The influence of religions on individuals waned in the late 20th Century, and the Cinema has become an important forum where people congregate to hear and share ideas and values. Films are the dominant way stories are shared in our culture. The importance of films to individuals parallels the economic and social power of cinema to society.

The PaRDeS method is used to analyse the following films: The Matrix (Larry and Andy Wachowski, 1999), Clueless (Amy Heckerling, 1995), Josie and the Pussycats (Harry Elfont & Deborah Kaplan, 2001), Taxi Driver (Martin Scorsese, 1976), and Black Swan (Darren Aronofsky, 2010). Why have these specific films been chosen?

Taxi Driver is one of the most famous, and most analysed films in the history of cinema. In PaRDeS terms, the extent of the commentary that surrounds the film represents a significant Midrash. Director Martin Scorsese and screenwriter Paul Schrader have each made extensive comments about the respective meaning(s) they attempt to inscribe in the film. The PaRDeS method is used to explore specific ways Schrader and Scorsese, and composer Bernard Herrmann and actor Robert De Niro use the ‘tools of cinema’ to develop multiple levels of meaning in Taxi Driver. The PaRDeS investigation (of the interactions between separate creative visions of the film) offers new insights about how the combined collaborative efforts of the filmmakers create a highly sophisticated framework of integrated multiple meanings. The PaRDeS analysis also produces original insights into Taxi Driver, and fresh perspectives of filmmakers that, despite the extent of the Midrash, have not before been unearthed.

Black Swan is a psychological thriller that features a female protagonist. Nina is a disintegrating personality closer to Travis Bickle in nature than to her female counterparts of the teen comedies Clueless and Josie and the Pussycats. Black Swan is in some ways a companion piece to Taxi Driver – both films are set in New York, made by filmmakers who are communicating similar themes and ideas, and each film features a small, core cast of characters. Both films are related from the point of view of the main characters. This thesis uses PaRDeS to not only interpret Black Swan, but also to investigate how cinematic expression has evolved between 1976 and 2010.

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The Matrix is one of the most successful films of all time. The bleak futuristic tale of an armed struggle by the human race waged against sentient computers resonated strongly with a young male audience. Since the film’s release in 1999, various scenes and cinematic content (including film style) have been referenced repeatedly in multiple forums, including other films, television shows, literature, academic scholarship, advertising and music.

In this thesis, PaRDeS is used to offer a fresh perspective that links the success of The Matrix to the filmmakers’ conscious and deliberate coordination of multiple levels of meaning. The mythic structure of The Matrix, and the decision of the Wachowski brothers to create multiple kinds of meaning, including deliberately inserted ‘hidden’ meanings, make this complex film particularly well suited to PaRDeS interpretation.

Does the PaRDeS method yield significant, original and unique analyses when applied to the interpretation of films that are less obviously inclined by genre to mythic structures? Another important way of evolving this new use of the PaRDeS method is its application to films that, by virtue of genre and target audience, construct simpler cinematic narratives.

Clueless is a teen comedy targeted at teenage girls, and here the PaRDeS method is tested against what at first appears to be a much simpler genre, and a film targeted at a very different kind of viewer. Clueless was one of the most acclaimed Jane Austen adaptations of the 1990's, popular with audiences, critics, academics and educators. The adaptation of a novel as well known as Austen’s Emma gave rise to numerous interpretations—the majority of which focus on the parallels and differences between film and novel. The PaRDeS analysis re-asserts cinematic qualities as the meaning of Clueless, a stark contrast to existing analyses that anchor the film’s meaning in the context of the novel’s meaning.

12 Expectations for the film were not high, given it was released at the same time as the long-anticipated prequel to The Star Wars trilogy, The Phantom Menace. While that film attracted the ire of fans and critics, The Matrix proved a surprise hit – perhaps the crushing disappointment of The Phantom Menace, awaited for years, served to heighten the connection to a similarly structured mythic film that, in contrast to the Lucas film, looked to the future (rather than to the past).

13 Joseph Campbell’s rigorous analysis of myths concludes that certain key narrative elements are common across a variety of cultures and film periods. (Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).) These narrative commonalities connect individuals to each other and to the world, and communicate meaning in the language of symbols and metaphors. The influence of what Campbell calls the ‘Monomyth’ on cinematic narratives was driven by George Lucas’s use of the Monomyth as the foundation of the narrative of Star Wars (George Lucas, "Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope," (20th Century Fox, 1977).) and screenwriter Christopher Vogler’s use of Campbell’s work as the foundation of a model of mythic cinematic narratives. (Christopher Vogler, The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters, 2nd ed. (London: Pan MacMillan, 1999).)

14 The writers and directors of The Matrix have noted that every filmic element of the film has a hidden meaning. See Larry (in) Wachowski, "The Many Meanings of The Matrix," http://www.matrixfans.net/symbolism/meanings.php

15 Interpretations thus become focused on finding evidence of the novel in the film, treating Clueless as a kind of cinematic jigsaw puzzle that, when the pieces are put together, reveals the novel. See, for example, Louise and Phillips Heal, William, "Extensive Grounds and Classic Columns: Emma of Film," Persuasions Online Occasional Papers 3(1999).
Josie & the Pussycats, a comedy about a girl band based on a 1960’s comic book, attempts to appeal to the same audience Clueless so successfully engaged. The big-budget Hollywood film failed to connect with audiences and critics. Josie and the Pussycats reflects the conscious efforts of Directors (and co-writers) Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan to use film as social commentary (Midrash).

PaRDeS analysis shows how filmmakers can, despite their best intentions, dilute and compromise simple cinematic narratives. In the case of Josie and the Pussycats, this results in a schism between what filmmakers intend a film to mean, and the meaning viewers ultimately make.

Using PaRDeS to investigate the meaning of these films points to the continual development of increasingly sophisticated audiences across all age groups, who are capable of reading and understanding complex films. Filmmakers and audiences have each developed their capacity to make and find significant, deeper levels of meaning. Even more importantly, both filmmakers and viewers crave meaningful cinema.

**Thesis Structure**

The thesis charts the development of cinematic meaning in these films through a PaRDeS-based examination of different key filmic areas. This chapter’s overview of the thesis is followed by an introduction to the PaRDeS model in Chapter 2.

The introduction to the PaRDeS model is followed by an assessment of important contributions to the body of literature. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how PaRDeS can be used to identify and synthesise different levels of cinematic meaning, and proposes a method of using PaRDeS to produce accurate and original film interpretations.

Chapter 3 introduces readers to the films used by the dissertation’s development of the PaRDeS film method. This chapter also uses PaRDeS to investigate the multiple ways filmmakers and viewers create (and negotiate) expectations about what a film means. Both genre and structure imply specific film content.16

Most investigations of genre in film analysis focus on classifying and sorting films according to genre characteristics. The relationship between genre and cinematic meaning is largely unexplored. The PaRDeS investigation of important ways genre expectations create meaning demonstrates why cinema analysis benefits from the method’s unique approach to genre analysis.

The interpretative processes that underpin the PaRDeS method require approaching interpretation of ‘lower level’ meanings before dealing with the complexities of Midrash analysis, or those of ‘hidden’ film meanings.\(^{17}\) The remaining chapters of the thesis explore the major components of film meaning framed by the way each makes meaning at multiple levels.

Chapter 4 summarises the critical response to each film, and concludes with a reflection on existing interpretative positions based on the alternative PaRDeS perspective. The discussions of this chapter are the foundation of the unique PaRDeS activity of ‘Cinematic Midrash’ (commentary).

Chapter 5 responds to existing problematic constructions of thematic film meaning, which ‘state,’ rather than ‘investigate’ the use of themes by filmmakers in the evolution of their own significant cinematic commentaries. Framing an investigation through the lens of the four levels of PaRDeS reveals useful insights about thematic content that are generally ignored by other methods. It becomes evident that films have the capacity to express ideological, philosophical and religious themes in multiple ways.

Chapter 6 concentrates on the different ways filmmakers utilise the power of their cinematic choices to create structures of multi-level meaning in films. The PaRDeS interest in how filmmakers and viewers negotiate multiple kinds of meaning is highly illuminating, and responds to a schism that exists between Auteur (filmmaker) and Cognitive (viewer) interpretative positions. The value of connecting the two is clearly indicated by the original insights about each of the films that PaRDeS analysis produces.

These insights are used to frame the subsequent discussion of applying PaRDeS for the purpose of scene analysis in Chapter 7. Here, scenes from two quite different films (Taxi Driver and Clueless) are examined from a PaRDeS perspective of film content, and how that content connects the (respective) meanings of filmmakers and film viewers. Chapters 6 and 7 (respectively) demonstrate important ways filmmakers manage multiple levels of filmmaking. The interpretative insights of the PaRDeS analyses of filmmakers’ cinematic choices in Chapter 6 establish a unique approach to scene analysis, which is further explicated in Chapter Seven’s detailed study of scenes from Taxi Driver and Clueless.

Chapter 8 offers a unique perspective of the multiple effects of character functions in cinematic narratives. The unique PaRDeS method of investigating character offers a markedly different assessment of film characters than other methods.\(^{18}\) The PaRDeS model refers

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\(^{18}\) Generally, other analyses of film concentrate on character as ‘signifier’ (naming functions), or else allegorical readings (as with David & Beresin Mischoulon, Eugene V., ""The Matrix": An Allegory of the Psychoanalytic Journey," *Academic Psychiatry* 28, no. 1 (2004)).
interpreters to examinations of meanings that contemporary film interpretation terms ‘difficult.’ These complex meanings are attached to the ‘higher’ levels of PaRDeS, and the method’s inclusion of these meanings in interpretations of film genre, theme and, in this chapter cinematic character maps, represent a significant contribution to the field.

Mark Brownrigg has identified several problematic areas in the interpretation of film music, which can be summarised by Kathryn Kalinak’s noting of a critical reticence that, “obscures a crucial component in the film’s signifying system: its musical score.” Chapter 9 discusses how PaRDeS is used to respond to a significant gap in existing interpretation by framing analysis of cinema music according to the ‘meaning effects’ of a film’s soundtrack. Music in film is investigated in a variety of (important) ways in Cinema Studies, and is recognised as an important ‘maker of meaning’ in films. Therefore, it is curious that the different kinds of cinematic meaning music creates are so rarely explored in actual interpretations of films. The PaRDeS investigation of film music in Chapter 9 responds to this interpretative gap.

Chapter 10 introduces the relatively novel concept of ‘Cinematic Midrash.’ PaRDeS frames film analysis as an open-ended interpretative conversation between different interpreters. PaRDeS is more respectful of alternative interpretations than most other methods. This chapter demonstrates how multiple interpretations can be reconciled within a single analysis. Using PaRDeS as an interpretative guide to the relationship between cinematic content and source material offers a fresh perspective on the creation of filmmaker commentaries, and the function of film as ‘parable.’

Chapter 11 concludes the thesis examination of PaRDeS as a method of film analysis with a response to the research question and goals of the thesis, and offers insights into the implications of the use of the PaRDeS model to frame film analysis for Jewish Studies and Film Studies, and a set of suggestions for future research directions.

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19 David Bordwell, “Film Interpretation Revisited,” Film Criticism 17, no. 2-3 (1993).
20 Mark Brownrigg, “Film Music and Film Genre” (University of Stirling, 2003).
22 Including narrative functions. See Claudia Gorbman, “Narrative Film Music,” French Studies 60(1980). Other studies of film become expositions of technique and style, such as Steven C. Smith, A Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
23 While some authors refer to Midrash in general terms, few authors actually ‘perform Midrash’ in film studies. A notable exception that serves as an exemplar for the linking of Rabbinical-theological Midrash to Cinema is Mois Navon, "The Matrix: A Mystical Modern Midrash," Divrei Navon Pop Media Series 1(2009). Navon’s Midrash differs in scope from the way the PaRDeS model applies it in this thesis. Specifically, Navon assumes a Judaic allegory, and then seeks evidence for it. That said, this analysis is an excellent resource for that particular allegorical reading of The Matrix.
Conclusion

Using PaRDeS to produce interpretations of complex cinema meaning is a new proposition for both Jewish Studies and Film Studies. The complex ways in which films (and filmmakers and audiences) make meaning have proven problematic in interpretative terms. Problems of cinema interpretation are partly a function of (relatively) inaccurate assumptions about film meaning – what it is, how it is made and how it can be interpreted. PaRDeS assumptions include the multiplicity of meaning, the effects of commentary and time on meaning development and the notion that a triad of filmmakers, films and audiences negotiates multiple meanings. PaRDeS asks different questions about film and about meaning during the interpretative process.

This dissertation’s adaptation of PaRDeS to produce useful film interpretations represents a significant contribution to the field of Jewish Studies. In extending the secular application of PaRDeS, and restoring contemporary appropriations of the method to ‘textual’ studies, this research is a pragmatic response to existing gaps in multiple fields.

This thesis further concludes that using the PaRDeS model as a way of responding to existing interpretative gaps in film analysis delivers a number of useful and significant contributions to the field of Cinema Studies. These include: (a) the delivery of realistic accounts of cinema meaning that include types of meaning usually avoided or unrecognised; and (b) an expansion of the interpretative scope of contemporary cinema investigation. PaRDeS interpretation of films yields significant new insights into specific films, and reinvigorates the general interpretative conversation between ‘competing’ film interpretation methods.

The motivation of using PaRDeS is inferred by the word’s Hebrew origins. ‘Pardes’ is variously translated as, ‘Garden,’ ‘Orchard,’ and ‘Paradise.’ The results of this thesis’ use of PaRDeS to interpret films support the traditional rabbinical proposition that the ultimate reward of PaRDeS analysis is the rich interpretative fruit that using the method yields. The PaRDeS acronym not only refers to different kinds of meaning, and the interpretative strategies required in finding them – it also suggests an interpretative destination. To understand the four levels of meaning simultaneously is to be in ‘Paradise.’

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Chapter 2 PaRDeS OVERVIEW

The traditional Jewish hermeneutics model of PaRDeS has an established history of interpretative applications to texts that spans centuries. This chapter introduces the model, and responds to the question: How does the PaRDeS conceptualisation of meaning drive an interpretative process that differs from its contemporary counterparts in both method and intention?

The review of relevant literature reveals that the socio-historic foundations of PaRDeS are well established. Yet little exists on using PaRDeS in interpretations of any modern text form, let alone film. This is despite (a) successful applications of PaRDeS in other contemporary narrative contexts;¹ (b) appropriations of PaRDeS elements by 20th Century theory;² and (c) calls for the use of the method in modern interpretative contexts, including cinema analysis.³

An assessment of contemporary film criticism and interpretation indicates that although it is generally acknowledged that films make multiple levels of meaning,⁴ few interpretations make any real effort to describe or synthesise them. This is partly due to the characterisation of profound meaning as ‘obtuse.’⁵ The PaRDeS method acknowledges the complexities attached to interpretations of this kind of meaning, and responds to them through a set of unique assumptions. These assumptions frame the analysis of ‘obtuse’ and other difficult meanings in terms of their interactions with simpler narrative meanings. The PaRDeS engagement with ‘difficult’ meanings, and the way these are synthesised in interpretative efforts is a new way of performing film analyses, and one that responds to a long-standing problematic area of contemporary cinema interpretation.

Chapter 2 concludes with an explanation of how the PaRDeS method can be used in film analysis, and offers a proposed approach based on the model for use in film interpretation. As the various investigations of this thesis reveal, PaRDeS effectively accounts for a spectrum of cinematic meaning, producing fresh and original interpretative insights.

² A notable example is the Deconstruction of Derrida, as reflected in Derrida, Of Grammatology. (See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Assaulting the Border: Kabbalistic Traces in the Margins of Derrida," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 70, no. 3 (2002).
The PaRDeS Method of Interpretation

Spaniard Moses de Leon and his contemporaries formalised the PaRDeS method in the late 13th Century. They, like many other scholars and philosophers of the era, were strongly influenced by the work of Maimonides, a philosopher, astronomer and physician writing a century earlier. Maimonides took a philosophical approach to meaning that drew on the work of Aristotle as well as Judaism. Maimonides’ aim was:

Not merely to propose philosophy, but to use Aristotelian psychology and metaphysics to point to mediations on secret Judaism, and to introduce a new paradigm for understanding it.

The blending of Aristotelian and Jewish philosophy led to the development of different kinds of interpretative frameworks, driven by an urge to find ways to find and describe ‘deeper’ levels of meaning. PaRDeS is a map of meaning that articulates Jewish philosophy and reflects the Jewish history of interpretation.

The interpretative goal of the PaRDeS method is to produce an expansive and accurate rendering of the meaning of the entire text (film). This requires understanding the multiple kinds of meaning that are not only present in a work, but that develop in response to that work. The traditional conceptualisation of the four levels of meaning is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Kind of Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>plain</td>
<td>simple, literal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>hint</td>
<td>allegorical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>search</td>
<td>significant/moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>secret</td>
<td>secret, mystical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 Waldman, "Edenic Paradise and the Paridisal Eden: Moshe Idel’s Reading of the Talmudic Legend of the Four Sages who entered PaRDeS." 86
The PaRDeS model has been used to interpret the narrative structures and implications of sacred Jewish texts for many centuries, and the assumptions of the model reflect a mature understanding of the intricacies of how meaning develops and evolves over time. The PaRDeS model proposes a synthesis of different kinds of meaning. These multiple levels are coherent (able to be understood) and consistent with each other. Contradictions evident in the text or film are apparent (not real). That is, filmmakers mean ‘textual’ anomalies (Peshat) to be noticed by viewers, who then use these cinematic contradictions as clues (Remez) to other levels of ‘significant’ and ‘personal’ meanings (Derash and Sod). This feature of the PaRDeS model relates to an assumption of ‘active’ spectatorship. PaRDeS assumes readers and audiences 'fill in the gaps' in their own attempts to make meaning of a work. Filmmakers, aware of this tendency, use various cinematic elements (such as discontinuity in editing or the use of musical motifs) to suggest their own commentaries (Derash/Midrash) to viewers.

Any film is itself considered an act of interpretation. This is because films are, in part, a filmmakers’ response to other films, and a reflection on the culture that produces cinema (Derash). Films are commentaries that elucidate other films, and reflect dominant social concerns and issues. Meaning is endless in the sense that it is being continuously created through the process of interpretation, the insights of which are shared with others. PaRDeS responds to this cinematic commentary through the activity of Midrash, which is at the heart of Jewish exegesis.

Lieve Teugal explains Midrash refers to the process or the result of rabbinc commentary on the Hebrew Bible. This approach to interpretation uses outside sources to make sense of a text or passage, as well as responding to existing analyses. The concept of ‘dialogical reading’ is the foundation of Midrash. This unique narrative approach arises from both the seeking of further meaning, as well as reflecting on the nature of the questions asked of meaning, and of the film.

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8 The PaRDeS model anticipates many modern ideas and theories, including, in this case, active spectatorship. See John Izod, “Active Imagination in the Analysis of Film,” Journal of Analytical Psychology 45, no. 2 (2000).
9 Meir Steinberg, for example, uses the concept of 'gap filling' in a discussion of the active interpretative reader voice that develops when engaged with a biblical story, Meir Steinberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). 'Filling in the gaps' is a way of constructing a story that maintains coherency of the text, and negotiates contradictions and repetitions within the context of the whole text. The assumption of inter-connectedness is maintained.
11 Bruns, Gerald L. Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern, 105. Since the context, according to Bruns, is social rather than logical, it is alterable and variable – parts may appear ‘insensible’ but taken in conjunction with the whole of the text, make sense. (114).
The PaRDeS conceptualisation of meaning differs in important ways from its contemporary counterparts. These important differences, especially assumptions about the structure of narrative meanings, underpin an interpretative process that culminates in analyses of films that considerably expand existing boundaries of how cinema meaning is made, and how film meaning can be interpreted.

**Review of Relevant Literature**

Writings on PaRDeS are sparse. PaRDeS was primarily practiced, rather than written about (at least in a scholarly way) for hundreds of years. PaRDeS first appears in academic literature in the early 20th Century. Prominent scholars who contributed to some of the most intriguing literary and interpretative discussions of the 20th century clearly knew of PaRDeS, and drew on elements of the model in their own theory-building. Although the potential of PaRDeS has been recognised for some time, a review of the relevant literature shows that its potential has yet to be actualised in contemporary interpretative contexts.

In 1929 Harry Caplan noted that allegory in modern hermeneutics, “must be referred to Jewish haggadic exegesis, which [has] an established history of allegorical interpretation for several generations.”\(^\text{12}\) Caplan was one of the first scholars to publicly acknowledge the potential of using an already well established, ‘Jewish way’ of reading allegory. However for various reasons, other kinds of approaches dominated 20th century interpretative theory and practice. It was not until Gershom Scholem established the origins of PaRDeS that most other scholars became aware of the method.

Gershom Scholem is the pre-eminent figure of modern scholarly investigations of Jewish Philosophy.\(^\text{13}\) Renown for his painstaking analysis and penetrating insights, his work is the foundation of subsequent PaRDeS scholarship. Our contemporary understanding of the origins of PaRDeS were established by Scholem over a period of two decades, and formalised in the substantial *Origins of the Kabbalah*.\(^\text{14}\) In opening up the study of historically significant writings by early Jewish scholars, Scholem established the historic foundations of PaRDeS, and drew attention to ways Jewish hermeneutics differed from its modern

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\(^\text{12}\) Harry Caplan, "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Mediaeval Theory of Preaching," *Speculum* 4, no. 3 (1929), p 285

\(^\text{13}\) After leaving Germany in 1923 Gershom Scholem worked in Jerusalem at the Hebrew University, initially as a librarian, and eventually as Professor of Mysticism and the Kabbalah. He was also president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

\(^\text{14}\) Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*. 

21
counterparts.\textsuperscript{15} Scholem is responsible for the (modern) conceptualisation of PaRDeS as not just as a description of meaning but also as, “A cipher for the four levels of interpretation.”\textsuperscript{16} His research (eventually) inspired others to investigate the PaRDeS model’s potential to respond to modern interpretative problems.

Although a period of relative silence in the academic literature followed as Scholem’s immense contributions were digested, knowledge of PaRDeS was reflected in the writings of distinguished scholars. As literary studies considerably expanded in the second half of the 20th century, philosophical questions began to be taken up more seriously by scholars. Notions of truth, reality and meaning were endlessly debated back and forth. Various schools of thought arose, and it is surprising, given the relative absence of discussions about PaRDeS, how many theorists from different and competing theories of meaning, interpretation and criticism drew on elements of PaRDeS. It is curious that these multiple appropriations of PaRDeS remained largely unacknowledged at the time. This silence may well be due to the method’s theological origins.

Giorgio Agamben investigates PaRDeS from a philosophical perspective, characterising it as, “the writing of potentialities.”\textsuperscript{17} Agamben’s clear linking of PaRDeS to its potential to counter modern interpretative problems contrasts with other scholars’ use of the method in theory building. ‘Traces’ of PaRDeS can be found in the work of Jacques Derrida, who refers to PaRDeS in the development of his post-modern theory of Deconstruction.\textsuperscript{18} Others have noted the link between Derrida and PaRDeS. Elliot Wolfson describes the link between Jewish hermeneutics, PaRDeS and Derrida’s deconstruction not as a direct influence, but as a “convergence.”\textsuperscript{19} This convergence reflects Derrida’s early cultural exposure to the PaRDeS method, and it is clear that he applied the method in personal ways. Derrida’s familiarity with the rabbinical use of PaRDeS is reflected in his biographical writings when he uses the method to method to describe his feelings about his own circumcision.\textsuperscript{20} Derrida’s Jewish heritage is reflected in his approach to interpretation as well. G. Douglas Atkins notes that, in the work of Derrida (and Geoffrey Hartman also), Hebraic modes of interpretation supplant the usual Greek, or Hellenistic modes that are the bedrock of modern analysis.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} Agamben, "Pardess: The Writing of Potentiality."
\textsuperscript{18} Derrida, \textit{Of Grammatology}.
\textsuperscript{19} Wolfson, "Assaulting the Border: Kabballistic Traces in the Margins of Derrida."
\textsuperscript{20} See, for example, Derrida, \textit{Circumfession: Fifty-nine periods and periphrases written in a sort of internal margin, between Geoffrey Bennington's book and work in preparation} (January 1989 - April 1990).
The PaRDeS model is an effective way of describing narrative structures, and Jerome Levi links the structuralism of Levi-Strauss to Jewish Hermeneutics.\textsuperscript{22} The sustained history of using PaRDeS to explore complex narrative structures finds a natural resonance with Levi-Strauss’s structuralism in its shared concern with story form, but differs substantially in terms of assumptions and interpretative emphasis.

Harold Bloom, a notable scholar, poet and critic, is more direct in acknowledging the influence of Jewish hermeneutics and PaRDeS on the development of his own theories.\textsuperscript{23} Bloom derives a theory of criticism based on Jewish hermeneutics and notes that doing so, “Offers both a model for the process of poetic influence, and maps for the problematic pathways in interpretation.”\textsuperscript{24} Despite the interest in, and appropriations of PaRDeS by these important scholars, as well as acknowledgements of the method’s potential usefulness in modern interpretative contexts, PaRDeS continued to be examined primarily in socio-historic terms.

That said, interest in PaRDeS as an interpretative practice was energised by Michael Fishbane’s applied investigation of ways PaRDeS can be employed to understand the meaning of modern texts.\textsuperscript{25} One of the advantages of using PaRDeS is the method’s acknowledgement of polysemous meaning – multiple readings among plural interpreters. PaRDeS conceptualises “the multiple dynamics of the hermeneutical task, [analyses] them separately and together, and [delineates] their interpretation with teaching and learning.”\textsuperscript{26} Fishbane’s body of work emphasises the Jewish practice of endlessly renewing a text through interpretation, and reminds us of the benefits of using PaRDeS. Each new generation needs its own new allegory if it is to make sense of the text. This ability to reinterpret text in light of contemporary contexts is the essence of Midrash. Eventually, this way of approaching text/film becomes an interpretative stance.\textsuperscript{27} While Fishbane explains the multi-level model in relation to scripture, he also notes that PaRDeS applies to textual study in general, and possibly even “for a broader cultural hermeneutic as well.”\textsuperscript{28}

Scholars from the field of Literary Studies, having travelled alternative theoretical pathways, increasingly turned to more explicit explorations of modern uses of Jewish Hermeneutics in general, and of PaRDeS in particular. In the late 1980s Elise New pointed

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{22}] Jerome M. Levi, “Structuralism and Kabbalah: Sciences of Mysticism or Mystifications of Science?,” \textit{Anthropological Quarterly} 82, no. 4 (2009).
\item[\textsuperscript{23}] See Bloom, \textit{Kabbalah and Criticism}. This work is further illuminated by another work of the same year, \textit{———, A Map of Misreading} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).
\item[\textsuperscript{24}] \textit{———, Kabbalah and Criticism.25}
\item[\textsuperscript{25}] Michael Fishbane, \textit{The Exegetical Imagination on Jewish Thought and Theology} (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).
\item[\textsuperscript{27}] Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash."
\end{itemize}
out that deconstructive criticism was increasingly turning towards the ‘beleaguered’ Hebraism of Talmudic Midrash, “which has offered a model for recent poststructuralist writing,” and which, unlike the Hebraism of the Bible, had been neither “reclaimed not revived.” These tentative suggestions of employing Jewish Hermeneutics to address existing interpretative problems found strong theoretical support in the inspirational writings of Moshe Idel.

Moshe Idel introduces scholars to new territory when he links PaRDeS to 20th century literary theory and practice. Idel draws on decades of scholarly exploration, and legitimises the applied use of PaRDeS. He is instrumental in framing the assumptions and practices of the method in contemporary interpretative language and links the interpretative value of PaRDeS to its Jewish origins.

Idel frames PaRDeS and traditional rabbinical interpretation in the context of the Interpretative Triangle, where he finds a balance between the contributions of the author, the text itself, and the 'exegetical devices' brought to bear on the text (by readers and critics). This characterisation of Jewish exegesis uses contemporary interpretative terms to formalise the relationship between the multiple ‘creators’ of meaning. This points to meaning as a function of (a) the properties of film (as texts) and (b) how films mediate the interactions of filmmakers, film audiences, critics and interpreters. While Scholem treats symbolic language as a kind of cognitive comprehension of hidden realms, Idel is more convincing in his argument for treating symbolic language as a specific hermeneutical technique. Idel’s emphasis on the effects of exegesis reminds us of the interpretative diligence PaRDeS demands of analysts.

Author and Rabbi David A. Cooper, who studied Kabbalah and Hasidism in Jerusalem with several masters (of these traditions) takes a practical approach to the use of PaRDeS. Rabbi Cooper’s interest is in the continuing use of PaRDeS to interpret and comment on sacred Jewish texts. Of particular interest to this research is the way he defines the four levels according to interpretative strategy (Table 2).

30 Idel, Absorbing perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation. ibid. Idel devotes a substantial Appendix to PaRDeS. He characterises PaRDeS as a vertical approach to interpretation, whereas most modern methods are horizontal. See 429-430.
31 Ibid. 432
32 Ibid. 106
33 The Interpretative Triangle conceptualisation of PaRDeS emphasises the different way traditional Jewish hermeneutics treats both authors (filmmakers) and the interpretative process itself. Film interpretation on the other hand, tends to alternatively focus on one point of the triangle only.
34 Idel, Absorbing perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation. 282-284
Cooper’s framing of PaRDeS points to the interpretation of meaning in a structured way, treating each level differently in accordance with its particular characteristics. Cooper’s discussion links interpretation to an integration of the insights of interpretation within general world-views. This suggests that reflections upon outcomes of interpretation can be shared with others, who then bring their own unique insights to the process. This connects the goals of PaRDeS interpretation specifically to achieving interpretative insights through knowledge of all levels of meaning. Further, without knowledge of all four levels, a complete account of meaning (as is possible) cannot be produced.

Several other authors propose PaRDeS as a way of achieving a more complete understanding of a text’s meaning through reconciling mystical and profound reader-responses (Sod) with the other three levels of meaning. Writer and Rabbi Dan Ornstein notes his own experience of seeing a text ‘through the eyes’ of four different groups of students of Jewish mysticism when teaching them the PaRDeS method. He says that this experience (framed by the insights of Michael Fishbane) is convincing evidence of the “tremendous value of this PaRDeS pedagogy.” Ornstein finds practical value in the use of PaRDeS, because the PaRDeS process encourages analysts (and students) to experience the text that they are analysing. This provides them with profound and unique insights into the text’s meaning (which they would otherwise not have had). Ornstein’s practical use of PaRDeS has particular implications for film analysis. The affective nature of the medium virtually ensures viewers have physical and emotional responses to films, leading them to use movies in highly personal ways. These responses to a text (film) arise through the process of interpretation.

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35 Rabbi David A Cooper, God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997). 47.
36 Ornstein, "PaRDeS Pedagogy."
37 Ibid. 161
For Henry Knight, PaRDeS is particularly useful as a process of interpretation since the method accounts for space in and between texts, and takes implicit questions arising from the text seriously.\textsuperscript{38} PaRDeS encourages ‘applied’ readings of cinema by creating an interpretative agenda that asks viewers to apply the meaning of the film to their own lives.

Author and commentator Heather Mendel’s use of PaRDeS concentrates on eliciting the spiritual implications of texts.\textsuperscript{39} Mendel’s analysis also elucidates the nature of the model of meaning as an interpretative process. Mendel acknowledges the potential reader-benefits of engaging with profound meanings (\textit{Sod}), noting the ‘mystery of the text’ in her use of PaRDeS in an interpretation of the story of Eve and the Garden of Eden. She notes that approaching the mystery of a text provides a means of returning to a deeper sense of not just the text, but of the self also.\textsuperscript{40} Using PaRDeS to interpret film meaning can be expected to yield similar viewer-interpreter benefits. The challenge becomes how these deeper insights are communicated.

Ralph Slotten, Emeritus Professor of Religion at Dickinson College, is unique in framing his discussion in terms of reader’s (viewer’s) interpretative positions. Slotten links the unique underlying assumptions and interpretative processes of PaRDeS not just to the model’s potential to respond to interpretative issues, but also to the potential of the PaRDeS model to transform contemporary theories of knowledge and human understanding.\textsuperscript{41} Slotten proposes PaRDeS as a ‘reconciling mode’ that overcomes the usual limitations of either exoteric (\textit{Peshat}) or esoteric (\textit{Sod}) modes of apprehension. Most contemporary methods of interpretation favour one or the other of these. This is problematic, for each mode rejects the validity of interpretations resulting from the other, resulting in incomplete accounts of meaning in both instances. PaRDeS, on the other hand, links the ‘competing’ exoteric and esoteric modes.

Slotten suggests the linking of exoteric (\textit{Peshat}) and esoteric (\textit{Sod}) meanings that are the foundation of the PaRDeS model has consequences not just for interpretation, but also for a broader reformation of modern conceptualisations of knowledge, meaning and interpretation. Slotten concludes that the PaRDeS model,

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Ralph Slotten, "Exoteric and Esoteric Modes of Apprehension," \textit{Sociological Analysis} 38, no. 3 (1977).
May also have philosophical, theological, or metaphysical implications of considerable subtlety, which belie appearances because PaRDeS allows for an understanding of gnosis in relation to a spectrum of philosophical, existential, cultural, and – not least – sociological expressions.42

This ‘gnosis’ or knowledge of a text or film is incorporated within an individual’s world-view, and is used by them in future interpretations of other texts and films. The notion of self-knowledge as a reward of interpretation has driven the adoption of PaRDeS for use in other fields.

Mordechai Rotenberg has been studying and researching the Judeo-Christian impact on Western social sciences since the early 1970’s. Rotenberg uses the PaRDeS model as, “a ‘therapeutic bridge between the rational-material and the irrational-mystic worlds.’”43 (This is similar to Slotten’s appreciation of the benefits of the PaRDeS reconciliation of exoteric (Peshat) and esoteric (Sod) modes of apprehension). In using PaRDeS to treat patients, Rotenberg’s successful adaptation points to the potential of PaRDeS to bridge similarly disparate meanings – ‘rational’ (Peshat) and ‘irrational’ (Sod) levels – of film narratives.

Finally, in an example that demonstrates the universal, interdisciplinary appeal of PaRDeS, Jean Alisse proposes PaRDeS as a criterion for evaluating scientific theories of increasing complexity.44 The benefits Rotenberg and Alisse respectively find in their different uses of PaRDeS suggest the model has the potential to be successfully adapted for use in another modern context – film interpretation.

Academic scholarship of PaRDeS has generally confined itself to either the history and origins of PaRDeS (as in the case of Caplan45 and Scholem46), or in the parallels and links between the system and broader hermeneutical concepts, including literary interpretation (as with Idel,47 Bloom,48 Ornstein49 and Fishbane.)50 Using PaRDeS in modern narrative contexts as Rotenberg51 and Alisse52 do is the first step in actualising the potential identified by Fishbane, Ornstein and others. This thesis takes another step forward, extending the range of contemporary applications by using PaRDeS to interpret film meaning.

44 Alisse, "To Fathom the world: Ockham's razor or PaRDeS hermeneutics."
45 Caplan, "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Mediaeval Theory of Preaching."
46 Scholem, Origins of the Kabbalah.
47 Idel, Absorbing perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation.
48 Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism.
49 Ornstein, "PaRDeS Pedagogy."
50 Fishbane, "The Teacher and the Hermeneutical Task: A Re-interpretation of Medieval Exegesis."
51 Rotenberg, Dia-logo Therapy: Psychonarration and PaRDeS.
52 Alisse, "To Fathom the world: Ockham's razor or PaRDeS hermeneutics."
Film Interpretation in the 21st Century

Film Studies is a relative newcomer to the field of critical analysis and interpretation. This discussion does not attempt to canvas the broad area of film theory, but instead examines film theory and criticism from the perspective of film meaning and interpretation.

Francesco Cassetti notes that the development of the major film theories post-World War II has been characterised by, “a series of unprecedented phenomena, which would slowly change the structure and the meaning of theory.”53 Film Theory exhibits the hallmarks of a struggle to find explanations of how film works as a medium, how film works as a craft and how film affects, and is received by audiences.

Warren Buckland asserts that three trends have driven serious study of Hollywood cinema: the aesthetic; the interpretative; and the industrial-economic (or media industry studies).54 In essence, Buckland identifies these as existing in a linear relationship, each gradually supplanting the former until Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, “rejected interpretative analysis and instead combined in depth industrial-economic analysis with astute aesthetic analysis.”55 There has been little incorporation of the philosophic discussions that arise in other disciplines when ‘meaning’ is studied.56 Although interpretative analyses are plentiful, few of them develop readings that account for multiple levels of meaning. Rather, the trend has been to specialise, to narrow down the interpretative field of vision.

Areas of interpretative specialisation in cinema critical practice include auteur studies, semiotics, linguistics, psychoanalysis, cognitive science, Marxism, Feminist critique, studies of film style, viewer-response models and cultural discourse models. Criticism rarely applies theory. Agreement between analysts from different theoretical areas is rare, even if they share important commonalities. The lively and sometimes polemical debates between advocates from differing theoretical perspectives characterise film interpretation in the latter half of the 20th century. Despite their professed differences, what many of these interpretative positions share however, is a reliance on studies and theories from other (mostly related)

55 Ibid.
fields. These include poetics, semiotics, linguistics, literary criticism and the cognitive sciences.

The major interpretative practices of film criticism and interpretation are based on theories that are derived from the study of other text forms. Is this the most appropriate way to develop the interpretative practices of cinema? Bruce Isaacs contends that,

Film theory is not adequately equipped to discuss film in affective terms, and that instead it emphasises ways of thinking about film and culture quite removed from the act of film 'spectating' – individually, or perhaps even more crucially, collectively.57

Film interpretation as it stands is basically a synthesis of how other kinds of texts (including poems, novels and paintings) are analysed. Film theories are based on methods that have their genesis in the study of literature, art and poetry. Ultimately, any accurate account of meaning in film will respond to the unique properties of film as a distinct ‘text form’ (medium) in its own right. Furthermore, the most common ways of interpreting films narrow the scope of investigation to suit particular interpretative perspectives. Yet such treatment is based on an unrealistic view of what meaning in film is, and many of these analyses tend to ignore or diminish the philosophical implications (Derash) and psychological realities (Sod) of films.

The French writer and critic Roland Barthes, a noted advocate of structuralism and semiology, asserts a multi-level construction of cinema meaning, although he relies on still images when he does so.58 Barthes claims that films do not convey any significant or obtuse meaning. This is despite noting that such meaning is integral to a film’s existence. Barthes calls for further study into this obtuse meaning, which he himself does not appear to have a clear sense of.

Several other commentators have also specifically addressed ‘levels of meaning’ in film. R. Crumlin is another commentator who links film meaning to art appreciation when he suggests a way of ‘looking at film’ in four different kinds of ways.59 Although Crumlin’s levels are roughly analogous to the PaRDeS schema, his arrangement of meaning differs in both intention and method.

57 Bruce Isaacs, "Film Cool: Towards a New Film Aesthetic" (University of Sydney, 2006).
58 Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Several Eisenstein Stills."
David Bordwell is a prominent advocate of cognitive film theory, the spectator-focused model that dominated the way film meaning was conceptualised and interpreted in the late 20th century. Bordwell’s exploration of film meaning and interpretation is focused on answering the question, “What enables people to produce those linguistic constructs we call film interpretations?” Bordwell frames his answer in terms of the cognitive processes of the film viewer. Making Meaning is a useful and credible text that clearly defines its field of inquiry, and substantiates the importance of film interpretation as a field in its own right.

However, Bordwell’s explanation of what Making Meaning ‘does not do’ suggests the contextual and philosophical distance between cognitive film theory and PaRDeS. After noting that, "Interpretation remains a vast and controversial topic in the humanities," Bordwell observes,

MM does not tackle many of the knotty philosophical problems in the literature. Here is one cluster: Can an interpretation be true or false, valid or invalid? Or are interpretations only plausible or implausible? MM remains agnostic on this issue. [...] Can no interpretation be invalid? Can the text bear an infinity of interpretations? If not, how many interpretations are possible? On what grounds can one justify excluding an interpretation? Once again, MM holds these questions in abeyance.

The cluster of philosophical problems attached to cinema analysis that Bordwell “holds in abeyance” are exactly the kinds of questions PaRDeS analysis seeks answers to. PaRDeS also does precisely what Bordwell describes when he says that to make sense of abstract meaning "one must have categories and concepts, and at least some preliminary sorting of data." Synthesising the results of different interpretative strategies – during the process of analysis – is a feature of PaRDeS. The framework of four levels is a way of organising the interpretative process. PaRDeS is a method that evolved during centuries of its development and use by Jewish philosophers and interpreters grappling with the kinds of questions Bordwell and other cognitive film theorists prefer to avoid.

Bordwell treats film interpretation as a distinct category within film criticism. This is counter-intuitive, for surely the reverse is more likely – that film criticism is a sub-set of film

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60 His views on film meaning and interpretation are synthesised in Bordwell, Making meaning : inference and rhetoric in the interpretation of cinema.
61 ———, “Film Interpretation Revisited.” 93
62 Bordwell uses the acronym ‘MM’ as shorthand for Making Meaning, (The first part of the title of the book).
63 Bordwell, "Film Interpretation Revisited." 94
64 Ibid. 95
interpretation? The film critic is one potential viewer/audience. Is the film critic's interpretation more important than anyone else’s? The treatment of filmmakers by Bordwell and other cognitive film theorists seems to suggest that the judgement of film critics about a film’s ‘meaning’ outweigh the filmmakers’ intentions.

Interpretations based on cognitive models of spectatorship contribute valuable insights to discussions of meaning. They do not, however, adequately account for the creation and development of film meaning. D. N. Rodowick offers a fundamental response and challenge to Bordwell’s scientific attitude to film theory.65 This scientific attitude, Rodowick argues, downplays ethical evaluation, and diminishes the study of sense, meaning and internal investigation. “What we need after theory,” he writes, “is not science, but a renewed dialogue between philosophy and the humanities.”66 ParDeS, a method conceptualised and evolved by Jewish philosophers, and with a history of engagement with alternative ideas (Midrash), is by nature and practice, inclined to renew the dialogue between philosophy and Film Studies. Further, the use of ParDeS in cinema interpretation may well stimulate existing interpretative dialogues in the broader Humanities as well.

For Bordwell and the cognitive film theorists, a film is treated as a virtually independent text. How realistic is this assumption? Films do not create themselves. They arise out of a series of choices made by filmmakers, some of whom treat film as art, and as a vehicle for self-expression. Not all writers or directors consciously seek to develop ‘deep’ levels of meaning in film - but some do. It is counter-intuitive to limit, or devalue the contribution to the development of film meaning by scriptwriters, directors and other filmmakers. Using ParDeS as a model of cinematic levels of meaning reflects a more realistic and accurate account of how film meaning is made, and values equally the contributions made by filmmakers and film viewers.

**ParDeS and the Interpretation & Analysis of Cinema Meaning**

ParDeS is positioned within the field of Film Interpretation as a philosophical hermeneutics method, and is consistent with the ‘New Hermeneutic,’ an approach to interpretation that coordinates different functions of hermeneutics in its own multi-pronged treatment of meaning. In describing the ‘New Hermeneutic,’ Elisabeth Malbon links interpretation to textual function, as well as the theological origins of hermeneutics:

66 Ibid. 100
Hermeneutics as speaking (or proclamation) moves towards philosophy (or theology). Hermeneutics as commentary (or explanation) aims at methodology […]. Hermeneutics as translation – and this is particularly clear with the new hermeneutic – sets its sights on existential understanding.67

Malbon not only identifies motives of interpretation as shaping the meaning interpreters find, but as defining the process of interpretation itself. The existential understanding she speaks of is usually ignored or given minimal attention in film analyses, since this meaning (analogous to Sod) cannot be scientifically verified. Are hermeneutics methods like PaRDeS an effective way of interpreting films? Consider the following from Shaun Gallagher, offered in support of his advocacy for philosophical hermeneutics, and pointing to how interpretative goals can be defined:

I think that it is better to think of science as using any means possible to explain what there is. And if what there is includes such things that cannot be reduced to computational processes or the sub-personal activation of neurons, or cannot be quantified, or objectified without loss — such things that nonetheless have meaning for human life, and that therefore fall into the province of hermeneutics — then to turn away from them and to deny their actuality is in fact being unscientific.68

In other words, a truly scientific approach to film interpretation aims to explain what viewers find meaningful (and why), including meaning that is difficult to describe in scientific terms. That PaRDeS is motivated to unearth and integrate profound, hidden and ‘secret’ meanings (Sod), and has a tested structure for doing so, represents a radical departure from usual interpretations of film, and emphasizes the originality of the new PaRDeS film method that this thesis produces.

The PaRDeS Interpretative Process

PaRDeS interpretation develops a unique approach to film interpretation. Film affects audiences on multiple levels. Viewers simultaneously respond to a film’s narrative content (Peshat) in affective and sometimes visceral ways. Viewers recognise that this narrative

content includes cinematic clues (Remez) to other kinds of meaning. When these hints in the film are perceived, viewers develop a moral and philosophical engagement with the film (Derash), which they may respond to in a variety of conscious and subconscious ways (Sod). The fact that films make meaning in multiple ways suggests that multiple interpretative modes are necessary to find and describe these different kinds of meaning. PaRDeS is unique in synthesising these multiple levels of interpretation of cinematic meaning within a single interpretative effort.

In the PaRDeS system, although meaning is made simultaneously on multiple levels, the interpretation of that meaning begins with just one, the ‘literal’ or ‘plain’ meaning, of the first level of Peshat. It is through the story and audio-visual content of a film (Peshat) that other levels of meaning are established. Different ways of doing so include the use of allegories, references to other texts, films and other sources of ideas (Remez), as well as cultural, sociological and ideological concepts (Derash). Understanding the true nature of the Peshat ‘simple’ meaning of a film means analysts can accurately gauge the nature and extent of other kinds of meaning.

Boundaries between film allegories, other kinds of Remez meanings, and film as commentary (Derash) meanings overlap. The simplest way of characterising the difference between the two levels is to treat Remez meanings as explicit, while Derash meanings are implicit. Examining Remez meanings points to potential interpretations of deeper meaning (Derash). This is due to the activities of the viewer. It is the viewers’ active search for ‘deeper meaning’ in the film, stimulated by a filmmakers’ cinematic expression (Peshat and Remez), that co-creates (with filmmakers) a film’s ‘significant’ meaning (Derash).

In a similar way to the Rabbis who made sense of biblical narrative by using contemporary sources and texts, filmmakers and interpreters make sense of narrative and story (Peshat) by referring to other sources (Midrash). Filmmakers communicate their insights and ideas to audiences using a complex arrangement of the cinematic properties of the medium of film. Whether or not, and how these cinematic insights are interpreted (by viewers, critics and film analysts) in ways that evoke the filmmakers’ intentions (or not) is explored in Derash (‘significant’) interpretations of film as both commentary and philosophy.

Finally, viewers respond in multiple ways to these film commentaries (Derash/Midrash). Filmmakers do use film as a forum to cinematically express profound ideas (Derash), and it is they who provide the cinematic stimuli (Peshat and Remez) for

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69 In traditional PaRDeS terms, this is colloquially termed, ‘The Primacy of Peshat.’
70 And who continue to do so, as evidenced in Cooper, God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism. And New, "Pharaoh's Birthstool: Deconstruction and Midrash.”
71 For examples that are specific to filmmakers analysed in this thesis using the PaRDeS method include, Mark Rowlands, The Philosopher at the End of the Universe: Philosophy Explained through Science Fiction Films.
viewers to find that a significant connection to the film (*Derash*). Ultimately, however, it is
viewers’ responses that ‘make’ films meaningful (*Sod*).

*Using PaRDeS to Ask Questions about Film Meaning*

PaRDeS interpretation uses different interpretative strategies to unlock four levels of
meaning in a film. Structuring questions within a framework of different kinds of meaning
initiates an interpretative process that unfolds differently for the respective levels of PaRDeS.
This different set of questions about film meaning that PaRDeS interpretation produces also
stimulates alternative interpretative pathways of investigation into individual films. The
answers to the initial set of questions guides each (respective) film analysis in unique
directions.

The thesis ultimately develops different sets of questions for each film. Each film
analysis begins with a response to the following questions, framed according to the level of
meaning being investigated.

At the ‘simple’ level of *Peshat* the following questions are used as a way of
‘initialising’ the respective film interpretations: What does story content mean? How are
images and sounds used to tell the story? How does film structure and genre tell the story? Do
they create expectations that are fulfilled or subverted? Are there any clues or references in
the film that suggest further meaning?

Responding to allusions to other sources is a feature of *Remez* interpretation. The
analyses this thesis produces uses the following questions as an entry point into this explicitly
indicated meaning: Are earlier sources, be they films, literature, television shows, cultural
icons and so forth, used to indicate another level of meaning? Is this meaning a ‘solo’
statement or does it serve the overall thematic statement of the film or filmmakers? Is there
any evidence of allegory in the film’s narrative or audio-visual content? Are symbols used in
the film? If so are they general, such as a yellow light (as a allusion to the amber warning on
traffic lights) serving as a warning to a character, or are they mythic symbols – used to
suggest another narrative, such as a cross representing Christ, and thus referring some viewers
to a religious allegory. If mythic or archetypal narratives are suggested (*Remez*), then a search
for significant, philosophical or ideological meaning (*Derash*) is indicated. Recognition of
mythic symbolism evokes a different way of connecting to the film – through viewers’
personal responses (*Sod*) to familiar (mythic or archetypal) narratives.

Investigating the third level of Derash aligns itself with implied meanings that are suggested by the narrative content of a film (Peshat). The questions this thesis uses as a starting point for this level of inquiry are: Is there evidence of ideological content in the film? Are there recurring motifs or symbols in the film’s imagery, audio, dialogue or story content? What do they mean? Are they co-ordinated in any way? How do audiences and critics respond to the film? Has this response changed over time? What is the film’s ‘status’ within its own canon, as well as its position as a cultural product/icon? Have the discussions around the film affected or changed its meaning over time, and in what ways? What is the influence of the film on culture in general and filmmaking and film viewing in particular? What, if anything, do filmmakers say about their own cinematic intentions?

The ‘hidden’ and profound meanings of Sod are examined after the meanings of the other three levels are established. This is due to the speculative nature of Sod. The potential for bias when analysts infect interpretation with their own ideological and philosophical positions is minimised when personalised responses (Sod) are tested against an already established framework of cinematic meaning (Peshat-Remez-Derash). The questions that relate to interpretations of ‘secret’ or ‘hidden’ Sod are: What does the film content mean to me? Does it connect to my personal experience, and in what ways? Is there any evidence (such as filmmaker comments) of deliberately inserted hidden meaning(s)?

Steps in a PaRDeS Approach to Cinema Interpretation

Given that PaRDeS has not previously been used as a method of film investigation, it is important to establish specific ways this thesis will use the method to interpret the five films. The actual process of interpretation is itself quite organic, since it is driven by the questions that evolve as analysis takes place. The following steps of PaRDeS interpretation are offered as a guide to other analysts, and this process was used in the PaRDeS examination of films in this thesis.

Step 1  Prior to Watching the Film

- Note the viewing context of the film.
- Note own prior knowledge of the film, including information from reviews, interviews and word-of-mouth.
- Identify any pre-existing ideas held about what this film means
Step 2 ‘First Response’

- Watch the film, (Recommend taking no notes).
- After viewing the film, summarise the story as remembered. Write a response to the film, that records first impressions about what the film means. Start building ‘Question Sets’ based on the 4 levels of PaRDeS.
- Watch film again, answering questions, and using responses as a basis for developing further questions. Make a note of any ‘inconsistencies’ present in the film.
- Make a note of any examples of filmmakers using repetition in image, sound or dialogue. Make a note of any intertextual references recognised. Note genre, narrative structure. Compare opening and closing scene sequences.

Step 3 Research Phase

- Research the production of the film: Who did what? Who are the main filmmakers that contribute to important elements of meaning? What do they have to say about their filmmaking choices and intentions?
- Review the critical and scholarly response to the film. What are the major interpretative positions? Review the comments (if any) of other filmmakers about the film.
- Summarise the reception of the film.

Step 4 Establishing Boundaries of Midrash (Commentary & Interpretation)

- The film is viewed again, but in the context of responding to the questions built up by the questioning of film meaning as a synthesis of the four levels.
- Support for other interpretations is sought.
- A more detailed examination of implicit (Derash) and explicit (Remez) cinematic content.
- Are there readings of the film that other interpretations have not identified?
- Examine the socio-cultural influence/impact of the film.
- What evidence is there of filmmaker commentary? Or commentary by others?
- How developed is thematic content?
- Does the film suggest ideological or philosophical content?

Step 5 Responding to Interpretative Questions

- These questions are different for each film. This thesis will use the analyses of the 5 films to examine the general kinds of questions that evolve when PaRDeS is used to interpret film meaning, and more specifically explicate the process of interpretation.
Step 6  Responding to own Interpretation of Film

- Casting a critical eye on own interpretation, seeking to recognise own potential biases and misinterpretations.
- Using a personal understanding of the film as the basis of a dialogic position from which to respond to existing interpretations.

Step 7  Making Choices about Meaning and Interpretation

- How valid are personal responses to film (Sod)?
- Are any of the interpretations invalid or misguided?
- Meaning begins with choices made by filmmakers, evolves as a consequence of choices made by viewers, and continues to evolve as a result of the interpretative activities of critics and analysts. What choices do interpreters make about the meaning of the film, and how are those choices justified?

The multi-level arrangement of meaning underpins the intuitive grasp most people have of PaRDeS. The PaRDeS interpretative process produces accurate and original analyses that are easily communicated to, and understood, even by those unfamiliar with the method. Yet, although PaRDeS frames meaning in terms of ‘levels,’ the results of this thesis demonstrate that the activity of interpretation is not a prescriptive process. Analysts do not ‘categorise’ meaning descriptions according to the four levels, but instead investigate meaning in four different ways in recognition of the existence of these levels.

The PaRDeS process of film interpretation is responsive to the unique interpretative questions that arise in response to the analysis of individual films, and to questions of meaning that are suggested during the interpretative process. Unique and original analyses are produced. In this sense, PaRDeS interpretation is ‘fluid’ in how it responds to, and asks questions of films in different ways for each respective analysis.

The remainder of this thesis is devoted to demonstrating how PaRDeS is able to unpack the dense and complex meanings of film, and in doing so, restores a sense of what is meaningful to a 21st century treatment of film meaning. Original insights are inevitably produced as a consequence of this unique conceptualisation of cinematic meaning, for PaRDeS investigates kinds of meaning that other methods do not. The use of PaRDeS in this thesis yields fresh perspectives on films such as Taxi Driver and The Matrix, each of which have been extensively analysed. The use of PaRDeS in film analysis in this thesis also offers new insights into the general nature of cinema meaning.

The unique framing of film meaning according to four different kinds of meaning produces comprehensive and accurate interpretations of films. Using PaRDeS to analyse films has not been done before, and this first step into new interpretative territory is explored in multiple cinematic arenas in the remainder of this thesis.
Chapter 3 THE FILMS & EXPECTATIONS OF MEANING

What are ‘expectations of meaning,’ and why might an investigation of these elucidate the PaRDeS analyses developed in this thesis? Viewers receive information about films from a variety of sources, prior to the actual viewing of a film. The body of knowledge that a viewer brings with them to the viewing experience affects their interpretations of the meaning of films in various ways. Although examinations of ‘expectations of meaning’ are pragmatic in that they elucidate the actual experience of film spectatorship, they are rarely performed, and certainly not in the context of multiple meanings. Using PaRDeS responds to both an interpretative and a critical gap. Its use in this thesis for the first time as a mode of cinematic interpretation offers an alternative point from which analyses of film meaning commence.

This chapter, in addition to introducing the films’ respective story narratives (Peshat), responds to the framework of the PaRDeS model in an interpretative process that is initiated by a consideration of the ‘effects’ of viewers’ expectations of a film’s meaning. PaRDeS establishes an alternative perspective to existing methods and offers a new perspective on the initiation of cinematic meaning creation by viewers.

The PaRDeS analysis of viewers’ expectations of meaning (which include a pre-existing understanding of the Classical Hollywood 3-Act narrative structure, and genre expectations) illuminates contemporary notions of both structure and genre. The PaRDeS analyses of this chapter also identify important ways in which filmmakers coordinate their understanding of viewers’ expectations with their (respective) film styles in their own creation of film meaning.

This thesis uses PaRDeS to interpret five films: Taxi Driver (Martin Scorsese, 1976), a classic film that continues to attract interpretative interest; Black Swan (Darren Aronofsky, 2010); The Matrix (Larry Wachowski, Andy Wachowski, 1999); Clueless (Amy Heckerling, 1995); and Josie and the Pussycats (Harry Elfont, Deborah Kaplan, 2001). This chapter begins with a brief discussion of Hollywood narratives, followed by film synopses. The following discussion then examines how genre creates expectations about film meaning prior to viewing in the context of the PaRDeS framework of multiple levels of meaning.

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Film Synopses

The following discussion of the various films introduces readers to the different cinematic narratives used in the various PaRDeS investigations of this thesis. These synopses constitute the foundation of plot (Peshat) of the five thesis films.

Taxi Driver

*Taxi Driver* was made during the hot New York summer of 1975. Director Martin Scorsese and his cast and crew were given just two months to shoot the film on the relatively small budget of $2 million. Scorsese, scriptwriter Paul Schrader and lead actor Robert De Niro were 'equally zealous' in their approach to *Taxi Driver*. The first edit of the film (edited according to Schrader's script) was considered unacceptable, and the film was re-edited many times in a short period. Even releasing the film was problematic, with US censors deeming the film as exploitative, and glorifying violence (essentially problems with the ‘visual’ Peshat). Scorsese de-saturated the colour, creating a less vivid visual rendering of violence on screen that enhances the overall surreal style of the film. *Taxi Driver* was approved and given a mainstream release in February 1976.

The film largely reflects the social concerns of the period (a post-Vietnam America tainted by the Watergate scandal), and is also a commentary on New York itself, and the malaise of American society in general (*Midrash*). *Taxi Driver* is first and foremost however, the cinematic narrative of a lonely man (Peshat).

(Synopsis) Night-time New York cab driver, Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro), is disgusted at the ‘scum’ he sees on the streets, and there is no doubting this ignorant man’s sincere desire to ‘clean up the streets.’ Travis makes his feelings clear in a voice-over that continues throughout the remainder of the film. Travis meets an attractive blonde, Betsy (Cybil Shepherd), a campaign worker for local politician Charles Palantine. Travis takes her on a date, and although Betsy at first likes Travis, she is disgusted when he takes her to a ‘porno theatre.’ Bickle’s faith in politician Palantine is shaken when he actually meets the man, who reveals himself to be corrupt.

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2 Extended plot summaries are provided in Appendix One
Bickle’s attentions turn to child prostitute Iris (Jodie Foster), and he develops an urge to ‘save’ the young runaway from her pimp, Sport (Harvey Keitel). Travis goes on a gun-buying spree, and, back in his dingy apartment, mimics the heroes from old Hollywood Western films as he practices drawing his gun, and shooting his adversaries, watching himself in the mirror and declaring, “You talkin’ to me?” before concluding, “Well I’m the only one here.” Travis cuts his hair in a Mohawk, arms himself and when his attempt to assassinate Palantine fails, Travis goes to the apartment where Iris is working. Travis kills Sport and his associates. The police burst into the room where Travis is ‘protecting’ a terrified Iris, and he mimics shooting himself in the head.

_Taxi Driver_ closes with shots of Travis’s apartment, papered with newspaper clippings and letters that testify to his heroism. Bickle is behind the wheel of his taxi. Betsy steps into the car, and although she expresses her admiration for Travis, he refuses both her money and her overtures. Travis is alone in the cab – and looks at the audience through the rear-vision mirror one last time.

**Black Swan**

Darren Aronofsky is a New York filmmaker who (as Scorsese did two decades earlier) immersed himself in academic film studies, making short films and writing the occasional movie review. Aronofsky confounded many viewers with _Pi_, the story of a mathematician’s perplexing journey negotiated by complex kabbalistic symbolism. His next film, _Requiem for a Dream_, reassured critics and viewers with a simpler narrative. Aronofsky’s next film, _The Wrestler_, revived the career of lead actor Mickey Rourke, and cemented Aronofsky’s reputation as a filmmaker.

Darren Aronofsky had the idea for _Black Swan_ at least ten years before he made the film, and he discussed it with key players including Natalie Portman and cinematographer Matthew Libatique for years. The budget was ultimately cut from $25 million to $15 million, and _Black Swan_ was a project done out of love, rather than for financial reward. The film achieved almost immediate critical and commercial success, culminating in its recognition at the Academy Awards® with a Best Actress Oscar for Natalie Portman.

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5 ———, "Requiem for a Dream," (Artisan Entertainment, 2000).
(Synopsis) *Black Swan* is a character study of young New York ballet dancer, Nina (Natalie Portman), and charts her psychological deterioration in her quest to produce the perfect twin performance of Odette/Odile in the Company Ballet’s production of *Swan Lake*. Repressed and frigid, tightly controlled by her Mother (Barbara Hershey) and a cold and distant Ballet Director, Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassell), Nina is friendless and obsessive. When Principal Dancer Beth (Winona Ryder) is retired from not only the Company, but also Leroy’s bed, both roles become open. Nina is determined to win the role of the Swan Queen, and disturbed when Lily (Mila Kunis) joins the Company. Lily dances with sensual abandon, a stark contrast to Nina’s own tightly controlled dancing.

Nina wins the role of Swan Queen, although Leroy warns the young perfectionist of his own doubts about her ability to embody the darkness of the Black Swan in her performance. Nina’s quest to perfect the dual role of White Swan/Black Swan leads her into increasingly precarious sexual and psychological explorations, graphically rendered on screen by Aronofsky. The film closes with the Opening Night performance of *Swan Lake*, where Nina’s pathological obsession with perfection culminates in the death of the Swan Queen at the end of the ballet, and the possible death of Nina as well.

*The Matrix*

Chicago siblings Andy and Larry Wachowski first conceived of *The Matrix* as a comic book, then evolved the idea into a film. In *The Making of the Matrix* they point to their fondness for kung fu movies and Japanese anime, Phillip K. Dick, John Foo movies, science fiction books and the nature of reality. They use the term ‘cyberpunk,’ noting that,

The whole idea of cyberpunk is that it is a great way to create a sense of alienation and disconnection and alternate worlds, being caught in this sort of quasi-dream, quasi-conscious states.

It is ironic that cyberpunk, as it was conceived by William Gibson and expressed in his novel *Neuromancer*, is itself a literary response to films. ‘Cyberpunk’ reflects a nihilistic disaffection with the world, expressed in futuristic narratives of technological struggle.

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8 The detailed storyboards the brothers prepared for *The Matrix* are written as a graphic novel. See Larry and Andy Wachowsk Wachowski, Spencer Lamm and Geof Darrow, *The Art of The Matrix* (Newmarket Press, 2000).


10 Ibid.
The Wachowski brothers develop a complex narrative using the comparatively simple story form of a Hollywood science-fiction/action film. The filmmakers effectively coordinate the narrative and audio-visual story elements of *The Matrix (Peshat)* to cinematically express multiple philosophical, religious and post-modern allusions (*Remez*) in the filmic development of their own commentary (*Derash*).

(Synopsis) Thomas A. Anderson (Keanu Reeves) is a discontented office worker by day and computer hacker by night. As his hacker alter-ego, Neo, he meets Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) and is drawn into the orbit of the legendary Morpheus (Lawrence Fishburne). Morpheus informs Neo that the ‘real world’ is an illusion – it is not 1999 but closer to 2199. A battle between computers and people led the humans to ‘torch’ the sky in an effort to deny the computers the solar power they relied on. The (apparently real) world that Neo inhabits as Thomas A. Anderson is a product of his mind, created by a programme inserted in human brains by computers. Meanwhile, billions of human bodies are sleeping in the biogrid, producing electricity for the machines. Zion, the last human city, lies deep in the bowels of the earth, a beacon of hope for the few free humans. Morpheus gives Neo a choice – to continue in the illusory world of the Matrix as Thomas A. Anderson, or join Morpheus and his crew aboard the spaceship, *The Nebuchadnezzar* and fight to free humankind from their bondage.

Neo joins Morpheus, and meets the cynical Cypher (Joe Pantoiliano). Neo acquires various skills through the uploading of computer programmes into his brain, and joins the struggle. Morpheus and Trinity are convinced Neo is ‘The One,’ in fulfilment of a prophecy that a man who could fight the computers in their own language of The Matrix Construct (the fake ‘real world’) will appear. They take Neo to meet the Oracle (Gloria Foster), who tells Neo that he is not ‘The One.’ Cypher betrays Morpheus, who is captured by Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving), an embodied sentient computer programme with phenomenal powers, and whom no human has ever defeated in battle.

Neo and Trinity rescue Morpheus. Neo fights Agent Smith, and despite his own superhuman abilities, is overcome by the Agent and ultimately killed. Neo is restored to life by Trinity’s kiss, as she whispers in his ear that she loves him, and therefore he cannot die – for the Oracle had told Trinity that the man she loves will be ‘The One.’ Neo rises up, defeats Agent Smith in a spectacular display of visually innovative violence, and ascends into the sky. The film closes with the now familiar lines of green computer code trailing down the screen as Neo declares his intention to destroy the entire Matrix Construct. He ascends into the sky.

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Clueless

Amy Heckerling’s Clueless is a light-hearted teen-comedy that makes effective use of popular music in its development of multiple kinds of cinematic meaning. Fifteen years earlier Heckerling’s first film, the cynical ‘Generation-X’ classic, Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982), made a much darker use of its high school setting. In Clueless, Heckerling experiments with a lighter side to teen angst. Heckerling deconstructed the structure of Emma, the novel by Jane Austen, and used the novel’s major plot points as the narrative foundation of Clueless.

The distinctive, believable teenage voice-over of Cher (Alicia Silverstone) can be attributed to Heckerling’s hours of frequenting high schools and other places where teenagers congregate – and paying close attention to what she saw and heard. Made on a relatively small budget of $US15 million, Clueless manages to exude an aura of wealth and privilege.

(Synopsis) Clueless opens with a musical montage that establishes a juxtaposition of image and voice-over that continues throughout the film. Cher Horowitz (Alicia Silverstone) is a wealthy Beverly Hills teenager, kind-hearted, vain and ‘clueless.’ With best friend Dioone (Stacey Dash), Cher is queen of the social hierarchy at Bronsen Alcott High School. Other than the occasional squabble with stepbrother Josh (Paul Rudd), Cher’s is an easy life dominated by fashion, shopping and socializing.

Cher is kind-hearted and sincere in her efforts to improve the lives of others by giving them makeovers. However, she is also vain and ignorant, as reflected in her obsession with appearances. When new girl Tai’s (Brittany Murphy) apparent ‘cluelessness’ about life at her new school appeals to Cher’s desire to ‘improve the lives of others,’ she is determined to give Tai a makeover – Cher’s way of ‘maintaining control in a world of chaos.’ This makeover sets ups a series of complicating incidents, as Tai usurps Cher’s place in the school social hierarchy, and then becomes interested in Cher’s step-brother Josh.

Cher has an epiphany, realizing she is in love with Josh. She is determined to redeem her former shallowness by turning her urge to improve others instead to herself. Cher undertakes the ultimate makeover – of her own soul. Cher is ultimately redeemed, Tai returns to a more authentic version of herself, and the film ends with a wedding between two teachers who Cher has brought together, and a kiss between Cher and Josh.

13 Amy Heckerling discusses the production of Clueless in Amy Heckerling, "Harold Lloyd Seminars of the American Film Institute," (AFI, 1995).
The genesis of the production of *Josie and the Pussycats* lies in the commercial concerns of the holders of the copyright to the original comic books the film’s title refers to. The producing partners and principals of Riverdale Productions (the film and television arm of *Archie* Comics) presented the idea for a film based on the *Archie* comic book spinoff, *Josie and the Pussycats* film to Universal.\(^{14}\) The experienced Marc Platt joined Grimes and DeRosa-Grund as co-producer, and Deborah Kaplan and Harry Elfont, were commissioned to write the screenplay and direct the film.

(Synopsis) Mega Records music producer Wyatt (Alan Cumming) is disturbed when members of the popular boy band, *Du Jour*, notice that there are subliminal messages planted in their songs. After leaving the band to a fiery airplane death, Wyatt parachutes into Riverdale, where he stumbles across members of a local garage band, The Pussycats. He signs the three members, Josie (Rachael Leigh Cook), Valerie (Rosario Dawson) and Melody (Tara Reid) to a record deal, even though he hasn’t heard their music, a punk-rock pop brand of teenage angst.

The band meets Mega Records CEO, Fiona (Parker Posey). She moulds the girls’ image and music. Unknown to the Pussycats, Mega Records (in collusion with the US Government) are layering subliminal messages in their songs. These subliminal messages are designed to encourage teenagers to buy various products. The visual presence of well-known multi-national brands in every scene goes unremarked by the characters. After the girls are separated, each deals with various antagonists.

The film closes with a Pussycats live performance where, unknown to the feuding band members, the new headphone set being launched (by Mega Records) is designed to deliver subliminal selling messages more efficiently to teenagers’ brains. Josie, Valerie and Melody overcome their differences, and together expose Mega Record executives Fiona and Wyatt. However, even as the Pussycats take to the stage, and Josie urges the audience to ‘think for yourself,’ the conspiracy continues, as the agents of the US Government reveal they have found a more effective way of controlling teenagers – by planting subliminal messages in films.

Implications of Hollywood Narrative Structures

Story in film “is an instrument by which you create [epiphanies] at will, the phenomenon known as aesthetic emotion.”15 Narrative structures organise stories into forms that resonate with readers and viewers. “Narratives are structures of events that are themselves meaningful.”16 The PaRDeS Model’s traditional interpretative aim of responding to the spectrum of meaning accounts for this new PaRDeS film method’s pragmatic engagement with ‘meaningful’ cinematic narratives.

PaRDeS is not just a model of the meaning of stories, but a description of narrative structures that links narrative (Peshat) to highly personal, individual experiences (Sod). Integrating these kinds of cinematic responses within film interpretations is a unique feature of the PaRDeS model, and establishes the investigation of a more broadly defined spectrum of cinematic meaning.

Canadian philosopher G.B. Madison connects the essence of the experience of being human with the telling of stories when he explains why contemporary explanations of narrative and story structure is important:

Ever since humans have been humans, they have sat around the fire telling and listening to stories about themselves and other selves – many of which were fictional selves, gods, demons, demigods, heroes, and other deified humans. It is only natural, therefore, that philosophy, that supremely human undertaking, should from its inception have concerned itself with the question of what constitutes the humanness of human beings.17

In Madison’s terms of narrative description, PaRDeS (as a philosophical hermeneutic)18 is a way of describing both the structure of narratives, and their effects on ‘human beings.’ The PaRDeS model is a powerful interpretative tool because it responds to the actual process, and human experience of storytelling. The different interpretative strategies PaRDeS coordinates are synthesised through their common goal of realistically reflecting the importance of narrative (Peshat) to human ‘experiences’ of meaning (Sod).

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15 McKee, Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting. 111. (Note: McKee’s italics).
16 George M Wilson, Seeing Fictions in Film: The Epistemology of Movies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 14 Specifically, how filmmakers choose to communicate via narrative structures and forms (Peshat) is itself meaningful (Sod).
18 Recall from Chapter 2, that in the language of contemporary film interpretation, PaRDeS can be broadly categorised as representative of the ‘New Hermeneutic’ of the 21st century; and as an interpretative summation of Jewish philosophy, the method can, in cinematic terms, be described as a ‘Philosophical Film Hermeneutics.’
Whereas PaRDeS approaches narrative through an exploration of story depth, the common contemporary way of treating structure is in a linear fashion, according to ‘Acts’ and time codes.\(^\text{19}\) The structure of Hollywood films represents a narrative code understood by both filmmakers and film audiences. Filmmakers, who in other ways are blessed with multiple means of expression, are still restricted by ‘acceptable’ viewing times. This limitation of how long Hollywood filmmakers have to tell their stories partly explains the dominance of the 3-Act model. This structuring of story goes back (again) to Aristotle, the acts being beginning, middle and end. In film this (generally) breaks up the structure of the story into approximately twenty minutes of ‘setting up’ character and action lines; a second act, making up about sixty minutes, where the protagonist and antagonist experience their ‘journeys,’ usually involving complicating incidents; and a final act of roughly twenty minutes that ends in a climax to the story, and the resolution of all character and action lines.\(^\text{20}\)

An important property of narrative is that it exists in both a linear and a circular form that links the past, present and future.\(^\text{21}\) The circular nature of narrative means that some viewers will connect the ending of a film to its beginning, and in doing so, these viewers may potentially re-examine earlier narrative events. These viewers may also question the meanings they had earlier conferred on the film, and reconfigure their own interpretations (Sod). Further, endings of films suggest new beginnings – new lives.\(^\text{22}\) It is viewers’ knowledge that there is an ending that develops the motivational aspects of cinema, and as the ending of a film approaches, many viewers begin to ‘fill in the gaps’ (Remez) suggested by the impending story conclusion (Peshat). One of the features of the classical structures of Hollywood cinema is a narrative urge towards resolution and unity, to which viewers intuitively respond (Sod).

*The Matrix* is an example of how filmmakers construct meaning using archetypal narrative structures. The narrative emotional and action arc of Neo parallels that of the ‘Hero’s Journey.’\(^\text{23}\) This is an archetypal story structure that breaks down into twelve stages.\(^\text{24}\)

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\(^\text{20}\) See ibid. Also, Vicky Schinkel, "Saturn Returns: An Exploration of Narrative Structure in Film Writing" (Master of Philosophy (Creative Writing), University of Queensland, 2007). *Saturn Returns* (in part) arranges various conceptualisations of cinematic narrative structure in terms of their relationship to Aristotle’s 3-Act structure and Classical Hollywood storytelling.

\(^\text{21}\) An explanation of this property of narrative, which specifically discusses cinematic narratives, is provided by Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters*.


\(^\text{23}\) The ‘Hero’s Journey’ is a term coined by Joseph Campbell. In his examination of myths, fairytales, legends and stories from across cultures and times, he discovered a narrative (storytelling) commonality that he describes in Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

The narrative structure of The Matrix closely conforms to this story structure, and in doing so links the Neo’s journey to universal archetypes (Derash) that resonate with viewers (Sod).

Mythic narratives are potentially powerful ways of structuring film because viewers respond to them in sometimes highly personal ways (Sod). Thomas Elsaesser argues that these kinds of narratives have a spiritual function (analogous to Sod), noting that mythic narratives:

Have the cultural or religious function [to] represent the origins of the universe, and our place and purpose within it: narrative as one of the “interfaces” between “man” and “his” God(s).25

When filmmakers use mythic structures and stories they are encouraging each viewer to find a connection to the narrative through their own relationship to culture (Derash), but also to ‘God’ – even if it is through their rejection of God’s existence (Sod). The Matrix was released during the Easter period (Remez), which potentially refers audiences to the underlying archetypal narrative of death and resurrection (Derash).

The Wachowskis demonstrate the benefits of structuring story according to pre-existing structures of storytelling. Consider now, the consequences when filmmakers do not adequately develop cinematic narratives. The first act of Josie and the Pussycats is promising. However, the ‘structural’ expectation viewers have of complicating incidents to flesh out the second act (and potentially deepening the film’s ‘significance’) is not fulfilled by the filmmakers’ narrative arrangement of events. The pacing and rhythm of the film – not just the music but how the film itself is structured – is disjointed and not always internally consistent (the story contradicts itself, or advances story development without benefit of action or exposition). The middle of the film fails to use complicating incidents and plot points. Instead, montages are used that do little to advance the plot, and at times actually suspend the narrative. The cumulative effect of these structural inadequacies is to alienate audiences.

Viewers intuitively recognise, and respond to this 3-Act structure of storytelling.26 The expectation of narrative progression viewers’ have (Remez) intersects with the meaning they begin to attribute to films prior to viewing, based on a film’s genre.

26 Although subversions of the temporal arrangement of that structure feature in the Hollywood canon (such as Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino (2000), these (for the most part) simply rearrange the order of the ‘pieces’ of the story – the elements of the 3-Act arrangement of narrative structure are still included. The most frequent ‘missing’ story element is ‘resolution,’ and is reflected in ambiguous endings.
Implications of Film Genre

Genre is an important way that filmmakers and audiences use a shared understanding to ‘together’ create cinema meaning. Robert McKee defines genre as a way of classifying films according to shared characteristics, noting, “Aristotle gave us the first genres by dividing dramas according to the value-charge of their ending versus their story design.” Aristotle’s four basic genres – Simple Tragic, Simple Fortunate, Complex Tragic and Complex Fortunate – have since been considerably expanded. Genre can mean more than just a way of classifying films however. Steve Neale explains genre function in terms of viewer expectations, pointing to the “specific systems of expectation and hypothesis” of viewers that “provide spectators with a means of recognition and understanding.” The process of understanding the meaning of a film begins before viewers even see a film, due to viewers’ expectations about character, action and story (Peshat) that are implied by a film’s genre (Remez). Filmmakers too rely on audiences’ understanding of genre, which they (filmmakers) can exploit, manipulate or subvert. Genre is restrictive in the sense that a shared understanding of genre “imposes conventions on story design, [and the] choice of genre sharply determines and limits what’s possible within a story.”

The bulk of genre analysis concentrates on sorting films into different categories, or proving a film is or is not a specific genre (or combination of genres). Robert Allen links genre theory to, “the way in which a work may be considered to belong to a class of related works,” and most analyses assess genre in comparison to other films. PaRDeS treats genre in terms of its effects on meaning rather than as a classification scheme. Doing so provides different insights into subtle ways genre affects the cinematic meaning that both filmmakers and viewers make – and mediate via the film.

What kinds of genre expectations contribute to the meaning of each of the five films? How do filmmakers use genre expectations and what are the effects on the meanings viewers make? Using PaRDeS to investigate genre (according to how filmmakers and viewers negotiate different kinds of meaning) offers a significantly expanded interpretative range to that which is usually found in analyses produced by contemporary methods.

27 McKee, Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting, 79
28 Neale, "Questions of Genre." 158
29 McKee, Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting, 86
Martin Scorsese reflects his interest in, and understanding of European cinema in both the thematic content and cinematic style of *Taxi Driver*. The darkness of the subject matter, the novel use of camera and editing, and the articulation of Paul Schrader’s script of alienation and despair coupled with Scorsese’s expressionistic film style inevitably led to genre descriptions of *Taxi Driver* as *film noir* (dark cinema). The theme, style and content of film noir support expectations of a different form of Hollywood filmmaking than the mid-1970’s audiences of Hollywood films usually viewed in mainstream cinemas. In his mid-20’s at the time of filming, Scorsese was not only reflecting a new kind of Hollywood cinema influenced by European directors like Bresson, Dresser and others, but a filmic response to ‘Old Hollywood’ (*Midrash*).

Although the script is not explicitly written as film noir, there is no doubting Schrader’s understanding of that film style. Even so, it is Scorsese’s expressionistic film style that links *Taxi Driver* to the genre of film noir, rather than Schrader’s script. Scorsese and Schrader do however ‘collude’ in their subversion of the staple American genre of the ‘Western.’ The invocation of the Hollywood Western in *Taxi Driver* subsequently evokes memories of the ‘Male American Hero.’ This confers certain character attributes on Travis Bickle, essentially the implication that as the protagonist, Bickle is ‘heroic.’ At the beginning of the film, many viewers empathise with Travis, and trust his narrative point-of-view. This initial empathy (*Sod*) is later tested by his irrational, graphically rendered violent actions (narrative and visual *Peshat*).

The complex morality of the film is both an extension of the relatively simple moral framework of many Hollywood Westerns but also a commentary (*Midrash*) on the dualistic framework of good and evil that underpins these films’ narratives. John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) is often cited as an influence on Schrader and Scorsese, and there are certain elements in *Taxi Driver* that parallel Ford's story – his hero, like Travis, is seeking to redeem a young woman who has been 'taken away' from her family.

In *The Searchers* the hero (John Wayne) is on a quest to rescue his niece who has been abducted by Indians. In *Taxi Driver*, Travis is trying to save a child prostitute previously unknown to him (Iris) who has run away from what is probably a sexualised, dysfunctional

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31 Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," *Film Comment* Spring(1972).
32 The appeal of Travis, as portrayed by Robert De Niro, reinforces viewers’ sympathy with his point of view.
33 For an explication on this, and various of features of the Western narrative, see J Carroll, *The Western Dreaming: The Western World is Dying for Want of a Story* (Sydney: Harper-Collins, 2001).
home. The two young women react similarly to their liberation. When each is faced with their violent 'rescue' neither wants to leave with their 'saviour,' and each is appalled at the violence perpetuated in their name.

Viewers familiar with *The Searchers* may perceive this narrative allusion (*Remez*) and the inferred link to themes of violence, purity and redemption (*Derash*). Even if viewers are unfamiliar with *The Searchers*, the tropes and character functions of Hollywood Western Cinema might still lead some viewers to connect *Taxi Driver* to staple Hollywood Westerns. If viewers *do* respond to this part of the filmmakers’ intended meaning, then these viewers are likely to have certain expectations of story events, direction, and how the film will end.

Of course, the main difference is in the actual character and setting of the typical Western hero, as typified by John Wayne in the mid- to late 1800’s in the American West. A crazed, bloodied Travis Bickle in a decrepit New York is certainly a stylistic subversion by Schrader and Scorsese that reflects on social change in the intervening period (*Derash*). Yet the point remains – in terms of story (*Peshat*) and structure, *Taxi Driver* is consistent with the Hollywood Western tropes and conventions (*Remez*). For the literally minded the ending even fulfils the expected ‘happy ending.’ However, the ending of *Taxi Driver* is open to multiple interpretations, and only the literal one (*Peshat*) is a ‘happy ending.’

*Black Swan*

*Black Swan* is usually described (by critics) as a ‘psycho-sexual thriller.’\(^{35}\) The implications of this genre category are that the cinematic narrative is a psychological journey featuring sex (visual *Peshat*). The ‘thriller’ component of the genre description suggests this journey will develop in intensity, and be flavoured with the tension of the unknown. Basically, viewers expect to titillated, challenged and ‘thrilled.’

The sexual content of the film reinforces the interpretative notion of subjecting women on screen to the ‘male gaze.’\(^{36}\) From a lesbian sex scene, to Nina masturbating, the viewer is regularly positioned as voyeur. However else they might respectively feel about it (*Sod*), viewers are delivered the genre promise of visually graphic on screen sex (visual *Peshat*).

Psychological exploration of the character of Nina is at the narrative heart of *Black Swan*. Aronofsky’s visual representations of Nina’s psychological deterioration underscore every level of story, including the action. These visual displays anchor the ‘thriller’ element

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\(^{35}\) The 52-page press kit for the film makes the genre very clear, and most critics and reviewers described the film using variations of much of what it contains.

\(^{36}\) As explicated by Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975).
of the genre promise (Remez). A recurring motif of the film, and a way of representing Nina’s fracturing of ‘Self’ is the use of close-ups of body disintegration (visual Peshat). Nina begins by picking at scratches on her back but eventually her body is falling apart in her hands, feathers fluttering from her bloodied shoulders.

The actual narrative events of Black Swan (Peshat) support a commentary (Midrash) on repression, madness, control and sex. Viewers who enjoy watching a character go through a psychological journey, especially in a movie with film noir ambitions, are not divided along gender lines. The protagonist is female and the setting is a New York Ballet company (narrative Peshat), but this does not make Black Swan a ‘woman’s film.’

Is Black Swan a 'ballet film?’ The film is certainly about a ballet dancer, and the entire film's narrative is driven by the rehearsal and performance of Swan Lake. Aronofsky does not film dance as it is typically portrayed in a ‘ballet film.’ In a sense, ballet creates the context of the film. An individual’s success supported through the perfected physicality of their body is similar in many respects to 'sports' films. However, it is not the performance that is the 'subject' of the film, but Nina's madness. Black Swan is a character study, and not a ‘ballet film.’

Director Darren Aronofsky does not regard Black Swan as a ‘genre film.’ His extended statement, pointing to a blending of genres, is worth noting in its entirety as a guide to a filmmakers’ perspective:

When you start blending genres together, people who like certain genres might not like other genres. Some people who like psychological thrillers might have some issues with some of the horror in the film. So there were some concerns about that. [I] had to throw up my hands and go with what I felt was most organic and truthful to the story. If [Black Swan] is any genre, it’s some type of Gothic ballet genre. A lot of ballets are really Gothic and tragic fairy tales. That’s the kind of the tone I was going for.

Genre creates an idea in the minds of viewers of what sort of narrative structures and contents films contain. This includes the events that will happen, how they will happen and why, who they will happen to, and how the film will end. Genre is closely related to narrative structure. (Peshat), and suggests narrative implications of that structure (Remez). Viewers’

37 Indeed, Aronofsky explores similar themes of perfection and physicality in his previous, highly acclaimed film, The Wrestler.
understanding of narrative structure in cinema also serves to create certain expectations about what a film means.

*The Matrix*

Knowledge of genre creates viewer expectations of *how* narrative and plot (*Peshat* elements) in films develop. These expectations can extend to other elements of film by suggesting specific character attributes (*Remez*). Heroes are expected to be heroic. When *The Matrix* introduces Thomas Anderson/Neo, viewers have already assigned meaning to the character. As the protagonist of the film, qualities like courage (and self-doubt) are assigned to Neo before the audience have any information about his back-story, or knowledge of his character or social role. Viewers understand the genre of science fiction in thematic terms, and regular viewers of science fiction films are ‘conditioned’ by previous films’ narratives (*Remez*) to engage with philosophical themes (*Derash*).

The Wachowski brothers use a combination of genres to suggest different narrative possibilities. *The Matrix* was promoted as a science fiction/action film. Each of these genres creates specific expectations of what *The Matrix* means, especially at the level of story and structure (*Peshat*). Science-fiction/action films suggest a struggle between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ forces. This narrative expectation of viewers provides a ‘meaning platform’ that ‘promises’ or implies specific emotional and action narrative arcs. *The Matrix* delivers on its genre promise when the opening scene introduces the innovative, visually arresting bullet-time action sequences that are a feature of the film.

The narrative (*Peshat*) meaning of *The Matrix* is a simple one. The line between good and bad in *The Matrix* is made very clear – there is no question that Neo and Morpheus are ‘good,’ and that Agent Smith and the Matrix construct are ‘evil.’ The implications of ‘good versus evil’ lay a foundation for the religious allegories (*Remez-Derash*) viewers of the film will be exposed to continuously throughout the course of the film. Since viewers do not have to re-consider their preconceived expectations of the film, they are better placed to ‘relax’ as viewers, and discern the many complexities of meaning otherwise layered in the film (*Derash*).

Neo is plagued by self-doubt. He is essentially passive. This is in direct contrast to Trinity. It is Trinity who carries the weight of the action – and it is she who surprises us in the very first scene of the film – simply by being female. Some commentators point to Trinity’s active role and Neo’s initial ‘weakness’ as a genre subversion of the hero.39 However,
although Trinity is heroic, so is Neo. The difference is, Neo is a ‘fledgling’ hero, not yet fully formed. Neo’s ‘Hero’s Journey’ has a different starting point to Trinity’s spiritual warrior. Trinity is a fully formed hero, but Neo is at the beginning of the journey to become one. This genre subversion is mitigated somewhat by the personality of the male protagonist. Neo’s initial lack-lustre passivity is what audiences expect of heroes before they are called to a destiny by events beyond their control (Derash).

This first scene also conforms to genre in other ways. The film opens with a fast-paced, visually stimulating action-chase sequence that introduces viewers to innovative ‘bullet-time’ filming. The audience are immediately reassured that The Matrix is an action film. Viewers are introduced to other themes and allegorical possibilities in the scene that immediately follows. Neo ‘wakes up,’ (Buddhism) retrieves a disk from a chapter in a hollowed out book, Simulacrum and Simulacra by Baudrillard (Philosophy), and ‘follows the white rabbit,’ (Alice in Wonderland suggesting a strange journey that questions reality). To delay the introduction of action sequences until later in the film may well have alienated viewers who are not interested in the deeper levels of meaning in the film. Meanwhile, to follow the opening action sequence with a scene full of visual cues (Remez) reassures viewers attracted to the philosophical content of the film (Derash). Many viewers are aware of the existence of this content prior to viewing the film, due to a pre-release promotional campaign.

An unusual interpretative area of investigation that arises during the PaRDeS examination of viewers’ expectations of film meaning is connected to how promotional campaigns for films creates audience expectations that affects viewers’ interpretations of, or responses to a film (Sod). Just as viewer’s understanding of film genre and cinematic narrative generates a set of expectations about film meaning, so too do the activities of film marketing.

The effects of cinema promotion on cinema meaning are rarely included in film analyses. This brief section is an introduction to how cinema promotion infers (Remez) meaning, and provides audiences with narrative content (Peshat) prior to the viewing of a film. Film commentary (Derash) is usually indicated in film promotion as well. When viewers enter cinemas they have already begun a process of personal response to film (Sod) that is shaped in broader cultural terms.

Marketing clearly affects viewer expectations, but is generally excluded from interpretative analysis. Promotional campaigns for films, and film trailers create an

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40 Bullet-time will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 where filmmakers’ choices are explored in depth.
41 Observant viewers will note the chapter from Baudrillard’s book, and which is ‘hollowed out’ is called, On Nihilism.
42 This is an area that is worthy of its own extended analysis, but an example here points the way to how PaRDeS would be employed in such an investigation.
expectation (about a film’s meaning) in the minds of viewers. Such material also previews plot points in the film. According to Jennifer Proffitt and others, The Matrix is more than a film – it is a corporate text, a “narratively integrated brand” that is achieved through the integration of technologies, and a “community of fans.” Applying PaRDeS identifies and develops an understanding of how the meaning of The Matrix is affected by its ‘commodification.’ In this case, the film is itself a commentary (Midrash). The pragmatic PaRDeS notion of multiple meanings, which requires assessments of the effects of film promotion, offers new pathways into critical frameworks of cinema meaning.

The Matrix broke box-office and audience records. Preview screenings and cinema promotion drove a word-of-mouth campaign but it was the film trailer that first surprised audiences with innovative action sequences, cryptic cinematic clues and a visual presentation of philosophical themes motivated by the question, “What is the Matrix?”

The theatrical trailer begins with a shot of Trinity flying from one rooftop to another, followed by Morpheus saying, “Have you ever had a dream Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?” Trinity whispers, “The answer is out there Neo. It’s the question that drives us.” Neo responds, “What is the Matrix?” This is followed by a series of action sequences from the film inter-cut variously with: “Forget everything you know/Forget everything you’ve seen/On April 2 The Matrix has you.” The trailer ends with Morpheus’ words: “Unfortunately no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself.”

How does the trailer generate meaning for the film, and at what level? Firstly, the concept and style of the film are introduced (visual Peshat). The trailer poses questions that audiences instinctively respond to, and by the time viewers enter the cinema theatre to watch the film, many are already ‘primed’ to consider the major theme of the film: the nature of reality (Derash). Potential viewers are introduced to the storyline (Peshat).

While the film trailer for The Matrix draws attention to the allusions and allegorical content (Remez) and might prepare viewers for a search for other meanings (Derash), it is at the speculative level of the interpretation of the personal responses of viewers (Sod) that meaning also accrues. How? The audience is not passive. Viewers are invited to respond to questions (visual and story Peshat), and if they accept this cinematically presented invitation,

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a process of mental engagement with the film (Derash) is initiated prior to viewing. When the viewer who has seen the trailer watches the film, they already have a sense of meaning that relates to their personal response. They bring this to the viewing experience of The Matrix and this ‘pre-knowledge’ affects the way(s) viewers make meaning of the film (Sod).

Clueless

Amy Heckerling’s Clueless differs starkly from The Matrix, not just in terms of genre but also in terms of target audience. Clueless is a comedy aimed at young women, set in a contemporary Beverly Hills high school.

Audiences can rightfully expect a comedy to be funny, and Heckerling ensures Clueless delivers on the genre promise of humour. What is interesting with respect to genre about this film is what the promotion of the film avoids saying. In the mid-1990s adaptations of Jane Austen’s novels were hugely popular, attracting large audiences. Yet Heckerling chose to conceal that Clueless is an adaptation/updating of Jane Austen’s Emma. Why might she choose to do this?

Firstly, to identify Clueless with Emma creates an additional set of expectations, and invites comparison with more traditional on-screen translations of Austen’s work. Identifying Clueless as an Austen adaptation has the potential to confuse the target audience about the film’s genre. Secondly, publicising the ‘Emma-connection’ might have potentially alienated the intended audience of teenage girls. Members of this audience might even consider Clueless ‘too worthy,’ if the film’s close association with literature was promoted.

Finally, Heckerling still managed to make the connection known. Other audiences, who normally wouldn’t see a teen-film, are attracted to Clueless as one of the ‘Austen’ films. These (potential) viewers are interested in Clueless as a reflection of Emma (Remez). Their viewing strategy relies on deciphering clues that hint at the novel, and finding parallels to it in the film. Thus, these viewers are engaged primarily with a ‘Remez’ interpretative strategy that is engaged solely with cinematically presented allusions to Jane Austen’s novel.

44 Some of the many ‘Austen’ films of the period includes adaptations of Persuasion, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice and Emma.
45 At the time of the release of Clueless (1995) Jane Austen novels were a staple feature of High School, College and University English courses. Many of the target audience have been exposed to Austen in a different, usually less entertaining context. It is another level of irony that a film that is set primarily in a High School would avoid noting the source text that is taught at school.
46 For example, in a number of interviews and seminars, including Heckerling, "Harold Lloyd Seminars of the American Film Institute," and "Amy Heckerling on Clueless - The Movie and Hollywood Execs and the State of Women in Film," The Moveable Fest, no. 12th July (2011).
The genre of comedy makes meaning in different, often less explicit ways than do films of other genres. The absence of the overt mythic structure of films like *The Matrix* means that a structure of archetypes and symbols (*Derash*) are less often used to communicate meaning to viewers. Instead, Amy Heckerling relies on elements of film like music, particularly popular music (*Remez*), as a means of inferring her film commentary (*Derash*). In doing so she demonstrates a sound insight into her teenage audience. Heckerling’s skilful management of multiple levels of cinematic narrative is markedly different to the filmmakers of *Josie and the Pussycats*.

*Josie & The Pussycats*

*Josie and the Pussycats'* writing-directing team, Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan have a history of working together. They co-wrote and directed the 1998 comedy, *Can't Hardly Wait*, and have the dubious distinction of having written *A Very Brady Sequel.*47 Both filmmakers were in their early thirties when they wrote and directed *Josie and the Pussycats*, a big-budget ‘Studio’ film based on a comic book series of the same name.

*Josie and the Pussycats* is a comedy that links the ‘origin’ narrative of the band to a struggle against a corporate America and US Government in cahoots to control teenagers using messages planted in popular songs. A ‘band’ narrative also suggests the sub-genre of musical comedy, and this is affirmed by the narrative foundation of the film, which is adapted from the *Josie* comic book series (and subsequent television shows).

These prior, non-cinematic sources related the adventures of a female band (The Pussycats) as they performed shows in their hometown of Riverdale, and across America, and solving various mysteries. Some viewers will respond to *Josie and the Pussycats* as a ‘comic-book film.’ Most films of this genre begin with what is known as the ‘origin story.’ They are also notorious for being subject to heavy scrutiny by fans of the original source comics, who respond to films through their prior knowledge of these other (original) sources (*Sod*).

*Josie and the Pussycats* conforms to the common 'origin story' treatments of films based on comic books. The narrative premise of the film is the story of how the Pussycats transform from an unsigned garage band into a chart success. The plot (*Peshat*) is an invention of Elfont and Kaplan, and does not reflect the comic book or television series accounting of the Pussycats’ origins (*Remez*). Older viewers attracted to *Josie* through the film’s connection to their own past (*Sod*) may well find the more radical changes to character disrupt the expected nostalgic romp through a childhood classic.

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While Fiona and Wyatt are ultimately called to account for their misdeeds, the multinational companies and US Government escape justice, free to contrive their next scheme, this time better armed to exploit mindless teenagers.\(^{48}\) This kind of internal storyline inconsistency only deepens what is an already cynical response on the part of the audience. How happy is an ending that suggests (\textit{Remez}) to its viewers (as they are standing up to leave the cinema) that they themselves are the very mindless, slavish brand followers the teenagers of the film are turned into by evil companies? The ending gives lie to the narrative motivation of the film (\textit{Derash}).

Viewers of \textit{Josie and the Pussycat} can, given the genre of teen musical comedy, expect the film to be amusing, to relate to the teenage audience, and to show some evidence of its comic book origins. Each of these genre promises is broken. The film is not consistently amusing. Other than using character names and the setting of Riverdale (\textit{Peshat}), the filmmakers of \textit{Josie and the Pussycats} ignore other narrative and character history of the comic books. Many viewers will at some point in the film recognise each of the implied genre ‘promises’ (\textit{Remez}) as ‘broken.’ If the film had satisfied viewers in other ways, perhaps these broken genre promises would not matter, but in other ways too Elfont and Kaplan alienate large segments of their audience (\textit{Sod}). Josie’s failure to communicate the meaning of the filmmakers’ intended critique of the commodification of music (\textit{Derash}) is inscribed in the narrative foundation (\textit{Peshat}) of the film from its inception.

\textit{Conclusions}

The PaRDeS method’s goal of accounting for the full spectrum of cinematic meaning involves framing interpretative questions designed to identify and include important kinds of film meanings that are not usually incorporated in contemporary analyses. The PaRDeS method begins by questioning the effects of prior knowledge that viewers bring with them to the experience of viewing a film (\textit{Sod}). The PaRDeS investigation of the multiple effects of viewer expectations (generated by narrative structures (\textit{Peshat}), genre implications (\textit{Remez}) and even cinema promotion) affirms the interpretative benefits that are a consequence of the unique assumption of a multiple-level framework of film. An important distinguishing feature of PaRDeS is that these multiple levels can be interpreted and coordinated in film analyses. The investigations of this chapter affirm the interpretative possibilities of the PaRDeS model.

\(^{48}\) Discussed in more detail later in the thesis, the end of \textit{Josie and the Pussycats} explicitly suggests (\textit{Remez}) that movies will be used instead of music to brainwash teenagers into becoming mindless consumers, a reading that conflicts with the filmmakers critique of the commodification of culture (\textit{Derash}).
Stylistically (Peshat) and thematically (Derash), *Taxi Driver* is film noir (‘dark cinema.’) Scriptwriter Paul Schrader deliberately manipulates the Western genre conventions of story (Peshat), and the inferred characteristics of the ‘American Hero’ (Remez). Viewers intuitively recognise these conventional treatments of story and character, and are cinematically ‘ lulled into’ a false sense of narrative security. This is reinforced by Travis’s voice-over ‘speaking to them’ (Sod). Travis is assumed, at least initially, to be a hero.

The production studio of *Black Swan* effectively defined the film’s genre in press kits as a ‘psychosexual thriller.’ Pre-release reviews reflect the promotion of genre. This contextualising of genre (by cinema promotion) actually serves to direct potential audiences’ attention away from an assumed genre of ‘ballet film.’ Even so, the ambiguous ending of the film (Peshat) still unsettles many viewers (Sod).

The simple genre and structure of *The Matrix* (narrative Peshat) conforms to viewer expectations of Hollywood blockbusters (Remez). This narrative simplicity leaves viewers with the ‘mental space’ to respond to the complex interpretative possibilities of the film (Derash/Sod). The narrative structure of *The Matrix* links Neo’s journey (Peshat) to universal archetypes related to the Hero’s Journey (Derash).49

Amy Heckerling also uses a simple narrative form, but one that lacks an overt mythic narrative spine. She ‘hides’ the narrative origins of *Clueless* from the teenage audience. This actually confines viewers’ expectations of the film to those arising from ‘teen-comedy’ – that the film is funny. *Clueless* is positioned differently for an alternative audience that responds to the film’s connection to Jane Austen’s *Emma* (Remez). That expectation confines their interpretative boundaries to finding cinematic allusions to the novel.

*Josie and the Pussycats* is targeted at the same audience, and sets itself up for failure by respecting neither genre, nor narrative conventions. A disjointed narrative (Peshat) anchors audience dissatisfaction. A conflict between the visual saturation of the screen with multi-national brands (visual Peshat) and the filmmaker critique of the commodification of music (Derash) deepens viewers’ perceptions of *Josie and the Pussycats* as ‘hypocritical’ (Sod).

PaRDeS interpretation illuminates the ‘implications’ of genre (Remez). Viewers’ expectations are relatively fixed, changing in response to new treatments of genre and structure by filmmakers. The classical Hollywood 3-Act structure creates expectations about story content and character development. Cinema promotion and critical reviews also prepare audiences to ‘interpret’ a film by introducing them to characters, themes and film style. How viewers coordinate these expectations as they make meaning of a film is largely a function of

how successfully filmmakers negotiate those expectations in the context of their own cinematic expression, and filmmaking choices.

PaRDeS analysis frames genre analysis in terms of meaning, rather than simply sorting films into categories, or analysing how filmmakers subvert genre. Investigating genre from a PaRDeS perspective yields different kinds of insights about filmmakers. PaRDeS film analysis illuminates how complexities in film content are mitigated by conformity to genre expectations (of viewers).

Other kinds of audience expectations about what films mean develop in response to the ways critical reviews and other interpretative analyses frame discussions of cinema meaning. The next chapter uses critical reviews to identify important interpretations of the thesis films.
Chapter 4 COMMON INTERPRETATIVE APPROACHES

Many film commentators adopt an interpretative position, and explore that position in the films they analyse. This continuing delineation of film interpretation into very specialised areas of investigative interest continues to be offered up to prospective analysts as their available set of ‘interpretative choices.’ PaRDeS film analysis, on the other hand, employs multiple interpretative strategies that ‘unlock’ different levels of meaning, and synthesises these within a single interpretation.

This chapter describes the most common ways the films described in the previous chapter have been analysed. Identifying the common modes of analysing these films reveals gaps in existing interpretations. Secondly, an interpretative benchmark is set in this chapter against which the new PaRDeS method of interpreting films produced by this thesis can be measured. Understanding how these films are usually analysed establishes a set of interpretative positions to which PaRDeS analysis responds.

The most common interpretative approaches to film represent the spectrum of contemporary ideology – Marxism, Feminism, Gender Studies, Race-Relations, Postmodernism, Geopolitics and multiple Philosophical positions. Many interpreters seek evidence of their own pre-existing ideologies. A smaller group of analysts also seek to disprove the interpretations of others. Recognising the limitations of existing interpretations, as well as responding to the questions they raise, is an important step in using PaRDeS to analyse the meaning of films.

Critical Perspectives of Film

Since a comprehensive review of any of these films is a substantial exercise, this chapter confines itself to discussing some of the most important and influential interpretations of the respective films in preparation for Chapter 10’s discussion of ‘Cinematic Midrash.’ In the following assessments of the various critical responses to the films, it becomes evident that the same general ways of interpreting films has remain consistently wedded to singular ideological reflections of films since the 1976 release of Taxi Driver.

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The critical response to *Taxi Driver* at the time of the film’s release was mixed. Gary Arnold of *The Washington Post* reflects the general response of reviewers when he described the film as, “the sort of movie to go out for a good stiff drink on, or walk the streets brooding about.” Many reviewers found the film disturbing, although not always for the same reasons.

Other analysts struggle with the narrative events of *Taxi Driver*, perhaps not recognising an underlying theme that links alienation to urban decay. In their analysis of film style, Patterson and Faber assert that *Taxi Driver* suffers from “motivational problems.” Their discomfort with both script and character is suggestive of the expectation held by both viewers and critics that Hollywood films conform to specific narrative conventions. The notion that filmmakers might subvert these conventions for specific purposes was relatively novel in American film criticism of the time.

The sheer level of violence in *Taxi Driver* is a narrative element of the film that many analysts respond to in negative ways. In a general analysis of American cinema, *Premiere* critic Peter Biskind calls the climax of *Taxi Driver*, “one of the most gruesome displays of onscreen violence in film history.” This violence is mostly interpreted as a comment on American society. Robert Lindsey notes, “The city was New York, but it could have been any large American city of the seventies.” Lindsey’s assertion is questionable, given the intensity of the intimate, life-long relationship Scorsese, De Niro and Bernard Herrmann (composer) each have with the city of New York.

Other critics link the violence of *Taxi Driver* to one of the (perceived) themes in the film – the malaise of American society in the wake of Vietnam. The violent actions of Travis are thus transformed into cultural comment. Other commentators treat the violence of the ending of *Taxi Driver* as a gateway into a more experiential (and less intellectual) audience response.

Charles Michener notes the ‘pulp’ nature of the film’s themes but concludes, “Scorsese has a way of converting pulp into something more.” Michener and many others read the ending of *Taxi Driver* literally (*Peshat*), leading to personal issues with both the film,

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3 Patricia & Manny Farber Patterson, "The power and the gory: Taxi Driver," *Film Comment* 34, no. 3 (1998).
6 According to the filmmakers, the taxicab is an integral feature of New York, its own character; the same story could not have been set in any other city. The Studio originally suggested San Francisco a location, but Scorsese was adamant that the film be made in New York. See David & Christie Thompson, Ian, ed. *Scorsese on Scorsese* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989).
and with Scorsese’s cinematic intent. Other commentators who connect to the film through their reading of character motivations are less inclined to literal readings, which suggest Travis as heroic. Respected critic Roger Ebert values Taxi Driver as a way of understanding the kinds of people who, “emerge, every so often, guns in their hands, enforcing the death penalty for the crime of celebrity.”9 Ebert’s critique connects specifically to Paul Schrader’s thematic intentions when writing the film.

John Thurman claims that the parallels between Taxi Driver and The Searchers10 signposts deeper thematic meaning in Scorsese’s film.11 The links between Taxi Driver and The Searchers, in terms of both story and film style, have generated a wealth of literature on Taxi Driver as an ‘Urban Western.’ Leighton Grist frames his illuminating genre analysis of the film as a “disabling generic revision” of traditional Hollywood Western films.12

Other commentators structure their analysis of Taxi Driver in sociological terms. James Clapp uses Taxi Driver as an example of how the problems of urbanisation are expressed in modern society.13 In these sociological treatments the cynicism expressed by Travis Bickle is interpreted as symptomatic of a modern world devoid of community. Clapp’s analysis takes interpretation of Taxi Driver beyond the historical context of Vietnam and Watergate into a broader assessment of social alienation. Other authors frame this alienation in terms of Travis Bickle as here/anti-hero. Andrew Swensen links Scorsese’s subversion of the hero with Dostoevsky’s literary anti-social ‘Underground Man,’14 while Maria Miliota reads Travis in terms of his relationship to women, concluding Bickle is a “failed man.”15

Taxi Driver is frequently interpreted in terms of film style. Marie Connelly treats Taxi Driver as, “a Modernist work of art,” comparing the film to works by (author) T.S. Eliot.16 Connelly acknowledges Taxi Driver as “highly allusive,” and open to multiple interpretations. Andrew Swensen is another who approaches interpretation of the film in terms of Scorsese’s film technique.17 These Auteur-based perspectives of Taxi Driver have come to dominate recent treatments of the film.

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16 Connelly, Martin Scorsese: an analysis of his feature films, with a filmography of his entire directorial career.
17 Swensen, "The anguish of God's lonely men: Dostoevsky's Underground Man and Scorsese's Travis Bickle."
The status of *Taxi Driver* has over time evolved from ‘radical’ to ‘classic.’ Scorsese is now acknowledged as a craftsman of cinema. It seems that both film and filmmaker have achieved near legendary status. A number of authors have produced books devoted to exploring *Taxi Driver* in depth. Amy Taubin’s *Taxi Driver*, and Geoffrey MacNab’s *The Making of Taxi Driver* are two notable examples. Scorsese and Schrader have each made numerous statements about *Taxi Driver*, and their comments usually form the foundation of later commentaries (*Midrash*) on the film. The film’s constant appearance near the top of ‘Best Films’ lists gives further gravitas to the statements of Scorsese and Schrader.

The PaRDeS analysis of *Taxi Driver* repositions interpretations of cinematic style according to the kinds of meaning filmmakers create on screen, and how these different meanings are negotiated by viewers. This method of integrating multiple filmic perspectives establishes a link between filmmakers and audiences within a framework of multiple meaning that is unique to PaRDeS.

*Black Swan & the Quest for Perfection*

The critical response to *Black Swan* has been dominated by analysis of the film’s themes. Lisa Mullen produces an interpretation of *Black Swan* based on the psychological development of the character of Nina. She notes that the, “overt references to the Powell and Pressburger film [*Red Shoes*] – most notably a shared obsession with mirrors - point up the thematic contrasts between the two pieces.” Mullen also connects Aronofsky’s film style to expressions of theme, linking the, “almost monotone palette and [Aronofsky’s] raspy, all-too-intimate sound design [to] Nina’s suffering.” Mullen is one of several reviewers who have noted the physical effects of composer Clint Mansell’s score for *Black Swan*.

Peter Debruge describes *Black Swan* as, “a fascinating complement to Darren Aronofsky *The Wrestler.*” Both films deal with the toll on the body and the mind in the quest to achieve perfection, be it the ‘low art’ of wrestling or the ‘high art’ of ballet. Debruge is impressed by the opening sequence, which appeals to women and is, “arresting enough to give sceptical male [audiences] reason to stick around.” Symbolic meanings in *Black Swan* are clearly presented in visual ways. Debruge points to the, “exaggerated stylistic choices [extending] to production design.”

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20 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
Philosophical perspectives of *Black Swan* are emerging in the critical literature. Dharmender Dhillon develops a Nietzschean interpretation of *Black Swan* based on his interest in, “Nietzsche’s belief that language fails to render the cosmic symbolism of music,” and he reads the film as, “the clashing of two world-views.” A Jungian perspective of film is found in Wilor Bluege’s proposition of three Jungian interpretative positions: feminine psychology, masculine psychology, and the, “unconscious dynamics moving within the collective life of modern America.”

Just prior to the 2011 Academy Awards®, a second review of the film appeared in the New York Times, in which Alastair Macaulay remarked that, “[*Black Swan*] feels hostile to ballet,” although he concludes that this was not Aronofsky’s intention. Ballet dancers from around the world concurred that *Black Swan* was, in various ways, ‘hostile to ballet.’ The noticeable turn of the critical literature towards the film’s representation of ballet may have been guided by interviews with dancers.

Judith Mackrell asked British ballet dancers their opinion of *Black Swan*. Mackrell notes, “The dance community had imagined *Black Swan* to be an update of Powell and Pressburger’s ballet classic The Red Shoes [but it has] more in common with Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby.*” Mackrell also suggests the ‘uglification’ of the film is reflected in Aronofsky’s film style when she notes, “the deliberately choppy style of filming isn’t just alienating, it also robs those moving bodies of their true power and beauty.” She does not appear to consider that this might possibly be the point, or to recognise a link between film style and Nina’s psychology.

When asked about the ‘backlash’ from dancers, Aronofsky defended *Black Swan*’s representation of ballet as ugly, pointing to, “the transcendence that’s possible within the art.” This transcendence is also possible within cinema – even Hollywood films, and PaRDeS analysis is unique in its integration of transcendent (*Sod*) meaning within a broader, multi-level framework of cinematic meaning.

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
Multiple Critical Perspectives of The Matrix

The question, “What is the Matrix?” is a fundamental plot feature of the film (Peshat). This question frequently appears on screen, and is heard in dialogue. What are the main ways other analysts respond to the question, “What does The Matrix mean?”

Feminist film critiques of The Matrix concentrate on the representation of the character of Trinity. G. Christopher Williams interprets Trinity as the “real hero” of The Matrix. Teresa Geller extends a feminist interpretation of The Matrix to include commentaries on race and nation. The basis of her reading of the film is feminist queer theory. Geller focuses on Trinity’s “formalist function” of “tough chick,” and how this characterization can be mapped as a ‘subversion’ of genre. Feminist interpretations of any film mostly investigate film meaning from the perspective of how female representation in cinema reflects a more general structure of confining women to social roles, and how character functions reflect these roles.

The wisdom and strength of the African-American characters of Morpheus and The Oracle form the foundation of interpretations of The Matrix that point to a sub-text of Afro-American resistance to White authority. Jason Haslem interprets Morpheus’ statement, “You all look alike to me,” (directed at the (white) Agents who administer the justice of the sentient Matrix construct), as a direct allusion to the Los Angeles Police Department’s beating of Rodney King. Haslem notes that the camera angle that films King’s beating is replicated in The Matrix. This, and other allusions to the, “history of African American resistance,” are the basis of Haslem’s assertion that The Matrix is a form of “coded discourse” on African American resistance to White America.

31 Williams, “Mastering the Real: Trinity as the ”Real” Hero of The Matrix.” Williams is another of the few analysts who combine an interpretative stance with a discussion of other influences – in his case Baudrillard’s ‘Desert of the Real.’
33 Rodney King was a black man who, in the 1980’s, was picked by members of the Los Angeles Police Force and brutally beaten on the street. This incident was filmed, and when the footage was released, led to race-related riots that lasted several days, and resulted in a number of deaths. For African-Americans, the Rodney King incident is a seminal moment in their shared history. While the release of the footage of the beating shocked White Americans, Black Americans were not surprised, for they already knew of their treatment at the hands of white authority. If this reading is intended by the Wachowskis, it would be interesting to determine whether or not they considered the implications (Remez) of white men operating within an institutionalised power structure (Hollywood) then appropriating a significant (Derash) part of Afro-resistance heritage?
34 Jason Haslem, "Coded Discourse: Romancing the (Electronic) Shadow in The Matrix," College Literature 32, no. 3 (2005). How likely are viewers to discern this meaning? Without knowledge of the beating of Rodney King, let alone the recall of that particular camera angle that captured the incident, the ‘hints’ at this kind of meaning (Remez) will not be recognized. African Americans are certainly more likely to recognize this meaning since the allusion appropriates their cultural experience. However, many more viewers will interpret this scene in a more literal way. “You all look alike to me,” is more often seen as an ironic comment.
The recognition of coded cinematic discourse in *The Matrix* is also used to substantiate theological readings of the film. Morpheus is alternately Moses leading his people in the wilderness, John the Baptist heralding the coming of the Messiah (Neo) or even God. Which meaning viewers make is effectively up to them. What is clear though, is that the Wachowskis have given them a choice. The notion of choice, which anchors the film’s narrative and thematic content, is reflected in the multiple allegorical possibilities viewers have to choose from.

Mois Navon makes a convincing argument in asserting that Neo is much closer to the military messiah of Israel than he is to the suffering and peace-loving messiah of Christianity. The last human city, Zion, is presented as evidence of a pre-dominant Jewish theme that characterises Morpheus as Moses, and links the film’s plot to that of the biblical story of Exodus. James L. Ford, on the other hand, suggests that *The Matrix* reflects a Buddhist worldview, explaining the film in terms of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism.

Ford presents elements of *The Matrix* story as evidence of the Buddhist approach to discipline and practice. Others commentators perceive Gnostic themes. Frances Flannery-Dailey and Rachel Wagner argue that the plot of *The Matrix* parallels basic Gnostic myth. Many of these various religious allegories rely on the same clues in the film, which suggests commonalities among major world religions.

Professor Martin Danahay claims that in visual terms *The Matrix* presents Marxist philosophy, specifically the scene where Morpheus tells Neo that the Matrix has reduced human beings to the status of ‘battery.’ One scene in a film makes a statement, but can it claim to represent the meaning of the entire film? Gregory Grieve, in the context of this scene, reads the whole film as evidence of late-Capitalistic ideology. In doing so, he argues against other interpretations – such as the Christian allegory or the Buddhist parallels. Like


39 Discussed later in this thesis, the commonality of world myths is identified by several authors, including Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Lawrence Scott, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas, 1928). and Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.*


many other analysts, his interpretation of a film is selective in that he refers to those parts of the film that support his ideological position, and ignores those that suggest alternative positions.  

*The Matrix* has served to stimulate a wide range of philosophical discussions. These cover a broad spectrum of modern thought, including Greek philosophy, technology and psyche, Nihilism, Baudrillard, Descartes, Nietzsche, Plato’s Cave and more. Alain Badiou’s analysis is typical of the way philosophy can be used as the basis of an interpretation of *The Matrix*. Badiou reads the film as a Platonic fable, “That destroys the world to interrogate the subject who tries to escape semblance.” This is an interpretation that is usually discerned only by philosophers, for it requires a prior knowledge of Platonic myth.

A philosophical interpretation of the film is possible with a less advanced knowledge of the field. Thomas Wartenberg argues that *The Matrix* functions as philosophy by calling upon viewers to question their own beliefs and assumptions. This interesting analysis (inadvertently) points to how viewers find the fourth level of personally derived *Sod* meaning of PaRDeS. They do so by asking questions of themselves that are, in part, a response to the thematic content of the film.

Post-modern interpretations of *The Matrix* refer to the uncertainty and scepticism of the modern era, although many analyses are vague about exactly how *The Matrix* is post-modern. Neal King is more convincing when he suggests that post-modernity is taken literally in *The Matrix*. Confusion is presented in a typically classical Hollywood narrative: parallel plotting. Communities are manufactured. The hero externalizes his ‘mind-warp’ in acts of spectacular violence at the end of the film. When Neo, in an attempt to defeat the Matrix Construct, engages in reckless, theatrical cinematic slaughter, the film reflects a post-modern preoccupation with notions of self, and technological ambivalence. King regards *The Matrix* one of a cohort of films that classically plot post-modern conditions since (in his view)
‘post-modernity’ is a major thematic concern of the film. King concludes that Hollywood postmodernism is constrained by commercial impulses.

What can we learn from these various interpretations of The Matrix? Do they answer the question posed by the film itself, “What is the Matrix?” This is evidently a complex and multi-layered film. Each of these different interpretations tells us something important about the film. However, The Matrix, a richly layered film, is often reduced in interpretation to a single idea.

**Clueless & Critical Links to Jane Austen’s Emma**

The connection between Clueless and Jane Austen’s Emma is not mentioned in the film, acknowledged in the credits, or revealed in promotion or pre-release interviews. How relevant is Emma to the meaning of the film? If this connection is not really that important in terms of film meaning, why does it dominate the interpretative discussions of Clueless?

William Phillips and Louise Heal link the film’s appeal to older viewers with what they term Amy Heckerling’s “alphabet puzzle approach.” Since Heckerling broke down the novel, and used it as the basis of plot and character design, Clueless can be approached as a collection of novelistic segments, which the viewer can try to decipher and rearrange. Thus, examinations of film style become an attempt to find evidence of Austen’s novel. Characters are interesting because of their connection to the past, and interpretation becomes burdened with producing lists of parallels, commonalities and differences.

Marc DiPaolo uses film theorist Geoffrey Wagner’s The Novel and the Cinema as the foundation for his assessment of film adaptations of Emma. He compares and contrasts Cher and Emma’s reading habits, and concludes that Clueless is a kind of domestic Bildungsroman (change from within) version of a fairy tale. Once again, the focus of interpretation relates the film to the Austen novel. Other notable ways that interpretations of Clueless are linked to Emma include Lesley Stern’s geo-social analysis, which discusses the parallels between the 19th Century setting of Emma’s England and contemporary Los

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48 Ibid.
49 Heal, "Extensive Grounds and Classic Columns: Emma of Film."
50 Marc DiPaolo, *Emma Adapted: Jane Austen's Heroine from Book to Film* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).
51 Briefly, Wagner categorises literary adaptations as a. Transposition, where the film is as faithful to the novel as possible; b. Commentary, where the novel is altered, leading to a re-emphasis or re-structuring and c. Analogy, which involves modernizing the story, usually setting it in the present.
52 DiPaolo, *Emma Adapted: Jane Austen's Heroine from Book to Film*. 139
Angeles and Nora Nachumi’s linking of the narrative voice of *Clueless* to the ironic narrative of *Emma*. Post-modern interpretations of *Clueless* concentrate their discussions on the many inter-textual references in the film, including allusions to literature, films, art and music. Postmodernism in *Clueless* is reflected in what Jane Mills describes as the way, “[Clueless] invites its audience to question the ways that stories are told.” If the use of irony, satire, and commentary on the text form is considered ‘post-modern’ than must we surely not also define Austen’s *Emma* as post-modern? That text similarly refers to current events and other novels as a clue to character (*Remez*), and in other ways hints at a particular moral trap one of the characters must avoid (*Derash*). What is unique to postmodernism in the modern era is the self-awareness of the inter-textuality that occurs – among both creators and audiences – and the self-conscious manner in which filmmakers use these intertextual references in ways that serve no narrative purpose other than conferring a sense of shared knowledge on viewers.

While a few commentators pay attention to stylistic elements of *Clueless*, acknowledging Heckerling’s intelligent articulation of the script (cinematic Peshat), most discussions of what *Clueless* means are framed by a search for evidence of parallels and differences to the Austen novel (*Remez*). Many of these interpretations illuminate the meaning of *Emma* at the expense of the meaning of *Clueless*. But, how important really is *Emma* in terms of what *Clueless* means to viewers? Chapter Ten’s investigation of *Cinematic Midrash* amplifies this short response: The meaning of *Clueless* resides in the cinematic narrative, and not, as the bulk of existing interpretation suggest, in Jane Austen’s *Emma*.

**Critical Responses to Product Placement in Josie & The Pussycats**

Conventional criticism of *Josie and the Pussycats* concentrates attention on the presence of product placement on-screen, or else the failure of the film to fulfil the genre

56 Jane Mills, "Clueless: Transforming Jane Austen's Emma (Film as Text)," *Screen Education* March 22(2004).
requirement of a comedy – to be funny. Michael O'Sullivan typifies the critical response to *Josie & the Pussycats* in noting that the film, “feels like one giant commercial.”58

Prior to release, Joe Leydon enthusiastically predicted that *Josie and the Pussycats* would be a “cross-over” hit due to its “across-the-board” appeal.59 He was to prove a lonely voice of praise in an otherwise overwhelming chorus of disapproval, for the critical response to *Josie & the Pussycats* after the release of the film was overwhelmingly negative. Wesley Morris ‘blamed’ the writing-directing team of Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan.60 Elvis Mitchell of the *New York Times* also found little to like in the film. According to Mitchell, “The girls can't act, [and] the satire of boy bands is too ham-fisted.”61

Positive reviews for the film appear in blogs and on-line film sites (themselves of varying quality). John Whitehead of *Metaphilm* is typical of positive reviewers when he applauds the irony of the product placement. Whitehead links the relentless onscreen brand assault (visual *Peshat*) to a cinematic commentary on commercialism (*Derash*). He points to how the film, “acknowledges the unassailable power of American consumer culture and its own status as yet another product of that culture.”62

It is perhaps unsurprising that *Josie & the Pussycats* has a presence in advertising literature, due to the film’s narrative premise that teenagers are being controlled by subliminal messages. These discussions are framed in connection with issues of product placement or subliminal advertising.

William O’Barr finds it disturbing that the film treats subliminal advertising as “negative,” but seems to have “no problem” with product placement.63 The potential complications of how product placement affects meaning are also explored by Mitchum Huehls, who questions the involvement of companies who placed products in *Josie & the Pussycats*. He notes the implied hypocrisy of product placement in the film, and points out that the film, “does not just perform this apparent hypocrisy, it points it out to us and insists that we recognise it; the hypocrisy also functions as the movie's content.”64

Youth audiences generally have a sophisticated understanding of modern culture, and of different modes of interpretation. In attempting to create a sense of camaraderie with the audience, the filmmakers rely on what they believe to be a shared sense of humour (*Sod*). Elfont and Kaplan fail to recognise that the viewers of *Josie and the Pussycats* place the

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64 Mitchum Huehls, "Knowing What We Are Doing: Time, Form and the Reading of Postmodernity," *Cultural Critique* Autumn, no. 61 (2005).
‘movie business’ in the same category as the music industry so heavily criticised by the film. The PaRDeS analysis differs from these other responses to product placement by anchoring this perceived hypocrisy in the conflicts between different levels of meaning that later chapters identify and explicate.

A PaRDeS Response to Contemporary Interpretative Positions

What does this critical review of the films reveal about the interpretative climate that surrounds each of the thesis films? The Matrix offers up multiple allegories. Most analysts concentrate on one of these, and acknowledge that other possibilities are present. Clueless is contextualised by Austen’s Emma. Josie and the Pussycats is deemed hypocritical. Taxi Driver initially provoked a mixed reaction, but is now termed a ‘classic’ and Black Swan is framed in terms of genre – including problems arising from analysts and others mistakenly interpreting plot and setting as ‘genre.’

PaRDeS interpretation differs in both process and intent from the major interpretative methods and positions. In this chapter, analysts are shown to use films as a way of illuminating broader socio-cultural concerns. The resulting analyses often reflect the ideological perspective of the interpreter. In other instances, film interpretation becomes an explication of film style and technique. Most methods are similar in that they restrict the scope (and level) of film meaning being investigated.

PaRDeS analysis, on the other hand, is framed by interpretative goals that: (a) seek to accurately find and describe multiple levels of meaning; and (b) aims to produce comprehensive accounts of film meaning. Interpreters seek to synthesise multiple kinds of meaning to produce analyses that not only accurately account for film meaning, but also respond to existing interpretations (Midrash). As a philosophical film hermeneutic, PaRDeS produces philosophical reflections of film that unite various interpretative perspectives,

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66 Such as the various philosophical expositions to be found in Rowlands, The Philosopher at the End of the Universe: Philosophy Explained through Science Fiction Films.
68 Recall Chapter 2’s framing of PaRDeS as part of the “New Hermeneutic” as described in Malbon, “Structuralism, Hermeneutics, and Contextual Meaning.” See also, Gallagher, "Hermeneutics and the Cognitive Sciences."
including studies of filmmaker style, film as text, and viewer responses (including the ideological perspectives reflected in the critical reviews of this chapter).

Certain commonalities are suggested by the critical review of these five films. Contemporary interpretative positions are well established in critical practice. These positions mostly ignore each other. Some analysts ignore meanings in a film that do not serve a pre-existing interpretative agenda.\(^{69}\)

Each of these different ways of dealing with questions of what a film means can produce useful and novel accounts of film meaning. These common interpretative positions are however, characterised by what is often a limited scope of interpretation. They are often set against each other. Chapter 10 offers ways to bring ‘competing’ perspectives into the same interpretative space through the unique activity of Cinematic Midrash.

PaRDeS has not been used before for the purpose of producing film interpretations. The remainder of this thesis is devoted to developing the new PaRDeS Film Method of analysis. In the following chapter, using PaRDeS to investigate a film’s thematic content in the context of the four-level framework of PaRDeS demonstrates how cinematic allusions and hints (Remez) are communicated in a variety of narrative and audio-visual ways (Peshat) to establish film as commentary (Midrash) and ‘parable’ (Derash).

The use of PaRDeS is able to illustrate how these levels of meaning are coordinated by viewers in ways that can lead to highly affective, emotional and profound responses to film (Sod). In doing so, PaRDeS film interpretation responds to existing issues of film interpretation by finding a way of dealing with an element of film meaning that, although commonly accepted to exist,\(^{70}\) is rarely investigated.

\(^{69}\) Thus, a feminist film critic is actively looking for evidence that supports a feminist interpretation of film; a Marxist interpretation will seek evidence of that specific ideology, and so forth for each respective interpretative stance.

\(^{70}\) See Chapter 2’s discussion.
Multiple thematic elements in film interact in sometimes quite complex ways. The PaRDeS examination of how different kinds of thematic content are synthesised in film analysis indicates that thematic effects can be far more complex than contemporary interpretations usually suggest.¹ This chapter’s investigation of a film’s thematic content uses the framework of the four levels of PaRDeS to explicate the links between thematic meaning and the socio-cultural environments that filmmakers alternatively refer to, respond to, and reflect upon.

Some filmmakers respond to the cinematic possibilities of filmic presentations of thematic content in complex ways, and variations of their cinematic arrangements of theme are uncovered in the PaRDeS film analyses of this chapter. The (potential) complexities of the cinematic integrations of film themes in multi-level meaning analysis of film have not previously been explored in Cinema Studies. Using PaRDeS to examine filmmakers’ management of multi-level thematic content in cinematic ways responds to this gap.

In this chapter, the PaRDeS analysis of different kinds of films (and filmmakers and audiences) links viewers’ responses to a particular film (Sod) to: (a) cinematic presentations of theme (Peshat) that (b) make use of the audio-visual properties of films to create content that refers viewers (Remez) to (c) establish film commentaries (Derash).

The PaRDeS process of ‘interrogating’ a film’s meaning (by asking successive ‘sets’ of questions linked to the four levels) reveals complex cinematic arrangements of theme. The insights PaRDeS analysis produces in this chapter suggest that the genesis of alternative film interpretation methods in literary criticism and art appreciation underlies the relatively simple, and sometimes non-cinematic treatment of film themes in modern critical practice.

Commentaries and other kinds of significant meaning (Derash) are (largely) established and defined by the presentation of theme in explicit ways (Remez) that viewers recognise and respond to in a variety of ways (Sod). Thematic meanings are generally established in the opening sequences of films. PaRDeS is used in this chapter to analyse the opening montages from two very different films (Taxi Driver and Clueless).

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¹ While themes in film are often named, the linking of thematic content, narrative content and commentary – that is, the way in which film themes ‘mean’ in cinematic contexts is not generally performed. See Mario J. Valdés, Hermeneutics of poetic sense: critical studies of literature, cinema, and cultural history (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1998). Treatments of film themes are, however, occasionally the subject of investigative analysis, although the interpretative aim differs from PaRDeS analysis. See Miliota, Scorsese's psyche on screen: roots of themes and characters in the films.
Multi-Level Cinematic Arrangements of Film Themes

The PaRDeS film method investigates thematic content differently to other methods by extending discussions that state theme in the context of plot, (Peshat) to a discussion of specific linkages between thematic content, viewers’ responses to a film (Sod), and filmmakers’ commentary (Derash). Acknowledging the importance of this link in terms of the creation (and evolution) of multiple kinds of cinematic meaning represents a significant development of the existing treatment of cinematic theme by contemporary film interpretation.

Taxi Driver: God’s Lonely Man

Most commentators concentrate on the socio-cultural concerns of the mid-1970’s – Vietnam, the Oil Crisis, the deterioration of urban neighbourhoods - in their discussions of theme in Taxi Driver. Themes such as these are content-related, communicated to viewers by story and setting (Peshat). Other themes are layered in the script in less obvious cinematic ways. Thematic content in Taxi Driver reflect the creative inputs of scriptwriter Paul Schrader, and director Martin Scorsese. Each man uses the medium of film as a forum to express different thematic pre-occupations that share common theological ground (Sod).

Schrader’s Taxi Driver script,2 supplemented by later comments, elucidates his thematic intentions.3 His major thematic concern is an exploration of loneliness, and how a lack of connectedness to other people, and to society initiates one man’s descent into madness. Alienation is the core subject of the script. Schrader maintains tight control over the cinematic presentation of theme in Taxi Driver by writing every scene from the perspective of the main character’s point-of-view.

Scorsese, on the other hand, relies on cinematic style to express his thematic vision.4 Questions of what is, and is not real visually dominate the screen. His Catholicism is perhaps reflected in the way he films the bloodbath at the end of the film. Scorsese visually glorifies in the ‘spilling of blood,’ bathing the screen in graphic gore. Scorsese uses blood in its

2 Paul Schrader, "Taxi Driver (Original Script)," (1975).
Catholic, redemptive mode (Derash). Bathed in blood, Travis is cleansed – and then born again (Sod).

The specific ways Schrader and Scorsese communicate different levels of thematic meaning are explored more fully in Chapter 7’s analyses of the famous, ‘You talkin’ to me?’ scene, and the explosive final scenes of Taxi Driver. The PaRDeS analyses of these scenes showcase how each filmmaker respectively manages to articulate multiple levels of thematic meaning in visionary, cinematic language.

**Black Swan: Visual Representations of Theme**

Cinematic representations of theme are a consistently expressed, visual narrative presence in Black Swan. Viewers are visually referred (Remez) to themes of self-reflection, the quest for perfection, questions of madness and reality, and notions of control and freedom. Nina is reflected and refracted in mirrors in several scenes, ultimately witnessing her reflection taking on a menacing life of its own.

When viewers consider the implications of cinematic suggestions (Remez), they are able to find entry points to new pathways of potentially significant readings of a film (Derash). In this instance, viewers of Black Swan might well extend cinematic reflections of madness that are supported by visual evidence, such as Nina’s autonomous reflection (Remez), to an examination of their own mental health (Sod). Interpretation is then guided by individual responses to reflective questions that apply Black Swan’s ‘significant’ (Derash) meaning to viewer’s own lives, such as, “How can we be certain what we ‘see’ is real?”

Film analyses usually link cinematic representations of dreams to interpretative questions about reality. Black Swan opens with a dream that turns into a nightmare. The opening scene features a distance shot of Nina dancing in a stark, and surreal setting absent of colour. Her entire body can be seen in the motion of dance, and is sympathetically filmed, the beauty of the dance emphasised. As the music becomes frantic, the surreal, dream-like dance transforms into a nightmare, where Nina is pursued by a dark and menacing figure, before she awakens.

The other-worldliness of this sequence, reflected in both content and film style (Peshat), alerts the audience to Nina’s tenuous grasp of reality (Derash). Dreams in Black Swan are a key allusion to Nina's subconscious (Remez), and reveal her secret dreams, wishes

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5 The Taxi Driver scriptwriter was clearly aware of this connection (see Schrader, Transcendental style in film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer.), and used his understanding to great effect in the script. This was further developed by Director Martin Scorsese
and desires (*Derash*) to viewers. Dreams make repeat appearances later in the film, and ultimately the cinematic reality of Nina’s ‘real world’ itself becomes questionable.

When Nina and Lily share a night of debauchery and sex in the latter half of the film, viewers are not sure if what they are witnessing is real (*Peshat*), a dream (*Remez*), or a product of Nina’s tortured mind, and a reflection of the psychological toll of her repressed sexuality (*Derash*). Aronofsky emphasises Nina’s surreal ‘version’ of the world by various visual representations of glass and mirrors. Eventually Nina’s reflection takes on a life of its own.

Aronofsky fills the visual space with various allusions to theme (*Remez*), uses disjointed editing and, in addition to the use of mirrors and reflections to infer duality, other characters are used as personifications of different aspects of Nina’s own psyche (*Derash*). Each of these relationships are dualistic in nature: Lily represents Nina’s sexuality; Leroy her animus, or male energy and need for control; the Mother becomes both her past (origins) and her future (monstrous); Beth, the ageing dancer Nina replaces as Principal Dancer in the Company, is initially what Nina would like to become (as evidenced by her theft of Beth’s lipstick, and use of it prior to a clumsy seductive plea to Leroy for the dual roles of Odette/Odile in *Swan Lake*), and then what Nina fears she will become (broken and alone, with no future).

That Nina attempts to destroy Beth later in the film, stabbing the older dancer with a pair of scissors when Beth is in a hospital bed (after literally falling under a bus), suggests Nina cannot conceive of a future beyond ballet (*Derash*). Nina is almost euphoric at the achievement of ‘perfection in performance’ that the ‘dual’ death of the Swan Queen and herself at the close of the film. In Beth’s and her Mother’s lives, Nina has ‘seen her own future’ as an ageing dancer – the madness of the Mother or the ‘brokenness’ of Beth. Neither choice is acceptable. In literally dying herself, Nina is affirming that there is no future beyond the perfect performance (*Sod*).

Duality is cinematically expressed in various narrative ways (*Peshat*) in *Black Swan*. The narrative of the film is vested in the story of *Swan Lake*, which explicitly explores duality through the tale of Odette and Odile, the black and white swans of the ballet (*Remez*). Fellow dancer Lily’s apparent wantonness is a foil to Nina’s initial frigidity. The theme of madness becomes a central narrative notion that links repressed sexuality to the splitting of self (*Derash*). The sexual content of the film (*Peshat*) – and the link between repressed sexuality,

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6 *Swan Lake* is itself based on another source - the fairytale *The Red Shoes* by Danish writer Hans Christian Anderson, and first published in 1845. This is not often noted (although the 1948 film of the same name is commonly referenced), possibly because some critics/interpreters are unaware of the connection. The link is not generally referred to by any of the filmmakers, or, for that matter, in various discussions of *Swan Lake* (which is usually framed in terms of Tchaikovsky’s orchestral score).
blood, and madness – are 'organised' within the context of Nina's home (Remez), where she lives with her oppressive 'mad' mother.

The lack of privacy in the home is contrasted with the privacy Nina finds in the 'group' – the ballet company, where despite the scores of dancers congregating in various social groups during rehearsal breaks, Nina is always alone (Peshat). Her social isolation is expressed visually, the camera privileging her character’s point of view, as she looms large in the foreground, her peers congregated in groups in dark corners and at the end of hallways. At other times Nina ‘invades’ Beth’s dressing room. She steals the Principal Dancer’s personal grooming items, such as combs and lipsticks, appropriating that woman’s image (Remez).

Nina’s dual selves (symbolised by the White and Black Swans) lack a ‘reconciling agent,’ a bridge between her opposing selves (Derash). Nina is afraid. She is a fractured self, and where there is fear and repression there can be no unity (Sod).

PaRDeS analysis energises existing commentary about Black Swan. When the implications of the visual representations of duality are investigated in the context of the PaRDeS levels, a complex relationship between cinematic expressions of theme, and film as commentary and philosophy (Midrash and Sod) is illuminated. The PaRDeS assumption that cinematic ‘clues,’ such as the visual presentation of theme in Black Swan (Remez), implicitly suggest ‘applied’ or ‘significant’ readings, underlie this unique approach to investigations of film theme.

**Negotiating Multiple Themes & The Matrix**

Thematic content of The Matrix is clearly identified in visual and narrative ways (Peshat). Neo is given a choice – does he want to continue to live in the illusory world of the Matrix, or enter the ‘real world?’ Several other themes are, by implication, connected to the notion of choice, for ‘freedom,’ ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ themselves are choices one can choose to accept or deny also (Derash). Even when Neo does enter the ‘real world,’ he still needs to make a personal choice to become ‘The One’ but this time not by taking action, as when he accepted Morpheus’ offer of the red pill, and entered the ‘real world.’ In becoming ‘The One,’ Neo must choose to believe he can transcend his body, and become super-human (Sod).

This notion of choice is itself subject to a dialogue between determinism and free will: Are we subject to the vagaries of fate, or do we create our own lives? Ultimately, viewers choose their own answers (Sod).

Theme is integrated into the plot of The Matrix (Peshat) in the way core themes are communicated to the audience through the posing of existentially flavoured questions in the narrative. Morpheus, more than any other character, ‘speaks’ to viewers in direct,
philosophical terms that serve to guide them towards thematic content. His answers (often to questions he himself proposes) contextualise how viewers think about the action, and provides them with an opportunity to connect to the film’s philosophical commentary (*Midrash*). When Thomas (Neo) asks, “What is the Matrix?” Morpheus says:

> It's that feeling you have had all your life. That feeling that something was wrong with the world. You don't know what it is but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad, driving you to me. But what is it? The Matrix is everywhere; it's all around us, here even in this room. You can see it out your window, or on your television. You feel it when you go to work, or go to church or pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

This direct explication of philosophical themes in dialogue explicitly links theme and audience. Most viewers have at some point felt the ‘Splinter in your Mind,’ that signifies a sense of ‘something wrong with the world.’ In putting these words in the mouth of Morpheus, the narrative content of the film (*Peshat*) explicitly refers to thematic content (*Remez*).

In *The Matrix* the world is not as it first appears. This is an *explicitly* expressed theme and it is linked to another explicit narrative element, the question “What is the Matrix?” Together they create a specific philosophical framework of interpretation that links the meaning of the film to questions about the nature of reality. Certain implications (*Remez*) are suggested: the implied assertion that reality is a dream, and the question that is implied by this: “Do we think for ourselves?” The process of responding to a range of questions *The Matrix* explicitly poses in multiple cinematic ways guides viewers to multiple film commentaries (*Midrash*). An unusual feature of the Wachowski brothers is that they apparently use a technique of *Midrash* analysis as part of the narrative content of the film (*Peshat*).

PaRDeS is unique in linking a filmmakers’ cinematic commentary (*Deraš*) to viewers’ personal and affective responses to film (*Sod*) in a systematic way. Interpreters that frame their personal responses to film (*Sod*) in this way are then able to uncover relevant personal perspectives that can be brought to bear on the meaning of a film.

In this case, it is significant that humanity in *The Matrix* exists in the mind (bodies are in the bio-grid, generating electricity). In the end, one can conclude, we, as human beings, are indeed ‘creating our own realities in our minds.’ Regardless of one’s philosophical

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7 The systematic process of PaRDeS analysis also provides analysts with an organised way to substantiate their interpretations to others.
inclinations, an individual’s thoughts define their choices of action (Sod). Without intent, there is no act. This is alluded to (Remez) when Morpheus tells Neo, “The body cannot live without the mind.” The Agents that fight on behalf of the Matrix, and are themselves generated by computer programmes, can never be ‘human,’ for they are limited by the constraints of their programming. The human mind, whilst it may be a programming and storage device, is also unpredictable and creative, prone to illogical speculations. When Neo masters his mind, he masters the Matrix. He destroys Agent Smith (literally from the inside-out after ‘diving’ into the Agent) before ascending into the sky. The true power of the human mind – the potentials – can be achieved only when uninhibited by the constraints of the body. Neo is determined to gain control of both (Sod).

For analysts, interpreting The Matrix requires a negotiation of religion and philosophy, myth and fairytales, the past and science, and technology and the future – an interpretative ‘response’ to the implications of the multiple allegorical readings of the film. The preceding discussion is an example of how linking thematic content to personal perspectives (Sod) using PaRDeS interpretation generates original conceptualisations of a film’s meaning, and clarifies the process of how viewers can ‘extract’ significant, or highly personal meanings from films.

**Expressions of Theme in Clueless**

This PaRDeS analysis of Amy Heckerling’s cinematic expression of theme in Clueless serves to demonstrate her skilful understanding (and use) of the audio-visual properties of cinema (Peshat) to refer viewers to ‘meaningful’ interpretations (Remez-Derash). These find their nexus in the attribution of potentially ‘spiritual’ or profound readings (Sod) of Clueless. This discussion establishes a significantly new interpretative direction. Studies of other sources (as is the usual interpretative focus) might elucidate the meaning of Clueless, but they do not constitute an accurate interpretation of the film’s meaning.

Teenage characters often talk about gender issues, sometimes in quite sophisticated ways. Heckerling uses Clueless as a ‘warning’ to the teenage audience against the dangers of being over-confident. She also makes an intriguing commentary (verging on ‘hidden’) on the nature of authorship itself (Derash).9

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8 Agents Brown and Jones meanwhile, have escaped by descending in an elevator – a symbolic contrast to Neo’s ascension, for their descent suggests a return to a hellish origin.
The cinematic presentation of themes related to female representation in the form of dialogue (Peshat) refers the audience in visual ways (Remez) to potentially significant (Derash) readings of Clueless. The consequence of this unique PaRDeS way of approaching themes in Clueless refers the interpreter not to Austen’s novel (as is usually the case) but instead reminds interpreters that any examination of film meaning must investigate the film as a separate work. In this case, using PaRDeS to interpret Clueless points analysts to potentially significant readings of the film (Derash) that are usually not identified. Consider the following discussion that is linked to subsequent discussions in this thesis about the different levels of meaning that are established in the opening montage sequence of Clueless.

In the opening montage Cher uses a computer programme that digitally renders alternative possibilities for how she chooses to dress each day. Cher partly justifies her use of a computer to fashion her ‘look’ by saying, "I don't like mirrors." This comment hints at the character's deeper motivations, and sense of self (Remez), and also implies that Cher does not like reflections – the physical kind as well as any kind of psychological reflection (Derash).

The symbolism of mirrors in Clueless reflects a pre-occupation with outward appearances, especially at the expense of important moral and ethical values (Sod). “I don’t like mirrors,” (Peshat) can therefore ultimately suggest that this aversion to mirrors is not due to Cher’s dissatisfaction with her appearance (Remez), but instead (symbolically) linked to a sense of her own spiritual emptiness (Sod). The consequences of this multi-layered cinematic narrative find expression in the ways viewers respond to this reading (if they recognise it) through the lens of their own beliefs and values (Sod).

A clue to the contemporary sensibilities of the film is typified in the following exchange between Cher and her father:

Mal Horowitz
You mean to tell me you argued your way from a C+ to an A-?
Cher
Uh-huh. Totally based on my powers of persuasion. You proud?
Mal Horowitz
Honey, I couldn't be happier if they were based on real grades.

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10 Recall from the previous chapter’s critical review of Clueless that the bulk of analysis is concentrated on finding parallels and differences between Emma and Clueless, or else concerned with using Clueless in commentaries about authorship (such as Nachumi, “‘As if!’ Translating Austen’s Ironic Narrator to Film.”)
11 This hidden Sod meaning is generally not perceived on the first viewing of the film.
Cher's father is a successful corporate lawyer, and his pride in his daughter's powers of persuasion to achieve a result that she does not deserve reflects his occupation – it is Cher's ability to argue and persuade, rather than her academic ability, which makes him proud. Yet a PaRDeS examination of this exchange also reveals a commentary (Midrash) on a modern society grounded in questionable ethics.

When Cher's grades reflect her capacity to virtually bully her teachers into awarding her higher grades (Remez), her father is more impressed than he would be by an intellectual achievement. This anti-intellectual bias supports a thematic-inspired commentary (Derash) that later contextualises other plot-related elements (such as Cher’s choice of the book, Fit or Fat, when she decides to improve her mind). The commentary implied by these plot features (Peshat) is not an advocacy for anti-intellectualism, but a explicative statement about the effects of a superficial culture, driven by a need to improve physical rather than intellectual or spiritual flaws (Sod). Using PaRDeS to explore the implications (Remez) of plot points (Peshat) is a new way of integrating what a film means to viewers (Sod) in film interpretations.

As well as offering a fresh perspective on the cinematic function of Clueless as ‘parable’ (Derash), PaRDeS film interpretation also contributes new insights to existing analyses (Midrash). Makeovers are a feature of the narrative (Peshat) of Clueless. At an early point in the film Cher’s best friend Dioone tells newcomer Tai that Cher’s main thrill in life is giving someone a makeover, since it gives her a sense of control in a “world full of chaos.” PaRDeS interpretation provides a fresh perspective on this heavily analysed feature of Clueless. The kind of makeover Cher gives other characters is suggestive (Remez) of a more significant statement about the character’s psychological motivations (Derash).

Making over her teacher, Miss Geist involves removing outward signifiers of character – unattractive glasses, dowdy clothes and so forth. Miss Geist, despite being an older woman and authority figure, succumbs to Cher’s dominating presence, and allows her student to change her physical appearance substantially. Yet, although Cher is genuinely delighted at the success of her ministrations (Peshat), her motivations are ultimately selfish – to transform Miss Geist into a woman who will attract the attentions of fellow teacher, Mr Hall, who is the only teacher who is impervious to Cher’s ability to ‘argue up’ her grades. Cher’s efforts are entirely successful and the two teachers’ wedding closes the film.

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12 Recall from Chapter 4’s examination of existing analyses of Clueless, the usual framing of interpretations (of the film) according to various elements of Jane Austen’s Emma. Many of these privilege the meaning of the novel at the expense of alternative explanations that one finds in an examination of the cinematic narrative of the film.

13 Most analysts recognise this narrative element of Clueless as a reflection of the character of Emma from Austen’s novel.
However, when Cher ‘makes over’ fellow student Tai, her motivations are pure but misguided, yet the consequences much more dramatic (*Peshat*). The makeover of Tai is more comprehensive than that of Miss Geist. Cher doesn’t just change Tai’s appearance. Cher tells Tai what to say, whom to like, and which strict social conventions to adhere to. When Cher ‘makes over’ Tai, she is adding layers to the young woman's character. In essence, Cher is imposing her *self* upon Tai, re-creating the girl in her own image (*Derash*). Part of the situational irony of *Clueless* lies in the consequences of this particular makeover. Tai ‘becomes’ Cher, supplanting the clueless heroine in the school hierarchy and ultimately setting her sights on Cher’s stepbrother Josh.

The unanticipated consequences of Tai’s makeover create the narrative impetus (*Peshat*) that positions Cher to perform the ultimate ‘makeover of the soul.’ Implicit in this sequence of events (*Remez*) is the suggestion that ‘making over another person in your own image,’ and controlling their individuality (as Cher does to Tai) is a greater personality flaw than manipulating another person, to improve your own position (*Derash*).

*Theme vs. Content in Josie and the Pussycats*

The PaRDeS analysis of *Josie and the Pussycats* is able to apply the framework of the different kinds of meaning to propose a nuanced rendering of the failure of the film that other methods cannot ‘discover,’ due to different assumptions about meaning.

Viewers of *Josie and the Pussycats* are visually exposed to over seventy well-known multi-national brand logos and symbols. These are not in the ‘background,’ but instead appear on everyday products used by the characters. In nearly every scene, brand logos appear on every-day products used by the characters (such as towels), or are a feature of the background décor, appearing on walls, carpets, shower screens and numerous other items (literally ‘part of the wallpaper’).

This conflict between the narrative (story *Peshat*) and the inescapable visual presence of brands (screen *Peshat*) provides fertile ground for misinterpretations of the film’s commentary (*Derash*). The effect of the misinterpretations that result from the conflicting meanings is that many viewers are either confused or disgruntled (*Sod*).

*Josie and the Pussycats’ ‘message’* to teenagers to ‘not sell out’ (*Derash*) out finds more currency in the independently minded rebellion against the system by Josie, Valerie and Melody (*Peshat*) when they refuse to be part of the conspiracy that plants subliminal messages in their songs. This is despite the fact that their acquiescence would ensure personal fame and glory. The implications (*Remez*) of this plot point (*Peshat*) develop a film statement (*Derash*) about the importance of remaining faithful to one’s ideals and values (*Sod).*
The visual distraction of product placement (Peshat) however, devalues the commentary (Derash), which ‘preaches’ a message of the importance of individual expression and remaining true to oneself. Whatever the filmmakers' intentions, the effect of the product placement is to confuse the message of the film. The foundation for misreading the intended meaning of the film is thus established at a thematic level. The first of the many conflicting meanings of Josie and the Pussycats is established.

Within a week of being signed by Mega Records, the first single by the Pussycats has reached the number one position on the music charts. A consequence of the rapid rise to the top of the charts by the Pussycats as a consequence of the subliminal messages in their music ensures any success the band does attain is tainted by suspicion (Remez).

In Josie & the Pussycats this suspicion is addressed by the ‘live’ band performance that closes the film. The song the band performs on stage is meant to ‘speak for itself,’ (musical Peshat) and leave viewers with no doubt of The Pussycats’ right to success (Remez). Yet the meaning this implies, and that PaRDeS analysis of significant meaning (Derash) reveals, is disturbing – for product placement in the rest of the film draws attention to the fact that the song itself is a ‘placed product.’ The film promotes the song (which performed much better on the music charts, than the film did at the box office). Teenage viewers can recognise the marketing-based connection between the film and the ‘narrative performance’ of the song.

One of the potential allusive (Remez) meanings this scene develops is that the Pussycats, as a cinematic construction, is itself a fake band. Viewers might also notice that the Pussycats cannot play their instruments – or at least they pretend to do so in an unconvincing way. For some, this becomes a noticeable frustration (Sod). Using PaRDeS to explore the interactions between the film narrative and the film commentary explicates the process of how the anti-selling, non-conformist theme of the film (Derash) is translated by viewers. The result of the conflict between thematic content that is communicated in the film narrative (Peshat and Remez), and what viewers see on screen (screen Peshat) is that some viewers identify unintended themes that conflict with the film’s narrative (an interpretative Sod reaction) with Josie and the Pussycats.

The ‘heavy-handed’ approach by the filmmakers of Josie and the Pussycats in developing the anti-commodity culture commentary (Derash) implied by this thematic content (Remez) means that the teenage audience have no choice but to acknowledge its presence in the film. When set against the unintended subtext of hypocrisy, the thematic drive of the film seems to suggest that teenagers have no minds of their own (Sod). This unique way of conceptualising film failure as a function of conflicting levels of meaning is further

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14 Some viewers are distracted from the narrative by poor lip synching, poor instrument synching and various other music-related misrepresentations of musical performances in the film.
evidence that the potential of PaRDeS to address existing interpretative gaps in cinema interpretation yields new and useful insights.15

*Expectations of Cinema Sex*

Sexual content in films is usually referred to in analyses by its narrative presence in a film (*Peshat*). Although rarely explicated in film analyses,16 modern film audiences have certain expectations that are connected to Hollywood Cinema’s increasingly frequent visual presentations of sex, sometimes in graphic ways. Once again, space and scope limit the length of this discussion. It is noted however, that the various gaps in the critical literature connected to the evolving cinematic representations of sex offer an opportunity for future PaRDeS investigations of the various implications of the narrative and visual presentations of ‘sex on screen’ (*Peshat*).

Certain film genres suggest the presence of sexual themes and scenes to viewers, and the promotion of *Black Swan* as a ‘psychosexual thriller’17 naturally creates a ‘viewer expectation’ of a sexually charged cinematic narrative (*Peshat*). In this respect, the film fulfils audience expectations. Sexual content in film is, however, increasingly being used by filmmakers as an allusion (*Remez*) to other, ‘non-sexual’ meanings. From the French comes the term *la petite mort*, or ‘little death’ as a description of the experience of orgasm. Nina’s orgasms can also be read as a precursor to her eventual demise (*Remez*).

In everyday life, most members of the audience do not normally watch strangers engaged in sexual activity. When Nina masturbates (on-screen *Peshat*) she becomes the object of the gaze of the viewer, who responds in ways that are unique to them, including their ‘feelings’ about their own sexuality (*Sod*).18

After Nina fails to impress Leroy in her efforts to attain the lead role in *Swan Lake*, he roughly kisses her and then tells her he doubts her ability to ‘truly know’ herself. Without getting in touch with herself, he tells her, she can never be convincing in the role of the ‘Black Swan.’ At home, after another disturbing encounter with her mother, Nina falls asleep.

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15 Recall from Chapter 2, the recognition by various authors of the potential of PaRDeS to respond to existing problems of interpretation. See, for example, Agamben, “Pardes: The Writing of Potentiality,” for a philosophical perspective, and Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*. for a literary criticism perspective. Meanwhile, in the field of Film Studies, various authors have noted the potential for Mediaeval Jewish Hermeneutics (including PaRDeS) to respond to contemporary ‘issues’ in film interpretation and criticism. See Marsh, *Explorations in Theology and Film: Movies and Meaning*. (Introduction) Also, David Graham, “The Uses of Film in Theology,” in *Explorations in Theology and Film: Movies and Meaning*, ed. Clive & Ortiz Marsh, Gaye (Malden, Mass Blackwell, 1998).

16 Occasionally for reasons unrelated to interpretative protocols, such as a personal reticence to discuss sex, and the lack of a ‘scholarly language’ in which to do so.


18 The seminal essay, Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” is an excellent reference for readers unfamiliar with this cinematic proposition.
When she awakens, lying on her stomach, she begins to masturbate, becoming increasingly responsive to her own touch. At the moment of climax she is horrified to realise her mother is in the room. The cinematic proposition of ‘viewers as voyeurs’ represents a subtle way of ensuring viewers feel connected in a personal way to the character (Sod responses of viewers that affect their ‘narrative’ perceptions of character).

There are two sex scenes in Black Swan – Nina’s masturbation scene, and the lesbian sex scene between Nina and Lily (Peshat). Each of these scenes is filmed in a way that positions the viewer as voyeur (Remez). By the second half of the film the audience has been presented with enough cinematic evidence in the form of fractured imaging, split screens and various reflections of Nina taking on their own life (Peshat), to have developed a sense of Nina as fragile, frigid, and potentially insane (Remez). Nina’s ‘ballet rival’ Lily arrives unannounced at Nina’s home, and takes out Nina for a night of debauchery. They experiment with drugs, flirt with, and passionately kiss various men, and dance with wild abandon. They return to Nina’s apartment, where the two dancers engage in a passionate encounter of their own, leading to Lily performing oral sex on Nina.

The angle of the shot positions the viewer from Nina’s perspective. Both audience and Nina watch Lily. She stares at Nina before performing sexually (Peshat). Filming the sex scenes from Nina’s visual point-of-view also calls into question whether or not the intimacy between the two women actually occurs (Remez), since once again, the audience is witnessing events from Nina’s perspective. The sexual content of the film is used as evidence of Nina’s developing insanity (Remez). The undeniable stylistic beauty of Aronofsky’s filmmaking does not mitigate the (relatively) unimaginative linking of madness to female sexual repression (Derash).

The PaRDeS multi-level framework of meaning is able to present a nuanced analysis of the subtle implications of cinematic expression and film style. This feature of PaRDeS differentiates the method from alternative modes of film analysis. When narrative content is privileged in viewer interpretations, the sexual content of Black Swan is mere titillation, beautifully filmed. Alert viewers link Nina’s sexual acts to her previous repression (Remez), and recognise the enormity of her sexual ‘deflowering’ by Lily. From this point forward, Nina’s insanity accelerates.

The visual sexual content in Black Swan – whether it is the relatively tame seduction of Nina by Leroy, the more intense sexual encounter between Nina and Lily, or Nina’s intense masturbation – serves specific story and character functions (Remez). Black Swan sex intensifies as Nina descends further into madness. In abandoning herself to pleasure she both
finds and loses herself. Orgasm, sometimes known as ‘the little death,’ presages Nina’s swan dive to her actual death at the end of the film. The framing of cinematic sexual content in terms of the multiple kinds of meaning it confers on films is another fresh perspective of film meaning offered by PaRDeS film analysis.

Sex and Cinema Narratives

Sex is not as explicitly presented (either narratively, or visually) in the other thesis films as it is in Black Swan. In Taxi Driver it is not the act of sex on screen (Peshat), but the function of the sexual act (Remez) that is emphasised. Travis is frustrated by his ‘lack of sex,’ and by the angelic campaign worker Betsy’s rejection of him. The knowledge that the pre-pubescent Iris is a prostitute – the fact that she is having sex – becomes his expressed motivation for ‘saving’ her when he perpetuates the violent slaughter of the closing scenes of the film.

The one chaste kiss between Trinity and Neo in The Matrix – when viewers think that he is dead – comes at the end of the film, and performs an allegorical function (Remez), rather than being a means to appeal to, or ‘titillate’ (mostly) male viewers.

Trinity breathes life into Neo (Remez). One is thus referred to Judaic notions of the Shechinah, loosely defined as the nurturing, life-giving feminine aspect of God. The implication is that the relationship between Trinity and Neo (and Morpheus as well) is ultimately ‘non-sexually’ motivated by their ‘spiritual’ function (Sod). Applying the notion of Shechinah frames the relationship between the three primary characters of Morpheus, Neo and Trinity in Judaic terms. The ‘entry point’ to this interpretation is inferred by Trinity’s name (Remez). A Christian interpretation struggles to reconcile her gender with a theological rendering of the three characters as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all masculine in the Christian tradition.

Once this allusion (Remez) is recognised by viewers, some will extend the implications of Shechinah to the broader character allegory, thus developing ‘significant’ readings (Derash) of the film. When at the close of the film Trinity’s sexless kiss restores Neo not only to life, but also to an elevated version of himself (‘God-like’), this interpretation is affirmed. When Neo literally explodes in a blaze of light following the kiss, he is effectively being restored as a being of light (Derash).

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Different authors variously describe the notion of the ‘restoration of the vessels.’ Briefly, throughout the course of Jewish history, some commentators have proposed that prior to ‘Creation’ there existed a self-contained unity, which although the nature of which is inexpressible, can be represented as a vessel. The ‘vessel’ could not receive the influx of ‘spiritual light’ and thus split apart. The term, ‘restoration of the vessels,’ ultimately infers a spiritual desire to re-unite the broken shards of light, and return to a state of unity.

Specifically, Neo as a being of light (Peshat) is a visual representation (Remez) of the ‘Restoration’ that is predicted to follow the ‘breaking of the vessels.’ This theologically inclined PaRDeS interpretation of The Matrix (Sod) represents a new way of responding to the character framework of the film. Recognising Trinity as Shechinah, the feminine ‘face of God,’ is a reading that is more correctly attuned to both the character’s name (Peshat), and her function as Neo’s ‘breath of life’ (Derash).

Not all films of course, offer these ‘spiritual’ perspectives (Sod), communicated to viewers by specific cinematic narrative content. As a ‘teen-comedy,’ Clueless is comparatively innocuous, and restrained by film classification regulations that impose limitations on what can be cinematically represented on screen. Thus, the term ‘jeepin’ serves as a euphemism for sexual activity (Remez). Whether or not a character partakes in sexual activity is in some way or other, implies personal qualities of characters.

An increasingly beleaguered Cher fails to convince her driving licence examiner to overlook her poor driving, and she does not attain her much-desired driver’s licence. Tai, meanwhile, is enjoying her elevated social status, and takes the opportunity to verbally attack Cher in front of their social group (narrative Peshat), culminating in the scathing comment that Cher is “a virgin who can’t even drive.” As Tai’s insult to Cher suggests, Cher is as ‘clueless’ about sex as she is about driving a car (Remez).

One again notes that a teenage comedy operates under specific restrictions as to what can be said, shown or suggested. Certain elements of the Clueless narrative specifically related to sexual activity are therefore developed using a metaphor of cars and the freeway upon which they drive, and which ‘transports’ the characters to new places (Derash). Recognising this vehicular sexual metaphor also suggests that the act of sex does so as well (Sod).

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21 This writer’s understanding of tikkun olum is framed by a history of intellectual engagement with the reflections of writer and educator Rachel Pollack, who links Jewish mysticism to symbolic (visual) representations of profound meanings. See, for example, Rachel Pollack, Seventy Eight Degrees of Wisdom (London: Thorsons (Harper-Collins), 1983). Pollack also refers consistently to PaRDeS in her writings, and advocates its use in personal contexts related to understanding the self.

22 Although specific systems vary from country to country, films targeted at teenagers are subject to enforced restriction about the kind of language, sex and so forth that can be presented on screen.
There is a natural resonance between cars and sex, especially for teenagers, to whom a car can represent the major location of sexual activity. Consequently, the use of vehicular terms to infer a sexual meaning (Remez) is a metaphor teenagers are able to recognise and respond to. Amy Heckerling operates within the framework of restrictions about how she cinematically presents her narrative, to infer sexual activity, while maintaining the innocence and charm of the primary narrative of *Clueless* (Peshat).

**Opening Scenes & Establishing Levels of Meaning**

Using PaRDeS in film analysis reveals how opening scenes establish multiple strands of thematic content that find their synthesis in filmmaker commentaries and other ‘significant’ interpretations (Derash).

Themes are expressed in visual ways, which establish a foundation of commentary (Derash) that ‘conditions’ the personal responses of viewers (Sod) by (visually) referring to potentially significant frameworks of meaning for a film. This PaRDeS conceptualisation of meaning frames an interpretative effort that, from the first stages, treats film meaning in markedly different ways to other film analysis methods.

In making different assumptions about both meaning and the ways it can be interpreted, the PaRDeS method is clearly distinguished from its contemporary interpretative counterparts. Although opening scenes are clearly recognised as ‘important’ by others in terms of establishing the narrative elements of a film (Peshat), the role of the ‘simple’ narrative in establishing a framework of multiple meanings is not well understood. The scene analyses that conclude this chapter demonstrate the effectiveness of using the PaRDeS method to respond to this gap.

This section clarifies the different ways PaRDeS interpretation deals with multiple levels of cinematic meaning by using specific examples that arise from the interpretations of two films. This discussion uses examples from *Clueless* and *Taxi Driver* to explicate ways PaRDeS interpretation examines opening scenes for evidence of a framework of multiple meaning. The research aim of this thesis is to elucidate the adaptation of the PaRDeS method to interpret films. Space does not permit an examination of scenes from each film, and scenes from these films were chosen as a way of explicating the broader research goals.

*Taxi Driver* and *Clueless* differ in terms of genre, target audience, and film style. Using scenes from these films explores alternative ways in which the PaRDeS process evolves during the process of interpretation.
A general question PaRDeS analysis seeks to answer is, “What are the effects of opening scenes and sequences – how are the different levels of meaning established?” Analysis begins with a set of elementary questions about each of the four levels of PaRDeS. Unlocking the meaning of each requires different interpretative strategies, co-ordinated by an interpretative goal of understanding and describing the full spectrum of a film’s meaning.

Specific questions for each scene analysis include the following: (a) What is the story? (Peshat); (b) What is being alluded to? (Remez); (c) Does allusive cinematic content implicitly refer viewers to other, ‘significant’ meaning? (Derash); and (d) Can any cinematic evidence of profound or hidden meanings be found? The PaRDeS interpretative process concludes with a question directed at explicating analysts’ (and viewers’) own unique reading of a films’ meaning: “Does the film strike a personal chord?” (Sod).

Subjectivity and the Titles (Opening) Sequence of Taxi Driver

As Amy Taubin notes, the title sequence of Taxi Driver (in particular) “encapsulates the essential elements of [the film] in regard to details of its mise-en-scene, film image and the filmmakers’ methods of inscribing subjectivity.”23 The opening and the closing scenes of Taxi Driver were filmed at the same time. The consequence of this is that the starting point and the closing point of the film were fixed in the minds (and the eyes) of Scorsese, the cast and the crew of Taxi Driver during the shooting of the bulk of the film. Style, colour and content synthesise the creation of a dream-like visual sequence, and from the opening scene of the film, the viewer is invited to question the reality of what they see on screen. Audiences are also exposed to the film’s first (symbolic) use of a motif that appears repeatedly throughout the film – the (rear-vision) mirror (Remez). From the opening sequence of Taxi Driver Scorsese and Schrader suggest the film reflects the audience.

Opening and closing scenes represent opening and closing statements from filmmakers about the ‘message’ of the film (Derash). They also define the parameters of the story (Peshat). The Opening Sequence of Taxi Driver includes the opening titles, the emergence of a taxi through a smoke filled night-time New York street, and biographical details about the protagonist of the film, Travis Bickle. There is a substantial amount of multi-level meaning contained in the opening sequence of Taxi Driver, and the PaRDeS method provides a unique means of discerning, understanding and ultimately describing that meaning, and subsequently elucidating the interpretation of the entire film. The title credits sequence occupies just over two minutes of screen time:

23 Taubin, Taxi Driver. 34
“Columbia Pictures” appears on the screen in small red letters on a black background. In larger red letters appears “Robert De Niro in” and as the titles fade the first of Bernard Herrmann's themes begins ('ominous' brass, side drum and cymbals in a descending two-note phrase). The music builds in intensity, and the screen titles are swallowed up in a cloud of white sewer vapours. A yellow cab slowly comes into view, and then moves out of frame, producing the title “Taxi Driver” in its wake. This title appears to hang on the screen momentarily before the titles continue against the glow emanating from the lights of the city – street lights, traffic lights, neon advertising signs. In a quick cut a pair of eyes fills the screen, tinted red against another cloud of sewer smoke. In its widescreen format, the eyes are framed in such a way that they seem independent of any attachment to a face. At this moment the second of Herrmann's themes begins – an almost romantic saxophone melody, built around the same descending two-note phrase. The image on the screen then switches to what the eyes on screen are seeing – night-time Broadway through a rain-drenched windscreen (the outside world oblivious to Travis as it continues to ‘move forward’ in slow motion). This point-of-view shot dissolves into an optically processed shot of the same location, with the windscreen no longer in the frame. Pedestrians cross an intersection (in slow motion) and then the final title appears: “Directed by Martin Scorsese.” Another close-up of the eyes fills the screen and scan left to right and left again, now appearing anxious.

What viewers witness on screen in the closing sequence of Taxi Driver parallels the psychological state of Travis Bickle (Remez). The subjectivity of the narrative perspective of Bickle is inferred by his role as the taxi driver of the title (and ultimately reinforced in the final image at the end of the film, when the taxicab ‘disappears’ into similar misty vapours). This subjective narrative perspective of Bickle, which many viewers accept as truthful, but is later cinematically implied to be questionable, is in fact suggested from the opening scene to be potentially doubtful (Derash).

The opening shot is saturated with colour (visual Peshat). The red tones signify the excessive quantities of blood (Remez) that flows in the violent slaughter perpetuated by Bickle at the end of the film. In other visual ways, the opening title sequence establishes a surrealistic cinematic world: the smoky, hazy shot, the use of a telephoto lens, slow motion filming and framing of the eyes, and the way in which the taxicab appears on screen through a cloud of swirling vapours. The taxi, and the world through which it moves, ‘feels’ like a dream.

Viewers find it difficult to pinpoint the distortions taking place on screen, and this contributes to other affective responses that are ‘felt’ by viewers (Sod). This is a remarkable
achievement for an opening titles sequence. The affective property of *Taxi Driver* is further developed through the introduction in this scene of one of the two musical motifs scored by Bernard Herrmann for the film – the so-called ‘Hell’ and ‘Heaven’ themes. The title sequence links surrealist visual imagery and twin musical motifs as a signal to viewers of Bickle’s narrative destination (*Remez*).

What does this titles sequence achieve in terms of creating multiple kinds of meaning? Firstly, it establishes the thematic concerns of the film. Secondly, the opening sequence announces the stylistic intentions of the director. Scorsese and Herrmann create a surreal effect when they introduce the world of Travis Bickle. From the opening scene *Taxi Driver* and the world of Travis Bickle, presents as an alternative reality. The entire sequence is an analogy for the psychological state of Travis Bickle, isolated and alienated from the world on the other side of the ‘screen’ – both the taxicab windscreen, and the screen on which viewers are watching the film. The world of *Taxi Driver* is New York through the eyes of Travis Bickle, and this scene establishes New York as the ‘City of Dreams’ (*Derash*) – a dream which Travis is no part of, and ultimately transforms into a nightmare through his violent actions at the end of the film.

Describing the titles sequence of a film in terms of different kinds of meaning enables the PaRDeS method of film interpretation to offer a fresh perspective that illuminates the craft of filmmakers. In particular, the effective coordination of music and image can employ the affective nature of both to directly connect viewers to filmmakers’ spiritual intentions and personal motivations (*Sod*). They are then in a position to recognise *Taxi Driver* as a perverted form of a urban redemption narrative (*Sod*).

*Don’t Listen to Me: The Opening Montage of Clueless*

*Clueless* opens with a musical montage, which introduces viewers to the privileged and carefree lives of Cher and her friends. This privileged lifestyle extends to expensive cars, clothes and houses (thanks to the wealth of the parents). The audience is guided through this sequence in two ways: Cher’s voice-over narrated over audio-visual content, and an ironic narrative that is established by the contrast between image and voice-over. The intended audience, production period and tone and style of the film are different to those of *Taxi Driver*, but so too do the intentions of the filmmakers in terms of what films ‘say’ (*Derash*). Scorsese and Heckerling do, however, share an understanding of how the audio-visual

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24 This naming of the musical motifs is common, and is found in multiple references, including Amy Taubin’s *Taxi Driver*.
properties of cinema offer sophisticated filmic possibilities when creating multiple levels of cinematic meaning.

The opening sequence of *Clueless* is a musical montage accompanied by Cher’s narration. Heckerling uses a series of jump cuts, mixing low and medium shots (visual *Peshat*) to infer the fast-paced and exciting lifestyle of the characters (*Remez*). The visual cuts match the musical tempo of the song, and Cher's voice-over begins. Her self-description of her “way normal life” is not borne out by the images of her life that appear on screen. Cher’s narrative voice as 'clueless' is immediately established. Consider the following segment of voiceover from the opening montage:

> So OK, you're probably thinking, "Is this, like a Noxema commercial, or what?!" But seriously, I actually have a way normal life for a teenage girl. I mean I get up, I brush my teeth, and I pick out my school clothes. Daddy's a litigator. Those are the scariest kinds of lawyers. Even Lucy, our maid, is terrified of him. He's so good he gets paid five hundred dollars an hour just to fight with people, but he fights with me for free 'cause I'm his daughter.

As well as communicating narrative information about the character (*Peshat*), this segment of voiceover establishes Cher’s view of her self (*Remez*) by emphasising her lack of awareness of what a ‘normal life for a teenage girl’ actually represents for the majority of the audience. This is the starting point for the journey to self-awareness (*Derash*) that Cher travels during the course of the film.

Cher’s delivery of voice-over (*Peshat*) emphasises her 'modern teen-age voice' ('way normal'), yet her narrative voice reflects that of an older woman, and is replete with allusions (*Remez*) that many members of the teenage audience are unlikely to understand. The following segment of voice-over from the Opening Montage illustrates how dialogue is used to create multiple kinds of meaning.

> CHER

Isn't my house classic? The columns date all the way back to 1972. Wasn't my mom a Betty? She died when I was just a baby. A fluke accident during a routine liposuction. I don't remember her, but I like to pretend that she still watches over me.

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25 *Noxema* is the brand name of a range of feminine hygiene products.
Consider just a few of the multiple meanings that accrue to this extract from Cher’s voice-over. 'Betty' is an allusion to Betty Grable, a reference the teenage audience (and many others for that matter) will not recognise. It is a particularly filmic reference. Irony is established by the use of 'classic' to describe 'columns' dated ‘all the way back to 1972’ (Remez). The opening scene establishes that Cher is motherless and in charge of her home. Cher is not upset by her mother's death, (as evidenced by both tone of voice and image), but does have a sentimental view of her mother grounded in a view of ‘life after death,’ where her mother “watches over” her. The death of the mother during a liposuction procedure is also indicative of personal vanities that lead to death (Derash).

The ‘significant’ meaning in the Opening Montage (Derash) suggests the consequences of an obsession with physical appearance. As with the faux-antique columns of the Horowitz home, it is style rather than substance that motivates action, and that inspires Cher’s expression of personal pride. Viewers could even arrive at another extension of the narrative when they consider the implications of how Cher’s mother died. The ‘routine’ liposuction that killed Cher’s mother was an effort to remove the post-baby fat acquired during her pregnancy. In an indirect fashion, Cher's birth led to the death of her mother, even if the precipitating factor is the mother's obsession with physical appearance (Sod). Cher clearly has not made this connection herself, for as this opening sequence suggests she (like her mother appears to been), is obsessed with her appearance, and like her mother before her, does not consider the consequences of personal vanity.

The unique interpretative process of PaRDeS offers a new assessment of the effects of Heckerling’s coordination of thematic content in the Opening Montage of Clueless. Framing this analysis based on the assumption of multiple levels of meaning reveals new insights into the development of the film’s commentary (Derash). Heckerling uses the visual properties of cinema to refer viewers to cinematic statements related to themes of superficiality, and her own comments on authorship that are later developed in the film.

**Conclusion**

Using PaRDeS to investigate thematic meaning reveals relationships between the narrative properties of film (Peshat), and film as commentary (Derash). This new method of dealing with film themes elevates interpretative discussions beyond the usual simple

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26 Betty Grable, an American actress and singer appeared in several well-known Hollywood musicals of the 1940’s, including *Mother wears Tights* (1947). Grable was noted for her beauty, famous for having insured her legs for a reputed $1 million.
identification of film themes. The PaRDeS analyses offer a unique perspective on how filmmakers rely on the visual properties of film (visual Peshat) to structure thematic content in ways that support a film’s primary narrative (story Peshat), and link cinematic visual ‘clues’ (Remez) to film commentary (Cinematic Midrash) and other significant interpretations (Derash).

‘Significant’ readings of films (Derash) are established and contextualised by thematic content (Remez and Peshat). Filmmakers work with intersecting themes as a way of expressing themselves in philosophical and ideological terms. In the PaRDeS interpretations of this chapter, thematic content reflects the socio-cultural concerns (Derash) of viewers and filmmakers. When perceived and understood by viewers, thematic content deepens the ‘experience’ of film spectatorship, and has the potential to impact viewers’ values and beliefs (Sod).

Analysts can use the PaRDeS model as a way of describing the framework of thematic meaning in cinema. Table 3’s classification of thematic meaning is a useful summary of the PaRDeS investigation of this important feature of film meaning, and is offered here as a guide to other analysts.

**Table 3 PaRDeS Interpretative Guide to Thematic Meaning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Presence in Film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>Story and plot (presents theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>Evidence of allegory (reinforces theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>Evidence of Midrash; archetype &amp; myth – Film as parable; (theme as commentary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>Viewer response to film as foundation of how they develop meaning (theme as perceived by viewers and critics)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Filmmakers rely primarily on the visual properties of film to alert viewers to theme, and usually do so early in the film. Thematic ideas are evoked using motifs (musical and visual) and other symbols. Closing scenes often reinforce thematic content by using the same visual imagery that established thematic meaning in the opening scenes (such as the taxicab in *Taxi Driver*).

**PaRDeS & Points of Difference to Contemporary Interpretations of Film Theme**

The PaRDeS framing of film meaning (as a synthesis of four kinds of meaning that are simultaneously carried within (and by) a film) is distinguished from its contemporary counterparts by differing assumptions about not only film meaning, but also about how that meaning can be interpreted.
Specifically, the majority of contemporary film criticisms and interpretations select an important feature of cinematic meaning (such as character), and then use that feature as a way of explicating links between films and society, culture and ideologies. The meaning of a film is not usually presented in its entirety; nor are analyses that aim for completeness generally offered. When the full spectrum of film meaning is considered, the (perceived) complications of dealing with significant (Derash) and profound or highly engaged personal responses to film (Sod) are treated as an interpretative problem. This approach means that even when the existence of these kinds of meaning is accepted, they are considered difficult to find and describe, and it is rare to find discussions about how they actually arise in cinema. The PaRDeS method, on the other hand, is actively engaged with these meanings in its interpretative efforts.

The problems that contemporary interpreters attribute to certain difficult cinematic meanings were themselves identified millennia ago by Rabbis and other Jewish commentators. In this tradition we find evidence of an extended engagement with the ‘difficulties’ inherent in significant (Derash) and hidden, mystical and profound (Sod) meanings. ‘Issues’ of interpretation identified as problematic by modern interpreters have been recognised, and explicated by Jewish philosophers since (at least) Maimonides’ linking of Aristotelian and Jewish philosophies in the 12th Century. It is this tradition of successful engagement with ‘interpretative struggles’ that first suggested the PaRDeS model as way of responding to current issues of cinema interpretation that underlies this thesis’ adaptation of the model to produce a new method of performing film analysis.

The interpretative value of PaRDeS is demonstrated in the fresh perspectives its use offers into the arrangement of different levels of cinematic meaning that are coordinated by a film’s audio-visual and narrative thematic content. The interpretative benefits of PaRDeS analysis are further explicated in the following Chapter, where the PaRDeS method’s original conceptualisation of film meaning frames an examination of the consequences of filmmakers’ various cinematic choices.

27 This is reflected not only in film analyses offered from a variety of ideological perspectives, but also in Film Theory. See Maria & Tom Wallis Pramaggiore, Film: A Critical Introduction, 2nd ed. (2007).
28 Examples that refer to this difficulty are found in several fields (including film analysis). See, Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Several Eisenstein Stills." Rotenberg, Dia-Logo Therapy: Psychonarration and PaRDeS. & Bordwell, Making meaning: inference and rhetoric in the interpretation of cinema.
29 Recall from Chapter 2, that the origins of PaRDeS lie in interpretations and commentaries produced by Rabbis and others about the Torah, Talmud and other sacred Jewish texts.
30 Bordwell, "Film Interpretation Revisited." 93 For a discussion of the ‘obtuseness’ of these meanings, see Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Several Eisenstein Stills."
31 Waldman, "Edenic Paradise and the Paradisal Eden: Moshe Idel’s Reading of the Talmudic Legend of the Four Sages who entered PaRDeS." 86
Chapter 6 FILMMAKER CHOICES & MEANING

Studies of filmmakers are primarily articulations of cinematic style and technique. These ‘Auteur’ interpretations represent valuable contributions to Film Studies. What most of these analyses do not do, however, is investigate the consequences of these stylistic cinematic choices in terms of the full spectrum of a film’s meaning. That PaRDeS interpretation is able to describe the consequences of these filmmaking choices in terms of the multiple kinds of meaning that accrue to them represents a significant contribution to the existing body of work.

Films exist because filmmakers choose to make them. The filmmaking choices they make are motivated by specific ideas, and expressed in the films they create. PaRDeS analysis of these ‘creative’ choices begins with a set of questions designed to investigate the cinematic expression of filmmakers: How are these choices reflected in the meaning films make, and the ways viewers interpret films? What kind of filmmaker is this? Are filmmakers trying to express deeper kinds of meaning or ideas? Who initiated and wrote the script? Who is the creative team on this film? What did the filmmakers mean? And does their film ‘mean’ the same thing? Is there evidence of a conscious attempt to use the film to express personal philosophies?

Filmmakers express their ideas in the language of cinema. John Gibbs identifies film style as a consequence of decisions made by filmmakers, reflecting upon them in a way that reflects why responding to these interpretative questions is useful:

Making a film involves a myriad of choices. Every frame, every cut, every element of performance and every note on the soundtrack results from pursuing one option and refusing many others. When investigating a film, a valuable approach is to identify a decision, or a group of decisions, and ask ‘What is gained by doing it this way?’ Of all the thousands of ways of opening the film, say, what are the consequences of the particular approach employed? To think in such terms is to consider the crux of the artistic process: the relationship between decisions taken and a work’s meaning.2

Explications of film style are a feature of cinema studies. These are invaluable resources that guide interpreters as they try to make sense of a film. However, few of these

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1 As the critical review of Chapter Four reveals, studies of Taxi Driver are dominated by studies of style and technique that leave to one side, questions of the film’s meaning.
studies link style to film meaning in a direct way. Interpretative focus is concentrated on areas that are essentially summarised as either, “Look how cleverly this was done,” or else, “This is how filmmakers technically manifested that scene.” Critics often refer to film style in reviews, but mostly do so in terms of how a film ‘looks,’ rather than what a film ‘means.’ Serious interpretations of films tend to focus on spectators rather than filmmakers, or else are serious Auteur studies. In either case, linking style to filmmakers’ intentions to create certain kinds of meanings is not often investigated.

PaRDeS is considerably more respectful of filmmakers, at least in terms of interpretations of cinematic meaning, than most other methods. This respect for the effects of filmmakers’ choices includes an evaluation of their own commentary (Derash/Midrash) about the films they make, and an evaluation of how viewers respond to filmmakers’ cinematic expression (of their own ideas) in the development of their own personal readings of films (Sod).

It makes sense to consider filmmakers’ own statements when interpreting the films they create. This form of ‘Midrashic’ activity responds to filmmakers’ comments on film style, film as art and their use of cinema as personal expression. This deepens analysts’ understanding of filmmakers’ intentions, and structures an evaluation of how effectively filmmakers articulate their intentions in films. To use PaRDeS to fully explore filmmakers’ choices is an extended exercise. This chapter serves as an introduction to the different ways PaRDeS investigates film style according to the framework of multi-level meaning.

The chapter commences with a detailed PaRDeS exploration of filmmaker style in Taxi Driver. That the PaRDeS method is able to provide fresh critical perspective on a film so heavily analysed by others is proof of the interpretative potential of this new PaRDeS approach to film meaning. Reconciling filmmakers’ choices with the consequences for meaning made by viewers is a valuable outcome of PaRDeS interpretation. This analysis is followed by an investigation of how using PaRDeS illuminates ways filmmakers control the direction of meaning made by audiences begins with a series of brief discussions about the filmmaking choices and cinematic expression of Darren Aronofsky (Black Swan), Larry and Andy Wachowski (The Matrix), Amy Heckerling (Clueless) and Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan (Josie and the Pussycats).

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3 A comprehensive treatment of this, and other key elements of film can be found in Wallis, Film: A Critical Introduction.
4 Useful filmmaker comments on film style and meaning are found in commentaries that feature as extras on DVD releases; where the Director or Writer is interviewed; and they are asked the right questions. The Making of the Matrix that featured on the first (and other) DVD releases of the film is an example of how valuable this kind of interpretative source can be. Further, many viewers utilise this source of interpretation.
New Perspectives on Taxi Driver

The following discussion uses Taxi Driver as an illustration of specific ways interpreters can apply PaRDeS to respond to questions about film style and its links to cinematic meanings, and their interpretation. This section explores how the script and story choices of Paul Schrader, and the editing, lighting and other choices of director Martin Scorsese affect the kinds of meaning viewers attribute to Taxi Driver.

Paul Schrader’s Taxi Driver: From Script to Screen

The PaRDeS method’s investigation of cinematic meaning in multiple ways finds a balance between the three makers of meaning represented in Moshe Idel’s Exegetical Triangle – filmmakers, film (as text), and film exegesis (by viewers and critics). This unique way of conceptualising not just meaning as a multi-level arrangement, but also the effects of the synthesis of the multiple contributions to the creation of the meaning of Taxi Driver, is the foundation of the unique perspective PaRDeS brings to film interpretation.

In the PaRDeS examinations of Taxi Driver, the value of including comments by filmmakers in arriving at an ultimate interpretation of the meaning of a film becomes evident. The PaRDeS response to comments by filmmakers introduces film analysis to new investigate areas, and provides fresh perspectives about film as ‘parable’ (Derash).

In the case of Taxi Driver, the personal experiences and background of the scriptwriter Paul Schrader (filmmaker Sod) resulted in that man’s own personal ‘Dark Night of the Soul,’ and it was during this period that Schrader wrote the script for Taxi Driver. Exploring the intentions of the filmmaker, as this PaRDeS investigation does, illuminates the commentary about the film (Midrash) by linking the narrative arc of the film (Peshat) to the personal experiences of Paul Schrader (Sod).

Paul Schrader had completed his PhD (on transcendental style in film as expressed in the works of Bresson, Ozu and Dresser), and then turned his thesis into a well-regarded and influential book. Guided by New Yorker film critic, Pauline Kael, he developed a career as a film critic – a promising start for a man in his twenties. However, Kael and Schrader fell out, he went through a divorce, the breakdown of another relationship, and he became seriously ill and was hospitalised. Schrader's life was beset by personal and health problems. It was during

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5 Idel, Absorbing perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation. 429-430
6 Schrader, Transcendental style in film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer.
this period that he wrote the *Taxi Driver* script, and Bickle’s alienation from society reflects that of his creator.

Schrader is responsible for a major portion of the story arc (*Peshat*) of *Taxi Driver* – and the script itself represents a significant commentary by Schrader (*Midrash*), articulated through the metaphor of a man driving alone in a taxicab through the decrepit, seedy streets of New York (*Remez*).

The premise of the script was inspired by Arthur Bremer, an assassin whose personal history roughly parallels that of Travis Bickle. Bremer, who kept a diary detailing his reasoning and motivations, tried to kill President Nixon. When this attempt was unsuccessful Bremer shifted the focus of his murderous intent to Governor George Wallace. In Maryland, during May of 1972 Bremer shot (and paralysed) Governor Wallace. Bremer's diary was published under the title, *An Assassin's Diary*, and it details similar feelings to those expressed by Travis in his voiceover – both men feel like ‘a nobody’ in a world where one only matters if they are 'somebody.' Schrader read Bremer's diary, of which he said, "It was just about a little angry man who wants to be somebody," noting the irony that perpetuating a murderous rampage results in a ‘nobody’ becoming 'somebody.'

At its core, the script is representative of Schrader's personal reflections on alienation and masculinity. The plot directly reflects Schrader’s personal angst (*Sod*) in the form of a commentary on social malaise (*Derash*) that exaggerates his own psychological reaction to rejection and failure (*Sod*). Schrader signals his intentions by opening the *Taxi Driver* script with a quotation from Thomas Wolfe, entitled ‘God's Lonely Man:’

> The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence.

Travis is ‘God's Lonely Man,’ and believes that he is doing sacred work when he kills the child-prostitute Iris’s pimp Sport at the end of the film. Schrader wrote *Taxi Driver* from Travis Bickle's narrative point of view. Doing so ensures the character’s believability (*Peshat*), and viewers are inclined to accept the character’s narrative voice as truthful, and to empathise with Travis (*Sod*). Schrader was influenced by existential themes, and these are

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7 After Bremer's capture and imprisonment, Sara Jane Moore shot at President Gerald Ford, resulting in her appearance on the cover of *Newsweek*.
8 MacNab, *The Making of Taxi Driver*. 64
9 Schrader, "*Taxi Driver* (Original Script)."
reflected in the script's characterisation of Travis. Schrader also reflects his literary influences when he says,

Before I sat down to write Taxi Driver I re-read Sartre's Nausea, because I saw the script as an attempt to take the European existential hero [and] put him in an American context. In so doing you find that he becomes more ignorant, ignorant of the nature of his problem.  

Sartre's work is a classic existentialist text on the meaningless of existence. His hero is obsessed with small, pointless details. Schrader appropriates the themes of Nausea and comments upon them in a context with which he was familiar – Hollywood cinema. This is a form of Midrash – that is, Taxi Driver is commenting on a literary text, Sartre's Nausea – and is reflected in the broader themes of the script, but is also expressed in specific, cinematic terms. Despite his obvious understanding of the techniques of European Cinema, Schrader downplays the influence of film noir on his screenplay. It can be taken then, that the expressionistic style of the film, and the meaning imparted by this, is attributable to Scorsese's direction.

When interpreters use PaRDeS to interpret films the subsequent investigation leads analysts into areas of research they might otherwise not explore. In this instance, recognising the underlying angst (Sod) reflected in the Taxi Driver script (Peshat) by scriptwriter Paul Schrader yields a set of questions that relate to the universality of the thematic content of the film (Derash). Is Schrader's psychological condition in 1975 reflective of an underlying malaise in the United States? Does Taxi Driver reflect American society in accurate socio-cultural terms? PaRDeS analysis is unusual in the way it links the past (previous events), the present (the cinematic world of Taxi Driver) and the future (the world of the audience) in analyses of film meaning. The PaRDeS process that induces analyses to pose and respond to interpretative questions (such as those generated by the analysis of Taxi Driver) offers a new perspective on how film meaning evolves over time (Derash), and in ways that can be highly personal (Sod).
Schrader defines the script (*Peshat*) as a metaphor for loneliness (*Remez*). The taxicab as a symbol of urban loneliness has been examined for decades. What is less commonly explored are Schrader’s ‘spiritual’ intentions for *Taxi Driver* (*Sod*). He says,

> What I am concerned about in film and in real life is redemption, because I do believe in purging and a kind of transcendence, either through contemplation or action. In *Taxi Driver* [it is] redemption through rough action, self-destructive action.

Schrader’s passion for transcendence (*Sod*) is reflected in the character of Travis. The angst both men feel is driven by an unfulfilled spiritual need. Only viewers prepared to engage in ‘contemplative cinema’ respond to this level of meaning in the film.

Schrader ‘admits’ to spiritual ambitions for the film. In the PaRDeS schema, the fourth level (*Sod*) is specifically concerned with uncovering this kind of spiritual intent of filmmakers. Spiritual meaning also develops through the intersection of the backgrounds of Schrader and Scorsese. According to Schrader,

> We both have essentially the same moral background – a kind of closed-society Christian morality, though mine is rural and Protestant and his [Scorsese's] is urban and Catholic.

Scorsese and Schrader were capable of, and willing to make a ‘spiritual’ film. Scorsese changed little of Schrader’s script, adding a scene for Albert Brooks, and one for Harvey Keitel. Schrader had crafted a script where every scene was told from Travis Bickle’s point of view. ‘Extra’ scenes designed to showcase actors (however brilliant they might be), broke with his concept of how the story should be told: “If he [Travis] doesn't see it, it doesn't exist.” Schrader felt that the scenes Scorsese wanted to insert would lessen the affinity of the audience with Bickle – in the end, the scene with Brooks was cut, and the scene where Sport (Keitel) and Iris (Jodie Foster) dance ends with a shot of Bickle watching them from a window. The audience is presented therefore, with no alternative view of the world other than that of Travis Bickle's.
As a filmmaker who came to the profession via a career as a film critic and academic, Schrader is uniquely positioned to view film from multiple perspectives. Schrader has a predisposition to self-reflection. He is indeed a filmmaker with an understanding of both the film text, and of himself, and as such is inclined towards a style of cinema characterised by self-reflection and projection of self via cinema. *Taxi Driver* taps into something in the human psyche because it was generated from deep within, was recognised as such by Schrader, and ultimately the rage, prejudices and obsessions that he discovers in himself are expressed in the *Taxi Driver* script. At a broader level, he had the idea of expressing similar ideas on the individual and society to that of Sartre's *Nausea* and at a more personal level he is expressing his own self-loathing and rage. We may not often speak openly of such things; indeed most of us feel uncomfortable doing so. But most viewers experience their own ‘dark night of the soul,’ and are more comfortable with conducting the discourse about such things in less personal and more abstract terms. Film, when it is ‘birthed’ in the manner that *Taxi Driver* was, serves as a forum (*Midrash*) for expressing existential angst (*Sod*).

*Taxi Driver* as commentary (*Midrash*) aims to illuminate social problems including those connected to race. Accusations of racism stem from a literal (*Peshat*) interpretation of *Taxi Driver*, where Travis is acclaimed as a hero after his murderous obliteration of the ‘scum on the streets,’ which in the film are mostly African-American. Literal interpretations generally ignore or minimise the more existential nature of the film, or the questions that are raised by film (*Derash* and *Midrash*). This includes the glorification of violence and the existentially inclined question that arises during the process of PaRDeS interpretation of *Taxi Driver*: In wanting to kill Palantine, who shares Travis's desire to ‘rid the streets of scum’ is Travis killing his successful alter ego? (*Sod*).

**Martin Scorsese and Taxi Driver**

Paul Schrader attempts to find personal redemption (*Sod*) in writing a script for *Taxi Driver* that reflects upon existential notions of human existence (*Derash*). Director Martin Scorsese responded to Schrader’s spiritual intentions for his multi-layered script for *Taxi Driver* (*Sod*) by bringing his own unique perspective to bear upon the film. Scorsese uses the tools and techniques of cinema to create an expressionistic film style (*Peshat*) that supports the thematic and ideological content (*Derash*) Schrader inscribed in his script.

Further, Scorsese also imposes his own spiritual intentions (*Sod*), and reveals them in clear cinematic ways (visual *Peshat*), such as the use of colour to infer (*Remez*) varying degrees of spirituality attached to characters. Thus, when Travis first sees Betsy, she is bathed
in light, an image of spiritual purity, while the carnage of the closing sequences is bathed in red and brown tones that refer the audience to images of hell.

Martin Scorsese recognises *Taxi Driver* as a ‘spiritual film’ and notes, “First and foremost, the urge behind this film is religious.”

Martin Scorsese has an impeccable film pedigree. After making student films, he worked at New York University's Cinema Department from 1968 to 1971 as a teacher. His personal view is grounded in his childhood as an ‘outsider.’ Scorsese has said that he uses film as ‘personal therapy,’ although he later admitted that he regarded this as a foolish statement since, in the end, the inner rage he thought he was ‘expelling’ when he made *Taxi Driver* stayed with him.

Film is the vehicle through which Scorsese finds and makes his own sense of meaning, a meaning he develops in collaboration with Schrader and others.

Martin Scorsese, as is often noted, trained for the Catholic priesthood (ultimately being asked to leave the Seminary), and says that he cannot help, “Catholicizing everything.” Scorsese’s Roman Catholic upbringing is evident in his films. He says, “I've been confessing most of the time [since 1965] on film [and] I can't help being religious. I have to ground everything in a bedrock of spiritual motivation.” From an PaRDeS interpretative viewpoint, the question arises: How is Scorsese’ religiosity (*Sod*) expressed in the film style and detail of *Taxi Driver*?

Catholicism is a formative influence on Scorsese as a man, and as a filmmaker. He says, “But for me the important thing has always been the notion of theatre – and, by extension, film – stemming from something being done in front of the altar.” In this, and other comments, Scorsese clearly reflects his religiosity in not just his films, but also his entire notion of cinema. While not overtly so (*Peshat* and *Remez*), *Taxi Driver* can be, for some viewers (as it is for the filmmakers) a religious text (*Derash* and *Sod*).

Consider the scene where Travis first sees Betsy on the streets of New York. Schrader's script dresses Betsy in the colour of yellow. Scorsese has Betsy instead appear in a white dress. White is traditionally associated with images of innocence and purity. When Scorsese alters this seemingly small detail (visual *Peshat*), he subtly infers similar qualities upon Betsy (*Remez*). Schrader describes Betsy (in the original script) in highly unflattering terms, which reflect his own (then) distorted view of women. Scorsese transforms his personal revulsion of Schrader’s misogyny (*Sod*) into a religious metaphor (*Remez-Derash*)

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19 MacNab, *The Making of Taxi Driver*. 20
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
24 Schrader, "*Taxi Driver* (Original Script)."
by 'purifying' the character. Her first appearance in the film is an example of how Scorsese uses the visual properties of cinema (Peshat) to do this.

Betsy appears to be glowing as she walks down a street bathed in natural sunlight. In the midst of the filth of New York, she alone appears clean. (At a Sod, or profound level, she can be regarded as an image of spiritual purity). The scene time is long enough to allow viewers to perceive the more nuanced meanings of this scene, for Scorsese shoots it in slow motion. There is ‘interpretative space’ for viewers to think about what they see on screen.

Lawrence Friedman notes that Scorsese sacrificed believability for another kind of 'meaning.' Scorsese develops his own idea of what Schrader's script ‘means to him,’ and in his position as director, is able to use editing and scene shifts to develop the director's meaning (as opposed to that of the writer). When two talented filmmakers work together in the way that Schrader and Scorsese do, the film that results is nuanced with the personal intentions of more than one creator (Sod). With respect to Taxi Driver, Paul Schrader employs a rather colourful metaphor to make this point.

Every director obviously changes the script, changes you, in a way fucks you. But that fucking is also part of the creative process, just as fucking in real life is. And if you can get fucked by good, talented people then you'll be happy with the child that emerges.26

For the most part, editing in Taxi Driver is orchestrated through point of view shots. The camera follows Bickle's point of view – audiences view the world from his perspective. Whenever narratives privilege the protagonist’s point of view – in this case through both voice-over and camera – there is an implicit suggestion of a potentially unreliable narrator. Dissolves are favoured over cuts in the editing process, enhancing the dream-like quality of the narration. Taxi Driver uses realistic settings. These are juxtaposed against an expressive way of shooting scenes that parallels themes of fantasy, reality and dreams.

Scorsese uses cinematic technique to reinforce Schrader’s storytelling, creating a structure of visual symbolism (Derash) where the director inscribes his personal spiritual ideas in the film text (Sod). The blood-based rituals of Catholicism27 are finally expressed graphically when the screen is liberally sprayed with copious, unrealistic amounts of blood.

25 Lawrence S. Friedman, Cinema of Martin Scorsese (New York: Continuum, 1997). 65 26 Corliss, "The Hollywood Screenwriter: Take Two." 47 27 Such as transmutation: 'This is your blood I drink, this is your body I eat,' a phrase invoked in the Catholic Mass, and the inference of Christ's sacrifice on the cross as a means of human redemption
PaRDeS interpretation yields fresh insights by linking the spiritual intentions of the filmmakers (Sod) to cinematic expression (film style) and a framework of multiple levels of film meaning. In doing so, the violence of the film is transformed from a literal interpretation, to a reading that recognises it as the synthesis of the spiritual intentions of the filmmakers (Sod).

**Filmmakers & Multiple ways of Making Cinematic Meaning**

The remainder of this chapter’s exploration of the PaRDeS method’s analysis of film meanings in the context of cinematic choices made by filmmakers continues the previous section’s interpretative focus on exploring ‘sites’ of film meaning that are, for the most part, not investigated by alternative methods. The following analyses of the individual thesis films yields fresh insights into each film, and also open up new pathways for future interpretation.

*Darren Aronofsky & Psychological Disintegration (Black Swan)*

Darren Aronofsky’s obsession with perfecting the visual style of *Black Swan* reflects his cinematic expertise, but comes at the expense of an equal engagement with the possibilities of cinema as commentary (Derash). Thus, audiences are witness to consistent visual displays of theme (Peshat-Remez) that, while beautifully filmed, ultimately refer viewers to a commentary (Derash) that remains undeveloped. When Aronofsky imbues the screen with clear visual evidence of Nina’s psychological disintegration (Peshat), such as the independent actions of her mirrored reflection, he focuses his efforts on how the film ‘looks’ (visual Peshat). Following the he ‘clues’ in the film (Remez) is potentially unsatisfying, for they refer viewers (back) to the narrative (Peshat), rather than leading to ‘significant’ cinematic meaning (Derash). Aronofsky’s stylistic obsession is reflected in Nina’s own perfectionist tendencies, and so hints at personal qualities of the filmmaker himself (Sod).

When the Director (Leroy) announces to the assembled dancers that they will be performing *Swan Lake*, he points out that ‘everyone’ may have already seen the seminal ballet, but not like this – his version will be visceral (narrative Peshat). Leroy’s announcement warns viewers (Remez) of the graphic visual representation of Nina’s disintegrating psyche that are to follow.

In addition to the use of Nina’s independent reflection, Aronofsky finds other ways to link the visual properties of cinema (Peshat) directly to viewers’ responses to *Black Swan* (Sod). Nina’s deteriorating psychological state is represented in graphic visual ways. As she
accelerates into insanity, her physical body (*Peshat*) is increasingly represented in visually disturbing ways (*Remez*). Her body, shot in extreme close-ups, becomes bloodied and scabbed, spews forth feathers, and falls apart in her hands. Viewing *Black Swan* is a visceral experience for viewers (*Sod*), whose senses are engaged by the pacing and rhythm of the music, as well as the visual and story narrative of the film (*Peshat*). The actual cinematic properties of the film, particularly the musical scoring by Clint Mansell (*Peshat*) have affective properties that engage the physical senses of viewers (*Sod*).

The way Aronofsky films dancers (*Peshat*), and the visual concentration he brings to the toll that dancing takes on the body (*Remez*) alludes to the theme of perfection (*Derash*). Aronofsky’s filmic representation of dancers differs from cinema’s usual presentation of the whole body in dance.28 This means that rather than seeing the whole body in graceful movement, viewers are shown the price that dancers pay to achieve perfection in their art. The negative effects of the ‘quest for perfection’ on the body are reflected in the close ups of Nina (*Remez*), as when she scrapes away at the dead skin on her feet - this disturbing image fills the entire screen. Filming the body in this way (*Remez*) also links the narrative (*Peshat*) to the fracturing of Nina’s self – the many different parts disconnected, each bearing its own burdens (*Derash*).

As Nina becomes progressively more insane, Aronofsky uses special effects in explicit ways to infer her psychological state (*Remez*). Nina’s face appears in paintings, on other characters, and in mirrors, reflecting the disintegration of her personality (*Remez*). The line between reality and fantasy becomes increasingly blurred. Viewers begin to question the reliability of is seen on the screen (visual narrative *Peshat*), and most viewers (and not always at the same point in the film) recognise that Nina has lost her ‘self.’ In connecting the psychological state of the character (*Derash*) to visual and musical imagery (*Remez*), Aronofsky invites viewers to participate in Nina’s deterioration not only intellectually, but through their senses as well (*Sod*).

There are other ways Aronofsky uses film style to support the surreal filmic world of *Black Swan*. The black/white dichotomy of the colour palette of the film (visual *Peshat*) is a clear way of referring viewers to themes of duality of self, and is used by Aronofsky as a means of generating surreal, affective sequences, and inferring psychological realities (*Derash*). The film’s editing does not aim to achieve the seamlessness of classical continuity editing, and the visual discontinuity of the narrative indicates Nina’s disconnection to self and others (*Remez*).

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28 Consider, for example, the musicals that dominated Hollywood cinema in the 1950’s and 1960’s, where professional dancers such as Fred Astaire, Claudette Colbert and others were filmed in the context of the beauty of the dance (*Peshat*), and mostly shown in full body shots. When close-ups of body parts were used, these (mostly) focus the attention of viewers on a particularly difficult dance step.
The hand-held camera technique is sometimes shaky (visual Peshat). It is rare that a scene in Black Swan begins with an establishing shot. Instead viewers are visually guided through the corridors of Nina’s mind, opening random doors and stumbling across yet more evidence of her psychosis. Aronofsky’s use of film technique to support theme, and to develop commentary (Derash and Midrash) is carefully crafted – and then applied with a heavy hand (visual Peshat).

What is Aronofsky trying to cinematically express with the film style choices he makes? They reflect a masterful understanding of the aesthetics of film (Peshat) and of thematic conventions (Remez). His choice to use a hand-held camera much of the time, the extreme close-ups of body parts, and his use of discontinuous editing (visual Peshat) create a surreal world that supports Nina’s disintegration of self (Derash). Whether or not Aronofsky has anything to say beyond a mastery of technique will be explored in Chapter 10’s examination of PaRDeS interpretative responses to existing commentary (Cinematic Midrash).

Using PaRDeS to examine the cinematic expression of Darren Aronofsky in Black Swan offers an alternative perspective to usual ways of investigating film style. PaRDeS analysis suggests that Black Swan represents a superficial examination of madness and repression (Derash). Although Aronofsky may have achieved mastery of technique and style, this does not necessarily translate into ‘significant’ film meaning – especially if the concentration on method (Peshat) means the opportunity to develop significant film commentaries (Derash and Midrash) is not responded to by the filmmaker.

The Wachowski Brothers & Micro-managing Meaning in The Matrix

The writer/director team of Andy and Larry Wachowski consciously endow every element of The Matrix with multiple meanings. Every colour, number, name, visual sound (and more) is treated by the Wachowskis as either a carrier of symbolic meaning, or a clue to other kinds of allegorical meaning. In micro-managing meaning in this way, the filmmakers offer viewers with multiple interpretative choices (Sod). It is highly likely that viewers will resonate with at least one of the many allegorical possibilities of the film. However, The Matrix still serves the function of ‘cinema as spectacle’ (Peshat) for those viewers who do not identify any of the cinematically layered clues in the film (Remez).

Stylistically the influence of Japanese anime, Hong Kong Cinema and dystopic themes drive the Wachowskis’ vision for The Matrix as ‘parable’ (Derash). An appropriate way of understanding the film style of the Wachowskis is to think of The Matrix as a filmed comic book. The storyboards for the film were prepared prior to filming, and the brothers were meticulous in their attention to stylistic detail.\textsuperscript{30} The film is virtually a moving representation of those storyboards, with music and sound added to the cinematic mix.

These detailed storyboards enabled the Wachowski brothers to make clear to the members of the film crew working on The Matrix the detail of the level of action, and shared the Wachowskis’ vision of how the film should look (Peshat). Using storyboards as a comic-book approach to scripting and design clarified the Wachowskis’ vision not just for themselves, but also for cast and crew working on the film. This created a cohesive collective vision on the set. The strength of the Wachowskis' authorial and their filmmaking leadership is the foundation of their delivery multiple meanings in clear and definite cinematic terms.

How The Matrix ‘looks’ is very much influenced by the Wachowskis’ love of Hong Kong Cinema’s filming of Kung Fu, with its use of long takes and wider angles and fluid wire work, featuring balletic jumps (grace in violence) and unrealistic ‘superhuman’ action.\textsuperscript{31} Keanu Reeves (Neo), Carrie-Anne Moss (Trinity), Lawrence Fishburne (Morpheus) and Hugo Weaving (Agent Smith) spent several months in daily training with the legendary Woo Ping and his Hong Kong stunt team. That the actors are clearly performing their own difficult, and visually arresting stunts in The Matrix gives the filmmakers different options for framing, and for choices of shots and angles.

The effect of training the actors in this way is that viewers connect to the ‘reality’ of the film – or at least are not jolted out of the filmic world by apparent filmmaker trickery, where the art lies in the seamless blending of actors and stunt-people. What filmmaker ‘trickery’ does exist in The Matrix is not about convincing the audience that the actor is doing their own stunts. Instead, the filmmakers make the most of the medium and its possibilities, drawing attention to the nature of the medium itself (Remez) by slowing down the fight scenes (Peshat), and highlighting the beauty of the impossible forms and movements stemming from the wirework.

The slow-motion action of the ‘bullet-time’ sequences indicates a potential commentary about the nature of time itself. This reading is first suggested (Remez) by the narrative premise that it is not 1999, but 2199, and that it is only the programming of the

\textsuperscript{30} These have been published, and are an excellent resource. See Wachowski, The Art of The Matrix.

\textsuperscript{31} In the Making of the Matrix, The Wachowskis reveal they used Woo Ping from Hong Kong, whose movies they love and have been watching for years. Woo Ping says he did not really want to do the film (“didn’t have the time”) but then he read the script, which he thought was brilliant, after which he became intimately involved with the choreography of the action sequences in the film.
Matrix construct that determines perceived time at all. This interpretative perspective finds support in the visual properties of the film itself (*Peshat*). Consider the following example, where the cinematic properties of ‘bullet-time’ are connected to the film’s commentary (*Midrash*).

Bullet-time is a form of slow-motion film technique during which the camera appears to orbit around the scene at ordinary speed.\(^2\) Introduced in the opening scene, the technique consistently appears throughout the film, mostly when Trinity and Neo fight against the Agents of the Matrix. How does this technique develop levels of meaning? Bullet-time, although used in action sequences, actually allows the audience to recognise and understand the responses of the characters as in, for example, the shot of Agent Smith, when he is facing a light-speed hail of bullets in the split second before he is killed but which in the cinematic world takes much longer. In addition to the narrative reality of his death, the use of the bullet-time technique allows the audience time to infer Agent Smith’s thought processes as well. This provides viewers with an opportunity to reflect upon, or reconsider their own personal responses (*Sod*) to the film’s commentary on time (*Derash*).

From the conceptualisation of the story, to the preparation of storyboards, to every detail of how narrative and character develop, and how these are represented on screen – the degree of meticulous planning of *The Matrix* is breathtaking.\(^3\) The Wachowskis understand and respond to their own influences, and weave their own impressive matrix of understanding into the film. PaRDeS analysis is unique in describing the film style of these filmmakers as a reflection on how the cinematic choices of the Wachowski brothers function to create meaning on multiple levels in very specific ways.

*Amy Heckerling’s Ironic Cinematic Narratives & Clueless*

Irony has a subtlety that many filmmakers struggle with, since the potential for misunderstandings is much greater than with more straightforward ways of being ‘funny on film.’ The PaRDeS analysis of *Clueless* re-establishes the ironic film narrative (*Peshat*) as a function of Amy Heckerling’s framing of the narrative perspective from the character’s point of view (using voice-over that communicates directly to viewers). This means that interior states of mind and internal thought processes that reveal the motivation behind her actions can be clearly communicated (*Peshat*), rather than inferred (*Remez*).

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\(^2\) The Wachowskis knew the visual effect they wanted, and worked with others to invent bullet-time specifically for *The Matrix*. It has since been much employed by other filmmakers.

\(^3\) Two excellent resources are *The Making of The Matrix (DVD Extras Original DVD Release)*, and, in the context of the intended meanings that motivate specific filmmaking choices, see Wachowski, "The Many Meanings of The Matrix".
The teenage audience is able to reserve their own interpretative faculties for examinations of the implications of the film narrative. This is an outcome of the use of voiceover in *Clueless* (revealed during PaRDeS analysis) that has not before been identified. The consequence of Heckerling’s use of voiceover (narrative *Peshat*) is that young viewers are able to limit the potential for misinterpretation, and are better able to connect to the film’s themes in a way that is meaningful to them (*Sod*).

The PaRDeS method links the success of ironic cinematic narrative of *Clueless* to a form of ‘cinematic conflict’ between different kinds of *Peshat* when Cher’s narrative voice does not concur with the visual image. The unique way that PaRDeS conceptualises the creation and success of an ironic cinematic narrative clarifies how other filmmakers can better refine their own versions of ironic storytelling in films. Further, this insight informs our interpretative perspective of ironic cinema narratives, and guides us to new sites of investigation. In the case of *Clueless*, the conflict between voice (narrative *Peshat*) and what viewers are presented with on screen (visual *Peshat*) confers the cluelessness of the film’s title on the character of Cher (*Remez*).

Consider the scene that follows Cher’s proclamation that her teacher, Mr Hall, needs to fall in love. Cher's reasoning is actually self-motivated, for if Mr Hall were happily in love, he would not grade his students as harshly as he does.

Cher wanders into the teacher's lounge, assessing the possibilities of various female staff’s potential as a love interest for Mr Hall. As the camera tracks Cher’s progress through the lounge (visual *Peshat*), it tracks back when Cher notices a chocolate bar: “Ooh, a Snickers.”

*Clueless* is full of such visual allusions (*Remez*) to the protagonist's point-of-view. The visual tracking of Cher's observations often reflects how easily she can be distracted — usually by fashion (“I wonder if they have that in my size?”), or food. Clothing and food, as subjects of her visual distractions (*Remez*), also infer her superficial concerns (*Derash*). This is a sophisticated use of camera technique to comment on Cher's personality, and reflects a deeper commentary that links Cher's superficiality to her ignorance.

Amy Heckerling noted the motivation behind her filmmaking decisions in a seminar at the American Film Institute, noting that with *Clueless*,

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The problems, the decisions that I made are very different than what comes up in other films. I mean, to me it was like keeping the kids focused and having color schemes for the scenes and making sure that there was the proper coverage to get across whatever jokes or scenes or material we were dealing with that day, making sure we had everything before the sun went down. I guess you're looking for some sort of statement of what kind of interpretive art it is but since I wrote it, I wasn't thinking what does the writer mean? It was like, how much pink can I put in this scene?  

What are some of the characteristic features of Amy Heckerling’s direction of *Clueless*? She uses the camera in a way that reinforces the connection the audience has with her protagonist. Most of the film is shot at eye level. This has a subtle effect – the audience is on the ‘same level’ as Cher. The continuity of editing and the natural lighting encourages viewers to remain in the cinematic world of the film. The attention of viewers is directed to filmic commentary (*Derash*) not only through visual details or editing (*Peshat* and *Remez*), but also through the use of voice-over. In more subtle ways, Heckerling uses colour as a code to Cher’s psychological maturation (*Remez*), and also as a reference to ‘the past’ (*Derash*). Cher’s preference for pink evolves. Her outfits reference the history of fashion. Just as *Clueless* updates *Emma*, so too does Cher re-fashion the past through her outfits, from modernizing traditional tartans to referencing outfits from 1960’s films.

Heckerling is masterful in her ability to imbue the simple narrative elements of the film with different layers of complexity. Unlike *The Matrix*, which at times labours under the enormous weight of its multiple ideologies, *Clueless* retains an elegant cinematic simplicity. Some viewers of *The Matrix* recognise that there are references in the film they do not understand. This can unsettle some viewers. With *Clueless*, audiences tend to adopt a viewing mode that privileges either the simple narrative (*Peshat*), or the ‘clockwork-puzzle’ readings of the film, where viewers focus on finding and arranging the various cinematic clues (*Remez*) to Jane Austen’s *Emma*.

*The Filmmakers & Humorous Narratives in Josie & the Pussycats*

Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan were in their early 30’s when they wrote and directed *Josie and the Pussycats*. They exhibit a self-conscious reaction to their role in making cinema meaning. The pair had worked on a number of projects previously. In *Josie*
and the Pussycats they seem to be sharing a joke that neither viewers nor critics found amusing.

Josie & the Pussycats is an unusual film in the filmmakers’ deliberate insertion of symbolic meanings (Remez and Derash) – as represented by brands like Target, Revlon, Motorola and MacDonald’s – in nearly every scene. The film becomes a carrier of symbolic values that have no relevance to the film’s meaning. These well-known and heavily advertised brands act as signs and designators of unrelated meanings. Logos and brands are powerful suggesters of meaning, and products, and in effect, become commodity signs. Brands such as Starbucks and Subway and the other brands each have individual symbolic meanings (Remez/Derash) and each time they appear (in every scene) they potentially suggest meanings that are not relevant to the film (misplaced Remez), and remind viewers of the film’s status as a ‘commercial product.’

Using well known established multi-national brand in this way contradicts the anti-consumer culture theme of the film. The inescapable physical presence of these brands, which comprises part of the Peshat meaning, leads many viewers to interpret Josie & the Pussycats as cinematic evidence of ‘Hollywood hypocrisy,’ since the seeming acceptance of the brand placement in the film conflicts with the narrative's call to ‘think for yourself.’ Viewers do not interpret Josie & the Pussycats as an ironic satire of consumer culture, or as a critical reflection on the commoditisation of music and art (Derash). Instead, the film is interpreted as a cynically conceived product of the commercial processes it claims to parody.

This miscommunication could have been avoided if Kaplan and Elfont had invented 'fake' brands to make the same point (Derash). Doing so would have eliminated misinterpretations, but still permitted a critique of ‘commodity culture.’ Product placement creates or transforms meaning on all four levels. As part of the film’s imagery these brand placements are a form of visual Peshat. Their visual presence suggests (Remez) an unintended reading to viewers (Sod) that results in interpretations of the film as ‘hypocritical.’ The actual commentary the filmmakers intend – and their cinematic reflections on the commodification of culture and music (Derash) – is diluted, misinterpreted or unrecognised.

The use of PaRDeS to interpret Josie and the Pussycats offers a nuanced (and original) rendering of film failure by linking misinterpretations of the film to the ‘conflicting’ multiple meanings offered to viewers by the film. An understanding of how the different kinds of meaning in film interact with each other, and of how viewers negotiate these, leads to effective ‘micro-managing’ of film meaning, as the PaRDeS analysis of The Matrix describes.

35 Jean Baudrillard, For a critique of the political economy of the sign (St. Louis, MI: Telos Press, 1981).
36 Note that none of the companies whose brands feature so heavily in Josie and the Pussycats were paid for the cinematic appearance of their products.
When filmmakers are able to develop and control meaning on the four different levels, they are more likely to accurately communicate their filmmaking intentions to viewers.

**Filmmakers & Cinematic Expression of Ideas**

The discussions of this chapter use PaRDeS to investigate how filmmakers create film meaning through a series of choices designed to reflect specific commentaries (Midrash). Understanding how filmmakers express their intentions cinematically informs assessments of how viewers and interpreters respond to film style. Interpreters are able to compare filmmakers’ comments to viewers’ interpretative responses. Using PaRDeS does not so much restore filmmakers to cinematic interpretation, as find a new place for them, based on a different understanding of (and assumptions about) film meaning, and how it is made. Analysts are better able to explain a film’s meaning to others when they ask themselves, “What are filmmakers saying, at what level, and why?”

In the analyses of this chapter another feature of PaRDeS interpretation emerges: the important role of the choices made by interpreters as well as those made by filmmakers and viewers. The PaRDeS method reflects its historical origins and maturity by treating the ‘act of interpretation’ as a reflection of individual choices about which cinematic features are ‘worthy’ of further investigation. The speculative readings of personal, profound and hidden meanings (Sod) are dealt with after the other levels of meaning are analysed. Framing an interpretation through a coordination of (four) different interpretative strategies, as PaRDeS does, is one way of minimising the effects of the urge to find meanings that support analysts’ pre-existing world-views and biases.

Interpreters are required to make ‘judgements’ about a film’s meaning by choosing which elements of the ‘film meaning spectrum’ they choose to engage with. PaRDeS, like other interpretative positions, reflects the choices of the interpreter. PaRDeS does, however, differ from other critical perspectives in an important respect – interpretative goals. As Chapter Four’s critical review of the films suggests, film interpretation is dominated by studies of film as a carrier of ideological meanings. Whilst PaRDeS interpreters share this concern, the range of meaning modelled by PaRDeS considerably expands the boundaries of analysis. PaRDeS analysis is devoted to the synthesis of the four levels to organise the meaning of the film as a whole text. These differences in conceptualisations of meaning and processes of interpretation are the foundation of the original insights that are produced in the PaRDeS film investigations presented here. The following chapter further extends the range of the PaRDeS film method by applying the method to the specialised interpretative activity of ‘Scene Analysis.’
Chapter 7 MULTI-LEVEL SCENE ANALYSIS

Scene analysis is a common mode of film interpretation. Analysing single, important scenes from films is a long-established method of film interpretation. As Andrew Klevan notes, “Honing in on moments [in cinematic analysis] is a method of magnification.” Scene analysis encourages interpreters to fully appreciate the effects of a filmmakers’ style. Scene interpretation also sharpens the attention of the interpreter, and this can lead to fresh insights about the meaning of the entire film. When ‘PaRDeS interpreters’ pay close attention to the dynamics of a single scene, the nuances of the cinematic expression of filmmakers (and how they use film style to articulate their intentions) become a ‘key’ (Remez) that unlocks the deeper meaning of the entire film (Derash).

Contemporary film criticism, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with using scene analysis in detailed explications of film style. PaRDeS scene analysis treats film style differently by performing scene analysis in the context of the multi-level arrangements of cinematic narratives. Reflections on cinematic expression are instead linked to the effects of film style on viewers (Sod), and on specific ways film style is used as a carrier of significant film commentaries (Derash).

This chapter uses PaRDeS to contemplate the meaning of scenes from two very different films. Firstly, an interesting ‘test’ of PaRDeS is its use in this chapter to interpret one of the most analysed film scenes of all times, the famous ‘You talkin’ to me’ mirror scene from Taxi Driver. The PaRDeS investigation effectively becomes an analysis of Martin Scorsese’s direction and Robert De Niro’s acting, for Paul Schrader’s screenplay for this scene contains a single line: “Travis talks to himself in front of mirror.”

Secondly, framing the scene analysis of the ‘Epiphany Montage’ in Clueless through this new PaRDeS film method’s interpretative perspective of multi-level meaning reveals a sophisticated framework of multiple meanings that both supports, and extends the meaning of the primary narrative. The allusions (Remez) explicitly indicated in the narrative (Peshat), and Heckerling’s cinematic commentaries (Derash) have up to this point in the thesis been contextualised by discussions of Cher’s voiceover (narrative Peshat). The audience has a greater insight into Cher’s inner nature than the character does (Sod). The PaRDeS analysis of the Epiphany Montage produces a unique perspective of how the different levels of meaning cinematically find unity at a narrative point (Peshat).

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2 As explained in Chapter 6, scenes from these films were chosen as a way of testing the use of PaRDeS to interpret films that differ in terms of genre, film style and target audience.
It is telling that this narrative point of unity occurs at what, according to the 3-Act structure, is a major turning point in the film designed to accelerate the action arc of the film ([Peshat]) in a new direction. The effect of Cher’s self-realisation ([Peshat]) is that from this point forward in *Clueless*, viewers no longer ‘know’ more about the character’s interior state than she does. This fresh perspective that PaRDeS offers on the cinematic narrative of *Clueless* is further evidence of the film’s success being attributable primarily to Heckerling’s cinematic expression (and not the film’s links to *Emma*, the focus of most other interpretative engagements with *Clueless*).

**The PaRDeS Film Method & Scene Analysis**

Using the PaRDeS method to answer the question, “What does this scene mean?” begins with setting up a systematic framework for analysis. This interpretative framework is guided by questions suggested by previous PaRDeS investigations of genre, structure, theme and film style, and the responses to these questions establish the direction in which any respective scene analysis will proceed. The responses to various interpretative questions is, in the PaRDeS method, always investigated in the context of the multiple kinds of meaning that are coordinated within the film, and by filmmakers, viewers and interpreters.

Approaching the interpretative process of scene analysis with a set of basic questions inevitably offers up new insights. The process of PaRDeS analysis of films unfolds in different ways, depending on the answers found by the analyst in response to a succession of different questions. Since different analysts find different answers to the sets of interpretative questions the processes of PaRDeS generates, ultimately each individual PaRDeS analysis develops a perspective that reflects the interpreter (‘interpretative Sod’).

Interpreters of films decipher the PaRDeS levels of meaning in different ways. Explaining the ‘plain’ meaning of *Peshat* is a response to story, narrative and the emotional and action character arcs of the film. Recognising ways films (and filmmakers) hint at other meanings ([Remez]) entails looking for evidence of explicit allusions to other films, texts or contemporary and historical events. Potential allegories are identified. The search for significant meaning ([Dera']) requires an investigation of the various ‘hints’ in the film. Allusions to other meanings ([Remez]) are usually tied together to create a kind of filmmaker commentary ([Midrash]). Do any of the suggested allusions relate to theme, message or film as parable? ([Dera']). As we saw in the previous chapter, filmmakers can also make explicit

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3 Readers are referred to Chapter 3’s PaRDeS discussion of Classical Hollywood narrative structures, and also to Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting.*
statements about their cinematic intentions that yield useful insights about meaning, and it is sensible to refer to their comments about specific scenes during the process of film analysis.

The fourth level of PaRDeS, Sod (secret) is always dealt with in the final stages of analysis. When interpreters have considered the meaning of the other levels, they are better placed to avoid imposing their own ideologies on interpretation. Analysts look for evidence of ‘spontaneous’ filmmaking, when meanings arise through serendipitous interactions that naturally occur during creative processes (unconscious filmmaker Sod). Also sought are any indications of deliberately hidden meanings (conscious filmmaker Sod). How and why some films resonate so strongly with certain cohorts of viewers relates to the ways they find their ‘self’ (and others) in films.

**Analysis of ‘Significant’ Scenes**

This chapter uses the following questions as a starting point for the following PaRDeS examinations of scenes from *Taxi Driver* and *Clueless*: (a) Does the writer, director or other filmmakers (respectively) intend to create different levels of meaning? (b) Do interpreters need to reconcile any anomalies in the scene? (c) Are different kinds of meaning present on the screen? (d) How are they communicated? (e) How do they interact to support a cohesive interpretation? Note however, that since these questions are the starting point of the PaRDeS analysis, the (respective) answers to these questions do not (necessarily) constitute the PaRDeS interpretation. Rather, the responses to these questions nearly always offer up new sets of interpretative questions. This organic process underlies the regularity with which PaRDeS interpretation yields new and original film analyses.

*The Mirror Scene in Taxi Driver: Are you talking to me?*

The Mirror Scene is a pivotal scene in *Taxi Driver*, a turning point where Travis’s motivations shift from seeking love with a woman to taking the first step towards the actualisation of his psychopathic potential. The Mirror Scene is nearly always contextualised (by critics and commentators) by the scenes of slaughter that follow, rather than the character development scenes that precede it.⁴

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⁴ See, for example, Patterson, "The power and the gory: Taxi Driver." Also, Biskind, "The Film School Generation." and Michener, "Taxi Driver."
The scene was shot in the front apartment on the second floor of a building about to be torn down on Columbus Avenue at 89th Street. The sounds of the street provided a noisy background to De Niro’s monologue. The absence of the evocative scoring of action and emotion by Herrmann itself signposts that this scene is worth our special attention.

Paul Schrader might have inscribed the mirror symbolism in his script, but it is Scorsese and De Niro who develop the associated metaphors, and who imbue the scene with its symbolic meanings (Remez). Scorsese lay on the floor and De Niro began improvising. Production pressures necessitated a quick take. De Niro found his own rhythm, and other than the occasional request to ‘repeat’ from Scorsese, was largely undirected in his performance.

First, let us consider the narrative content of the Mirror Scene (Peshat). Travis walks among the crowd at a campaign rally for Charles Palantine, the politician whose campaign platform is ‘to clean up the streets.’ Travis approaches a tall man in a brown suit and sunglasses, and asks the man if he is a Secret Service Agent. When the suited man answers in the affirmative, Travis tells him of some suspicious people in the area. Travis tries to impress the Agent, who offers to send Travis the information he needs (to apply to the Secret Service). Travis gives a false name and address (Henry Krinkle) that signposts his transition to a disjointed reality (Remez).

The film then cuts to Travis in his apartment, standing in front of a mirror. He is practising drawing his weapon – as heroes in American Western films do, and talking to an imaginary ‘bad guy’ (Remez).

TRAVIS

Yeah. Huh? Huh? Huh? ‘M faster than you, you fuckin’ son of a … I saw you comin' you fuck, shit-heel. I'm standin' here. You make the move. You make the move. It's your move. (Draws gun from concealed forearm holster). Don't try it you fucker. You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? (Looks behind). Well, who the hell else are you talkin' to? You talkin' to me? Well, I'm the only one here. Who the fuck do you think you're talkin' to? Oh yeah? Huh? Ok. (Whips out gun again).

The visual imagery becomes increasingly disjointed. Travis is no longer speaking to himself in the mirror, but instead portrayed in various repetitions of the preceding

5 The production information in this section is sourced from Taubin, Taxi Driver.
6 Martin Scorsese notes that one could hear the sounds on the street, and how noisy it was on the set. Martin Scorsese as told to Richard Schickel, Conversations with Scorsese (New York: Alfred A. Knopf (Random House), 2011).
7 Ibid.
conversation. The film replays upon itself, cutting between Travis lying on his bed, or in front of the mirror 'playing' the 'tough guy' (visual *Peshat*).

**TRAVIS**

Listen you fuckers, you screwheads. Here's a man who would not take it anymore. Who would not let ... Listen you fuckers, you screwheads. Here's a man who would not take it anymore. A man who stood up against the scum, the cunts, the dogs, the filth, the shit, here is someone who stood up. (There is a close-up of an entry in Travis's diary: “Here is,” followed by three erratic dots.) Here is ... (Travis draws his gun). You're dead.

The sound of families in the apartment block can be heard and voices from the street filter through the window. This ‘familial’ auditory soundtrack is a contrast to the silence in the apartment that is broken only by the ‘You talkin to me’ monologue. Travis's isolation is re-enforced. What is essentially the presentation of De Niro's stream-of-consciousness (‘Actor’s *Sod*’) in the cinematic narrative (*Peshat*) reveals to the audience Travis's inner state-of-mind (*Remez*).

The scene concludes with Travis mouthing the words, “You're dead,” and as the closing line of the scene, almost voicelessly delivered by De Niro, this reference to death is potentially significant (*Derash*). The line, “You’re dead,” foreshadows the bloodbath Travis perpetrates at the end of the film, when, out of bullets, he presses his bloodied fingers against his temple and mimics shooting himself three times (*Peshat*). When Travis metaphorically kills his reflection in this earlier scene (*Remez*), he recognises that he is already dead inside (*Derash*). This recognition frees him, in the sense that, with no life to lead, he can finally succumb to his repressed feelings of rage, even if doing so results in his own death (*Sod*).

When Travis says, “You’re dead,” he is speaking not only to himself, but to the audience as well (*Sod*). The viewer can interpret his statement as a clue to the character’s inner psyche (*Remez*) that confirms the visually disjointed editing (visual *Peshat*). “You're dead,” is being targeted at not just his own reflection, but thrusting a cinematic barb back at the society that has produced him (*Sod*). In the end, viewers are dead also – that is, the end result of the society (that both Travis and the viewer live within) is that viewers’ own violent demise, even if it is only internally experienced, is inevitable (*Sod*).

Prior to filming, Schrader relates that he told De Niro that Travis is “a little kid playing with guns and acting tough.” De Niro does perform the scene this context – although

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8 Opening and closing scenes are positioned to make statements. Opening and closing lines of scenes sometimes perform this ‘film as statement of intent’ function also.

9 Jackson, *Schrader on Schrader & Other Writings*. 119
his 'little kid' is on the brink of sanity. This scene is a slow-motion montage of images (visual *Peshat*). Travis is ‘trying on’ his new identity – that of the Hollywood Western Hero (*Remez*). He does a double take. He appears to rotate in isolated splendour in front of the mirror. Voice-overs and cuts are repeated. This serves to impel the audience to critically examine the cinematic moment. This increases the likelihood that viewers will engage with the filmmakers’ (respective) commentaries and personal intentions in their own construction of ‘profound’ interpretations of *Taxi Driver* (*Sod*).

*Film Style & Multi-Level Synthesis of Film Meaning*

Using PaRDeS offers a unique perspective on the Mirror Scene by framing the discussion in terms of the kinds of meaning that accrue to the audio-visual properties of cinema. When Scorsese positions the audience as the reflection in the mirror to whom Travis is speaking (visual *Peshat*), he invites the audience to reflect upon their own ‘part’ in Bickle’s insanity (*Derash*). For some viewers, this culminates in highly personal responses (*Sod*). When viewers recognise and respond to this cinematic invitation, then it is not only the film character (Bickle) that undergoes a process of self-examination, but viewers also. These processes can be framed in PaRDeS terms as personal responses (viewer *Sod*) to cinematic commentaries (*Derash*) and to filmmakers own, highly personal meanings (filmmaker *Sod*), that they inscribe in films (*Peshat*).

Viewers understand what the Mirror Scene means through their knowledge of, and response to visual metaphor (*Derash*), rather than having meaning explained to them in explicit cinematic narrative ways (*Peshat*). Yet viewers are simultaneously placed in opposition to Travis – when he is threatening his image in the mirror he is looking directly at the audience – he appears to be threatening the audience (*Derash*). And so some viewers recognise Travis as a threat to society, and that when they leave the cinema they may well meet a man like him (*Sod*).

Understanding the respective Meta-readings of a filmmakers’ meaning (*Sod*) is not an easy matter, and calls for an insight into the inner nature of the filmmakers themselves. PaRDeS is unique in relying on a framework of cinematic interpretation that includes this kind of meaning in formulating film interpretations.

In the case of Scorsese, the personal meaning that he inscribes in the Mirror Scene (filmmaker *Sod*) is hinted at in the following quote, which reveals that as a youngster,
Scorsese had fantasised about acting by standing before a mirror and imitating Alan Ladd in the classic Western Shane, Victor Mature and eventually even Marlon Brando and James Dean.¹⁰

The cinematic deployment of mirrors in Taxi Driver reflects both the society that Scorsese comments upon (Derash), and the director himself (Sod). His childhood experiences are inscribed on the screen in subtle and not so-subtle ways. The symbolic meaning of mirrors in Taxi Driver (Remez), such as the use of the rear-vision mirror of the taxicab that Travis drives (and which Scorsese uses as a way to invite viewers into Travis’s cinematic world) is visually, and explicitly emphasised in the Mirror Scene. If viewers have not previously considered Travis as a reflection of themselves (Derash), they are overtly invited to do so now.

Acting Technique & Multi-Level Meaning

Given that the Mirror Scene is improvised,¹¹ a substantial component of the multiple layers of meaning it develops can be attributed to the acting of Robert De Niro, and the personal meaning he invests in the psychotic breakdown of Travis Bickle (Sod).

Robert De Niro’s characterisation of Bickle is an example of how actors can imbue characters with ‘hidden’ meanings (Sod). Travis Bickle’s character, and motivation to action are themselves established in Schrader’s script (narrative Peshat). Bickle’s psychotic tendencies are revealed in cinematic and narrative ways (Remez). Yet despite portraying a character already expertly managed by writer and director, De Niro manages to imbue Bickle with a very personal sense of his own ‘interpretation’ of the character (Sod). PaRDeS analysis is unique in linking De Niro’s interpretation of character to the (respective) spiritual intentions of Scorsese and Schrader (Sod).

On set, De Niro generally avoided all other cast and crew, excepting director Martin Scorsese,¹² and through a process of remaining in character, in living as Travis does, De Niro cinematically ‘becomes’ the character he plays prior to his performance. An interpreter can isolate a raised eyebrow or a furrowed brow and assign meaning to it, but ultimately actors interested in communicating different levels of meaning through their craft are advised to find within themselves a (personal) expression of the characters they portray. From a cinematic perspective, at least in terms of communicating film meaning to viewers, actors can, like

¹¹ Taubin, Taxi Driver.
¹² For information on this, and other key production information that informs analysis, see MacNab, The Making of Taxi Driver.
directors and writers, actively inscribe films with their own cinematic intentions (Sod). Although the voice-over and point of view shots clearly allude to the personal point of view of Bickle, it is in this scene that Travis as the archetype of the ‘Narcissist’ is confirmed (Derash). Some viewers will re-examine the previous narrative events of the film, and re-interpret them in light in what they have just witnessed (Sod).

De Niro’s ego-related, self-involved demonstration of character in the Mirror Scene (Peshat) not only explicitly suggests that Travis is insane (Remez), but also cements the character as an unreliable narrator. However, the simple fact that he is the narrator does, for some viewers, lend a certain authority to the character’s narrative viewpoint. Viewers who empathise with Bickle’s point of view are more likely to read the entire film in a literal way (Peshat). This literal interpretation suggests (to these viewers) that Travis’s subsequent slaughter of the pimp Sport (and others) is a heroic action (Derash).

Film Status & Viewers’ Responses to the Mirror Scene in Taxi Driver

Over time, the fame of this scene sequence (Derash) means that new viewers often have prior knowledge of the Mirror Scene, and anticipate its appearance in the film. These viewers are more likely to frame their response to the entire film through the context of prior knowledge of the scene. The status of the film also affects the way the film is interpreted (over time) (interpretative Derash).

Amy Taubin points out that since the film's release, the Mirror Scene in Taxi Driver, “has taken on a life of its own [and] become a fetish object – an emblem of besieged masculinity making a defiant last stand.”

13 When a film has been as heavily analysed as Taxi Driver has, new interpretations (using contemporary methods of film analysis) tend to re-examine the film in light of current socio-cultural issues.14 The Mirror Scene is usually presented as evidence of the cinematic brilliance of Martin Scorsese, or the acting excellence of Robert De Niro.15

The PaRDeS interpretation of this scene re-invigorates the contemporary discussions of the film (Midrash) in its examination of the Mirror Scene according to the kinds of meaning the filmmakers develop, and the effects on the meaning viewers make (Sod). Editing such as that evident in the Mirror Scene reminds the audience that they are watching a film (Remez), thus ‘returning’ them momentarily to the ‘real world.’ The surrealistic effects and editing of the Mirror Scene constitutes an implicit invitation to the audience to consider their

13 Taubin, Taxi Driver. 56
14 See, for example, Sabine Haenni, "Geographies of Desire: Postsocial Urban Space and Historical Revision in the Films of Martin Scorsese," Journal of Film and Video 62, no. 1 (2010).
15 For example, Clapp, "Are You Talking to Me? New York and the Cinema of Urban Alienation."
own experiences in the non-cinematic, ‘real world’ (Sod). Whether or not viewers accept this invitation is their choice, but if a search for meaning is initiated then the viewer is more likely to elicit a significant (Derash) interpretation of the film.

The meaning of the Mirror Scene takes on a different significance (Derash) upon repeat viewings when, based on knowledge of the ending, the scene more clearly signposts the closing sequence of the film. When a viewer has previously seen Taxi Driver they already has a visual image of the graphic violence of the film’s ending. When they watch Taxi Driver a second time, their reading of the Mirror Scene is contextualised by their knowledge of the ending of the film. Other, first-time viewers are (now) often aware of the inordinate amount of blood that is about to be splashed onto the screen, due to the dissemination of commentary about Taxi Driver (Midrash). A viewer's knowledge and expectation of the carnage perpetuated by Travis (Sod) re-enforces the implied madness of Travis that this scene suggests (Remez).

Consider the effects of three decades of cultural referencing of the line, “You talkin’ to me?” The line’s first appearance in Hollywood cinema was in 1953 when Shane’s Jack Wilson (Jack Palance), gun on his hip, delivers the phrase as a challenge to an actual cinematic antagonist (Peshat). The use of the line in Taxi Driver alludes to the status of the film as an ‘Urban Western’ (Remez), and also implies a cinematic response to the portrayal, and evolution of the ‘American Hero’ in Hollywood films (Midrash). The PaRDeS interpretative activity of revisiting cinematic meaning as films move through time (Derash), offers new insights into this important line of Taxi Driver dialogue. The impact of the phrase has been diluted in the decades that have passed since the film’s release.

There is a now a risk of the Mirror Scene being ‘read as parody’ by some viewers. Even De Niro has mocked his performance, according to a report in London's The Mirror, where he explains, “I did do [‘You talkin' to me?’] once though, in Rocky and Bullwinkle.”16 The line is arguably more famous than the film itself. It carries its own cultural weight – or burden (Derash). Over time, the line has become so heavily referenced in popular culture that viewers potentially respond to this scene through their prior knowledge of “You talkin’ to me?” with a comedic, or superficial response to the commentary (Midrash).

Existing interpretative and critical perspectives of the Mirror Scene, and the continuous intertextual references in other films to the line, “You talkin’ to me?” emphasise the cultural impact of the scene at the expense of what is perhaps the more meaningful line in the scene, “Well I'm the only one here.”17 In the context of Travis Bickle as Thomas Wolfe’s

17 With the benefit of two decades of reflection, Roger Ebert asserts that this is “the truest line” in Taxi Driver Ebert, "Taxi Driver: 20th Anniversary Edition."
'God's Lonely Man,' PaRDeS analysis reminds us of the importance of the closing line of the scene, and its re-assertion of Bickle’s alienation, and status as an ‘outsider’ (Derash/Midrash). Responding to this segment of voiceover, rather than focusing on the aggressive question, “You talkin’ to me,” offers a new insight into both the scene, and the film. The closing line of the Mirror Scene, “I’m the only one here,” reminds us that ultimately Travis is driven by an inner sense of alienation (Derash) and it is he, and possibly not society, that is dysfunctional.

The Closing Sequence of Taxi Driver

At the end of Taxi Driver, the meaning that viewers attribute to the film is dependent on how they have related to Travis up to this point of the film. Director Martin Scorsese uses camera angles, and editing techniques to reflect the character’s point of view (and spiritual angst). These cinematic expressions of Bickle’s narrative voice substitute for ‘fair witness,’ the perception of audiences that the character ‘telling the tale’ is being truthful. How do viewers perceive Travis up to this point of the film? Let us reflect first on the final scene sequence of Taxi Driver.

*The Rally* Travis shows up at a Columbus Circle Campaign Rally. His hair is cut in a Mohawk. He is wearing his army jacket, and his affect is menacing. Palantine finishes his speech and is escorted from the podium. Travis walks closer, undoes his jacket and reaches inside. Security guards spot him and chase him off. His mission has failed, and he has lost his resolve. He gets into his taxi, which is parked in the street, and leaves.

*The Killing* Travis freshens up at his apartment and goes back out. He pulls into a side street and approaches Sport, Iris's pimp. They exchange words and then Travis shoots Sport in the chest, the blood splattering up the doorway. Travis goes inside the apartment block where Iris is working. A man in the corridor puts a hand up as Travis approaches – Travis shoots it off. Travis kills three men, leaving blood and gore in his wake as he makes his way to the bedroom. Iris is hysterical. Police enter the room. Travis mimics a gun with his hand, presses it against his temple, and ‘shoots’ himself in the head three times.18

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18 Given the earlier discussion in this chapter on Scorsese’s cinematic expression of his Catholicism, the ‘Trinity’ is invoked by the ‘overkill’ of three shots to the head.
The Aftermath Real or imagined, the cinematic world has progressed to a future time. Newspaper clippings stuck to the wall of Travis's apartment document what happened after the killing. Travis is a hero for having saved Iris from prostitution. There is a letter from Iris's parents thanking Travis. ‘Steps’ have been put in place to ensure that she does not run away again. Travis is on the sidewalk, chatting to fellow cab drivers. He picks up a fare. It is Betsy. As they are driving, Betsy mentions that she heard about ‘what happened.’ Travis is self-deprecating. Betsy steps out of the taxicab, and as she attempts to pay the fare, seems about to say something but does not. Travis drives away without taking her money. A close-up of his eyes in the rear-vision mirror stares out at the audience one last time.

Paul Schrader provides a screenwriter's note in the original script with regard to the closing sequence:

The Screenplay has been moving at a reasonably realistic level until this prolonged slaughter. The slaughter itself is a gory extension of violence, more surreal than real. The slaughter is the moment Travis has been heading for his whole life, and where this screenplay has been heading for over 85 pages. It is the release of all that cumulative pressure; it is a reality unto itself. It is the psychopath's Second Coming.¹⁹

This scriptwriter’s note by Schrader anchors his cinematic intent, and refers audiences to the implied theological commentary of the film (Derash). It is also useful to consider the use of overtly religious language – ‘unto’ and ‘Second Coming.’ Schrader, just as he was shaped by his illnesses and relationship problems with women at the time of writing the Taxi Driver script, was also informed in his worldview by his strict Calvinist upbringing (Sod). This religiosity is matched by Scorsese's Catholic sensibilities, reflected in the comment:

Travis is a commando for God, in a sense. And look at the saints. He's full of their same energy; his just goes off in a different direction. He sees something ugly or dirty and he has to clean it up. [In] his eyes, he is doing good work.²⁰

¹⁹ Schrader, "Taxi Driver (Original Script)." 100
The possibility of multiple interpretations of the ending of the film gives power to the viewer to assign a meaning to the film that is consistent with their own views, beliefs and attitudes (Sod). Subscribing to a particular interpretation of the closing sequence might even result in the meaning of the entire film being revised by the viewer. How can the closing sequence be interpreted? Consider the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characterisation of Interpretation of Ending</th>
<th>Table 4 PaRDeS Interpretations of Ending of Taxi Driver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>‘Happy’ ending: Travis is a hero.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>‘Delusion’ ending: Travis is still crazy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>‘Dream’ Ending: Commentary on media/society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>‘Spiritual’ Ending: Travis is dying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How an individual viewer reads the ending of Taxi Driver is a function of whether or not (and how) they connect to the filmmakers’ intended commentary (Derash). There is a strange noise, right before the end credits. The noise is a xylophone and when Scorsese thought it was too obvious an indication (that Travis is still crazy) Bernard Herrmann suggested playing the sound backwards.21 This has the serendipitous effect of re-affirming the continued insanity of Bickle (Remez), and supports the other cinematic suggestions in the film that Travis was, and still is ‘crazy.’

Multiple Interpretations of the Closing Sequence of Taxi Driver

The PaRDeS interpretation of this scene directs the analyst to assess not just the narrative content of the film (Peshat), but also the implications of the filmmakers’ cinematic expression (Remez). In doing so, the link between film style (cinematic Peshat) and film as parable (Derash) is illuminated. Scorsese uses acute camera angles. The audience can hear the sound of blood dripping down walls. There is a close-up of the fingers of an old man who is shot in the hand by Travis. It could be interpreted that his violent actions at the end of the film is Travis's last desperate attempt to engage with others, to create a niche for himself in society. The closing sequence does suggest alternative interpretations in a number of ways, and each film collaborator makes a contribution to developing significant kinds of meaning (Derash), related to their personal theological motivations (Sod).

21 Laser disk 30th anniversary edition commentary track (Taxi Driver).
Scorsese denies the ending of *Taxi Driver* is a dream.\(^\text{22}\) In an illuminating commentary on the film (*Midrash*), Scorsese and Schrader acknowledge the dream possibility, but seem to bypass it by suggesting a reality where Bickle might “do it again” and is “a ticking time-bomb.”\(^\text{23}\) Is Travis a hero or not? One could perceive Travis as delusional, a hero not in reality, but only in his own mind (*Sod*). And the proposition of a happy ending to *Taxi Driver* is ‘happy’ only in the sense that Travis achieves fame, and social respect, and not ‘inner peace.’

The visual evidence of the return of Iris to her parents (*Peshat*), as evidenced by their letter of gratitude to Travis, suggests an unrealistic narrative consequence of the carnage viewers have just been witness to. Given what Iris has experienced, is it feasible that her parents would write such a letter? Or that she would be returned to the home from which she ran away? Or that she is ‘doing well?’ Or that Betsy would now admire Travis, when his rampage actually confirms her earlier character assessment that led her to reject him? And so forth. It could well be a useful interpretative exercise to coordinate all the ‘happy’ narrative outcomes of *Taxi Driver* into a single PaRDeS table and then assign the different interpretative strategies of each level to them.\(^\text{24}\) For example, if we take the literal interpretation, and Travis is a hero, then this reading has its own unique implications that have consequences for interpretations of the other, ‘deeper levels’ of the film. When a viewer reads the ending of the film literally, then their acceptance of the ‘truth’ of ‘Travis as Hero’ suggests a commentary (*Midrash*) upon the ‘sickness’ of a society that elevates a psychopath to the status of ‘hero.’\(^\text{25}\) When viewers read the ending of the film according to one of the other possibilities (summarised in Table 4), the closing scene of *Taxi Driver* suggests alternative film commentaries.

If viewers accept a literal interpretation of ‘Travis as Hero’ (*Peshat*), then at another level the ending of *Taxi Driver* also represents a small, personal victory for Travis since, if they accept this literal interpretation of the ending, then viewers also have to accept that it is reasonable and feasible that Travis was not arrested for his actions. Now is that possible? Yes, if viewers conclude that it is feasible that the ‘Media’ would interpret and report his actions as ‘heroic.’ In this case Travis could also be perceived as a saviour, whose motivation for violence was to ‘rescue’ Iris from a life of sin, and restore her to her parents. To accept Travis as heroic is suggestive of a morally corrupt media and an ethically questionable society. The audience is aware that Bickle shot Sport because he first failed to kill Palantine, and wanted to

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\(^\text{22}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{23}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{24}\) See Appendix 2 for examples of the PaRDeS tables used in the interpretation of *Taxi Driver*.
\(^\text{25}\) This interpretative method also reminds us of the consistent use of questions framed by the four levels of PaRDeS during the interpretative process.
kill somebody (Peshat). Some viewers also recognise his actions as a means to vent his own violent sense of self-loathing (Derash). The society from which Travis is so alienated ‘approves’ of his actions (Derash), as evidenced by the newspaper clipping on his walls that applaud his violent behaviour (Remez). These news reports present his violent actions as heroic, but viewers are privy to information that gives lie to an interpretation of Taxi Driver that elevates Travis to ‘hero.’

Consider the glance Travis gives viewers through the rear vision mirror as Betsy steps from his cab (Peshat), and he is ‘restored’ to his former isolation, an observer of the world through the windscreen of the taxicab. This ‘backward glance’ (Remez) suggests the question: If the entire sequence of carnage were a ‘fantasy,’ would Travis still be paranoid? Rather than interpret this scene as narrative reality however (Peshat), one can use this final backward glance as evidence that Travis is still insane, and anticipate a future where he will repeat his psychopathic rampage (Sod). He has been an unreliable narrator – how does the audience know anything he presents about himself is real? Indeed, the entire film’s narrative (Peshat) could be Bickle’s fantasy, for he ends the film in the same place he began – alone in his taxicab and disconnected from, and disgusted by the outside world. There is a different context however, for by the end of the film it is as if viewers are now inside the taxi with Travis – the audience has become part of the delusion (Sod). Given that the film tracks a man’s descent into madness, then he must still be mad. And possibly the audience is as well.

When Travis stares at the audience in the final moment of the film, his eyes again framed by their reflection in the rear vision mirror, some viewers will recall the Mirror Scene. The symbolic use of mirrors in the film is a consistent motif suggestive of the film’s reflection on society, and of the intangible and elusive nature of reality (Derash). The musical motif of ‘Hell’ is particularly forceful during this closing sequence of the film. Composer Bernard Herrmann explained to Scorsese “the reason [the music was played that way] was to show that this was where Travis’s fantasies about women led him.”26 According to the composer’s interpretation of the character it was the act of fantasising about women that led to madness. For Schrader, it was the experience of loneliness. For Scorsese it was an sense of inner rage. De Niro, in the way he brings the loneliness inscribed by Schrader, and the rage of Scorsese, to the final scenes appears to have linked the character closely to Travis’s mid-Western roots (Sod). De Niro’s emphasis on Travis’s background contextualises his alienation as an ‘outsider’ – to New York and to society as well.

It could be argued that ‘how’ the ending of Taxi Driver is interpreted is a function of how viewers engage with the thematic content of the film (Derash), dependant upon which themes of the film (Derash) most resonate with them. For example, if the literal (Peshat)

26 Amata, “Scorsese on Taxi Driver and Herrmann.” 7
interpretation of the ending – that Travis is a hero – is accepted by a viewer, then the theme (Remez/Derash) that the viewer perceives as a dominant influence can essentially be summarised as, “Kill someone famous, become somebody famous” (Sod). How far an individual viewer travels down the implications of that statement is a matter for them – and contextualised by their response to the cinematic presentation of other themes in Taxi Driver. Individual viewers’ interpretation of the film (Sod) is a function of how much (if at all) they reflect upon thematic content in the film.27

This PaRDeS method’s process of ‘interrogating’ film meaning finds ways of coordinating multiple instances of filmmakers’ personal intentions (Sod) within the interpretative process, and emphasises the method’s original treatment of ‘profound’ cinematic meanings. The interpretative value in the inclusion of these kinds of personal filmmaker and audience perspectives (Sod) is evidenced in the unique insights into the meaning of Taxi Driver. In Chapter 9 this original approach extends its synthesis of the multiple ‘meaning’ contributions by the individual filmmakers of Taxi Driver, in a discussion of composer Bernard Herrmann (Sod) that extends the implications of the original insights of the PaRDeS analysis even further.

The Synthesis of Multi-Level Narratives in Clueless: The ‘Epiphany Montage’

Using PaRDeS in the analysis of a scene from a film from a different period, and of a different genre illuminates other ways filmmakers coordinate multi-level frameworks of cinematic narratives. Amy Heckerling again relies on the use of a musical montage at a key turning point in Clueless to develop the implications of the primary narrative in terms of the character’s personal reflections. Heckerling employs a combination of montage techniques and voiceover to suggest the underlying film commentary (Derash).

The ‘Epiphany Montage’ links Cher’s recognition of her own ‘cluelessness’ (in this instance, about her feelings) to not only the character’s motivation for action (narrative Peshat), but to also suggest a moment of self-realisation about her own shallowness (Derash). This involves the character asking ‘hard’ questions of her response to the crush that her friend Tai has on her stepbrother Josh (narrative Peshat). Cher’s internal monologue reveals not just what she is now thinking (Peshat), but also suggests a process of self-reflection that resonates with the teenage audience (Sod).

27 See Chapter 5’s discussion on the cinematic presentation of theme in Taxi Driver.
The voice-over tracks a lonely Cher as she wanders familiar streets, absently window-shopping and reflecting on her apparent rejection by Josh, who has finally expressed a frustration with his young stepsister’s frequent interference in the lives of others. Cher finally arrives at a dark, still fountain.

Everything I think and everything I do is wrong. I was wrong about Elton, I was wrong about Christian, and now Josh hated me. It all boiled down to one inevitable conclusion, I was just totally clueless – Oh and this whole Josh and Tai thing was wiggin' me more than anything. I mean, what was my problem? Tai is my pal. I don't begrudge her a boyfriend. I really – [Cher sees a dress in a store window]. Oooh! I wonder if they have that in my size? [Cher comes out of the store carrying shopping bags]. What does she want with Josh any way? He dresses funny. He listens to complaint rock. He's not even cute in a conventional way. I mean, he's just like this slug that hangs around the house all the time. Ugh! And he's a hideous dancer, couldn't take him anywhere. Wait a second, what am I stressing about? This is like Josh. Okay, okay, so he's kind of a Baldwin.\footnote{‘Baldwin’ refers to the surname of the Hollywood actors, brothers Alec, Billy and Stephen, and is used by Cher to infer Josh’s attractiveness.} What would he want with Tai? She couldn't make him happy. Josh needs someone with imagination, someone to take care of him, someone to laugh at his jokes in case he ever makes any … Oh my God! I love Josh! I'm majorly, totally, butt crazy in love with Josh! But now I don't know how to act around him. I mean, normally I'd strut around in my cutest little outfits, and send myself flowers and candy but I couldn't do that stuff with Josh.

Cher is in the classic position of being the ‘last to know.’ She has finally recognised that she is in love with Josh, and realises that she does not know ‘how to behave.’ In the middle of what (for her) amounts to an existential crisis, even though she is now aware of her own ‘cluelessness,’ Cher still finds time to shop. In addition to the visual humour, this action refers viewers (Remez) to the film’s commentary on the superficial (Derash). Once Cher’s (shallow) urge to shop is satiated, the character returns to an examination of her ‘existential crisis,’ and in doing so, viewers have the opportunity to ‘discover’ new insights about the character.

The voice-over (Peshat) shifts from Cher addressing the audience to a more interior form of narrative, where she begins to reflect upon her own personality and feelings. She finally becomes aware of the nature of her own ‘cluelessness,’ and that her shallow obsession
with appearances cannot sustain her (*Derash*). Cher’s superficial qualities are a character flaw that viewers have been aware of for some time.

Cher’s pretended disdain for her stepbrother and his social causes is unconvincing, and this is one of the ‘narrative truths’ that the other characters are unaware of. For once, Cher’s friends and the audience do not share the same knowledge about the character. The other characters accept Cher’s apparent contemtuous disregard of Josh (*Peshat*); viewers recognise him as Cher’s ultimate destination, and a symbol of her future. (*Remez*). Most of the time Cher’s general cluelessness is no secret to either viewers, or to the other characters. It is only Cher who remains unaware of her own ‘cluelessness.’ It is in this scene that Cher’s knowledge about herself, and what viewers know about the character align.

Do viewers believe Cher when she says, “I don’t begrudge Tai a boyfriend?” Is there a specific meaning that accrues to the fact that it is at this point of her self-examination she is distracted by goods in a store window? After she satiates her ‘urge to shop,’ and a visual allusion to the cause for her inner angst reminds the audience of her obsession with appearances, Cher’s internal dialogue resumes. Her complaints about Josh, which begin as an answer to the question of why Tai desires him, reveal the qualities she desires in a partner, and her list, which includes how Josh dresses and dances, reflects her shallowness.

Music in the Epiphany Montage (musical *Peshat*) is used by Heckerling to reinforce the ironic effects of positioning Cher’s actions against what viewers ‘hear’ the character saying to them (*Remez*). This scene plays out against the Eric Carmen song, *All by Myself*.29 The soaring, plaintive vocal (*Peshat*) almost feels like Cher’s teenage love angst, and alludes to her inner feelings in affective ways (musical *Remez*). As the song swells and rises to a crescendo (*Peshat*), and Cher finally recognises she is in love with Josh, the dead empty fountain behind her suddenly bursts into a cascade of water and light, visually symbolising the character’s ‘epiphany.’ The multi-level PaRDeS framework extends this relatively simple symbolic reading beyond the explicit allusion, when it questions the implicit meaning of the symbol. The use of the gushing fountain is a symbolic way of both representing Cher’s ‘aha’ moment of self-recognition (*Remez*), and also gently sexualising the nature of the revelation of love (*Derash*).

The final words of the voice-over (*Peshat*) hint at the potential for a more profound character transformation (*Remez-Derash*). Cher recognises that her usual modus operandi – strutting about in cute outfits and generally trying to draw attention to herself as desirable (and desired by other males) – will not attract Josh, for he is oblivious to superficial displays

29 As the chorus of the song swells to the lyrics, “Don’t want to be all by myself,” Cher is ‘all by herself.’ The linking of the lyrics of the song to the narrative has been done before, and essentially is an example of musical and narrative content (both different kinds of ‘plain’ or *Peshat* meaning) being synchronised.
of feminine charms. Indeed he is more likely to find such behaviour repellent. Finding Josh attractive suggests Cher’s maturation (Remez). Her subsequent attempts to improve herself are both comical and sincere. Cher might be engaged on a course of self-improvement that is designed to ‘snare’ a man, but at least she has the good sense to be attracted to a man that values women of substance (Sod).

The closing lines of the voice-over return the audience to the narrative and action arcs of the film. Cher is confused and, for the first time in the film, unsure of herself. Cher has caught up with the audience. Neither Cher nor the viewers ‘knows’ what will happen next, although the genre-grounded expectations of viewers (Remez) virtually guarantees that Cher and Josh will find love, after some complicating factors that are keeping them apart are dealt with (narrative Peshat).

**Interpretative Reflections on ‘PaRDeS Scene Analysis’**

In this chapter, it becomes clear just how much control filmmakers have over the meaning audiences attribute to audio-visual stimuli, and how these cinematic ‘clues’ (Remez) can be coordinated by filmmakers to support the primary narrative (Peshat).

This chapter’s use of PaRDeS in scene analysis shows how the absence of sound can be as important as its presence. Audiences are accustomed to music occupying narrative space in a film, or else hinting at impending action, or perhaps providing clues to emotional and/or psychological states of characters (Remez). Audiences are used to ‘hearing’ films, and the absence of sound becomes potentially ‘meaningful’ (Derash).

In *Taxi Driver*, the realism of the street noises outside Travis Bickle’s apartment, and the absence of music in the Mirror Scene is reminiscent of the ways some Rabbis have used PaRDeS to interpret the meaning of white spaces between black letters. An equivalent notion is expressed in the painterly concept of negative space. The absence of Herrmann’s jazz score in this scene, which has to this point served an integral narrative function, provides viewers with a different kind of interpretative ‘space’ to respond to.

**Taxi Driver**

In the years since the making of *Taxi Driver*, analyses of Martin Scorsese and his cinematic have become a focal point of Hollywood Cinema Studies. A wealth of literature

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exists that explores his methods and techniques in explicit detail.\textsuperscript{31} The PaRDeS process examines the various insights of these earlier investigations (Midrash) in its own interpretative efforts to elucidate previously unexplored elements of the meaning of the film.

In the case of Taxi Driver, PaRDeS analysis identifies a gap in the critical literature. Previous analyses that explicate film style (Taxi Driver) and film choices (of the filmmakers), particularly in terms of scene analysis, focus their efforts on the mastery of cinematic technique. PaRDeS interpretation responds to the insights of these other investigations by using them to inform its own analysis of a filmmaker’s coordination of the framework of multiple meanings. The PaRDeS interpretation responds to an existing gap in the critical literature by revealing the links between the different levels of meaning, culminating in a unique perspective of the relationship between the spiritual intentions (Sod) of the filmmakers and the narrative meaning of the film (Peshat).

In the Mirror Scene, Martin Scorsese’s distortion of what is seen on screen explicitly alludes to the fracturing of Bickle’s psyche. The closing sequence of Taxi Driver showcases the different interpretative possibilities of the film’s ending. That the filmmakers are able to so thoroughly disorient viewers by film’s end is further evidence of Scorsese’s skilful management of multiple narrative possibilities. In being able to develop multiple interpretative choices, the filmmakers not only imbue Taxi Driver with a framework of multiple meanings, but also provide viewers with an opportunity to decide for themselves which of these ‘works’ for them (Sod).

Scene analysis also provides an opportunity for analysts to appreciate the nuances of an actor’s technique. In the case of Taxi Driver, De Niro’s performance reminds us of why method acting leads to subtleties of character expression that affect the meaning of the film in unanticipated ways. These are layers of meaning brought to the character solely by the actor’s interpretation of the character. In this case, the meaning inscribed by Robert De Niro supports scriptwriter Paul Schrader’s conceptualization of the character. Schrader’s script direction for the Mirror Scene is one line. That De Niro is able to bring Travis to the screen so effectively is testament to his understanding of Bickle. In becoming Travis Bickle so completely, De Niro fulfils Schrader’s vision of character.

\textit{Clueless}

Using PaRDeS to interpret scenes from a different genre (teen-comedy) serves as an introduction to how the method can be used to analyse scenes in films made by different

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{31} A number of extended analyses of Scorsese, Schrader, De Niro and Herrmann reflect on various aspects of the background, production and making of the film, as referred to in Chapter 4’s critical review.
\end{footnote}
kinds of filmmakers. Amy Heckerling uses the visual narrative in different ways to Scorsese but for the same purpose – character development. The Mirror Scene in *Taxi Driver* and the Epiphany Montage in *Clueless* are each pivot points that link a character’s self-realisation to a change in their (respective) motivations.

Using PaRDeS to analyse the Epiphany Montage in *Clueless* identifies different ways pivotal scenes create multiple kinds of meaning. The Epiphany Montage is a sign of Cher’s self-realisation that teenage audiences can recognise. The Epiphany Montage is a pivot point in the film that develops a new narrative direction by connecting the past and the future of a character (*Derash*). Cher’s self-realisation devalues her past actions that focused on changing others, and returns her to a sense of self. Heckerling’s genius lies in the way she connects music, image and voice-over to weave a visual exposition of profound character development.

**Conclusion**

The interpretative investigations of this Chapter also support the conclusions of the previous chapter’s examination of the consequences of filmmakers’ choices (in terms of cinematic frameworks of meaning), and their cinematic expression. The importance of referring to comments of filmmakers, and of finding ways to minimize the interpretative biases of film analysis ensures that a wider spectrum of meaning is synthesised accurately in film interpretations. The scene analyses of this chapter also extend the current understanding of specific ways that filmmakers inscribe different levels of cinematic meaning.

The fresh perspectives that PaRDeS interpretation offers are produced in response to different interpretative goals to those of its contemporary film analysis counterparts. The specific goal of explaining narrative structures in terms of how different levels of meaning interact to produce a synthesised ‘whole’ meaning is unique to PaRDeS analysis. As the thesis successively applies PaRDeS to a variety of different components of cinema, it becomes clear that framing various investigations of cinematic meaning according to the PaRDeS model produces analyses that respond to existing critical gaps in the literature, and illuminates existing understandings and notions of what the various thesis films ‘mean.’
Chapter 8 CHARACTER & FILM MEANING

This chapter applies the PaRDeS model to an analysis of filmmakers’ use of character to support a structure of multiple meanings. This is a unique interpretative perspective of film characters. Characters are forced by the narrative structure of films into action.\(^1\) Film characters create meaning in multiple ways – from character as signifier (Peshat), character as allegory and character as symbol (Remez and Derash), through to ‘spiritual’ meanings (Sod), such as those inscribed by Paul Schrader and Robert De Niro in the character of Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*.\(^2\) In the following PaRDeS investigations of different cinematic characters, the originality of the interpretations PaRDeS produces can be attributed to its unique assumptions about a multi-level meaning structure that includes integrations of profound intentions for, and responses to film (Sod).

This chapter begins with a general discussion of PaRDeS and how analyses of film characters can be framed according to the four levels of meaning. This section responds to existing analytical frameworks of film characters, and emphasises the originality of interpretation that accrue to the PaRDeS assumptions about multiple levels of meaning (and how they can be interpreted). The general discussion of PaRDeS and film characters is followed by a series of specialised investigations of character in several films, with a concentration on exploring interpretations of film characters in the ways that are unique to the PaRDeS film method.

Film Characters & Multi-Level Frameworks of Meaning

There are certain elements of character in films that are expressed in clear, cinematic and narrative terms. These include characters’ names, what viewers’ see on screen, what characters say and do on screen, and other ways characters communicate non-verbally (Peshat). Each of these basic character components can also be used (by filmmakers) as the foundation of other levels of meaning.

Film characters can hint at a structure of allegory (Remez), as is the case with *The Matrix*, or allude to contemporary culture as a way of connecting to multiple audiences (Remez), as is the case with *Clueless*. The PaRDeS exploration of film characters also

\(^1\) A discussion that relates character to various narrative effectives can be found in McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*.

\(^2\) The PaRDeS analysis of scenes from *Taxi Driver* (in the previous chapter) characterises these ‘profound’ meanings inscribed by Scorsese and Schrader as linked by their shared ‘spiritual’ intentions for the film (Sod).
examines a character’s non-cinematic origins (*Remez*) for clues to a film’s meaning, as is the case with *Josie and the Pussycats*, which is adapted from a series of comic books. Film characters can also reflect their creators in complex ways that are not readily accessible (*Sod*), as the PaRDeS analysis of *Taxi Driver* reveals, or be visually deployed in the service of representing complex psychological states of mind (*Derash*), as is the case in *Black Swan*.

While studies that elucidate the form and function of character are useful guides, the PaRDeS synthesis of character with other narrative elements of a film reveals new conceptual ways of approaching character. The major film interpretation methods are derived from theories based on analysis of other narrative forms, such as literature and art. Film analysis methods based on these are pre-disposed to reflect their non-cinematic origins in how characters in cinema are analysed. Interpretations of film characters using PaRDeS, a method unencumbered by a rigid, singular interpretative emphasis, engage specifically with the cinematic properties of character. The fluid process of PaRDeS interpretation asks different questions about the various character maps of the five thesis films, and in doing so, offers an original perspective on the cinematic properties of various types of film characters.

The previous chapter contained an analysis of the cinematic ways Paul Schrader and Marin Scorsese invest *Taxi Driver* with different ‘versions’ of their respective personal spirituality (*Sod*). This chapter extends that PaRDeS analysis in an exploration of how Robert de Niro’s performance as Travis Bickle adds further levels of meaning to this character (and the film).

In *Black Swan* Darren Aronofsky makes the structure of character – and its stability – a core narrative feature of the film (*Peshat*). In *The Matrix* character names allude to specific allegorical constructs (*Remez*), and ultimately evolve into ideological readings of the film (*Derash*). In *Clueless* names become a subtle feature of the ironic commentary of the film (*Derash*) as Amy Heckerling weaves a narrative founded in multi-character transformation. The way Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan use character in *Josie and the Pussycat* demonstrates little awareness of the possibilities of how character development (narrative *Peshat*) can support their commentary on commodity culture (*Derash*).

**Character Names & Cinematic Narrative Functions**

PaRDeS interpretations of film character emphasise the connection between a character’s narrative journey (*Peshat*) and the commentary a film develops as it cinematically relates that journey (*Derash*). The ‘simple’ name (*Peshat*) or symbolic meaning (*Remez*) are

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3 Such as literature, poetry and art, and reflected in linguistic, semiotic, structuralist, cognitive and other specialised interpretative modes that investigate non-cinematic textual features.
linked to the other two PaRDDeS levels of meaning – the significant meaning and commentary (*Midrash*) of the third level, *Derash*, and the highly personal meanings of *Sod*, which includes filmmakers’ deliberate meanings ‘hidden’ in character names as well as the personal responses audiences have to film characters (and their names). This unique PaRDDeS arrangement of the interpretation of cinematic meaning reveals insights about film characters that other methods overlook.

Paul Schrader (as scriptwriter) makes important choices about character names and functions in *Taxi Driver*. Schrader prefaced the script with a quote from Thomas Wolfe, *God’s Lonely Man*, identifying Travis with a metaphoric character representation of loneliness. It is Travis as a personality (*Remez*), rather than what he is called (*Peshat*), that is of interpretative interest during the PaRDDeS analysis of character.

The other characters in *Taxi Driver* are portrayed from Bickle’s point of view, and this is reflected in his appearance in every scene, as well as the use of camera angles that positions viewers alternately as being observers of Bickle’s life (as is the case in the opening scene where viewers share Travis’ perspective of New York), or ‘against’ Travis as when, in the Mirror Scene, he stares directly into the camera as he asks the question, “You talkin’ to me?”

What characters are named is revealed to be of greater significance in the PaRDDeS interpretations of the other films. In *Black Swan*, for example, a new way of arranging the character relationships based on the implications of character names is suggested. The use of symbolic names (*Remez-Derash*) is subtle. The character of the sexually confident and seductive Lily is inferred by her name (*Remez*), for ‘Lily’ was one of the Succubi, beauties who mythically enslaved men with their compelling unnatural feminine charms.

Two major characters are often referred to in the script by their role in the main character’s life – The Director (Leroy) and The Mother. These characters’ names (*Peshat*) reflect their narrative function (*Remez*). They also imply specific, psychologically derived links to the main character, Nina (*Derash*). Freudian based psychoanalysis, for example, frames analysis of an individual’s psyche in terms of ‘Mother,’ ‘Father’ and ‘Child,’ and the use of the term ‘Mother’ as a character name ‘invites’ a psychoanalytic interpretation.

The character of the Mother in *Black Swan* is framed against archetypal representations of ‘Monster Mothers’ derived from fairytales, and a history of recurring appearances of these destructive kinds of women in films. The character of Leroy (the

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4 Schrader, "*Taxi Driver (Original Script).*"

5 Succubi are female demons that appear in the dreams of men, sexually enticing them ‘away’ from their divine destiny. They are usually visually represented as very beautiful women. The most commonly referenced succubus in contemporary popular culture is Lilith, who in the Jewish tradition, is sometimes presented as the first wife of Adam, the first man created by God in the *Book of Genesis*.  

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Director) is alternately the Sultan surrounded by his harem, and harsh taskmaster (Derash), or even (as his name could be interpreted to mean in the context of the film), a ‘Creator-God’ himself, engaged in a quest for perfection and gnosis derived from his own ‘creation’ and production of the Swan Lake ballet (Sod).

Trinity as Shechinah

The ‘naming’ function (Peshat) can be used to allude to other types of meaning that are present in a film (Remez). The Wachowski brothers, for example, utilise the symbolic value of character names (Remez) in The Matrix to draw attention to allegorical readings (Derash). Hence, ‘Neo’ is an anagram of The ‘One,’ while as Thomas A. Anderson, his ‘Matrix’ name translates from the Greek as ‘Every man.’ The inference is that any of us can choose to draw back the veils that obscure the truth, and if we face our own fears, find salvation (Sod). The character name of ‘Trinity’ alludes to Christian doctrine. Less apparent but just as relevant are the implications of her gender (Derash) in connection with her name.

When Mois Navon presents a Modern Mystical Midrash of The Matrix, the interpretative emphasis is the identification of multiple plot points in the film that support a Jewish mystical reading of the film. Although the various discussions (Midrash) associated with these collectively represent an impressive interpretative effort, Navon’s analysis does not coordinate these various identifications (most unconnected to the following discussion) beyond the single perspective of Jewish mysticism. The following discussion of the PaRDeS response to the character name of ‘Trinity’ differs in interpretative emphasis, and in its integration of potentially ‘profound’ viewer responses to the character (Sod).

Trinity’s name infers her function as a feminine participant in the ‘holy union’ between Man and God, which suggests the Shechinah, the nurturing feminine element of God that is a feature of some Jewish speculations on the holy texts. In many ways Trinity is the most admirable of characters – the bravest, the truest, the most determined and purposeful. She has a mission, and believes in her cause – and in Morpheus and in Neo as well. In the end Trinity is however, restored to her traditional female cinematic function – to support and love a man. How do PaRDeS analysts reconcile Trinity’s character function with her heroic actions?

Trinity’s name explicitly suggests (Remez) the holy trinity of Christian-based religions by invoking the triplicate of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Derash). Conventionally, theological reflections that arise from discussions about Trinity concentrate of evolutions of

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7 Mollenkott, The Divine Feminine: The biblical imagery of God as Female.
this Christian framework of character. Do these discussions, however, synthesise Trinity’s ‘name’ with her character function? Consider the following PaRDeS reflection, which aligns more accurately to both the character’s name, and her function in the film.

Less obvious, but more consistent with the character’s gender, is the Jewish concept of Shechinah, the female ‘in-dwelling’ presence. Recognising Trinity as Shechinah responds to her nurturing and life-giving properties. Trinity is a strong and independent woman, and her attraction to the passive and blank Neo is puzzling. Interpreting Trinity as a symbol of the nurturing, life-giving properties of a female aspect of God reforms the romance between herself and Neo. Theirs is not a traditional romantic relationship, driven by sexual urges. Trinity and Neo work together, uniting the unique elements of their respective genders, towards achieving the same (spiritual) goal, and ultimately succeeding in their quest. Trinity does not ‘need’ to be the hero, as most analysts with a feminine perspective suggest is her narrative function. Her strength lies in her life-giving properties, her beliefs and her faith in her cause and in Neo. When he apparently dies near the end of the film, Trinity’s chaste kiss restores Neo to life (Peshat). Shechinah is also the ‘life-giving breath,’ and Trinity ‘breathes’ life into Neo and in doing so initiates his transformation into ‘The One.’ Their romance does not need to be explained in sexual terms, for it now has a mystical aura (Sod). Trinity’s kiss represents the restorative and life-giving powers of ‘women in action.’

Character & Teen-Comedies

The following discussion clarifies how PaRDeS reflects upon the multi-level meanings that accrue to the (relatively) simple narrative of a teen-comedy. Amy Heckerling links character names (Peshat) to theme and commentary (Derash) in Clueless. The main character Cher and her best friend Dioone are named after famous singers (Remez) who, “now do infomercials.” Given that the singers after which the two girls are named are the highly acclaimed Dioone Warwick, and the well-known and popular singer Cher, the linking of these women’s fame to infomercials (Remez) has several implications.

Firstly, this link between fame and the selling of products in televisualadvertorials serves the comedic intentions of Heckerling’s ironic cinematic narrative (Peshat); Secondly, Cher’s ‘cluelessness’ is established (Remez) by her ignorance; Thirdly, Cher’s own personal values are implied (Derash), for Cher’s linking of the two singers to their (respective) roles in selling merchandise suggests what she herself values; and finally, the seeds of a filmmaker commentary (Midrash) blossom when viewers reflect on the changing nature of the careers of

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8 These are Remez-based interpretations that respond to Trinity’s role as ‘subversion of the hero.’ See Williams, "Mastering the Real: Trinity as the "Real" Hero of The Matrix."
these two singers over time. This culminates in reflections on the nature of fame, and what society itself values (Sod).

*Clueless* is a (relatively) rare example of a teen-comedy where nearly all the characters evolve (Peshat), and this reflects Heckerling’s sustained effort at coordinating a film commentary (Derash). These various evolutions of individual characters (Peshat) are each linked to the notion of the importance of personal transformation of the ‘Self’ (Sod). How are the character transformations narratively achieved in *Clueless*?

Cher and Dioone give Miss Geist a makeover. The dowdy but kind teacher finds confidence and love, and her wedding to fellow teacher Mr Hall closes the film. Elton is transformed from ‘stoner doofus’ to focused, drug-free skateboarder. Dioone loses her virginity to boyfriend Murray and becomes a ‘woman.’ Tai returns to a more authentic version of her self, having learned valuable lessons along the way, and of course Cher herself is transformed from a self-satisfied superficial girl to a self-aware woman. As one delves deeper into the way Heckerling cinematically reflects the theme of transformation in the development of characters in *Clueless*, one cannot help but be impressed by the subtle skillfulness of this filmmaker.

In *Josie and the Pussycats*, character names (Peshat) are one of the few narrative aspects of the original comic preserved by Elfont and Kaplan.9 The characters appear to go on a journey insofar as starting the film in one place and ending in another, given The Pussycats rise from unknown garage band to megastars. In terms of character development they do not so much evolve, however, as ‘devolve.’

In terms of the band’s supposed ‘punk rock ethos,’ the three Pussycats actually ‘sell-out’ – no self-respecting punk rock musician, or garage band would allow both themselves and their music to be commercialised as easily as the Pussycats do (Sod). At the end of the film Josie stands on stage and preaches the message, ‘Be yourself’ to her teen (and cinema) audience. This is ironic as well as hypocritical since the film is supposedly critiquing the commodity culture (Derash) that takes its characters – and viewers (Sod) on this narrative journey (Peshat).

Applying PaRDeS to the character names from the various films is an illuminating example of the interpretative benefits of a method that relies on a multi-level meaning framework to coordinate its analysis of a film. What the preceding discussions emphasise is that the multiple meanings that accrue to what a character is named (Peshat) can serve to guide viewers and interpreters towards significant commentaries made by both filmmaker and

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9 Indeed, one character in the film appears to serve no narrative purpose. Alexandra Cabot, is asked “Why are you here?” to which she replies, “I was in the comic.” In the comic book she was a regular antagonist; in the film she sullenly drifts in and out of scenes and is ignored by other characters.
film (Derash). Personal viewer responses (Sod) inevitably depend upon recognition of any allusions, intertextual references, anagrams (as with Neo/the One) and other clues (Remez) layered in the cinematic narrative (Peshat). This PaRDeS conceptualisation of character names offers a unique perspective on their potential deployment in film narratives to support multi-level cinematic narratives. The following analyses of character functions in cinema extends the PaRDeS investigation of character names, and serves as an interpretative example of an extended PaRDeS examination of filmmakers’ management of viewers’ responses to multi-level cinematic narratives.

Character and Hidden Meaning: Is Travis Bickle really Paul Schrader?

One of the effects of the dominant influence of cognitive theories of film spectatorship is the devaluation of filmmakers’ role in the construction of cinematic meaning. The PaRDeS method finds equal resonance with viewers and filmmakers, and in doing so is able to reconcile the two perspectives. In the case of Taxi Driver, this naturally leads to questions about how the protagonist (Travis Bickle) reflects his creator (Paul Schrader). This is a useful exercise, for as the following discussion shows, new insights into the character are uncovered.

Travis Bickle might not ‘be’ Paul Schrader, but he certainly is a cinematic representation of an aspect of Schrader’s personality. In a profoundly personal way (Sod), Travis Bickle serves as an outlet for Schrader’s self-loathing, and reflects elements of Schrader’s personality of which he was ashamed, including racist and violent tendencies. The usual treatment of Schrader in contemporary criticism is to concentrate on his function as a scriptwriter. Other kinds of analyses reflect the various interpretative stances that characterise contemporary interpretation. PaRDeS analysis asks: “How is the character of Travis Bickle a reflection of his creator, scriptwriter Paul Schrader?”

Schrader, like the character he created, was “very suicidal,” obsessed with pornography, and drinking heavily – a ‘lonely man’ when he wrote Taxi Driver. Schrader inscribes his personal experiences (Sod) in the character of Travis. The heavy racism and sexism in the film serves as Schrader’s cinematic response to his own internal abhorrence of these prejudices within himself – an outcome of the process of self-reflection. This reading of the script for Taxi Driver as the outcome of a self-prescribed form of psychotherapy (Sod)

10 See Bordwell, “Film Interpretation Revisited.”
11 Readers are referred to the relevant PaRDeS analyses of Chapters 2 & 4 of this thesis.
12 Jackson, Schrader on Schrader & Other Writings. 117
finds support in Schrader’s own statements. The meaning inscribed in Travis Bickle by Schrader is deliberate, a function of his view of Taxi Driver as art:

I think that one is stung into progressive, positive behaviour by an awareness of the great lure of negative thought; it's the awareness of the prejudice inside you that spurs you on to rid yourself and others of it. One of the things you should do in art is lift up the rock and look at those things inside you.

Schrader creates Travis in his script, but the cinematic representation of the character is also a function of how Scorsese, De Niro and Herrmann each cinematically reflect their own interpretations of the character of Travis Bickle. Schrader 'births' Travis; the other filmmakers 'bring him up' to maturity. Further, each of these other filmmakers brings their own personal, profound element of Sod to the character of Bickle, and to the film generally.

An interesting change Scorsese made to Schrader’s script, which demonstrates how the director imposes his own religiosity on the film, is his modification of the character function of Betsy. How Betsy was originally written differs to the way she appears on screen. Schrader, following a divorce and the break-up of his subsequent relationship, the loss of a prestigious job, and hospitalisation following a long period of ill health, was psychologically disintegrating when he wrote Taxi Driver. The character of Betsy largely reflects Schrader’s (then) distorted view of women (Sod). Betsy was less ‘angelic’ in the script than she is in the film – both in Scorsese's direction, as well as Cybill Shepherd's portrayal of the character. Schrader had originally described the character as a “star-fucker,” and written her as a manipulative and bitchy woman motivated by success. Scorsese transforms the character into an image of spiritual purity.

**Character and Hidden Meaning: Is Robert De Niro really Travis Bickle?**

Even though the previous discussion establishes Travis Bickle as a reflection of scriptwriter Paul Schrader, the ‘entry point’ into the character for most viewers is through Robert De Niro’s portrayal of Travis Bickle. For some viewers, the distinction between the

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13 Recognising this deliberateness differentiates PaRDeS analysis from psychoanalytic interpretations of film, which are focused on the ways filmmakers reflect their unconscious (rather than conscious) intentions.
14 Jackson, *Schrader on Schrader & Other Writings*.
15 Readers are referred to the relevant discussion in Chapter 8 on page 127.
16 MacNab, *The Making of Taxi Driver*.
17 Schrader, "*Taxi Driver (Original Script)*.”
18 See, for example, the earlier discussion in this thesis on Betsy’s first appearance in the film in a white dress, thereby inferring an image of spiritual purity.
character and the actor who portrays him becomes blurred. How do these viewers use their perceptions of character to frame their understanding of the meaning of *Taxi Driver*?

Firstly, De Niro’s physical representation of the character (visual *Peshat*) is a meaning that the actor inscribes in the character, based on his own ‘interpretation’ of Travis Bickle (*Sod*). The schizophrenic nature of the way Travis moves on screen dilutes, to some extent, the highly personalised representation of angst Schrader creates in the script. De Niro portrays a more universal representation of Bickle, which a greater range of viewers can connect with. When Travis reveals himself for the violent psychopath he is, the effects of his rampage are all the more shocking to those viewers who ‘connected’ to Travis Bickle through De Niro’s representation, and empathise with the character.

Robert De Niro is widely regarded as the archetypal method actor. Breaking down the specific ways in which De Niro layers the character of Travis Bickle with meaning is of special interest to actors due to a focus on how acting technique can develop different kinds of meaning. De Niro's methods in creating meaning are of particular interest to other actors, as well as those engaged in film analysis. In De Niro’s portrayal of Bickle interpreters can find clues to the deeper commentaries (*Midrash*) that are embedded in the film narrative (*Peshat*).

Robert De Niro is one of the most respected actors working in Hollywood. Meryl Streep has commented on De Niro’s acting:

> If you go deep into a character that Jack Nicholson is playing, sooner or later Jack will pop out. But no matter how deep you go into a character that Bobby is playing, it will be that character all the way through. He's really pure. He just loves acting. He's a pure actor acting.  

Given his meticulous attention to detail and almost obsessive concern with realism it is likely that the way that De Niro plays Travis Bickle has a special significance. De Niro obtained a temporary taxi driver’s license and began a process of inhabiting the character. In working as a taxi driver, in renting an apartment in a 'Travis-like' neighbourhood, De Niro gave himself the opportunity to acquire the 'lived experience' of Travis, and reflect that experience in his portrayal of the character.

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19 Although he has somewhat undermined his own reputation with his choice of roles in the latter part of his career.  
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21 Taubin, *Taxi Driver*.  

Schrader uses script (Peshat) as a means of self-expression (Derash and Sod), while Scorsese does the same with editing and imagery (visual Peshat). De Niro, on the other hand, uses his physical being (Peshat) and his emotionality (Remez) as vehicles of cinematic self-expression. Bickle, even as he carries with him the imprint of Schrader/Scorsese, ‘becomes’ De Niro's creation – certainly as far as viewers are concerned (Sod).

There is a certain 'definitive’ quality that De Niro’s portrayal brings to Travis on screen that is not in the script. De Niro notes that he imagines Travis as a crab, saying, “You know how a crab sort of walks sideways and has a gawky, awkward movement? Straightforward to them is going to the left and to the right.”22 This peculiarity is reflected in the way Travis walks (an ‘alternative’ Travis to the one who seats in the driver's seat), and other physical mannerisms (Remez) are used by De Niro to suggest the emotional state of the character. The schizophrenic quality of Travis in Taxi Driver was not, according to writer Paul Schrader, in the script,23 and this character quality is an important part of De Niro's contribution to the meaning of the film. He takes Travis to a point where the violent, sexist psychopath can actually be perceived sympathetically by some viewers.

When De Niro interprets the character of Travis (Sod), he is doing so within the boundaries of Schrader’s script (Peshat). In using method-acting techniques to 'become' Travis Bickle, De Niro creates a character that some viewers empathise with (Sod).

Black Swan & Questions of Character

The limited number of characters in Black Swan gives viewers the opportunity to at least question, if not more deeply explore, the interior state of all the major characters – Nina, Lily, Beth, Thomas Leroy and the Mother. How Nina (cinematically) relates to other characters – and how they relate to her – communicates a wealth of information (on multiple levels) about the meaning of the character, and of the film.

Despite being a member of a company of dancers (with whom she spends much of her time), Nina is clearly a loner. Whenever the Company takes a break during rehearsals for their performance of Swan Lake, Nina is always alone, while the other dancers congregate in groups (Peshat).

22 Lawrence Grobel, "Robert De Niro (Interview)," Playboy, January 1989.
23 Ibid.
Nina is both ‘woman’ and ‘girl.’ Her bedroom decor conveys a great deal about her psychological maturation – it looks like the bedroom of a child. This girl/woman dichotomy of self is reflected in the white swan/black swan duality of the narrative of the ballet of *Swan Lake*. Portman’s portrayal of Nina earned her an Academy Award® for Best Actress, and her insight into the way she develops the character is worth noting here. Portman says Aronofsky would tell her to, “Do one for yourself,” and ventured the following observation:

That [direction] opened a whole new world to me. It gave me power and respect for my own artistry that changed the entire process. It gave me new insight into my character, because her whole journey is from pleasing other people to learning how to please herself, and so she kills the little girl and becomes a woman and an artist. He handed that to me on a platter.\(^\text{24}\)

Aronofsky’s direction of Portman clearly inspired the actress to draw on all the tools in her acting repertoire to cinematically ‘interpret’ the character of Nina. Natalie Portman uses her body to express Nina’s emotions, and as the character descends into madness, her own body becomes ‘an unreliable narrator.’ Nina’s perceptions of the mind so dominate her embodied experience (*Derash*), that by the end of the film she can break a mirror, stab herself with the shards, and then go on stage (*Peshat*), seemingly oblivious to her injuries (and impending death). By the close of the film, Nina’s psychological deterioration parallels the visual representations of her bodily deterioration. Can viewers ‘believe’ that Nina really did kill or attack anyone, as she was ‘seen’ doing earlier in the film?

The thieving of Beth’s personal items is Nina’s way of appropriating the older dancer’s personality and, by implication her ‘life’ as well. These thefts are an essential clue to her character, for they indicate not only moral ambiguities (*Remez*), but also imply her yearning to be someone other than herself (*Derash*). Nina’s use of the stolen lipstick (bright red) before going into Leroy’s office with a clumsy seductive request for the role of Odette/Odile is suggestive of Nina’s sexual curiosity and ambition. The theft of such a personal item of a rival, is a clear indication (at this early stage of the film) of the character’s psychological problems, and their potential to manifest in tangible ways (*Remez*).

The relationships between women are a narrative feature of *Black Swan*, although the key role of Ballet Company Director Thomas Leroy is integral to these various relationships. Beth has been cast aside as both principal dancer and lover – and Lily and Nina each wish to replace her. Lily and Nina are competing with each other, and trying to impress Leroy in their

efforts to be cast as the Swan Queen. Nina’s Mother believes she understands the Director, and she tries to guide Nina’s own behaviour, based on her own painful past. The Mother’s flawed assumptions about Leroy’s motivations reflect her cynical view of men, and hint at a deeper reason underlying her smothering protection of Nina (Remez).

There is little sense of feminine camaraderie in Black Swan. Even the sexual encounter between Lily and Nina is less to do with desire, than it is to do with issues of power and control. When viewers discover Lily is from San Francisco, a city known for liberal and open attitudes, they are given another clue (Remez) to the character’s uninhibited personality. When Lily seemingly has no recollection of the sexual encounter the following day, viewers who have not previously done so are now (narratively) called upon to question Nina’s sanity. Indeed, in this film the women represent different ways of being insane (Derash). How does Black Swan narratively present the feminine psyche as unstable? Nina is sexually repressed and psychologically fragile. Lily is wanton and manipulative. The Mother is controlling, dominant and monstrous and Beth disintegrates when her career as a prima ballerina is over.

The PaRDeS investigation of Black Swan also offers an alternative interpretative perspective of Nina’s Mother by questioning whether or not the character actually exists. The authenticity of the Mother character is suggested in various visual ways (Remez). This question of the actual cinematic reality of the character does not arise until the latter half of Black Swan, when the escalating madness of Nina calls into question what viewers have seen through her eyes up to this point. Black Swan privileges the protagonist’s (Nina’s) point of view. Since Nina is insane, her point of view (Peshat), and the psychological reality that point of view infers, and which viewers so readily accept at the beginning of the film, is now called into question.

The visual content of Black Swan, such as the disjointed visual representation of Nina, suggest the untrustworthiness of her narrative point of view (Remez). The result is that viewers, rather than questioning themselves in response to the themes of duality (Sod) instead question the veracity of the narrative (Peshat). This feature of Black Swan is a possible reason why a significant film commentary (Derash) is underdeveloped. That PaRDeS analysis is able to attribute a reason for the somewhat hollow spine to Black Swan is further evidence of the fresh insights offered by this new process of interpreting cinematic meaning.

25 The American city of San Francisco came to worldwide attention in the 1960’s, when it became a beacon for ‘hippies,’ flowers, and ‘free sex,’ and was colloquially known as ‘The City of Love.’
26 These include Jungian interpretations, such as Bluege, "The Black Swan: Three Perspectives." For a philosophical perspective that reflects a psychological understanding of character, see Dhillon, "Black Swan."
27 This is a differently expressed version of the ‘unstable narrator’ that is a feature of the unreliable voice-over narration of Cher in Clueless and Travis Bickle in Taxi Driver. Writer/Director Amy Heckerling juxtaposes the narrative content of Cher’s voice-over (narrative Peshat) against visual content (visual Peshat) to support an ironic commentary (Derash/Midrash) that links themes of superficiality to the need to develop one’s personal qualities.
Beth (Winona Ryder), the aging ballerina and former lover of Thomas Leroy represents Nina’s future (Remez). Nina steals many of Beth’s personal items (from Beth’s dressing room), particularly those to do with grooming and appearance. When Nina attacks Beth in the hospital she is metaphorically killing her future self (Derash). Ultimately Nina kills her ‘self’ in the literal sense as well, when she swan dives to her death at the end of the film (Peshat).

Nina’s last words are, “I was perfect.” To the twisted mind of Nina the future following her perfection of the performance of the Swan Queen is meaningless. There is no future. There is no need of it (Sod). The use of PaRDeS as a way of examining the significance of the ending of Black Swan suggests a potentially spiritual reading of the film, even if this reading was unintended by Aronofsky. Nina’s death at the end of the film is a form of restoration of self (Sod). This is akin to the concept of tikkun olam incidentally, the restoration of the vessels in Jewish mysticism, where the reunion with the light requires the death of the physical body.\(^{28}\) Once one has achieved one’s idea of perfection, one is able to detach and leave worldly concerns behind (Sod).

Black Swan is an in-depth portrait of one character, Nina. The PaRDeS analysis emphasizes the relationship between other characters and the antagonist (Nina), and suggests that their own character functions ‘matter’ only in terms of how they relate to her. This is markedly different to existing character analyses of Black Swan, which are primarily psychologically grounded reflections on the duality of a single character.

**Multi-level Framework of Character in The Matrix**

The major characters in The Matrix are united in their struggle against the sentient ‘Matrix.’ In connecting the narrative motivation for action (Peshat) to a shared sense of alienation (Remez/Derash), the spectacular violence perpetuated by Neo, Morpheus and Trinity at the end of The Matrix is imbued with a mystical aura (Sod). When Trinity’s kiss brings Neo back to life before the penultimate ‘holy battle,’ and this is followed by Neo’s ascension into the sky (Peshat), the philosophical and spiritual readings of the film’s narrative (Derash and Sod) are affirmed. The meaning that is found by any individual viewer however is based on how (and indeed whether) the viewer responds to the question, “What is the Matrix?” (Sod).

One of the ways the Wachowskis manage the limited character development in The Matrix is to allegorise character names and functions (Remez). Viewers invest meaning in

\(^{28}\) Recall in the earlier discussion in this thesis of “Trinity as Shechinah” (page 137), which, in a discussion of a different film, also finds evidence of a reading that supports the ‘restoration of the vessels.’
characters based on their own unique understanding of the allegories that are cinematically referred to in *The Matrix*. Their response depends on whether they recognise any of the allegorical possibilities in the first place. A framework of character as allegory imbues the story, and the characters, with a gravitas they otherwise would not have had.

Some character functions are explicitly indicated in the film. The ‘Judas’ role is clearly indicated from the first time Cypher appears on screen. His role is reinforced through his clothing, his name, and in what he says and what he does (narrative *Peshat*). How Cypher dresses (in snake-skin, visual *Remez*) confirms his character function as the snake (in the Garden of Eden), a man who cannot be trusted. His clothing is a clue to his ultimate betrayal of Morpheus, Neo, and Trinity.

Every major female character in *The Matrix* is morally and ethically upright, and all but one is a fighter. The two main female characters in the film, Trinity and The Oracle, represent two different ways of being a ‘strong woman.’ Assertions of Trinity as hero respond to her powerful bodily expression in the action sequences of the film (*Peshat*). This (literal reading) is also a response to the usual treatment of women in action films (*Midrash*), where females are variously ‘rescued’ by the (male) hero, or complicit with the antagonist (and ultimately ‘subdued’ by them), or sex objects, or (usually beautiful) vacuous sidekicks. In comparison to such women, Trinity is indeed heroic.

The way Trinity, and the other major female character in *The Matrix*, The Oracle, are cinematically represented can also be used as evidence for an interpretation of the film as a (possibly unintentional) commentary on gender roles (*Derash*). Most interpretations of *The Matrix* respond to the narrative presence of Trinity as a fighter (*Peshat*) in support of an assertion of female strength.²⁹ The PaRDeS analysis, on the other hand, identifies Trinity’s submission to Neo as evidence of gender conformity (*Derash*). The other major female character in *The Matrix*, The Oracle, is also presented in the guise of a feminine stereotype.

The Oracle, an older African-American woman living in the simulated world of the Matrix, meets Neo in the kitchen of her apartment. Affable and pragmatic, she is wearing an apron and baking cookies. She is visually presented as a parody of the peripheral ‘Black Mammy’ kinds of characters that black women often portrayed in classic Hollywood films, such as *Gone with the Wind* – at least it is to be hoped that the character is presented as parody to serve an intentional commentary (*Derash*), for the alternative is that, unlike virtually any other aspect of *The Matrix*, the filmmakers have resorted to thoughtless stereotype. The visual representation (*Peshat*) of The Oracle as a Hollywood stereotype

²⁹ For example, Geller, "Queering Hollywood's Touch Chick: The Subversions of Sex, Race and Nation in The Long Kiss Goodnight and The Matrix."
(Remez) suggests a reading of The Matrix as a misguided commentary on gender roles (Derash).

Acts of heroism and words of wisdom are a defining characteristic of the black characters – more so than they are of Neo and the other white characters in The Matrix. The antagonists (Agents) are white yuppies. The cowardly Cypher who betrays Neo is physically a ‘little white guy.’ Agent Smith is the ‘whitest’ of characters in the film. In the context of the religious allegory (Remez), Agent Smith plays an ‘agent of Satan.’

Agent Smith is in fact an agent of control. At the literal level of Peshat Agent Smith is a computer programme (appearing as human) designed to protect the Matrix – and at a symbolic level (Remez) he is the mental programming of human society. If viewers link this symbolic representation of character to the thematic content of the film, they arrive at an interpretation of the ‘Agents’ as inferring the dominant, authoritarian political and economic institutions of society (Derash). PaRDeS analysis has thus far established multiple interpretations of The Matrix that are supported by hints (Remez) in the visual and story narrative (Peshat). In this instance, the multi-level analysis of Agents Smith supports Marxist interpretations of the film.  

How character is interpreted (by viewers) depends on several factors, including whether or not viewers connect characters to one of the possible allegories in The Matrix. How viewers interpret a film is also related to the manner in which they identify with one or more of the film characters. If, for example, viewers identify the ‘Judas Clues’ attached to Cypher, their understanding of the Christian allegory means they attribute the character qualities of Judas to Cypher. They thus become suspicious of the character sooner than viewers who have not recognised the allegory, and are able to anticipate how the story unfolds. Cypher’s function as ‘Judas’ affirms Neo’s role as saviour. One need not be a Christian to be able to make this connection.

In ‘micro-managing’ every visual, narrative and other cinematic element of meaning in The Matrix, the Wachowskis coordinate multiple levels of interpretative possibilities that viewers recognise and respond to in framing their own interpretations (Sod). In this way, they exert a ‘tighter’ control than most filmmakers do over the meanings viewers can potentially derive from the audio-visual and narrative content (Peshat) of a film.

When PaRDeS investigates film characters in terms of different levels of meaning, the resulting film analyses reflect the method’s unique assumptions by synthesising what are usually ‘separate’ filmic investigations of character roles, functions or archetypes.

Earlier in this chapter it was noted that the major characters in Clueless are each transformed in some way by the end of the film. Cher is the catalyst for the transformations other characters undergo, and it is only when the other character transformations are completed that she herself is in a position to ‘make over her soul’ (Sod).

Tai represents an ‘alternative’ version of Cher, and her character development suggests the personality flaws that accrue to a self-obsession that, unlike Cher’s, is not tempered by kindness. Tai is transformed from a flannel-wearing, pot-smoking outsider, into a clone of Cher, and then supplants her as ‘Queen’ of the school social hierarchy. When Tai ‘becomes’ Cher, she becomes ‘swelled up with pride,’ and (unlike Cher, her ‘creator’) is unkind, her actions and words casually cruel. The implication is that the ‘copy’ is flawed.

Tai’s promiscuity is also a stark contrast to Cher’s closely guarded virginity. Both the original (Cher) and her clone (Tai) are surface reflections of the real ‘self’ (Derash). It is only through representing oneself authentically in the world that one is able to avoid the ultimately shallow experience of a superficial world (Sod).

Since character development is virtually non-existent in Josie and the Pussycats, any interpretative investigations of frameworks of character in the film are themselves necessarily limited. The most significant insight yielded by the PaRDeS analysis is that the consequence of drastically modifying the original character personalities from the original comic book series is to deepen the sense of ‘elusive’ dissatisfaction with the film that is felt by many viewers (Sod).

The comic book characters had distinct personalities and relationships that are not transferred to the characters in Josie and the Pussycats. Those viewers familiar with the original Josie characters bring to the film an expectation of character based on other sources (Remez). Some of these viewers will virtually impose their pre-existing perceptions on the characters, ignoring any filmic evidence to the contrary.

It is more likely however, that many viewers will note the disparity between their pre-existing conception of the character (Sod), and the way characters are represented in the film (Peshat). It is often the case with comic-book adaptations that viewers are disgruntled when characters are substantially altered in the cinematic transformation. In yet another way, even if through the absence of (character) ‘meaning,’ the filmmakers of Josie & the Pussycats deepen the ‘conflict’ between the intended cinematic commentary (Midrash) and viewers’ responses to the film (Sod).
Conclusion

Cinema characters operate within the context of story, and the visual properties of film mean that filmmakers have unique choices in how they represent character on the screen. These choices include decisions about how (and if) to use character to support a structure of multiple meanings.

*Black Swan* and *Taxi Driver* are both character studies, and directors Darren Aronofsky and Martin Scorsese find different ways to visually represent the psychological deterioration of their central characters. Study of character in these films becomes an investigation of how Aronofsky and Scorsese respectively use the tools of cinema to communicate their characters’ interior states to audiences (*Remez*). Each develops a distinctive film style that relies on the presence of visual and aural symbolism as clues to character traits, psychological breakdown and insanity (*Derash*).

Filmmakers use character development in different ways and for different purposes. The lack of character development in *Josie and the Pussycats* is not necessarily a critical flaw in the film. However, failing to preserve core qualities of the comic book characters risks alienating older viewers who look for connections between the film and its origins.

In some films a lack of character development serves the overall vision of the film. In *The Matrix* using characters as archetypal representations of characters from stories, myths and religious texts (*Remez*) potentially overcomes the limited development of the characters. The different allegorical possibilities provides most viewers with a structure of archetypes that identifies individual characters with story functions – Morpheus as the ‘Voice of Wisdom’ or Moses; Neo as the Messiah or as Buddha; Trinity as the Holy Spirit, Mary Magdalene or an embodiment of Shechinah; Cypher as Judas or ‘a Snake.’

When a viewer connects to an allegory in *The Matrix* they are able to apply character traits, actions and functions attributable to the archetype or allegory to individual film characters. Limited character development then, occurs at the primary level of meaning (*Peshat*) but when filmmakers represent characters as allegory and archetype, viewers have the opportunity to contribute to character development – if they recognise the structure of allegory (*Remez*) used by the filmmakers.

Despite the extensive analyses of *The Matrix* that investigate the various interpretative consequences of allegorical content in the film, this insight into the mitigation of limited character development by allegorical character structures represents another fresh interpretative perspective offered by PaRDeS film analysis.

Another unique perspective offered in the PaRDeS interpretations of cinematic character is the conclusion that the changing character map of Hollywood films suggests that
audiences respond enthusiastically to cinematic narratives that move beyond the typical character duality of protagonist-antagonist.

Although these films are not representative, the PaRDeS interpretations of them are indicative of how the role of the antagonist in particular has evolved in the last three decades. Of the thesis films, only two – *The Matrix* and *Josie and the Pussycats* – have a clearly defined antagonist and even then Neo and Josie are fighting against ‘systems’ rather than individuals.

In *Clueless*, Cher’s greatest ‘enemy,’ and the biggest ‘threat’ to her ambitions, is her own pride and conceit. *Taxi Driver*’s Travis Bickle and *Black Swan*’s Nina are each driven, and frustrated by their own despair.

The Hollywood tradition of the Male Hero has also evolved. Three of these films feature female protagonists (*Clueless, Josie and the Pussycats* and *Black Swan*), and Trinity in *The Matrix* is a strong woman with a dominant screen presence. It is only in *Taxi Driver* that we find the cinematic presentation of the female gender reflects ‘Old Hollywood’s’ lack of understanding of the complexities of women beyond their twin functions as ‘angel-whore.’ The changes in how filmmakers ‘use’ their characters since the mid-1970’s (that PaRDeS analysis of the thesis films suggests) is further evidence of the increasing sophistication of filmmakers and audiences.
Chapter 9 FILM MUSIC & MEANING

Musicology studies are among the most detailed analyses that deal with cinema interpretation, but these studies are weighted towards reflections on musical composition, and other examinations of technical excellence.\(^1\) PaRDeS analyses of film music support these expert studies by offering a fresh perspective on how music functions in specific narrative ways to create and support a structure of multiple levels of cinematic meaning.

The PaRDeS interpretation of film music is unique in framing analysis in terms of the synthesis of the multiple levels of meaning. The broader PaRDeS interpretative process, guided by questions yielded during analysis, seeks to account for the various ‘textual’ aspects of film according to the kind of meaning(s) these different aspects respectively create. As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, using PaRDeS to interpret film meaning consistently offers fresh perspectives and unique insights about the meanings of the films it is applied to. In the film analyses of this chapter, the use of PaRDeS (to reflect on film music) again offers fresh perspectives and new insights on each of the various films.

Further, approaching the interpretation of film music and songs in the context of the multi-level framework of meaning is a new way of dealing with cinematic music in general. Since, as the following analyses demonstrate, cinema music clearly has multiple ‘meaning effects,’ the use of PaRDeS to find and describe these in multiple ways produces nuanced and accurate interpretations that most methods, by virtue of different assumptions about film meaning, are unable to provide.

The scope of this Chapter’s investigation is using the PaRDeS interpretative process to illuminate the cinematic structure through which music and songs in film makes meaning at multiple levels. This ranges from the ‘signposting’ of the action in The Matrix (Remez), to Bernard Herrmann’s profoundly moving jazz score for Taxi Driver (Sod). The unique way PaRDeS negotiates the affective qualities of film music (Derash), and translates these in the language of interpretation offers a new perspective on the relationship between musical cinematic content (Peshat and Remez), and significant film commentaries (Derash) and profoundly personal responses to film (Sod).

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PaRDeS analysis reveals how the use of popular songs in *Josie and the Pussycats* (auditory *Peshat*) conflicts with what viewers see on screen (visual *Peshat*). In *Clueless* the marriage of music to image is more successful, and used to identify the interior state of the main character (*Remez*), and to substantiate a cinematic commentary (*Derash*) that links superficiality to spiritual barrenness (*Sod*). Finally, Clint Mansell’s score for *Black Swan* intersects in suggestive ways with Tchaikovsky’s music (for the ballet *Swan Lake*) to reinforce the narrative pace and rhythm of the film.

As this chapter’s various discussions demonstrate, one of the valuable consequences of the use of PaRD to produce film interpretations is the method’s synthesis of meanings that accrue from: Musical narratives (*Peshat*); Musical inferences (*Remez*); the use of music as a form of cinematic commentary (*Midrash*), as well as other ways music creates significant meanings (*Derash*). Finally, in seeking to respond to the affective nature of music and songs, and their capacity to evoke physical, emotional and profound viewer responses (*Sod*), PaRDeS film method differs significantly from its contemporary interpretative counterparts.

**Interpretative Perspectives of Film Music**

Mark Brownrigg concludes that analysts generally approach film music from several alternative perspectives, including,

[A] musicological approach, a function-based approach, an auteurist, composer-centred approach with its roots in traditional musicology, a historical approach closely linked to this, a psychoanalytic approach and a semiotics-centred approach that again feeds out from traditional musicology

Brownrigg’s categorization of the way film music is interpreted highlights several gaps in our current linking of cinema music to film meaning. While Brownrigg responds to the lack of research that connects the meaning music makes to genre expectations, the PaRDeS analysis responds to different gaps: namely, the ways music makes meaning at multiple, intersecting levels.

2 Brownrigg, "Film Music and Film Genre." 9
K.J. Donnelley discusses some of the ways music communicates meaning in films. These are broadly categorised as: (a) Eliciting and affirming emotion; (b) Clarification or provision of information (such as mood and setting); (c) Providing a ‘sound bath’ that immerses the audience in the film world; (d) Traditional functional aspects that include attempting to provide continuity across edits and joins between shots and time-spaces; (e) Related structural functions such as anticipating subsequent action in the film; and (f) commenting on screen activities or providing a further symbolic dimension not evident in other aspects of the film.

These aural functions are reflected in the thesis films to varying degrees of sophistication (and effect). In the Matrix we find music used to signpost emotional responses to action sequences. This use positions music as a ‘sign’ of culture and rebellion (Remez). Amy Heckerling relies on musical montage in Clueless as a way of advancing the narrative (Peshat), as well as inferring the psychological development of the main character (Remez). The filmmakers of Josie and the Pussycats use music as a central feature of the narrative, including original songs and band performances (Peshat). Taxi Driver finds a harmony between image and sound, largely due to Bernard Herrmann’s score, which creates the ‘sound bath’ Donnelly speaks of, and which connects viewers to the spiritual intentions of director Martin Scorsese and scriptwriter Paul Schrader (Sod).

Generally, film music is used to communicate the emotional and psychological states of film characters. Viewers may well respond emotionally to the music they hear, be it the moving ‘Heaven’ motif of Taxi Driver (Derash), or a stirred memory of youth that viewers experience when they hear David Bowie’s Fashion Girl in Clueless (Sod).

Music and sound can also affect viewers' physiology. Specific tones and frequencies, in certain combinations, induce physical responses – the heartbeat quickens, the stomach sinks. Music and sound evoke affective responses. In addition, the film score can perform a narrative function (usually in conjunction with visual image) and can also communicate 'meta-textual' information – such as genre, and the urgency of action scenes. At other times music suggests the impetus towards film endings (Remez). Music ‘makes’ meaning at multiple levels in cinema, and it makes sense to approach its analysis through the lens of these multiple levels using methods that acknowledge, and respond the their existence, such as PaRDeS.

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3 Donnelly, "Saw Heard: Musical Sound in Contemporary Cinema."
4 Ibid. 107
**Taxi Driver: Bernard Herrmann’s Swan Song**

Bernard Herrmann was 64 and in ill health, nearing the end of his distinguished career when he wrote the score for *Taxi Driver*. Born in New York to Jewish immigrants, Herrmann knew the city intimately. Herrmann was a legendary Hollywood director, notorious for his irascibility, and respected for his collaborations with Alfred Hitchcock (including *North by Northwest*) as well as his work in cinema classics like *Cinema Kane*.

Herrmann conducted the orchestra on the first night of recording, and died the next evening, five hours after completing the score – *Taxi Driver* is dedicated to him. Herrmann had an affinity for both new and traditional music. He managed to combine his understanding of older and newer musical modes through his commitment to writing music that ‘speaks to the soul’ (*Sod*). Herrmann was known for his intractability with filmmakers, and examples of this, and the influence it had on the creation and development of meaning in a scene are in evidence in *Taxi Driver*. Smith describes the result as “the paradox of Hermann's intellectual sophistication and frequent social tactlessness.”

Travis and New York City are presented in the script of *Taxi Driver*, and on the screen as disjointed and fragmented (*Peshat*). This is reflected in Bernard Herrmann's score (*Remez*). A film score can be ‘Remez-like’ when music alerts the audience to other meanings, and can also suggest to viewers how they are 'supposed' to respond to the scene in question, be it emotionally or intellectually (*Sod*). Meaning can also be developed more directly however, as when the score underlines the action (*Peshat*). In these instances, the score ‘describes’ the action arc of the narrative.

Yet because of the way that music affects viewers (including in sensory ways), it is also possible to find examples of music creating meaning of a more significant kind (*Derash*). This is evident in the hands of a skilled composer such as Bernard Herrmann. How? Music can create a space in film for a kind of inferred reflection – viewers are led, by their ‘felt’ responses to music, to search within themselves for a more significant (*Derash*) or profound (*Sod*) meaning than the 'mere' narrative (*Peshat*) might otherwise suggest. These effects are themselves achieved through Herrmann’s rigorous understanding of (and talent for orchestrating) the relationships between rhythm, tone, timbre, dynamics and tempo.

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5 Alex Proyas, "Dark City," (Mystery Clock Cinema, New Line Cinema, 1998).
6 Orson Welles, "Citizen Kane," (Mercury Productions & RKO Radio Pictures, 1941).
7 Taubin, *Taxi Driver*.
8 Smith, *A Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann*. 50
Bernard Herrmann is widely regarded as a composer first and foremost, and is from this perspective that his work as a film music writer is usually framed. His distinguished career and musical output has been the subject of expert analyses that inform subsequent interpretations. A PaRDeS analysis of Herrmann’s score for *Taxi Driver* is a substantial interpretative exercise, which space and scope does not permit here. However, the following discussion of an excerpt from Herrmann’s score for *Taxi Driver*, and the associate interpretative comments are designed to introduce readers, and other analysts to the manner in which a PaRDeS interpretation of film music would develop.

A military styled musical theme is heard each time Travis drives his cab through New York, inferring his ‘soldierly’ response to New York, and suggestive of ‘battle’ (*Remez*). The music that plays over the opening sequence of *Taxi Driver* hints at the violence to come: military rolls on the drums infer that it is not just Travis, but viewers who are entering a ‘cinematic battlefield.’

Herrmann also uses music to define character. For example, when Travis first sees Betsy on the sun-drenched streets of New York the insistent music is juxtaposed against her walking in slow motion. The audience is provided with ‘time’ to reflect on the meaning of the character of Betsy, and Herrmann’s musical ‘Heaven’ motif suggests her character’s function as ‘angel’ (*Remez*). Later, when Travis’s red-tinged eyes are featured in a close-up, the accompanying piece of music, a *jazzy* saxophone, matches the yearning in De Niro’s eyes, before the military drums herald the darkness once more (*Derash*).

Herrmann imbues multiple kinds of meaning in *Taxi Driver* by utilising the unique capacity of music to affect viewers in physical ways. In addition to using PaRDeS to elucidate these, the method (in this case), also offers a unique perspective on the Herrmann score for *Taxi Driver* in the way it accommodates the meaning ‘hidden’ in the music by the composer (*Sod*).

As noted earlier, Bernard Herrmann is widely regarded as one of the finest composers of Hollywood film music, and his remarkable career has been well documented. The PaRDeS interpretation of music in *Taxi Driver* is unique however, in demonstrating the profound connection between Herrmann’s intimate relationship with New York, and the personal meanings he inscribed in the music he composed for the film (*Sod*).

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9 Notable examples include, ibid. Grant Stevens, “The Days Do Not End: Film Music, Time and Bernard Herrmann” (Queensland University of Technology, 2007). and Butler, "The Days Do Not End: Film Music, Time and Bernard Herrmann.”

10 Much of the scholarship relates Herrmann to the various scores he composed for Alfred Hitchcock films.

11 Other analyses arising from Music Studies’ examine Herrmann’s score in terms of the use of the Heaven & Hell musical motifs, and their signposting of Travis’s narrative journey.
Herrmann was plagued by ill health when he wrote the score for *Taxi Driver*, and was also aware that his score for the film would be his last musical composition. His arrangement of a musical stratum of meaning culminates in a score that represents Herrmann’s ‘swan song,’ his farewell love letter to the city of New York (*Sod*).

This PaRDeS examination has concentrated its investigative efforts in this instance on responding to gaps in existing analyses. The PaRDeS engagement with profound meanings (*Sod*) is unique to this method, and links these kinds of meanings to Herrmann’s skilful orchestration of the affective nature of music. While the score to *Taxi Driver* reflects Herrmann himself in profound ways (filmmaker *Sod*), his mastery of music ensures viewers too have an opportunity to respond to the film in highly personal ways (*Sod*).

*Pop will Eat Tchaikovsky in Black Swan*

Aronofsky and Clint Mansell create a musical landscape founded on Tchaikovsky’s original music for *Swan Lake*. Aronofsky notes Mansell dissected the ballet’s score, pulled it apart and then reinterpreted it for the screen, inserting “a lot” of original music in the process.12

Clint Mansell has a contemporary music background. The English musician and composer is the former lead singer and guitarist of the much-loved, and influential alternative band, *Pop Will Eat Itself*. In *Black Swan* the musician, in a first for him, used another composer’s music – Tchaikovsky’s score for *Swan Lake*. Mansell defined his approach as deconstructing, and then reconstructing *Swan Lake*.13 Like many brilliant contemporary musicians from the world of rock and popular music, Mansell has no formal music training. Fortunately, the classical score to *Swan Lake* could be transcribed into a computer, where Mansell experimented with Tchaikovsky’s original music.14 His challenge was to, “find the tones within [Swan Lake] that corresponded with what was going on in [Black Swan] and then experimenting with those tones.”15 Ultimately, this experimentation led to critically acclaimed band, *The Chemical Brothers*, to pen pieces especially for the film. Aronofsky uses an example to explain how the film’s score was developed, that is worth noting here, when he describes the process of Mansell’s reconfiguring of Tchaikovsky’s score.

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12 Rich, "Interview: Darron Aronofsky on Music, Scares and Gender in Black Swan."
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
The famous *Requiem* piece that you hear in everything was actually – Clint in pre-production wrote some ideas down. He made a CD of a few ideas he had that he did on his midi, and then he was stuck at a certain point. He couldn't figure out what to write for the film. We listened to the CD together, and there was this little snippet that's that famous piece-- it was in the middle of a song. I said, "This could be good! Let's try this over the opening scene." We synched them up together, and we played it, and that kind of triggered him.

One of the challenges of using music as embedded in modern culture as Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*, is neutralizing the connections to other meanings the music might evoke. Mansell virtually internalized the score, knowing that the use of such a well-known piece of music represented a major challenge. The way Mansell overcomes this is to break the Tchaikovsky score into segments, and isolate pieces of music, looping them to develop new musical impetus (less rise and fall in the music), and create musical motifs that identify action with theme. He brings in musical pieces penned by the innovative group, *The Chemical Brothers*. The re-configuring of familiar music into unfamiliar forms hints at the fracturing of Nina’s psyche (*Remez*). At an even deeper level, just as *Black Swan* the film and *Swan Lake* the ballet combine to serve a commentary on transformation (*Midrash*), so too does Mansell’s use of Tchaikovsky’s score.

This unique PaRDeS reconciliation of the affective consequences of music with the multiple narrative meanings of *Black Swan* is unique in attributing the development of the more significant elements of the film’s meaning (*Derash*) to the composer, and not to the director, as is usually the case. The fresh perspective offered in the preceding PaRDeS analysis (of an excerpt from Clint Mansell’s score for the film) is further evidence of the interpretative value that accrues as a consequence of the method’s unique integration of film music in its assessments of multi-level cinematic narratives.

**Popular Songs and Narrative Function in Clueless**

Using popular songs performed by contemporary artists consistently throughout *Clueless* develops the modern and ‘fun’ sensibility of the film. During the first part of *Clueless* the music is ‘Britpop’ – music and songs written or performed by bands from the United Kingdom (aural *Peshat*). How does this affect meaning on other levels?

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16 An instrument-computer interface usually controlled from a music keyboard, or the computer itself.
17 Rich, "Interview: Darron Aronofsky on Music, Scares and Gender in Black Swan."
The use of British popular music actually develops cinematic commentary (Derash) in a subtle way (not usually identified by other analyses) by implying both the derivative nature of American culture, and by reinforcing a commentary suggested by Heckerling’s recreation of modern society, based on the cultures of the past (Midrash).\textsuperscript{19} The musical reinforcement of this commentary supports other cinematic references to it, including Cher’s ‘re-fashioning of the past,’ when she ‘updates’ the traditional Scottish tartan in her own outfits. This commentary is even inferred by her name itself, a cinematic reflection on the nature of fame that is expressed in Cher’s attribution of the fame of her namesake, the singer Cher, not to her past as a celebrated singer and performer, but instead the singer’s appearance in infomercials.

In Clueless songs are sometimes used as a form of ironic commentary (aural Derash). The songs in the film are mostly from an earlier period, and re-recorded by contemporary artists. Heckerling uses music in service of irony when the narrative meaning of the song is in conflict with the narrative meaning of the image. This connection between lyrics and image is evident from the opening of the film. Here, the lyrics to Kids in America, which are a (British)\textsuperscript{20} expression of a ‘normal’ rebellious teenager are juxtaposed against Cher’s luxurious lifestyle, which is indicated by the visual sequence of images from the character’s “way normal” life. When the meaning of the song (lyrical Peshat) corresponds with the meaning of the image (visual Peshat), then the dramatic impact of the scene is also reinforced. Jeff Smith makes the general point that, like most orchestral scores, pop music, when used in this way,

Underlines character traits, suggests elements of character development or point of view, reinforces aspects of the film's setting, and supports [a] film's structure by bridging the spatial and temporal gaps between sequences.\textsuperscript{21}

Conventional analysis focuses on how music is used in the way Smith describes, including the use of music to suggest the development of character and setting (Remez), and the use of music to respond to gaps in the narrative (Peshat). The PaRDeS interpretation suggests another way in which music makes meaning.

\textsuperscript{19} This commentary is first suggested by the (unacknowledged in the film) fact that Clueless is based on Jane Austen’s Emma, published in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century.
\textsuperscript{20} The song was written by UK artist Marty Wilde, and originally sung by his daughter, Kim Wilde. Incidentally, if PaRDeS analysis of this commentary was to ‘continue,’ the fact that both Marty and Kim Wilde were each ‘one-hit wonders;’ and that the Kim Wilde’s success being a consequence of her father’s success is similar to Cher’s privileged lifestyle being the result of her father’s wealth would be a potentially useful ‘PaRDeS site of interest’ insofar as the potential connection to this commentary (Midrash).
\textsuperscript{21} Smith, "Popular Songs and Comic Allusions in Contemporary Cinema." 414
Specifically, the quality of the sound of the music itself, the sound frequencies used, the isolating of specific instruments, and dislocations between music and image all serve to destabilise the cinematic narrative in some way. These might be recognised by the viewer, and then consciously connected by them to the film’s narrative. However, when not noticed, the affective nature of music means these technical elements of sound can still create a ‘transformative interpretative space,’ as a consequence of the physiological effects on the viewer. Certain frequencies, for example, can initiate a state of anxiety. An ominous rumble can be ‘felt’ in the chest. These ‘felt’ responses deepen a viewer’s ‘experience’ of a film, and can (potentially) physically induce a particular response that requires integration into individual interpretations of a film.

The preceding example of a PaRDeS analysis of film music in Clueless offers a fresh perspective on the consequences of Heckerling’s use of musical montage to serve multiple levels of cinematic narrative. There are four musical montage sequences in Clueless, each centred on Cher and her experience of the world. The first sequence, at the beginning of the film, is an establishing sequence, but the other three each relate to the progression finding the ‘Self,’ when Cher ‘musically experiences’ moments of self-awareness, self-reflection, and ultimately self-realisation. These potentially suggest a more substantial transformation of the character (Derash). Finally, when the four musical montages in Clueless are interpreted as different stages of progression, viewers and analysts can potentially derive a ‘formula’ to find the ‘authentic self’ that begins with ‘cluelessness’ about one’s own condition, before self-awareness and self-reflection precipitate self-realisation (Sod).

Musical Montage as Cinema Narrative in Clueless

Consider the use of Eric Carmen’s All By Myself, and the lyric, “Don’t want to be all my myself,” during the ‘Epiphany Montage.’ This scene marks a turning point in the protagonist’s journey.

This Epiphany Montage represents a moment of self-realisation for Cher, and All By Myself is a musical clue (Remez) to her character that links the genesis of the ‘Makeover of the Soul’ (that is inspired by Cher’s self-realisation) to an individual’s experience of a ‘Dark Night of the Soul’ (Derash). After her makeover of new student Tai sets off a chain of events that ultimately results in Tai developing a (romantic) crush on Cher’s stepbrother Josh, and Cher’s own social exclusion from her peers, the privileged young teen is left feeling disaffected and alienated.

Cher’s voiceover guides viewers through her own thought processes, and the screen image takes audiences on her actual physical journey when she wanders the streets, reflecting on how she arrived at her current situation (narrative Peshat). The lyrics of the song, All By Myself, support this narrative content (Remez), but also develop the continuing commentary (Derash) that was established in the Opening Montage in response to Cher’s expressed shallowness (in the character’s voiceover).

In the Opening Montage, Cher is surrounded by friends who share her privileged lifestyle, and ‘collude’ with her superficial activities (such as shopping). Two songs feature heavily in that sequence – The Muffs’ re-recording of Kids in America, and David Bowie’s Fashion Girl, which refer viewers to the film’s commentary (Derash/Midrash) on the ultimate emptiness of a superficial life – the ‘cluelessness’ of the title. This musical fashioning of multiple kinds of meaning through the use of music (that is established in the opening montage) is a feature of the narrative of Clueless.

At the narrative point of the Epiphany Montage, Cher shifts her attention from her outward concern with her surroundings and the people around her to an inward focus that ultimately leads to greater self-awareness. Part of Heckerling's ironic narrative is vested not only in the use of All by Myself to infer the character’s psychological state (Remez), but that it also signposts this shift in Cher’s personal conception of self. This suggestion, taken to the limit of its interpretative implications, concludes that the use of All by Myself invokes the existentialist concepts of loneliness and isolation (Sod).

Music performs a Remez function in Clueless by alerting the viewer to the constant changes in Cher's emotions. Thus, when she is ‘happy’ the music is ‘joyful’ and has an upbeat tempo. It is curious, given its use by filmmakers, how infrequently the ways music creates film meaning is actually included in film interpretations. Value judgements are sometimes produced about the quality of the songs featured in a film, but analysts rarely integrate this important element of film meaning in their interpretations. This general interpretative gap is even further undermined in analyses of Clueless, which are so heavily influenced by the ‘Austenites,’ and their interpretative emphasis that privileges the meaning of Jane Austen’s Emma at the expense of the cinematic structure of meanings in the film.

23 See Chapter Seven’s discussion of this montage sequence.
24 See Chapter Five’s PaRDeS analysis of this sequence.
25 This change in emotions that music signposts in film is studied mostly in fields related to ‘Music’ rather than ‘Film.’ See for example, Gorbman, "Narrative Film Music." Film Studies is interested in soundtracks (and comparing Box Office and Album Chart success); Serious studies are undertaken in the theoretical arena, but music often rates less than a paragraph in most contemporary interpretations.
26 The term is a self-appointed moniker that refers to devotees of the works of Jane Austen – avid admirers of the woman herself are known as ‘Janeites.’ See, for example, Elzette Steenkamp, "Janeites for a New Millennium: The Modernisation of Jane Austen on Film," Transnational Literature 1, no. 2 (2009).
Narrative Effects of the use of Popular Music in Josie and the Pussycats

Songs feature in the *Josie and the Pussycats* soundtrack, and as such form part of the primary narrative. However, as the PaRDeS interpretation reveals, songs and music develop meaning in other, sometimes unexpected ways.

The songs and music in *Josie and the Pussycats* perform twin narrative functions: ‘Music as Performance,’ and ‘Music as Narrative.’ Music as Performance links the Pussycats to garage bands and independent music (*Remez*). Consideration of ‘The Pussycats as musicians’ (*Peshat*) reinforces the perceived hypocrisy of the film, and develops the thematic content of the film in such a way that the meaning that viewers make not only differs from, but in fact contradicts the meaning intended by the filmmakers.27

The ‘hit’ single that catapults the Pussycats to the top of the charts needs to be convincing enough to pass for a top-selling song in the non-cinematic world of the audience, and also be consistent with the ‘garage roots’ of the band. Consider the final chorus from *3 Small Words*:

> It took six whole hours  
> And five long days  
> For all your lies to come undone.  
> And those three small words  
> Were way too late  
> 'Cause you can't see that I'm the one.

These lyrics (if the words are substituted with numbers) actually count down from six to one – a lyrical conceit that some viewers may feel quite pleased with themselves if they recognise it. The song’s title, ‘Three Small Words,’ immediately brings to mind the question, “What three words?” to which many teenage girls will respond with, “I love you.”28 Yet the potential sentimentality of the song’s title and chorus is offset by the verses, which include phrases like, “I’m a punk-rock prom queen.” Since Fiona later remakes the Pussycats into ‘fashion queens,’ this lyrical claim to a punk ethos is insulting to real ‘punk rockers’ and their fans (*Sod*).

Music is of particular importance in this film, forming as it does the backbone of the plot (*Peshat*).29 The marketing of music is also a target for the commentary by the filmmakers (*Derash*), and serves as an allegory for a post-modern consumer society (*Remez*).30 Hidden meanings in music is addressed directly by the plot of the film (*Peshat*), which focuses on the

27 See Chapter 6’s discussion of *The Filmmakers & Humours Narratives in Josie and the Pussycats*, pp 111-112.
28 Other viewers may well recall the musical comedy, *Three Small Words*, featuring Fred Astaire.
29 Recall that the soundtrack for *Josie and the Pussycats* was very successful, and features well-respected contemporary artists.
30 Huehls, "Knowing What We Are Doing: Time, Form and the Reading of Postmodernity."
attempts of a multi-national record company and the US government to brainwash the youth of America by planting subliminal messages in popular songs. Music is a narrative impetus, and what music means in *Josie and the Pussycats* is developed on the four PaRDeS levels. Music represents motivation at a clear and distinct narrative level. The *Peshat* or narrative of *Josie and the Pussycats* is itself concerned with exploring what music means on different levels, including its subliminal effects.

**Multiple Narrative Effects of Film Music**

The possible choices of the use of music in film include its use to support narrative arcs (emotional and action), to suggest emotional states of mind (*Remez*), and to using music as an actual narrative constituent of the plot (*Peshat*). Using PaRDeS to analyse the thesis films in this chapter suggests that film music and sound can also be framed according to the four levels of the model in a more general way also. The PaRDeS approach to interpretation conceptualises film music meaning in terms of the *kinds* of meaning it makes.

Viewers use song lyrics to provide narrative information, and at other times the performance of music is a narrative feature of a film (*Peshat*). At the next level of *Remez*, viewers recognise specific musical allusion, and film music may also be used to set mood, and to imply specific psychological states of mind. The use of repetition through musical motifs becomes a way of linking scenes that share similar meanings or themes.

The use of music and sound in film becomes significant (*Derash*) primarily when *musicians* exert some degree of independent control over the score (as was the case with Bernard Herrmann). The capacity of music and sound to support cinematic commentary (*Derash*) is centred in the affective nature of music, and its ability to physiologically induce audiences to feel, rather than think about their response. At the final level (*Sod*) are found examples of ‘meaningful’ music. The capacity of music to move viewers to inexpressible moments of self-realisation can develop highly profound meanings for some viewers. A viewer’s personal ‘relationship’ with specific songs may intersect with a film’s use of it to produce similarly profound responses to film.

The key to finding and understanding the more complex levels of meaning lies in what viewer see and what they hear when watching a film – the ‘story’ of a character’s ‘journey,’ and how it is cinematically conveyed (*Peshat*). It is in this ‘simple’ meaning that the clues to ‘deeper’ levels are layered. In the following chapter, these explicit clues in film (*Remez*) are shown to initiate an interpretative ‘search’ for more significant meaning, which ultimately connects them to a body of pre-existing cinematic commentary (*Midrash*).
Chapter 10 CINEMATIC MIDRASH

Clive Marsh likens film audiences to church congregations – ultimately for him, film functions as parable (Derash). We might not concur with the notion of ‘cinema as church,’ but there is no doubting that cinema has important effects on individuals’ values and beliefs, in addition to its cultural and economic relevance to society.

Using the context of the significance of films, and their influence on individual and social value and belief systems is a unique feature of the PaRDeS interpretative strategies that investigate ‘significant’ meanings of a film. PaRDeS is distinguished from dominant interpretations of films in its scope of interpretation, and the formal use of Midrash as a way to coordinate the analysis of a film’s meaning. This chapter comprises two main sections that respectively explore different elements of Midrash interpretations of cinema.

The first part of Chapter 10 investigates how other sources can be used to ‘make sense’ of film meaning. The second part of this Chapter represents the ‘voice of PaRDeS’ in the contemporary interpretative dialogues that revolve around each film, the boundaries of which were established in Chapter 4’s review of existing analyses of the five films. The investigations of other sources, and the PaRDeS interpretative responses to other analyses in this chapter together comprise what is termed, ‘Cinematic Midrash.’

Framing the Context and Purpose of Cinematic Midrash

The Rabbinical use of Midrash incorporates the use of other sources to make sense of the meaning of sacred texts. This thesis similarly uses outside material as a way of refining, contextualising and (ultimately) accurately reflecting the meaning of individual films. The purpose of this kind of interpretative strategy is to explicate the multiple ways films become ‘significant’ through their (textual) interactions with (a) other films, audiences and critics and (b) more general sources, including literature and art, contemporary events, other kinds of intertextual references, and social discourse. Midrash analysis investigates ‘applied’ readings and asks: “Does the film have anything to say? How is the film ‘used’ by viewers in the context of their own lives?” In the language of film analysis, Cinematic Midrash illuminates the function of film as ‘parable’ or philosophy.

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2 This historic foundation of Midrash is formalised in contemporary interpretative terms in Idel, Absorbing perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation.
PaRDeS analysis also responds to the influence of a film’s source material, and asks: How and why have these sources and references been used? Do they help elucidate a film’s meaning? How do viewers ‘apply’ the meaning of a film, be it to their own lives, or in their own interpretations?

Another important way of using other materials in the PaRDeS interpretative effort to describe and elucidate the effects of Cinematic Midrash, and consequences of existing commentary on the making of cinematic meaning, is developing a response to existing interpretations. It is not only filmmakers and viewers who ‘choose’ their meaning – interpreters also make choices about which elements of cinema are ‘meaningful.’ These interpretative choices are informed by analysts’ assessments of the cinematic narrative (Peshat), and examining any allusions explicitly indicated by that narrative (Remez).³

This chapter introduces the interpretative processes of Cinematic Midrash, a unique investigative activity that comprises part of PaRDeS analysis, in two main sections. Firstly, source, and other ‘outside’ material is discussed. The scripts for Clueless and Josie and the Pussycats are based on other sources.⁴ This chapter investigates the effects of source material on film meaning, and how filmmakers manage the potential complications of ‘source effects.’

In the case of Black Swan, where another work (Swan Lake) is the narrative foundation of the film, the PaRDeS analysis stimulates a discussion on the narrative relationship between the ballet and the film.

The second section of this chapter’s exploration of Cinematic Midrash represents an interpretative response to the summary of interpretative perspectives discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter’s response to the critical reviews of the (respective) films links PaRDeS analysis to a synthesis of the meanings found by other analysts.⁵ This inevitably involves responding to the value judgements of critics. The systematic (PaRDeS) method of Midrash, (that first traverses more explicit kinds of meaning in the process of interpretation), is designed to clarify and explicate a foundation of meaning that (to some extent) responds to, and mitigates the personal biases that accrue to interpretations.

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³ As reflected in the various PaRDeS interpretative discussions of the thesis films in the preceding chapters.
⁴ Clueless is a contemporary adaptation of Jane Austen’s Emma, and Josie and the Pussycats is derived from a comic book series of the same name.
⁵ The major interpretative positions, as identified in Chapter Four, include Feminist Film Criticism, Marxist Analysis, Philosophical, Theological and other Ideological Interpretative stances, Race-related readings and Postmodern Film Criticism.
Responding to other interpretations is: (a) a way of including the important insights of others; (b) brings together multiple interpretations; and (c) inspires new understandings of the meaning(s) of the thesis films. Understanding the significance of the films is essential in the PaRDeS interpretative process. It is only when an accurate account of the other levels of meaning has been established, that interpreters have a stable foundation from which they can accurately contextualise the complexities of ‘profound’ Sod meaning.

**Using Other Sources to Make Sense of Films**

*Taxi Driver* is less directly affected by the meaning of other texts than are the other thesis films. Although *Taxi Driver* does make multiple references to other films, these mostly represent a form of cinematic tribute by director Martin Scorsese or writer Paul Schrader to other filmmakers and movies. However, the ‘moral’ (Derash) and ‘spiritual’ (Sod) meanings the filmmakers inscribe in *Taxi Driver* are themselves heavily affected by other sources, including Sartre’s *Nausea* and Dostoevsky’s writings.

Martin Scorsese uses the audio-visual properties of film (Peshat) in various ways to refer viewers (Remez) to his own cinematic commentaries (Derash). These references link the film narrative’s recognisable themes to the director’s own sense of spiritual alienation (Sod). In addition to Scorsese’s cinematic expressions of religiosity, the director finds other uniquely filmic ways to develop intersecting commentaries (Cinematic Midrash).

Scorsese uses subtle cinematic allusions to European filmmakers (such as Bresson) ensuring *Taxi Driver’s* reputation as a movie for filmmakers and film buffs, for these are allusions that the general audience was (at that time) unlikely to recognise. These kind of cinematic allusions (Remez) reveal Scorsese's cinematic sensibilities. The cinematic allusions to other films are an indication that Scorsese’s cinematic commentary can also be discovered in them.

*Black Swan* ‘uses’ a famous in multiple ways. The narrative and themes contained within, and suggested by *Swan Lake* substantiate the film’s narrative (Peshat), but (in other ways) also serves as a metaphor that hints at a ‘deeper’ meaning. Although Aronofsky does not himself (appear to) develop a substantial film commentary (Derash), the different ways that *Black Swan* frames the female psyche contains an implicit, archetypal reflection of social attitudes towards, and responses to female sexuality.

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6 For example, George Stevens, "Shane," (Paramount Pictures, 1953).
7 Discussed specifically in Chapter 6, and referred to in subsequent chapters.
8 See Chapter 8’s analysis of character.
The Matrix actively encourages viewers to find and understand multiple levels of meaning by using explicit and implicit references in the film that, if investigated, lead to a ‘Enter the Matrix’ website, which explores the multiple allegorical possibilities. ‘Christian’ interpretations of the film typically use biblical verse to make sense of The Matrix. Other theological readings are also inferred by various intertextual references, including Buddhist and Judaic interpretations. Philosophically related intertextual references to Baudrillard, Plato’s Cave and other philosophical sources offer alternative interpretative possibilities. Others analysts respond to intertextual references to Greek or Gnostic myths, using these sources as a foundation for their linking of the meaning of the film to the mythic narratives of Hellenistic and early Judaic cultures. Understanding film allegories requires knowledge of the source of the allegory, and these kinds of references in The Matrix stimulated a mainstream engagement with different theologies, and philosophy in particular.

Amy Heckerling uses Jane Austen’s Emma as a source text for the story, characters and plot of Clueless. Essentially, Heckerling appropriates the story function and character design of Emma, and uses these as the foundation of a cinematic commentary on superficiality (Derash). Heckerling extends Emma’s authorial commentary in an exploration of her own ideas on authorship, translation and transformation (Sod). Meanwhile, Josie and the Pussycats demonstrates yet another mode of film authorship through its appropriation of a more contemporary source, a comic book. This film however, is the outcome of a commercial vision of the original material by its copyright owners, rather than a creative vision of a filmmaker.

The Interpretative Process of Cinematic Midrash

Analysts using alternative interpretative methods regularly offer studies of ‘film intertextuality’ and ‘film symbolism.’ Given the limitations of space, these components of cinema have, in this thesis, been previously brought into analysis where relevant – as with the
Wachowskis’ use of Jean Baudrillard in *The Matrix*—rather than being accorded a separate chapter or section. However, before proceeding to investigate other elements of cinematic commentary (*Midrash*), it is worth noting the following about the uses of PaRDeS in an investigation of film intertextuality and symbolism.

A consistent theme of the PaRDeS investigations of the various ways film meaning is made is the recurring creation of sets of questions that guide the direction and activities of the PaRDeS interpretative process—these evolve during the act of interpretation itself. Other questions that initially arise during the investigative activity of *Cinematic Midrash* include: Is the other source *explicitly* referred to in the film? If so, how overt is the reference? Is the audience witness to the reference(s), and if so, how do viewers respond? Is there any significance in how the intertextual references or visual symbols are seen or heard (such as the implications of *who* said something)? PaRDeS deals with the effect of outside sources by contextualising them within the ‘meaning’ of the entire film.

The PaRDeS interpretation proceeds in slightly different ways for each of the films. This is because earlier investigations of the respective films (in previous chapters) have yielded different sets of questions in response to the different interpretative activities associated with each of the four levels: (a) narrative and story (*Peshat*); (b) filmic clues (*Remez*); (c) evidence of significant meanings and filmmakers commentaries (*Derash* and *Midrash*); and (d) integration of filmmakers ‘profound’ intentions, and potentially ‘profound’ viewer responses (*Sod*).

Each PaRDeS film interpretation does, however, require a response to existing commentaries that surround each respective film (*Midrash*). All five films will be included in the final section of this chapter’s development of *Cinematic Midrash*.

First, however, those films adapted from, or heavily based upon other sources (*Black Swan, Clueless* and *Josie and the Pussycats*) are examined in light of the effects of those other sources on the meaning(s) of the films. *The Matrix* is then examined in the context of the effects of multiple allegorical structures of meaning, before the chapter concludes with a PaRDeS interpretative response to existing commentary (*Midrash*) for each of the films.

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14 Recall the use of Baudrillard’s *Simulacrum and Simulacra* in the opening scenes of the film (Chapter 5) in visual ways to refer viewers (*Remez*) to philosophical readings of *The Matrix* (*Derash*).

15 This is different to contemporary treatments of intertextuality and sources texts like *Emma* and the *Josie* comics, where the focus of investigation often seems to be the outside sources, rather than the film meaning.
Swan Lake & Black Swan

When Company Director, Leroy (Vincent Cassell) describes Swan Lake to the assembled dancers, he finishes his description of the story of the ballet with, “We open our season with Swan Lake. Done to death, I know. But not like this. We strip it down. Make it visceral and real.” It is not only Leroy and the Company who create a “visceral and real” creative work of art. Aronofsky too, strips down the layers of his cinematic study of Nina’s disintegrating personality in visceral and confronting visual ways.

It is difficult not to compare the directorial styles of Aronofsky’s management of Black Swan, and the fictional Leroy’s direction of Swan Lake. Leroy’s sharing of his perspective of the story of the ballet with characters and with the audience clarifies the major themes of the story both Leroy and Aronofsky are ‘directing.’ Aronofsky claims that he was unaware of potential parallels between himself and Leroy.16 Even so, it is inevitable that the similar roles both men play in directing the meaning of a creative work draws attention to the notion of a commentary on the ‘art’ of directing (a film or ballet) itself (Derash).

The key themes of Black Swan parallel the key themes of Swan Lake: duality, reality, death, love and betrayal. Both ballet and film reflect a social acceptance of women competing with each other for the attention of a man, albeit for different reasons. Despite being ‘royalty,’ neither Leroy (Black Swan) nor the royal Siegfried (Swan Lake) seems worth all the angst and effort that results from the female characters competing for their attention (Sod). It is Nina’s quest for perfection however, and not Leroy’s intentions for the production of Swan Lake, that alludes to her motivation in pleasing the ballet director (Remez).

Are there other ways the meaning of Black Swan is linked to, or affected by the ballet (Remez)? Swan Lake begins with Prince Siegfried’s coming of age celebrations. Black Swan is Nina’s ‘coming of age story,’ and the commencement of her journey is less promising. The ballet itself is quite symbolic – the lake, (as the pool of the tears of the parents of the girls who have been turned into swans by day), is regarded by Wilor Bluege as a symbol of the unconscious in his Jungian interpretation.17 Originally presented in the late 1800’s, at a time when interest in emerging studies of human consciousness was high, Swan Lake theatrically and musically represents that period’s notions of the different levels of self (Derash). A continuing fascination with different levels of self is reflected (Remez) in Aronofsky’s contemporary treatment of the story of Black Swan.

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16 Haddon, "Darren Aronofsky Talks Black Swan”.
17 Bluege, "The Black Swan: Three Perspectives."
The girls who became swans in the ballet were on the way to their own weddings. Viewers of *Black Swan* who frame their own interpretations in the context of prior knowledge of *Swan Lake* are responsive to cinematic representations of the ‘virginal maiden.’ When Siegfried falls in love with Odette, the Queen of the Swans, he is falling in love with a royal counterpart. Class boundaries are not crossed. In fact, as Queen, Odette outranks Siegfried. Many viewers of *Black Swan* know little about the ballet, or the original fairytale (*The Red Shoes*) by Hans Christian Anderson, which inspired the ballet. Whether viewers consider the fairytale, the ballet or the film, ultimately, in ‘demonising’ the black swan, the (male) authors are making the ‘dark, unknowable’ side of women a sexualised, unlikable other (*Sod*).

**Literary Sources & Cinematic Meaning: Clueless**

In using Jane Austen’s *Emma* as the basis of *Clueless*, Amy Heckerling had specific cinematic choices available to her in how she reflects the novel in her film. Heckerling has noted that she structured the film according to the plot of the novel, and that the character design is essentially the same.

*Emma* was in part Jane Austen's response to the dominant cultural product of her time – literature. *Clueless* parallels this narrative response in its numerous references to film texts. The voice-over is a guide to Cher's interior state, and not an omniscient narrator. Instead, it becomes a device used to establish Cher's lack of self-awareness. Rather than use an omniscient narrator (as Austen does in *Emma*), Heckerling defines Cher as ignorant of her own condition (‘clueless’), and places viewers in an omniscient position relative to the protagonist’s own (lack of) knowledge of her character flaws. This is perspective uncovered during the PaRDeS analysis, and of interest because Heckerling positions the viewer as an *implicit* element of the translation from text to film. By being placed by the filmmaker in the role of omniscient narrator, the viewer potentially becomes part of the film (*Sod*).

*Clueless* can be read as a comment on the nature of authorship itself (*Midrash*). Heckerling’s script is subtle in how dialogue is used to not only suggest specific character traits (*Remez*), but also to cinematically reflect on modern appropriations of literature (*Derash*). In the following exchange it is not Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that is referred to by Cher, but Mel Gibson's film of the same name.

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18 Note that the same character archetype applies to Josie in *Josie and the Pussycats*, and to Cher in *Clueless*.
19 Heckerling, "Harold Lloyd Seminars of the American Film Institute."
20 These references range from low art (infomercials), to high art (Monet, Botticelli).
Cher's stepbrother Josh has returned home while on a break from his studies, and he and a female college friend (Heather) are driving Cher to a party. Josh is engaged in an intellectual argument with Heather, when the following exchange takes place between the two women:

Heather
It's just like Hamlet said, "To thine own self be true."
Cher
Ah, no, no, Hamlet didn't say that.
Heather
I think I remember Hamlet accurately.
Cher
Well, I remember Mel Gibson accurately, and he didn't say that. That Polonius guy did.

Another layer of irony is developed when analysts note that the quote being debated is 'To thine own self be true,' for Cher can scarcely be said to be self-honest at this early point in the film. The more clearly discerned irony lies in the reference to Mel Gibson’s Hamlet, for strictly speaking, Cher is correct, and her use of the filmic source to substantiate her literary response is valid (Peshat).

The PaRDeS interpretative process continues by asking a question suggested by its analysis of this scene, and an exploration of how it ‘hints’ at the filmmakers’ commentary (Derash). Is the author dead? Is Mel Gibson's film version of Shakespeare's Hamlet more authoritative than the play? Is the modern film more relevant to contemporary audiences than Shakespeare’s play?

Joel Gibson reads Clueless as a commentary on the allegorical death of the author, describing the films as a “self-reflexive late twentieth century statement on adaptation.”21 What are viewers and critics to make of the exclusion of Austen from the credits of the film (Remez)? Given that the story and the structure are derived from Emma, does the exclusion of Austen suggest that, as Barthes famously declared, “The Author is Dead?”22

21 Gibson, "Authoricidal Tendencies: Emma and less Clueless: Approaches to Film Adaptations of the Canon." 6
Cher is certainly clueless about literature, at one point quoting Shakespeare, and attributing it to Cliffs Notes, the well-known series of study guides to texts. Yet to suggest that the author is dead is to ignore the commentary on the original text, Emma (Derash). Clueless is evidence not so much of the death of the author, but of the transformation of the author (Sod).

How does the ‘Emma Connection’ create and develop meaning in Clueless? It does so in two ways. Firstly, Heckerling’s deconstruction of the characters and story structure of Emma informs her filmmaking. Secondly, audience knowledge of Emma potentially affects how viewers interpret, and respond to Clueless (Sod). The ‘Emma-Connection’ can be perceived to operate on all levels (depending on a viewer’s awareness of the novel as source text).

There are multiple ways in which viewers can potentially connect to Emma in its function as source material for Clueless. Since Heckerling appropriates the plot and characters of the novel, the narrative content (Peshat) of the film naturally reflects these elements of the novel. However, both plot and character frameworks are substantially transformed in Heckerling’s updating of the story, and in her transformation of both to reflect contemporary concerns (Derash). The meaning that viewers find in the film (Sod) evolves in response to the cinematic narrative of Clueless, and not solely in response to the literary narrative of nearly two centuries earlier.

A commentary (Midrash) dominated by analyses with a dominant interpretative interest in Jane Austen contributes to the perceived significance of the film (Derash). This commentary has, over time, ensured that new viewers are often aware of the connection between Clueless and Emma.

Finally, if a viewer is aware of the connection to the novel, and familiar with it, they construct personal meanings differently to viewers who are unaware of the literary source. For those viewers who are unaware of the connection, Clueless may offer allusions (Remez) that they cannot recognise.

For those viewers who are aware of the connection, a relationship with the novel creates a Peshat-Sod axis of meaning. That is, the narrative meaning of Clueless (Peshat) intersects with an individual viewer’s personal experience (Sod meaning) of a different text (and text form), Emma. Both the degree of familiarity with, and the original response to the novel are the foundations of this Sod layer of meaning for individual viewers of Clueless.

Knowledge of the connection between Emma and Clueless draws attention to the similarities and differences between the two texts, effectively creating loose ‘boundaries of meaning’ for some viewers. One of the stark differences suggested by this temporal space is materialism (Derash). One of the most obvious similarities revealed by this temporal space is the placing of romantic love at the centre of a woman’s existence. Within the poles that these
two concepts represent lie other issues of difference and similarity (Derash). The form and nature of commentary (Midrash) continues to evolve in new directions.

The PaRDeS analysis of the link between the meaning Clueless and viewers’ knowledge of Emma is unique in framing its interpretative discussion in terms of the effects of viewers’ prior knowledge of the literary source for the film. The preceding discussion offers new insights into the interpretative connections between Clueless and Emma, and represents a significant re-contextualisation of the existing commentary, the majority of which elevate the meaning of the novel at the expense of analyses of the meaning of the film.23

*Archie, Comic Books & Josie and the Pussycats*

Most critics note that Josie and the Pussycats is 'based' on a spinoff from the Archie comic books (Remez). As a translation, the film bears little resemblance to the original comic books and animated series beyond the names of characters and the setting of Riverdale (Peshat). The core relationships are ignored by Elfont and Kaplan, and instead of presenting The Pussycats as an established touring band (as they are in the comic book series), the filmmakers re-define the band as a group struggling for recognition. New characters are also created, and other (original comic book) characters excised.

The relationship between the comic book and the film can be described within the framework of the PaRDeS model of meaning. Doing so produces a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between source text(s) and the film. Further, describing this relationship using PaRDeS reveals that the way in which the filmmakers approached the source text created the first of the many ‘meaning schisms’ that develop as a consequence of conflicting levels of meaning. These ‘meaning schisms’ are first inscribed by an unsuccessful adaptation of the source material that alters the character design and plot (Peshat) in ways that viewers’ (potentially) recognise as a lack of respect for the source material.

In the case of Josie and the Pussycats, the connection to another source cannot be ‘hidden’ (Sod), as Heckerling did with Clueless (when she did not include Austen in the credits). With Josie, the actual title reminds audiences of the source (Remez). If viewers expect to find a reflection of the characters they (might have) loved in the comic book (Sod), they are likely to be disappointed with the film.

Elfont and Kaplan pay too little attention to their screenwriting and directorial efforts in translating and adapting the source material in a way that viewers (familiar with the source material) recognise and respond to. Rather, the filmmakers concentrate their efforts on creating new material that is, for the most part, unrelated to the original texts.

Dealing with what is, for some viewers, a 'cult' source invites the attention of fans of the original comic book series. This increased level of viewer scrutiny can affect interpretation in positive or negative ways, depending on how the filmmakers negotiate the issues of translation, adaptation and transformation of text.\(^{24}\) The ‘act of creation’ when adapting a source text is itself intrinsically an act of interpretation (of that source text). When the filmmakers' ‘interpretation’ of the source material differs from that of audiences, the result is that some viewers devalue the meaning of the film. Elfont and Kaplan, in treating the source text as they do, are effectively establishing a foundation for the unsatisfactory meanings that ultimately develop in the film text.

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**Allegorical Structures of Meaning in The Matrix**

Allegorical meanings of cinema make a connection between a film and another story or narrative structure. It is in the structure of story that allegory differs from symbolism in film, for symbols denote a singular meaning. Allegories, on the other hand, impose story structures.\(^{25}\) This is a connection that is explicitly revealed in the narrative content of a film (Remez). However, when interpreters assume that the film, and the story it allegorises mean the same thing, they are mistaken. Allegories ‘hint’ at meaning – they do not constitute it.

Allegorical content in The Matrix refers viewers back to themes of free will and faith. Ultimately what is presented by the filmmakers to viewers is a choice of multiple allegorical possibilities. It is up to the viewer to decide which of these they choose to engage with, and respond to in devising their own readings of a film (Sod). The concept of being called to one's destiny is not particular to religious narratives, but applies also to mythological narratives. The structure of The Matrix closely approximates Christopher Vogler's stages of the Hero's Journey,\(^{26}\) itself based on the ‘Monomyth’ of Joseph Campbell.\(^{27}\)

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\(^{24}\) In addition to earlier discussion in the thesis, see also Davis, "I was a Teenage Classic: Literary Adaptations in Turn-of-the-Millenium Teen Films."

\(^{25}\) The structures of allegory are the subject of detailed exploration in the field of literary studies. For a simple cinematic perspective, see McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting.*


\(^{27}\) Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.*
Responding to allegorical content in *The Matrix* can be problematic for some viewers since multiple allegorical possibilities are presented simultaneously. The audience of *The Matrix* is presented with interpretative choices, and different viewers respond to different cinematic stimuli. What is perceived in one scene as a Christian parallel, for example, will also introduce allusions to philosophical interpretations.

The narrative provides a ‘cinematic clue’ (*Remez*) in the scene where Agent Smith shoots and 'kills' Neo. Neo is brought back to life by Trinity's kiss (*Peshat*). In Christian narrative Jesus is dead for three days before resurrection. In terms of the primary narrative of *The Matrix* (*Peshat*), Neo is not dead for three days – but the allegory of a risen Christ is hinted at by his death in Room 303 (*Remez*). The number ‘303’ is a symbolic allusion to the three days Christ following his crucifixion, before his resurrection, and ascension to the ‘Right hand of the Father,’ as well as representing another reference to ‘The Trinity’ (*Remez*). The Wachowskis also ‘hide’ meaning in other numbers in the film (*Sod*). Neo’s future as ‘The One,’ is alluded to by the number of his apartment – ‘101.’

Does the PaRDeS analysis suggest further meanings that accrue to this ‘numeric’ site of meaning in the film? The number ‘303’ also represents an evolution of Neo’s singular existence as Thomas A. Anderson (*Derash*), since it can be read as the triplicate of the original room number 101, where he lived prior to leaving the illusory 1999 world created by the Matrix computer construct (narrative *Peshat*). His ‘holy unity’ with Morpheus (*Derash*) was set in motion when he accepted the resistance-fighter’s offer to join the fight against the Matrix (*Peshat*). When Trinity’s kiss restores him to life (*Peshat*), the ‘Holy Trinity’ is established, with Morpheus as ‘God,’ Trinity as the ‘Holy Spirit’ and Neo as Messiah.28 Trinity’s kiss, a symbolic visual clue (*Remez*) to the theological possibilities of the film (*Derash*), affirms multiple theological readings that rely on notions of a holy union of three. These include the Christian allegory discussed above, as well as the Judaic reading of Trinity as Shechinah, the ‘breath of life’ that animates humanity.29 This PaRDeS reading offers new insights into the nature of the relationship between the ‘hidden’ (*Sod*) and allusive (*Remez*) ‘meanings of numbers,’ when analysis links these to the previously discovered ‘Trinity as Shechinah’ interpretation.

Are there other implications of allegorical content that other interpretations have not yet discovered? The PaRDeS method responds to multiple levels by seeking ‘synthesis’ and in doing so yields fresh perspectives on cinema allegory and how it is coordinated within an interpretation.

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28 Neo himself, is represented as a ‘Trinity of Self’ – Thomas A. Anderson, Neo, and ‘The One.’
29 Discussed earlier in this thesis, the PaRDeS response to the character name of ‘Trinity’ culminates in an interpretation that is framed by the notion of Shechinah, a feminine participant in the holy union of ‘3.’
Thus, the religious allegory in *The Matrix* is further reflected in the narrative structure of the film (*Remez*). Neo does not appear in the opening scene, appears in the second scene where he is heralded as a personal saviour, and in the third scene he receives his 'call' – from Morpheus, on a mobile phone delivered by a Federal Express postal agent, who in the allegorical interpretation is the Archangel Gabriel with his trumpet heralding the coming of a new Messiah.30

There is an exchange between Neo and Morpheus that takes on an added significance in the light of Neo's death and resurrection at the end of the film.

**NEO**
Are you saying I can dodge bullets?

**MORPHEUS**
When you're ready you won't have to.

Later in the film (following this exchange) the audience is witness to Neo dodging bullets in a sequence filmed in the new special-effects technique invented for *The Matrix* known as bullet-time. This is a narrative ‘event’ (*Peshat*) that some viewers have anticipated since Morpheus’ response to Neo’s question about ‘dodging bullets.’ However, after his resurrection as ‘The One,’ Neo *can* stop bullets. What are the implications (*Derash*) of this narrative sequence (*Peshat*)?

The Oracle had told Neo in his meeting with her that his ‘potential’ would only be realised in his ‘next life.’ Neo takes this as confirmation that he is not ‘The One.’ However, as subsequent events of the narrative visually indicate (*Remez*), he arises from death a ‘new man’ (*Derash*). It is this ‘new man,’ animated by the ‘holy spirit’ of Trinity (*Remez*) who is ‘The One,’ not the ‘old’ Neo who met the Oracle. This PaRDeS interpretation enables the Oracle’s earlier statement that Neo was *not* the One to retain its ‘narrative truth.’

The originality of PaRDeS analysis is reflected in different ways in the various interpretative investigations of films in this thesis. In this, instance, we are again reminded of the benefits of reflecting on the personal ways viewers negotiate different levels of film meanings (*Sod*).

30 Gabriel is one of only two angels mentioned in the Bible (the other being the Archangel Michael). Archangel Gabriel, sometimes depicted as female, is the Angel of Annunciation, Resurrection, Revelation and Judgement.
Responding to Other Interpretations

A ParDeS analysis of film assumes that multiple meanings are present in the film text (whereas many of the usual approaches to film interpretation produce readings that reflect more specific and sometimes narrower readings). The investigative activities of ParDeS analysis ‘require’ an assessment of existing commentary about a film (Cinematic Midrash).

ParDeS interpretation is a specific process that commences with the investigative strategies of the ‘plain’ meaning of Pesha, traverses multiple interpretative pathways in its use of the interpretative strategies of cinematic clues (Remez), exploring their implications in ‘applied’ readings using the interpretative strategies of Derash, and concluding with a synthesis of the first three levels with the final level ParDeS examines, the ‘profound’ readings of ‘Sod analysis.’ The process responding to existing commentary (Cinematic Midrash) begins with establishing an initial interpretative position. Then the analyst records a ‘first response’ immediately after viewing the film to capture their first impressions of meaning, and interpretative responses.

The next step involves watching the film a second time, and writing a plot summary. This involves taking note of audio and visual elements of the film, as well as recording insights about story, narrative structure, character, and dialogue. It is important to make a note of anything in the film not understood, as well as any allusions or hints in the film – symbols, intertextual references, musical motifs repeated at key moments, lighting and colour schemes and so on. Do character or other names have a special meaning? This second viewing of film usually establishes the plain (Pesha) and allegorical (Remez) levels of meaning. Preparing a set of questions to develop the interpretation is an important part of the ParDeS process of analysing a film. As the analyst works with the first two levels of meaning, the search process of interpretation means that more ‘significant’ (Derash) meanings are clarified.

Some of the films analysed in this thesis have a substantial body of academic literature attached to them. Critics play an important role in shaping how other viewers define film meaning. It is important to find out what filmmakers themselves say about the film, and to evaluate the cinematic expression of their intentions. Statements about filmmakers’ intentions are worth noting. It is not that these comments are privileged; rather that it illogical to ignore information about intended meaning, and how that meaning is made

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31 Recall from Chapter 4’s discussion of Contemporary Interpretive Positions, that the majority of the most common approaches reflect ‘singular’ ideological readings of a film.
32 Readers are referred to the proposed ParDeS film method this thesis presents at the conclusion of Chapter 2’s overview of ParDeS.
33 In particular, Taxi Driver and The Matrix are among the most analysed films produced by Hollywood Cinema.
(during the filmmaking process). These various PaRDeS examinations of other commentaries comprise the foundation of Cinematic Midrash.

Having established a framework for existing ideas about what a film means (and sometimes, to whom) the analyst is able to use PaRDeS to respond to these ideas – through the lens of the four levels. In the case of The Matrix, interpretations of various allegories dominate critical dialogues. Often, these allegorical interpretations are used as the foundation of philosophical and moral discussions. ‘PaRDeS Analysts,’ on the other hand, are interested in how the meaning of the film can be framed as the sum of multiple allegories and how the meaning of the film is affected by an ongoing commentary that privileges one kind of interpretative strategy, as the critical review of Chapter 4 suggests is common practice.

At the third level of ‘significant’ meaning (Derash), the interpretative focus turns to what is meaningful to society.\(^{34}\) Does the film affect viewers, and in what ways – physiologically or emotionally? To what degree are viewers affected? Do they have an emotional response to this film? Are any physical responses noted while watching the film?\(^{35}\)

Including these kinds of questions in the process of responding to existing commentary (Midrash) inevitably leads interpreters to develop their own, unique interpretation (Sod). The range of interpretative pathways that PaRDeS film analysis explores, and synthesises in interpretation, are the result of a unique analytical process that is guided by successive sets of questions framed by the four different levels of meaning.

*Taxi Driver: Circumstantial Insanity*

The ways Taxi Driver serves as a cinematic commentary (Midrash) on the city of New York is a revealing lens through which to view the film’s meaning. Three of the four major filmmakers – Scorsese, Herrmann and De Niro – are New Yorkers. Scorsese and Herrmann share an intimate relationship with the city, and were witnesses to the process of urban decay that culminated in the dark vision of New York presented in Taxi Driver.

Scorsese was clearly affected by the changes he had witnessed, saying

> When you live in a city, there’s a constant sense that the buildings are getting old, things are breaking down, the bridges and the subway need repairing. At the same time society is in a state of decay; the police force are not doing their job in

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\(^{34}\) The next level of Sod analysis focuses on what is personally meaningful.

\(^{35}\) Some viewers experience goose bumps in response to music in film. At other times, a tightening in the chest reflects an emotional response. More commonly, some viewers cry when moved or saddened in a film.
allowing prostitution on the streets, and who knows if they’re feeding off it and making money out of it.\textsuperscript{36}

Now consider what Travis says about New York:

Well, whatever it is, he [the president] should clean up this city here because this city here is like an open sewer, you know. It’s full of filth and scum. Sometimes I can hardly take it. Whoever becomes the president should just really clean it up, know what I mean? Sometimes I go out and I smell it. I get headaches it’s so bad, you know. It’s like . . . they just never go away, you know. It’s like the president should clean up this whole mess here. He should just flush it right down the fucking toilet.\textsuperscript{37}

Yet these words are written by Schrader, whose connection to New York was not as established as Scorsese’s. Ultimately the decay of New York is representative of every major city in the United States. Viewers are returned specifically to New York however: through the windscreen of the taxi cab, a ‘character’ that can exist only in New York; and in the ways Scorsese uses the camera to reveal ‘urban decay’ in intimate detail. The audience becomes a witness to a life on the streets that is markedly different to the usual Hollywood representation of city life.

Why does \textit{Taxi Driver} succeed as a commentary (\textit{Midrash}) and how do the creative efforts of these four filmmakers combine to produce different levels of commentary?\textsuperscript{5} In the PaRDeS process, questions of what a film ‘means’ inevitably lead to questions of how films are made, what filmmakers seek to inscribe in their work, and how (and whether) viewers perceive and understand the different kinds of meaning that exist in the film.

The filmmakers inscribe other meanings but whether or not other meanings, such as the psychological fragmentation of Travis, are recognised depends on how the viewer engages with the film. If a search for meaning has begun, than some viewers will infer a prison-like parallel (\textit{Remez}), for example, from where Travis lives – his apartment is his prison cell. The character’s apartment infers Travis’ state of mind, (‘hemmed in’) and his social condition (isolated).

\textsuperscript{36} Scorsese in Thompson, \textit{Scorsese on Scorsese}. 60
\textsuperscript{37} Schrader, "\textit{Taxi Driver} (Original Script)."
Meaning at a ‘profound’ Sod level in Taxi Driver is recognised by its primary creators as being driven by inner spiritual urges, and this is expressed in the first instance in the description of Travis Bickle that begins Paul Schrader’s script (and what might virtually stand as a mission statement) for the character: 'God's Lonely Man' (Sod). Where Travis lives affirms both his loneliness, and his self-conferred status as, ‘God’s Soldier.’

Understanding commentary first requires some knowledge of what it is that is being commented upon, as well as some knowledge of the major influences that articulate this period in American history. In this respect a Derash reading of film includes film analysis in its historiographic aspect, which applied to the study of the treatment of the themes of the film reveals to modern viewers something about the time and place in question.

It is surprising how frequently Taxi Driver is deemed a commentary on Vietnam, for Martin Scorsese has explicitly stated, that it is not. Yet Taxi Driver continues to be associated with a canon of films connected to filmmaker commentary on Vietnam, and the treatment of returned soldiers. The filmmakers may not have intended a specific commentary associated with the controversial war, but the ‘Midrashic’ activity of interpretation and the creation of a substantial body of commentary, means that over time Taxi Driver has become inextricably bound up with Vietnam.

At an even deeper level (Derash), it could be argued that Scorsese, as a young American man who went to film school, not war, cannot help but, through the lens of his own experience, be responding to this dominant socio-cultural influence. Travis, either as a returned Vietnam veteran or a man who likes to be mistaken for one, cannot help but suggest Vietnam to viewers as well – even if Scorsese did not intend a commentary (Midrash) on Vietnam, Taxi Driver ultimately delivers one.

Scorsese was more interested in urban decay in New York in the 1970's specifically, and the United States in general. This is linked to the effects of social change on individuals. The commentary on society relies upon certain symbolic elements in the film, although it could also be argued that Travis Bickle is himself a commentary on the society that can produce – and ultimately laud – such a man. Is this the new American hero?

In addition, PaRDeS analysts can establish a distinction between critical commentary, and commentary that develops over time, based on multi-level investigation of the comments about films by the individual filmmakers themselves. Scriptwriter Paul Schrader develops a commentary grounded in the character development of Travis Bickle, while director Martin Scorsese uses different techniques aimed at directing the attention of the viewer in a certain

39 Thompson, Scorsese on Scorsese.
direction, and leading some to question society, and perhaps themselves (Sod). Lead actor Robert De Niro's 'commentary' reflects the individual in society, and composer Bernard Herrmann seems to be saying something profound about life itself, and the emotional drives that motivate action.

This PaRDeS interpretative coordination of commentaries and critical responses (that comprise Cinematic Midrash) is an effective analytical mode that synthesises multiple interpretative possibilities, and yields new insights about a film’s meaning. This unique process of Cinematic Midrash further differentiates the PaRDeS film method from its contemporary film interpretation counterparts.

**Black Swan: A Triumph of Style over Substance?**

The director of Black Swan, Darren Aronofsky indirectly reflects the influence and reach of film analysis and commentary (Midrash) when he says of the response to the film,

> More than any other film I've done, this one has been compared to other people's work. It's the result of a lifetime of watching movies. But filmmakers are always looking at what others have done before. The biggest influence was the Tchaikovsky ballet Swan Lake. We tried to build the entire film from the fairy tale.⁴⁰

*Black Swan* is a coming-of-age tale – of Nina (Peshat), of Aronofsky (Derash), and ultimately, of viewers themselves (Sod), who are cinematically ‘encouraged’ (Remez) to reflect on themes of duality, and notions of self by the audio-vidual content of the film.

Filmmakers and viewers are asking different kinds of questions not just of and about film, but of themselves and the world around them. PaRDeS interpretation encourages analysts and critics to do the same, and offers the interpretative incentive of original analyses, and unique insights as a consequence of engaging in the process of Cinematic Midrash.

The final sequence of Black Swan takes place during the opening night performance of Swan Lake. It is in the closing scenes of films that writers and directors express their conclusive statements about what their film means in terms of its socio-cultural ‘significance’ and commentary (Derash and Midrash). What does the final sequence of Black Swan convey to viewers and film analysts about what Aronofsky is trying to cinematically express in the

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film? How effectively does his cinematic presentation of a commentary on perfection and on duality lead viewers into ‘significant’ meanings?

The PaRDeS analysis of Black Swan is unique in distinguishing between the obvious allusions to duality (Remez) and the filmmakers’ commentary which in PaRDeS terms, is ‘significant.’ (Derash). The use of symbols in film sometimes confers, as in this case, the illusion of ‘cinematic depth,’ especially in Hollywood films. PaRDeS analysts are confronted with finding ways of establishing the distinction between the allusions conveyed by the cinematic narrative (Remez), and the ‘significance’ (Derash) of these ‘clues.’

In the case of the PaRDeS analysis of Black Swan, that difficult distinction is clarified, for the visual dominance of symbols, and of other cinematic visual ways of referring to Nina’s psychological disintegration (Remez) are not developed individually, or integrated in the form of an identifiable filmmakers’ commentary (Derash). Even so, the music, also a literal or Peshat element of a film, so consistently re-defines Tchaikovsky’s music for Swan Lake, that ‘alert’ viewers might well perceive a different kind of commentary (Derash) in Black Swan – but one made by composer Clint Mansell, instead of the more usual cinematic association of ‘significance’ in film (Derash) with writers and directors. In this instance, Mansell’s commentary is a ‘musical reflection’ on, and response to Tchaikovsky’s original music, and its consistent appropriation by popular culture.

Black Swan viewers invariably want to know ‘what the ending means,’ and whether or not Nina dies in the final moments of the film.41 Also questions about what was truthfully presented in the cinematic narrative and what was not are suggested. For some viewers, the intersection of the affective qualities of Mansell’s score, and the visual fracturing of the cinematic narrative by Aronofsky results in a viewer response that is akin to being ‘inside the head of a crazy person’ (Sod). When the Director is explaining the ballet to the Company, he says of the ballet’s ending, that in death the white swan finds freedom. This is a key statement that refers viewers to the ending of the film. Nina, in the end, is pursuing not just perfection but freedom – ultimately from the ‘bondage’ of bodily existence itself.

Viewer’s Interpretative Frameworks

The initial PaRDeS response to Black Swan suggests that a key element of the craft of filmmaking (as opposed to the business of filmmaking) is the creation of a space by the filmmaker, in the film text that leaves room for the viewer to engage with the film through a process of self-reflection.

41 Recall the ambiguous ending of the film, where Nina (as both self, and in her performance as the Swan Queen in the opening night of Swan Lake, leaps to her death, and lies, bleeding on the stage floor.
By ‘leaving’ viewers to develop their own responses to deeper, thematic content, rather than imposing his own judgement (through the film text), Aronofsky reveals himself to be an accomplished, and mature filmmaker. He presents ideas, not sermons. Aronofsky is asking questions of the audience, offering them cinematic stimuli (Remez), and it is natural that some viewers ‘find themselves’ in their personal responses to *Black Swan* (Sod).

Four of the five core characters in *Black Swan* are women. Each of them is either under the control of the Director, or seeking his approval. What he says and how he treats each of them directly impacts their individual self-esteem. Of the three ballerinas – Beth, Lily and Nina – each responds in a different way. Nina, as the core character, unites the misogynistic orbit of the Director. Beth she first mimics, than steals from and then, perhaps contributes to the destruction of; Lily she fears, than becomes intrigued by and then mimics; Her own mother – the somewhat stereotypical mother monster – is to be placated and then finally overcome. Each of Nina’s female counterparts becomes incorporated within her own sense of Self – and all in an effort to please a man. Yet how else can the story work? The gender dynamics in this film, exaggerated as they are, are reflections of how women are controlled – through their own image. Aronofsky demonstrates this both visually and thematically in *Black Swan*.

The implications of good and evil are first suggested in the title of the film. The use of colour to represent the twin poles of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is a commonly accepted convention in filmmaking, and recognised and understood by most viewers. The use of colour in the film remains consistent with this duality throughout.

Since Aronofsky perpetuates certain stereotypical representations of the ballet world, and the people who inhabit it, *Black Swan* divided the real life members of that fraternity. In a very real way, these divisions are typical of competing levels of interpretation. Those disturbed by the film tend to read it quite literally (*Peshat* interpretation) while others are excited by the secondary level of meaning with its allegorical possibilities (*Remez*). Still others are stimulated and excited by the aesthetic and stylistic pasts of the film (*Peshat*) or the commentary on perfection and its effect of the self (*Derash*).

Of course, PaRDeS positions the literal and narrative aspects of the film (*Peshat*) as the benchmark from which the other levels develop. For some ballet dancers, the literal representation of what they consider their craft is simply too offensive (Sod) for them to be receptive to any other kind of meaning in the film.
Mois Navon describes Midrash as, “a creative device used to impart deep philosophical concepts through a medium that wins immediate attention by its apparent simplicity and entertaining quality.” As a communicator of philosophical ideas The Matrix makes and invites its own commentary (Midrash). Interpreters are faced with choices about which ideas in the film to engage with. Navon specifically focuses on Jewish themes in The Matrix. Midrash however need not confine itself to matters of Jewish interest.

Interpretations of The Matrix reflect the more general state of contemporary cinematic criticism. Analysts mostly adopt one of the following interpretative positions: Afro-Resistance, Feminist perspective, theological, Postmodern, Marxist, film as ‘philosophy’ and auteur studies of filmmakers. Occasionally a commentator will join two or three of these positions together. However, most interpretations of The Matrix fail to recognise other positions. Nor do analysts consider what the effect of the numerous interpretative possibilities is on the meaning viewers find in The Matrix (Sod). Specifically, when the Wachowskis provide the audience with so many options to choose from, another kind of meaning – religious pluralism, rather than a specific religious allegory – is suggested.

The Wachowskis, whilst preferring to remain silent about what The Matrix means, are happy to reveal that,

[The Matrix] is about mythology, theology, and to a lesser extent, higher-level mathematics. [All] are ways human beings try to answer bigger questions, as well as the ‘Big Question.’

The Wachowski brothers do not subscribe to a particular religion. Yet they use religious metaphors, allegories, symbols and themes from many different theological traditions. In doing so, the Wachowskis rely upon the dominant ideologies of society. They use viewers’ familiarity with cultural myths and ideologies as a way of conferring a mythological status on the film.

Most analysts concentrate on just one religious allegory or metaphor in producing interpretations of The Matrix. The numerous religious allusions (Remez) offer up multiple candidates for interpreters to choose from. Analyses usually begin with character – Neo as

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42 Navon, "The Matrix: A Mystical Modern Midrash." 3
43 Ibid.
45 As in "Wachowski Brothers Interview (On-line Chat)".
Jesus, Morpheus as Moses or John the Baptist – and extend the [respective] allegory and find ways to apply its meaning to the entire film. Some commentators acknowledge alternative readings, but most tend to concentrate on ‘proving’ their respective positions.\(^4\)

Christianity dominates religious interpretations of *The Matrix*. The symbolic references are undeniable. There are many explicit references (*Remez*) to Christian doctrine and a few ‘hidden’ references (*Sod*). The markings on Morpheus’ ship, *The Nebuchadnezzar* – Mark III No 11 – has, for example, been interpreted as an allusion to the New Testament of Mark 3:11: “Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, ‘You are the Son of God.’”\(^4\) Thus the markings of *The Nebuchadnezzar* are ‘used’ to support a reading of Neo as ‘The One,’\(^4\) the prophesised Messiah.

However, the Messiah Allegory is just one part of the overall religious based meaning development in *The Matrix*. If all allusions and explicit references (*Remez*) pointed to the same allegory, then the interpretative conclusion could be that *The Matrix* is in fact a ‘Christian’ film as some commentators claim. Since there are numerous allusions to all the major world religions however, this assertion does not stand. Instead the PaRDeS method recognises the religious pluralism of the film.

*The Matrix* makes a cinematic statement about the ‘need for faith’ (*Derash*). The effect of including references to virtually all of the major world religions develops *The Matrix* commentary (*Midrash*) along theological lines. There is a clear signposting of the religious theme and the religious allegory.

Recall how in the opening sequence, Thomas/Neo provides a minor character (Choi) with a computer disk (which he retrieves from the chapter, ‘On Nihilism’ from a hollowed out copy of Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation*). Choi then hails him as a ‘personal saviour.’ This scene combines multiple perspectives – the philosophic as well as the religious. The juxtaposition of Baudrillard with Christ presents viewers with a choice of not only what they pay attention to in making their own meaning, but gives them an opportunity to unite the philosophic and the religious to create their own unique interpretations (*Sod*).

Other interpretations are framed in terms of race. Why approach ethnicity in a black-white dichotomy? Certainly, the ‘literal’ (*Peshat*) interpretation of dialogue, particularly that of the major African-American characters of Morpheus and The Oracle, explicitly indicates rebellion against a dominant (white) culture. Over time the reputation of *The Matrix*, and pre-existing analyses inspire new interpretations.

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\(^4\) The wide variety of not just religious, but philosophical parallels suggests Joseph Campbell’s ‘mono-myth.’ See Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The commonality between different cultures’ myths and stories supports the notion that human beings are especially responsive to the same archetypes and moral structures.

\(^4\) See, for example, Fontana, “Finding God in *The Matrix*."

\(^4\) “ONE” is, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, an anagram of NEO.
The effect of this commentary (Midrash) evolves a different set of expectations new audiences have for the film. These ‘new’ viewers are pre-disposed to search for evidence of the interpretations that already dominate the film conversation (Midrash). Over time some interpretations become accepted as ‘fact’ – a concrete meaning that becomes attached to the film and is rarely questioned.

An alternative interpretation suggests an American pre-occupation with itself and its self-appointed role as ‘saviour of the world’ (Derash). The Matrix reflects a common Hollywood treatment of any worldwide conflict or battlefield: the notion that it is Americans who will fight the battles that ‘save’ the rest of the world.49 Viewers from non-American cultures interpret both the narrative, and the characters’ behaviour differently to American audiences. For some viewers the characterisation of the United States as both policeman and saviour of the world demeans the otherwise significant commentaries of The Matrix (Sod).

How likely is it that viewers will respond to the various philosophical references in The Matrix? Further, if viewers do perceive these philosophical references, do they ‘accept’ the Wachowskis’ ‘version’ of philosophic truth (Sod)? It is ironic that in appropriating Baudrillard, The Matrix invites that philosopher’s attention. His most famous declaration about The Matrix reflects the problems popular culture has in adequately communicating philosophical ideas: “The Matrix is like the film about the Matrix that the Matrix would have produced.”50

A multitude of philosophical readings of The Matrix have been widely disseminated. The film features explicit philosophic content, including dialogue (from Morpheus and The Oracle), and well as visual references (such as the hollowed-out Baudrillard book). These readings are evidence of the cultural impact of The Matrix. Viewers have a choice about how they wish to engage with the film. This choice is dependent on existing knowledge, and it is not surprising that most philosophic readings of the film stem from philosophers. Viewers less familiar with philosophy can still derive a philosophical reading however, for a natural question arises from the plot itself.

Specifically, viewers know what the Matrix is (a sentient computer construct) because Morpheus informs them, through dialogue. They discover that sentient computers created a virtual world to occupy human minds, whose bodies are wired up in a bio-grid. Human beings sleep. Morpheus wakes them up. However, what evidence do viewers have that the Matrix has not recognised that a certain kind of mind will always rebel? To deal with the percentage of rebellious minds, why not create a programme of action and adventure? In

49 Indeed, we can extend this idea to other interpretations. For example, the ‘Messiah’ is always American. Some commentators refer to Keanu Reeves’ (Neo) mixed-race heritage as a subtler form of resistance to white authority.
psychology, the ‘Messiah Complex’ is a well-known phenomenon. The Matrix (programme) is certainly capable of creating a ‘reality’ where the sleeping human inhabitants of the bio-grid ‘imagine’ themselves as a ‘hero.’

*Restoring film meaning to Cinematic Interpretations of Clueless*

*Clueless* is unashamedly 'fashionable,' and does not present an adult's version of teen culture but instead attempts to replicate that culture using a standard high school setting. Yet according to the weighty bulk of interpretative efforts, what this teen classic means is ‘All about *Emma.*’ These ‘impositions’ of the novel’s meaning on the film include efforts designed to enhance the teaching of the novel, studies of contemporary cinematic translations of literature, and specific narrative connections between novel and film.

It is clear that the allusions to the novel, and other ways the film reflects Austen’s book, ensure that *Clueless* is ‘appealing’ viewing for devotees of the writer. The connection to the novel explains the appeal of the film to an older audience. As the PaRDeS interpretation demonstrates however, the meaning of *Emma* does not comprise the meaning of the film, as the existing interpretative emphasis suggests. Why is the meaning of the novel so consistently elevated above that of the film?

The plot and character design of *Emma* is used by Amy Heckerling as the framework of *Clueless* (*Remez*). However, this is a starting, rather than an end point of interpretation, for the film’s meaning is an outcome of other features of Heckerling’s cinematic narrative. *Clueless* is a reflection of contemporary circumstances, pressures and ‘place,’ (*Derash*) that exploits, rather than translates the intricate network of relationships Austen set up in the novel.

The links between the film and novel are subtly reflected in a multitude of ways, and exploring them is ‘enjoyable’ for devotees of the Austen novel. However, using these links to ‘organise’ the meaning of *Clueless* inevitably limit analysis to an exploration of ‘shared’ themes. A PaRDeS examination of the film however, reveals that Amy Heckerling has developed additional thematic content. She uses different, cinematic tools at her disposal in how she communicates her own reflections and ideas (*Midrash*).

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51 Robert Eggleston, "*Emma, the Movies and First-year Literature Classes,* *Persuasions Online* Occasional Papers No 3(1999).
52 Stern, “*Emma in Los Angeles: Clueless as a remake of the book and the city.*” and Nachumi, ""As if!" Translating Austen's Ironic Narrator to Film."
53 ———, ""As if!" Translating Austen's Ironic Narrator to Film."
Thus, Heckerling can imbue scenes with light and colour as a way of reflecting Cher’s carefree life, her sunny nature and even infer the thematic commentary (Midrash) on superficiality (later wrestled with as the sun sets and darkness falls on the troubled teen in the Epiphany Montage). Heckerling manages to transform a novel driven by dialogue, where action is conspicuously innocuous, into an intensely visual work by using a variety of film techniques to create a visual narrative that delivers the ironic voice of Austen's novel, and ‘imposes’ Heckerling’s response to the novel in the cinematic narrative. The PaRDeS method virtually ‘reverses’ the interpretative emphasis of other analyses of Clueless.

Clueless has been criticised for not adequately addressing serious issues but the film is a comedy directed primarily at teenage girls – how ‘serious’ can it realistically be expected to be? Besides, serious issues are addressed in the film, but not in the serious, earnest or direct fashion that some commentators apparently expect. The satire is primarily at Cher’s expense, the humour unrelenting and sophisticated and the story content relevant to a teenage audience. If that were the least of Clueless’ achievements, the film could be termed a success. Yet Heckerling manages to connect these to an intricate, thematically driven exploration of women, how they relate to men and each other, and how they respond to social pressures.

The frequent resort of female characters to react in helpless despair when in trouble, requiring rescue by one or other of the male characters supports feminist critiques of Clueless. The way male characters speak to, and treat women is used to support claims of endorsing a kind of paternal sexism. Cher’s best friend Dioone argues with her boyfriend Murray, who, in their jovial banter, refers to Dioone as ‘woman.’ To claim Murray calling Dioone ‘woman’ is evidence of sexism has currency but (a) does not reflect the common usage of the word by contemporary teens; and (b) fails to contextualise how Murray justifies his usage of the word when he tells Dioone,

Street slang is an increasingly valid form of expression. Most of the feminine pronouns do have mocking, but not necessarily in misogynistic undertones.

Besides, overt moral messages ‘preached’ at the audience are cinematically ineffective in teen-comedies. If a moral directive is ‘preached’ then the intended audience is not likely to be interested in what is being said because it is not real to them. The use of

54 See Hatch, "Review: If the "Kids" Are Not "Alright," I'm "Clueless": Response to a Review by Henry Giroux of the Movie "Kids"," as a representative example.
56 This is another example of how Heckerling has a teenage character voice a sophisticated socio-cultural commentary (Derash).
dialogue in youth films effectively connects to audiences when it reflects the way that young people speak, not the way that adults speak, or the way that adults think teenagers should speak.\textsuperscript{57}

That said, the dialogue can extend beyond those boundaries, for it is engaging with an intelligent audience, such that Murray can go on to justify his use of the term ‘woman’ in highly academic, socio-cultural terms (\textit{and} be understood by the teenage audience). Interpretations of \textit{Clueless} tend to emphasise the differences and parallels to \textit{Emma} whilst not giving due emphasis to the genre – a teen film with a teen audience and a teen sensibility. However, the 'literariness' of the source text attracts commentators who seem to expect something more of the film – that it communicates to \textit{them}.

PaRDeS interpretations also question the effects of the passing of time on how a film’s meaning is perceived and interpreted. How has the status of women changed since Austen's time? There are obviously huge changes that have affected social norms and mores and a reframing of social hierarchies and life-styles. Since Austen’s novel was released in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Western society has witnessed the evolution of feminism, and the evolving structures of romantic relationships.

Heckerling provides a response to questions of social change over time both as a writer, and as a director. Interpretative questions that explore feminism can actually lead to a 'reverse' understanding since both Emma and Cher occupy dominant positions in their own societies, and each is powerful in terms of effecting their own desires and maintaining control over their immediate domains (\textit{Derash}). PaRDeS analysis considers the possible implications of the respective characters’ social power. Perhaps the simultaneous empowerment and suppression of women is a culturally ingrained phenomenon. Perhaps each gender is confined within certain roles and societal structures that dictate how members of either gender may empower themselves, or succumb to suppression (\textit{Sod}). Certainly, both Emma and Cher, despite believing themselves to be powerful and strong, eventually recognise that without self-awareness they are in fact ‘clueless,’ proud and conceited. The process of self-realisation is not uniquely situated in the modern era, and the PaRDeS analysis suggests that self-recognition that inspires personal change is an integral part of the ‘experience of being human,’ regardless of the time period in which one lives (\textit{Sod}).

\textsuperscript{57} An excellent explication of this can be found in Mills, "Clueless: Transforming Jane Austen's \textit{Emma} (Film as Text)." See also, Denise Fulbrook, "A Generational Gig with Jane Austen, Sigmund Freud and Amy Heckerling: Fantasies of Sexuality, Gender, Fashion and Disco in and Beyond \textit{Clueless}," in \textit{Jane Austen and Co: Re-Making the Past in Contemporary Culture}, ed. Suzanne R. & Thompnen Pucci, James (Albany: State University of New York University Press, 2003).
Virtually all reviewers of *Josie and the Pussycat* focus on two major flaws in the film—problems with story and plot resulting in a comedy that is not funny,\(^{58}\) and the presence of product placement.\(^{59}\) These problems are identified by conventional analysis but the implied effects on meaning, be it that made by the filmmakers or that constructed by viewers, has not been developed.

The PaRDeS method not only develops the implications of what conventional analysis simply identifies as present (by exploring the implications of product placement and plot problems), but uncovers further sites of meaning that traditional methods miss. (The way symbolic meaning (*Remez/Derash*) develops in unexpected ways is one example). PaRDeS helps explain that film failure is in fact much more complex than conventional interpretations usually suggest. Further, the complex modelling of film failure that PaRDeS generates also has implications for deepening interpretative understandings of why films succeed. This knowledge is of use not only to critics and analysts, but also to filmmakers themselves.

Hence, a Midrashic approach to *Josie and the Pussycats* yields the following insight: that the *transformation* of the relatively 'mono-fashion' approach of the source texts (where the cartoon characters essentially always appear in one of the same two outfits) into the high-end fashion array of outfits in the 2001 film is itself suggestive of a social commentary on changes in physical and social representations of self (*Sod*).

When significant levels of meaning (*Derash*) are not 'managed' by the filmmaker(s) (or when filmmakers essentially have nothing to say) the result is *less interesting* films. In this era of ‘sophisticated spectatorship,’ viewers have different expectations of films. When filmmakers have little to say, they can resort to being ‘cinematically clever.’ However, with neither ‘cleverness’ nor ‘something to say,’ filmmakers are increasingly likely to make films that ‘fail.’

‘Successful films,’ PaRDeS analysis suggests, are made by filmmakers who have an awareness of the different ways meaning is created in film, and maintain a degree of control over the different levels of meanings, and the interactions between them. When the meaning schism in *Josie and the Pussycats* (described earlier in this thesis) distances viewers’ responses from filmmakers, films are more likely to fail to connect with audiences.

\(^{59}\) O'Sullivan, "Purr-fectly Placed Products."
**Interpretative Choices**

This chapter’s various discussions demonstrate how *Midrash* involves making choices about which interpretations analysts’ value, and which outside material they wish to use in their own ‘making sense’ of a film.

When films are adapted from other sources, it makes sense to refer to those sources, for perhaps they illuminate the meaning of the movie. Understanding the contexts of both production and interpretation also establishes how perspectives of what films mean changes over time. This process of *Midrash*, a feature of the investigative activities of the third level of PaRDeS, accepts that other interpreters and commentators have valuable insights to share.

This chapter serves as an introduction to different ways the new concept of ‘*Cinematic Midrash*’ can be performed. The PaRDeS process of *Midrash* uses other sources to make sense of film. This becomes an important exercise as time passes, and references in the film become less contemporary. As films move through time, they develop different attributes that affect their meaning. Films acquire or lose status; the societies they reflect change; viewers evolve different attitudes towards films; critics and interpreters apply different interpretative strategies.

Using outside sources *within* the cinematic narrative affects the meaning viewers make in several ways. Firstly, any effect on meaning is a function of a viewer’s knowledge of the outside source, and whether or not they perceive its presence in the film. What does that source mean to the viewer? Do viewers transfer or confer that meaning onto the film? If the meaning suggested is supported by other elements of a film, the outside material is more likely to be used by viewers as they make their own meanings. Sometimes the effect of using other material to make film meaning is to ‘do the thinking’ for the viewers. Knowing about *Swan Lake*, for example, means a viewer might *Black Swan* to explore similar themes of duality: dark and light, night and day and black and white and ultimately good and evil. Finally, even when viewers know nothing of the source, films themselves can still articulate the meaning of that source – as when Scorsese reflects Bresson’s dark commentaries in an appropriation of the European filmmakers’ cinema style.

Interpretations that reflect personal or ideological biases are carefully considered during the process of PaRDeS analyses, for these might well point to highly personal or ‘profound’ ways of reading films that are an attribute of the fourth level of *Sod*. For the most part however, these kinds of ideological positions about cinema meaning use film to explore other ideas – the way women are portrayed in film as a reflection of social disempowerment or an interpreter’s use of a film to demonstrate geo-political power structures. These are examples of how films contribute to commentaries and discussions of important issues.
However, these singular ideologically based analyses do not necessarily describe what a film actually means; at the very least, the full spectrum of film meaning is mostly ignored, except where that meaning supports the ideological position of the analyst. PaRDeS, by virtue of an assumption of multiple, intersecting levels of meaning, is clearly differentiated from these usual interpretative methods in its response to, and synthesis of their multiple ideological, theological and philosophical perspectives.

Reconciling multiple meanings through the activity of Cinematic Midrash inevitably involves making (interpretative) choices about relevance. PaRDeS uses the ‘plain’ meaning of Peshat as an interpretative benchmark. Interpretations that invalidate the basic narrative meaning of a film (essentially plot and story) are usually rejected unless dealing with an ‘apparent’ contradiction, when they then become sites of further analysis. Some cinematic anomalies are supposed to be recognised, such as the reversal of musical motif at the end of Taxi Driver, and are clues to other levels of meaning.

PaRDeS interpretation attempts to limit the effects of interpretative bias by reserving its exploration of the commentary and philosophies of Derash meaning for a stage of analysis where the plain meanings (Peshat) and allusions and allegories (Remez) of a film are already defined (and described) by analysis. These establish the frame upon which analysts can position different ideological positions arising from ‘following the clues’ in a film’s narrative. The inevitable value judgements of film analysts are managed through the PaRDeS framing of questions that are themselves contextualised by the ‘meaning’ of the first two levels – and the interpretative intent of avoiding biased interpretation in the first place. PaRDeS analysts are then finally able to consider more speculative interpretations of a film and understand how and why films become meaningful.
Chapter 11 THESIS CONCLUSION

Introduction

Using PaRDeS as a schematic for understanding and describing film meaning has never been done before, and this thesis has proved that using PaRDeS as a method of interpreting a film’s meaning is a highly original response to contemporary issues of film interpretation. The use of PaRDeS to interpret films is a practical response to the noted potential of the model by notable theorists and practitioners, including Moshe Idel, Giorgio Agamben, Michel Fishbane and others.

As this thesis unfolds, the research question, “How can the PaRDeS method be used to interpret cinematic meaning?” has been responded to by using the method to analyse five different films: The Matrix (Larry and Andy Wachowski, 1999), Clueless (Amy Heckerling, 1995), Josie and the Pussycats (Harry Elfont & Deborah Kaplan, 2001), Taxi Driver (Martin Scorsese, 1976), and Black Swan (Darren Aronofsky, 2010).

PaRDeS has been applied to various cinematic elements, including the implications of film genre and structure (Chapter 3), a ‘PaRDeS response’ to existing interpretative positions of the film (Chapter 4), the effectiveness of examining film themes in a multi-level arrangement of meaning (Chapter 5), filmmaker’s cinematic choices and their effects on viewers (Chapter 6), scene analyses that uncover unique interpretative insights (Chapter 7), and an illuminating PaRDeS re-framing of character analysis in the context of the four levels of meaning (Chapter 8). An investigation of the use of film music as a way of supporting multi-level film narratives (Chapter 9) is a novel treatment of a film’s score, and emphasises the links between the affective qualities of music, and the profound responses felt by some viewers (Sod). Chapter 10’s exploration of Cinematic Midrash is both a response to the critical review of the films (Chapter 4), and also a forum in which the earlier PaRDeS examinations find an interpretative synthesis.

In what other ways has this thesis achieved the goals established in Chapter 1? This thesis has, ‘sought to respond to the existing scholarly conversations about the secular application of PaRDeS in contemporary contexts’ by using the insights of previous scholars to guide its own secular use of PaRDeS.

60 Bordwell, “Film Interpretation Revisited.”
61 Idel, Absorbing perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation.
62 Agamben, "Pardes: The Writing of Potentiality."
The interpretative insights yielded by studies from Michael Fishbane, Harold Bloom, and others first suggested the use of PaRDeS (in this thesis) as a way of responding to contemporary interpretative issues.

The aim of, ‘producing a workable adaptation of the PaRDeS model suitable for contemporary cinematic interpretation,’ is addressed when a PaRDeS conceptualisation of cinematic meaning is developed in response to existing problems in contemporary film analysis.

Finally, the ‘set of guidelines on how to use PaRDeS to interpret films is fulfilled in Chapter 2’s presentation of the PaRDeS Film Interpretation Processes (and which this thesis applied in its own interpretative investigations).

This thesis proves that the PaRDeS model can be used to interpret film. Using PaRDeS produces unique and original interpretations of film, as exemplified by analysis of Taxi Driver, possibly the most interpreted film text of all time. That PaRDeS can open up the boundaries of meaning for such a film is indicative of the usefulness of the model in film interpretation. With the other films too, PaRDeS analysis yields intriguing, accurate and original insights. The PaRDeS interpretation of The Matrix, (another highly investigated film), shows how the interactions between different allegorical interpretations ultimately suggest an ideology much closer to religious pluralism. This is in stark contrast to the usual interpretative advocacy of a singular ideology.

*PaRDeS & the Interpretative Process of Film Analysis*

The process for film interpretation provided at the close of Chapter 2 is offered as a set of guidelines to other ‘PaRDeS analysts.’ These steps are adaptable, and open to evolution and change. Each step of the process involves posing interpretative questions that are generated by the answers yielded to earlier questions. This definitive feature of the PaRDeS film method underscores the originality of the film interpretations produced by applying the method, for the fluidity of the PaRDeS process itself, reflects the method’s unique assumptions about film meaning.

Rather than arguing then, for a particular interpretative stance, PaRDeS suggests that multiple interpretative modes are the most effective means of accurately describing meaning in film – this meaning is a function of filmmakers, film text and viewers.

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64 ———, "The Teacher and the Hermeneutical Task: A Re-interpretation of Medieval Exegesis."
65 Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism.*
66 Ornstein, "PaRDeS Pedagogy."
This thesis does not aim to propose PaRDeS as a better way, or the ‘right’ approach. It is simply that just as some feel compelled to reflect their worldviews in interpretation, be it Marxist, feminist, geo-political, gender-related, Afro-resistance or any other particular position, so too are some interpreters compelled to reflect their worldviews in their analyses. It so happens that this author at times resonates strongly each of the various interpretative stances. At other times, they simply do not reflect a film’s actual meaning. The openness and expansiveness that accrue to the assumptions of the PaRDeS model (Chapter 2) establish PaRDeS’ open engagement with the insights of other analysts. The process of using PaRDeS to interpret films is personally rewarding since doing so ‘unlocks’ multiple kinds of meaning - insights are yielded about film, culture and society, others and self in unexpected ways. This can happen only because PaRDeS does not confine the interpreter to specific ideological positions, and because it has a proven (historically established) framework that ‘manages’ the complexities of ‘profound’ film meanings (Sod), and seeks to limit the personal biases of the analyst.

Recognising the biases of interpretation is part of the PaRDeS process, and why it unfolds in the sequential analysis of the levels, beginning with the ‘plainness’ of Peshat, travelling through the gentle guidance of Remez explorations of hints and allusions, visiting the Derash commentaries of filmmakers and other interpreters, and reflecting on these before arriving at the personal destination of Sod analysis.

Major Conclusions: PaRDeS & Cinematic Interpretation

This thesis demonstrates specific ways the PaRDeS model can be applied to the interpretation of film meaning. The method is an effective way of dealing with interpretations of mythic narratives, and works equally well with ‘simple’ genres such as comedies. The method is respectful of multiple participants in the creation and interpretation of film meaning, and characterises these multiple contributions as a series of choices made by the respective participants – filmmakers, critics, viewers and interpreters. The history of PaRDeS in its application to the interpretation of the sometimes complex narrative structures of biblical texts and stories underpins a mature and sophisticated way of coordinating the multiple meanings that are inevitably found in texts – and films.

67 Idel, Absorbing perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation. 429-430
PaRDeS identifies theme in film by directing attention to questions about different dimensions of meaning and this thesis demonstrates how character and dialogue interact to create additional layers of meaning. The PaRDeS model describes ‘simple’ film genres as effectively as it does more complex ones. Filmmakers that are not necessarily attempting to specifically communicate ‘deeper’ levels of meaning still produce films that in fact contain multiple kinds of meaning.

What can we learn from this analysis about the way the PaRDeS model applies to film? Firstly, we see that multiple dimensions of meaning attach to simple forms. Secondly, deeper levels of meaning do not need to be deliberately inserted in film – they develop as a natural consequence of the creative process. Thirdly, these layers of meaning are a function of not just the filmmaker(s) but derive also from viewer activities. The PaRDeS model provides a framework that helps us to understand how this occurs. The interpretative activities of Cinematic Midrash synthesises a variety of traditional interpretative efforts. Rather than describing a unitary and fixed meaning, the PaRDeS model initiates an analytical process that accepts that multiple meanings can attach to even the simplest of film genres and cinematic narratives.

**Unique Interpretative Emphasis of PaRDeS**

What does PaRDeS Interpretation do that traditional modes of film interpretation do not? As well as according the author a more respectful role in the making of meaning, the PaRDeS Film Method encourages the analyst to ask, “How effectively does the filmmaker create and communicate their intended meaning?” The more comprehensive the answer to this question, the greater the likelihood that the filmmakers’ intended meaning serves to loosely define the boundaries of interpretation for viewers. In this sense at least, filmmakers lead viewers to a ‘meaning direction’ by providing cinematic stimuli (Remez).

Traditional interpretative modes for film have for some time focused (in both general and sometimes quite specific ways) on spectatorship. PaRDeS does not argue against doing so – in fact, it participates in the same interpretative efforts as cognitive, and other film analysis methods do. However, when the interpretative focus is on identifying, describing and understanding the meaning of a film, a pragmatic view suggests that to ignore a film author’s meaning results in a misunderstanding of the other two components of the ‘interpretative triangle’

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68 Ibid.
The PaRDeS process of interpretation does not diminish the role of the filmmaker in ‘meaning making,’ as the cognitive film theorists do as a consequence of their interpretative interest in ‘spectatorship.’ PaRDeS is markedly different to cognitive film theory, framed by different assumptions about meaning and how it can be interpreted. PaRDeS analysis coordinates viewers’ responses in multiple ways, and synthesises meanings other methods prefer not to interpret, including ‘profound’ meanings (Sod).

The multiple unique insights the PaRDeS investigations of the various thesis films uncovers and explains in terms of a multi-level framework of cinematic narratives are evidence of the interpretative value of ‘restoring’ filmmakers to analyses of film meaning.

Filmmakers potentially have a great deal of control over the path to meaning that viewers tread in arriving at their own interpretations of film. This is because filmmakers have at their disposal film techniques that direct the attention of the audience to specific details of setting, scene and narrative. They are able to associate disparate concepts through montage. Directors can advance narrative function through the use of music. Clearly, the film text makes meaning in different ways to novels.

Yet, much film analysis and interpretation is based on literary methods like semiotic or linguistic analysis. To date, no clear sense of a film hermeneutics has emerged from the competing theories. The PaRDeS Film Method is an approach to film interpretation – it is not a theory. It is hoped however, that this interpretative approach will be part of a body of work that inspires others to further research a philosophical film hermeneutics construct.

Another interesting feature of the PaRDeS Film Method is that it is easily incorporated as a technique or tool of analysis by other approaches to interpretation. If, for example, an analyst is interested in feminist representation in film, and plans to produce a feminist film critique, the PaRDeS Film Method provides an approach that uncovers specific ways in which filmmakers create the kinds of meanings feminist film critics are interested in – and how meanings connected to the portrayal of women, how women are treated in the narrative and so on are developed in multiple ways and intersect to establish a feminist perspective of the film.

Recall the definition of hermeneutics as the art and science of interpretation. This definition implies the two essential interpretative elements that can be effectively reflected in metaphoric terms as: the intuitive and inspired forms of interpretation when the analyst wears the artist's smock, and the systematic and pragmatic interpretation that results when clothed in the scientist's lab coat. PaRDeS as a method leads to the melding of the intuitive and interpretative talents of the critic with a systemised approach to interpretation. The reason that

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69 This extends to highly detailed and complex ‘scientific’ analyses of viewer responses, such as the number of times a viewer blinks while watching a film.
the two can be combined so effectively in one method lies in the nature and underlying assumptions of the PaRDeS model – assumptions not just about interpretation, but about meaning itself.

Approaching a film text with the PaRDeS set of assumptions about meaning, and using the associated interpretative approach increases the chances of uncovering something new and interesting and even unique about films, even those that have been interpreted and analysed hundreds of times. Returning to the issue of effectiveness – approaching interpretation in this way means that our concern with style is focused differently than in traditional Auteur-driven interpretations. That is, elements of style are contextualised by the approach of interpretation; they do not become the focus of interpretation.

**Implications of this Research**

As Sabbar Sultan points out, “Success, brilliance and persuasiveness are elements with which not every interpreter is endowed.” PaRDeS at least encourages the development of existing skills, and to some extent circumvents the shortcomings of the analyst. In encouraging its users to approach meaning as through a prescribed, yet fluid process, PaRDeS develops lines and trains of thought about film that otherwise would not occur. Further, the method generates sets of unique questions about films, about their themes and about broader social and cultural issues that impact on interpretation. These questions include those arising from creative imagination, personal experience and cultural context. Finally, in attempting to identify the effects of interactions between different kinds of meaning, PaRDeS produces new conceptualisations of film meaning.

This thesis establishes PaRDeS as a useful film interpretation method, and suggests a PaRDeS interpretative process that can be used as a guide by other analysts, critics and scholars. In scholarly terms, the results of the thesis affirm the potential recognised by so many important scholars over the last several decades. Further, the notion of *meaningfulness* as an important feature of cinematic and other textual investigation has theoretical implications that are beyond the scope of this research, but potentially stimulating to theorists in other fields.

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70 Sultan, "Interpretation: The Infinite Controversy." 34
Extending the secular application of PaRDeS supports a trend in Jewish Studies to find modern uses for PaRDeS. The narrative construct of meaning PaRDeS describes has proved useful in other fields, and this first systematic ‘textual’ use of PaRDeS extends the range of fields that find ways of using PaRDeS to respond to existing problems of interpretation. In a sense, given its origins in Jewish rabbinical interpretation, it is appropriate that the way this thesis uses PaRDeS is more aligned to its original purpose of textual analysis than other adaptations, such as Mordechai Rotenberg’s psycho-therapeutic adaptation,71 or Alisse’s use of PaRDeS to evaluate scientific theory.72

This thesis uses PaRDeS to interpret films in a way that respects its socio-historic background and connects the usefulness of PaRDeS in modern interpretative contexts to the quality of the film interpretations it produces. Using the PaRDeS method to analyse films responds to existing problems of cinema interpretation related to different conceptualisations of what film meaning is. The PaRDeS film interpretative method is a pragmatic approach to narrative structures that recognises that stories function in multiple ways to make meanings, and sometimes produce transcendent effects.

The universality of PaRDeS, linked to its multiple correspondences to other forms of analysis, means the process can still be employed in other kinds of interpretation that proceed from a different foundation of understanding – the benefits of using PaRDeS are linked to the process of interpretation it suggests, The PaRDeS assumptions about what meaning is, or what ‘truth’ is do not need to be adopted by others when they use PaRDeS, for the method is useful regardless of the ideological intentions of its user. How others utilise PaRDeS or incorporate it in their own interpretative efforts is eagerly anticipated.

The model of PaRDeS suggests areas of future academic investigation related to notions of what cinema meaning is. Recognising the role of viewers’ expectations, and how individual viewers insert themselves into a text (film), the multi-meaning framework and the assumptions that underpin it; and the re-evaluation of the role of not only filmmakers, films and viewers, but interpreters also, has implications for cinema theory in general (especially in terms of its own assumptions about film and cinema meaning, and how its interpretation is best dealt with). A post modern-nihilism that is reflected in assumptions about meaning does not accurately reflect the actual experience of viewers. Some films, at least, become meaningful to individuals and sometimes in broader social arenas.

71 Rotenberg, “Pardes and PaRDeS: Towards a Psychotherapeutic Theory.”
72 Alisse, “To Fathom the world: Ockham's razor or PaRDeS hermeneutics.”
Denying the existence of ‘profound’ meanings in films, or of viewers’ profound responses to films (Sod) is unrealistic (and potentially ignorant). Not all interpreters need to be concerned with ‘profound, but invalidating the analyses of those who are does not serve the general purpose of film interpretation – to accurately reflect film meaning and to describe the effects of cinema in socio-cultural and individual terms.

‘Profound’ meaning is difficult to both find and describe. PaRDeS interpretations are a starting, not an endpoint of interpretation of profoundly personal meanings, and values them in terms of how they represent world-views and cultural dialogues. How PaRDeS interpretations develop in the hands of others will reflect respective analysts’ individual interpretative skills and talents. The benefit of using PaRDeS, particularly for students, is that the process evolves the interpretative skills and talents of analysts and promotes an open-minded questioning of film, society and self.

Researching this thesis revealed that some of the most innovative work being done on film interpretation and criticism is in the Education discipline. This thesis’ development of a PaRDeS film analysis method, inspired in part by that field’s effective articulations of the potential of PaRDeS, ‘hopes’ to similarly inspire that sector in return.

Specifically, although it did not form part of the original objective of the development of the PaRDeS Film Method, the consequences of this research for the field of education are highly supportive of the use of PaRDeS as an approach to teaching film. PaRDeS approaches meaning from a different angle to contemporary methods of textual analysis, and yields insights from, and about multiple interpretative perspectives.

PaRDeS assumptions frame the ‘concept’ of film meaning differently, and the kinds of questions asked about film meaning are themselves arranged according to the different levels. The consequence of these differences between PaRDeS film interpretation and contemporary criticism, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, is that an interpretative process guided by different assumptions, and the asking of different kinds of questions, produces unique answers to multiple questions about a film’s meaning.

It is precisely because interpretation is so fraught with difficulty, that a systemised approach to film interpretation that accounts for the multiplicity of meanings (and that engages so specifically with the unique audio-visual properties of cinema) is so potentially useful.

Finally, given that so many us experience film profoundly, it makes sense to use an approach to interpretation that not only acknowledges profound meaning, but also seeks to identify, describe and explain it. How long are analysts and film critics going to avoid this meaning? Until a way is found to deal with profound meanings, film interpretations cannot be complete. The new PaRDeS film method produced by this thesis is a unique and effective response to this interpretative dilemma.
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Appendix 1 Plot Summaries

*Taxi Driver*

Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro), unable to sleep, gets a job driving taxis. Gliding through the grimy streets of New York, he is disgusted at the ‘scum’ he sees every night, filtered through the windows of his cab. Travis spends some time with other drivers, and shows himself to both racist and somewhat ignorant. There is no doubting his sincerity however, as he wishes he could sweep the scum off the streets. He becomes aware of Palantine [actor], a politician whose campaign platform is to clean up the streets, but his faith in the man is shaken when the politician actually gets into Travis's cab one day and reveals himself as corrupt.

Travis notices a Palantine campaign worker, the angelic Betsy (Cybil Shepherd), and asks her out. Betsy’s initial attraction during the date, and when Bickle takes her to a pornographic theatre she wants nothing more to do with him. His attentions turn to child prostitute Iris (Jodie Foster), who he is determined to ‘save.’

An increasingly disturbed Travis goes on a gun-buying spree, and practices at his apartment in front of the mirror: drawing his gun, speaking to imaginary enemies. He cuts his hair into a Mohawk, arms himself and attempts to assassinate Palantine, but is thwarted by Secret Service Agents. He goes to the home/workplace of Iris and her pimp Sport (Harvey Keitel), where he graphically, and in blood-drenched detail, kills Sport and his cronies before being cornered in Iris's room, the young girl cowering and terrified. As the police burst into the room Travis, now out of bullets, fashions his hand into a simile of a gun and feigns three shots to the head.

After this scene, Travis is restored to his place in society, back driving his cab, the pictures, letters and newspaper cuttings in his apartment revealing that he has been lauded as a hero by the media for restoring Iris to her mid-West family. Betsy steps into the back of his cab. She clearly admires him. He refuses both her money and her overtures. Travis is left alone in the taxicab – and looks at the audience through the rear vision mirror. Something does not feel right.
‘Company’ Ballet Director Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel) is rehearsing *Swan Lake*, and following the ‘demotion’ of aging star Beth (Winona Ryder), seeking to cast a new ‘star’ in the twin roles of Odette/Odile, the white and black swans of the mythic ballet. Nina (Natalie Portman), a loner within the Company, is desperate for the part, and during auditions notices the sensual and uninhibited dancing of Lily (Mila Kunis). We understand Nina’s unease when she returns to the apartment she shares with her mother. Nina’s mother (Barbara Hershey), a former dancer, is pushing her daughter to a success she herself never found. The Mother is a passive-aggressive and passionate woman. At home, Nina is a little girl, as reflected in her bedroom, which looks like it has not changed since she was twelve.

Nina approaches Leroy to ask for the lead role, painting her lips with a deep red lipstick stolen from Beth (who has been sleeping with the Director). Leroy explains to Nina that she is a perfect white swan, but he doubts her capacity to abandon herself to the ‘dark side’ of the black swan. Leroy kisses Nina, who bites his lip. Intrigued, he casts her in the starring role of *Swan Lake*.

Rehearsals begin. Nina is inhibited in her dancing, and refusing to sleep with a frustrated Leroy. She has bizarre and graphic visions, and develops a rash on her shoulder. Nina becomes certain that Lily is scheming to take over the lead role. Lily may not have the perfection of Nina’s technique, but she dances with abandon and joy. The tightly controlled Nina becomes increasingly paranoid, and pre-occupied with Lily. Leroy is sexualising their rehearsals, exhorting Nina to get in touch with her sensuality. She masturbates in bed, and is jolted out of her reverie by the shocked realisation her mother is in the room, asleep in a chair in the corner. One night Lily turns up at the apartment and takes Nina out for a whirlwind night of dancing, flirting, drugs and alcohol, Nina and Lily end the night with a passionate, explicitly filmed sexual encounter in Nina’s child-like room.

Nina awakens, late for rehearsal. The Mother, seriously disturbed at her loss of control over Nina, is now sabotaging her daughter’s success. When Nina escapes, and arrives at the theatre, Lily is dancing the lead role of the Swan Queen. Nina confronts Lily, who claims she went home the previous night with a guy from the club. Lily makes fun of Nina’s ‘obsession’ with her: “Oh my God! Did you have a wet dream about me? Was I good?” Neither Nina nor the viewer knows for sure whether Lily and Nina went out the night before. Is Lily manipulating Nina in her pursuit of the role of Swan Queen, or is Nina imagining the entire thing?
Nina’s descent into insanity accelerates. She picks at the worsening scabbed rash on her shoulder – there are black feathers inside. Her mother’s paintings speak to her. The graphic visions continue. The opening night arrives. Nina’s mother calls the Company and tells them Nina will not be performing. Nina reacts violently before finally arriving at the theatre, where she finds Lily in costume, ready to go on stage as the Swan Queen. Nina prepares for the role and goes on stage for the disastrous first act, during which her partner drops her.

Returning to her dressing room she finds Lily dressed as the Black Swan. Nina attacks her, breaking a mirror and stabbing Lily with one of the shards. She drags Lily’s body into the bathroom, and returns to the stage as the Black Swan. Nina is superb. She receives a standing ovation. Black feathers sprout from her body. Returning to her dressing room to prepare for the final act, she finds Lily waiting to congratulate her. The mirror is broken – Nina had, in her fevered imagination – not killed Lily but instead stabbed herself. She takes her place on stage for the final act, which requires the Swan Queen to leap to her death. Nina emulates the character she is playing, leaping to her own possible death at the end of *Swan Lake*. As she lies, broken on the ground, surrounded by cast and crew, she delivers her final words: “I felt it. Perfect. I was perfect.”

**The Matrix**

Green computer code rains down a black screen as a man (Cypher) and woman (Trinity) speak on the phone about someone they have been watching. Suddenly, the woman is in trouble, and even as the cryptic conversation (“Do you think he knows?”) we have just heard lingers in our minds, the action begins. After some incredible stunts, she ‘miraculously’ escapes. From here, the story is primarily told from the point of view of Thomas Anderson/Neo (Keanu Reeves). It is 1999 and Thomas Anderson works in a dead-end office job by day, and is a computer hacker going by the moniker of Neo at night. His is a tired and grey life. One night a series of seemingly cryptic events culminate in Thomas/Neo following ‘the white rabbit’ (a tattoo on the arm of a girl with a hacker customer). He ends up at a nightclub, and eventually meets the legendary computer hacker Trinity (Carrie Ann Moss) – “I thought you were a guy!” Thomas/Neo exclaims; “Most men do,” she replies. She tells him about a man called Morpheus (Lawrence Fishburne), but he wastes his chance to escape with her when later they are attacked. Similarly, when Morpheus contacts him at work, and attempts to guide him (over the phone) to escape, Thomas literally winds up on the edge of a high-rise building – but he cannot make the final leap of faith.
Captured by ‘Agents,’ Thomas Anderson is initially cocky – “I want my phone call.” But when his lips meld together and he has no mouth, he realizes the world does not work the way he thought it did. He is rescued by Morpheus, and discovers that it is not 1999. It is actually closer to 2199. Morpheus shows Neo the ‘real world,’ quoting Baudrillard when he says, “Welcome to the Desert of the Real.” The real world is a post-apocalyptic nightmare following a war between humans and sentient computers. In a last ditch effort to destroy the computers, humans ‘torched the sky,’ hoping to deny the machines the solar power they ran on. It did not work. Computers enslaved humanity, breeding people in factories, and then linking them in their billions in the ‘bio-grid.’ Here, the electricity generated by the human body is harvested. “The Matrix” is an artificial, virtual reality construct designed by the computers, and for the purpose of keeping their human ‘crops’ from destroying themselves. Human minds ‘live’ in the Matrix, while the bodies sleep eternally in womb-like pods. Within this artificial world – the world we think we live in – are sentient computer programmes called Agents. Three of these – Agents Smith (Hugo Weaving), Brown and Jones – are on a quest to destroy Morpheus, and obtain from him the ‘Codes to Zion.’ The codes will lead the computers to the last remaining human city, deep in the bowels of the Earth, Zion. Then the destruction of the human race will be complete.

Morpheus gives the skeptical, but intrigued Thomas/Neo a choice – the Red Pill or the Blue Pill. Take the red pill, and see the world as it really is, or take the blue pill and remain in blissful ignorance. In taking the red pill, Thomas Anderson is dead forever, and Neo takes his place in the real world as a crewmember aboard Morpheus vehicle, The Nebuchadnezzar. Neo is reunited with Trinity, and meets the other crewmembers while going through a period of restoration and healing. One of these, Cypher, is openly skeptical of the way Morpheus, Trinity and the others treat Neo as “The One,” a saviour whose coming has been heralded by The Oracle, a wise woman and guide to Morpheus and Trinity.

Morpheus introduces Neo to Buddhist notions of training the mind and the body. Human beings have appropriated the technology behind the Matrix construct as a way to upload programmes into their brains – they can instantly learn to fly a helicopter, repair complex machinery and, in this case, learn Kung Fu. After the new world and new skills are established, the fight against The Matrix is renewed.

Neo is taken to meet The Oracle, who lives inside The Matrix where she appears as an amiable, elderly woman with a fondness for baking. Young ‘novices’ who practice and espouse Buddhist philosophy live with her. She tells Neo he is not the one, although she is not emphatic. Rather, she notes, “if you are the one, you would
know.” Neo is full of doubt. He is certain he cannot be the One. Even so, Morpheus and Trinity continue to believe in him.

In between the action sequences that dominate the struggle against the Agents, Cypher meets with Agent Smith in The Matrix. He sells out Morpheus and his fellow crewmembers, directly contributing to the death of several of them before he himself is killed. Morpheus is captured by the Agents and tortured. Agent Smith takes the unorthodox step of sending the other Agents out of the room and reveals a remarkably human emotion – hate (of the ‘stench’ of the human world). Agent Smith wants to escape the Matrix as well. Against impossible odds, and against a background of considerable violence, Neo rescues Morpheus.

With a growing sense of belief in himself, Neo finally enters the Matrix to fight the Agents. Agents Brown and Jones flee, leaving the powerful Agent Smith to fight Neo alone. Neo seemingly dies, but is restored when Trinity chastely kisses him, telling him he cannot die because The Oracle told her she would love the one – and she loves Neo. Neo is resurrected and continues the fight. Where before his unique skills meant he could dodge bullets, now he finds he can stop them. As Agent Smith and Neo fight, Neo becomes increasingly calm and Agent Smith increasingly frustrated. Neo is an efficient, emotionless machine. Eventually Neo ‘dives’ into the Agent’s body, inhabiting him from the inside and exploding forth in burst of light. Neo can ‘see’ the computer code the way the computers do, and so they have no power over him.

In the final scene, Neo is in the Matrix, on the phone. Over the now familiar green line of digits that represent the Matrix Neo announces his future intentions, concluding by saying to the computer construct, “Where we go from here is a choice I leave to you.” The Matrix line of digits stops flowing, replaced by ‘SYSTEM FAILURE.’ Neo hangs up the phone and ascends skyward. The credits roll as Wake Up! (a heavy rock song by Rage Against the Machine) makes a virtual aural assault on viewers as they leave the cinema. If viewers remain watching until the very end of the credits, they see a code word that unlocks a website that is a gateway to detailed discussions about the meaning of the film.

**Clueless**

The first of four musical montages begins with a jeep full of happy teenagers careering down the freeway as Kids in America plays in the background. A series of shots establish the Beverly Hills setting and privileged lifestyle of the characters. A voice-over begins as the pretty blonde girl at the centre of every scene explains her ‘way normal’ life. This extended, MTV music video style montage ends in the
bedroom of a huge mansion where Cher (Alicia Silverstone) compares outfits using imaging software.

Cher continues to speak directly to viewers, sharing her thoughts about herself, the world and the people around her. Cher is a teen fashion queen, and shares leadership of the ‘popular’ girls at Bronson Alcott High with best friend Dioone (Stacey Dash), occasionally butting heads with fashion clone Amber (Elisa Donovan) and generally enjoying her own popularity. Cher is equally in charge of her home life, where she cares for wealthy litigator father Mal Horowitz (Dan Hedaya) in lieu of a dead mother who died “during a routine liposuction procedure.” Cher alternately bosses and cajoles her father, who indulges his charming daughter. Cher’s concerns are superficial but she is kind, sweet and generous – her main thrill in life is giving other people makeovers as a way of improving their lives.

Cher’s stepbrother Josh (Paul Rudd) arrives from college for an extended stay. Although she feigns disdain, there is an obvious camaraderie between the precocious teen and the slightly older Josh. He keeps an amused eye on Cher as she variously makes over the new girl at school, Tai (Brittany Murphy), studies for her driver’s license, and gets in and out of various scrapes, all the while guarding her preciously preserved virginity (You’ve seen how picky I am about my shoes and they only go on my feet!)

The kind-hearted Cher is constantly playing matchmaker. She soothes Dioone when she argues with boyfriend Murray (Donald Adeosun Faison), brings together the awkward Miss Geist (Twink Caplan) and Mr Hall (Wallace Shawn), and attempts to set Tai up with Elton (Jeremy Sisto). Elton throws a spanner in the works however by rejecting Tai, and in attempting to seduce Cher precipitates an argument that culminates in his abandoning her in a bad neighbourhood. This is the first of many mild pickles from which Josh can rescue Cher, which he generally does with good-natured resignation.

Cher is a romantic idealist unprepared to gift her virginity to the unsophisticated boys at school – she is ‘saving myself for Luke Perry.’ So when the handsome James Dean look-alike Christian arrives as a new student at the school, she does her best to attract his attention. The two share cultural interests and it takes some time for Cher to realise what her other friends had recognised immediately – Christian’s homosexuality.

Accepting Cher’s guidance in all things, Tai rejects Travis (Breckin Meyer), the boy she actually likes because he is a member of the wrong social group – the pot-smoking stoners. Tai proves to be a convincing imitation of Cher. When she characterises a mild incident of horsing around as a near-death experience the slightly
savvier teen supplants Cher in the school social pecking order. Tai begins to show an interest in Josh, who has made a point of treating her kindly. He is completely unaware of Tai’s crush on him.

Cher finds herself in what is for her a state of chaos. Josh seems to find her superficial interests distasteful, she has lost her social status and she fails her driving test. For the first time in her life Cher feels unsure of herself, out of place and alone. As she wanders the streets, pondering her circumstances she has an epiphany – she is in love with Josh and she has no idea what to do about it. The perplexed girl throws herself with great sincerity into worthy activities. Cher undertakes a determined self-directed programme of good works in what she calls a personal ‘makeover of the soul.’ Tai and Cher make up, expressing mutual affection. Travis gives up smoking pot and he and Tai admit to a mutual passion.

Doing her best to assist her father’s litigious efforts on an important case Cher is first dejected when one of her father’s associates yells at her and then delighted when Josh passionately springs to her defence. This leads to a declaration of love, a close-up of a kiss and then a long-distance shot of a wedding at the Horowitz home. Is this a rather precipitous move by Josh and Cher? “As if!” she says before a radiant Miss Geist marries Mr Hall. (Cher naturally catches the bouquet).

**Josie & the Pussycats**

Josie (Rachel Leigh Cook) and her friends Valerie (Rosario Dawson) and Melody (Tara Reid) live in Riverdale. Their band, The Pussycats, plays to disinterested audiences at bowling alleys. Meanwhile, the world's most famous boy band, *Du Jour* is on tour, flying across America to a gig with their Mega Records producer Wyatt (Alan Cumming). Wyatt is unhappy that members of *Du Jour* has noticed their No 1 single, *Backdoor Lover*, has messages in the background. Wyatt and the pilot don parachutes and jump out of the plane, leaving the band to die in fiery explosion that occurs off-screen.

Wyatt needs a new act and after landing in Riverdale, serendipitously meets the Pussycats, and signs them to a record contract even though he has not heard them play. The girls are thrilled. They meet Mega Records CEO, the eccentric Fiona (Posey Parker). Fiona takes Josie, Valeria and Melody on a dizzying tour of Mega Records, makes them over into ‘Glamazons’ then throws them a massive party; here their paths diverge.
Meanwhile, using the aid of Mega Records secret technology, and with the assistance of the FBI, the *Pussycats*’ single, *3 Little Words*, is layered with subliminal messages. These messages take the song to the top of the singles charts.

Valerie and Melody become suspicious and investigate on their own while Wyatt and Fiona isolate Josie from her band-mates (using subliminal messages to achieve their ends). A brainwashed Josie rejects her friends and Alan M., the boy she is interested in. Mega Records plan a massive concert designed to launch a special set of headphones that will allow even more specific 'control' of American youth.

Backstage at the concert Fiona and Wyatt try to kill Valerie and Melody. Josie comes to her senses and rescues her fellow Pussycats. With the help of the members of *Du Jour*, who miraculously survived the place crash that opened the film, the Pussycats expose Wyatt and Fiona. The authorities cart off the pair, and the girls take to the stage, exhorting their audience to think for themselves, before launching into their single. Alan M. crowd-surfs his way to the front of the crowd, and joins Josie on stage for a kiss, to the rapturous applause of the young audience. The Agents and multi-national CEOs are called to account for orchestrating the plot, and as the films end, one of them points out that exposure doesn’t matter since a better way of manipulating cashed up teenagers is films. The end credits roll.
Appendix 2 PaRDeS Tables (Film Analyses)

The PaRDeS schematic of four levels of meaning can be used to frame analysis by tabulating key interpretative information. Although it is not recommended that these tables be presented in final interpretations of films, they are provided in this Appendix as a guide to analysts and students. These tables are representative of initial framings of the films according to PaRDeS in preparation for interpretation. Note that by the time of the analysis of *Black Swan*, which was the last film (chronologically) interpreted in this dissertation, tables such as those in this Appendix were no longer used to develop the film analysis as part of the formal PaRDeS interpretative process (although they were ‘mentally’ formed).

Table 5 Features of the 4 Levels & Film Interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>Identification of Narrative, story, plot, style, imagery, genre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>Analysts begin to question Peshat elements; if films are ‘hinting’ at a more developed meaning, we start to question the meaning of the film in response to these hints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>Analysts begin to search for meaning, using symbols and other film elements they have already identified; Interpreters’ results lead to new questions about the structure of allusions/allegories and about the significance of these hints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>In some cases analysts find deliberately inserted hidden meaning by the filmmaker(s). In other cases, they can identify ways the filmmaker(s) reveal aspects of themselves in the work they create. Finally, interpreters come to a developed sense of meaning that is unique, and specific to themselves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 PaRDeS Bridge: Film Functions & Film Viewers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Film Functions</th>
<th>Film Viewers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>Communicates meaning</td>
<td>Passive Viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>Suggests meaning</td>
<td>Alert viewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>Develops meaning</td>
<td>Engaged viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>Transcends meaning</td>
<td>Affected Viewer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Taxi Driver PaRDeS Tables

#### Table 7 The PaRDeS of Travis Bickle's Apartment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PaRDeS</th>
<th>Travis Bickle's Apartment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>Where Travis lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>Prison cell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>Insight into Travis's state of mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>God's Lonely Man</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 8 Different Levels of Scriptwriting in Taxi Driver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expounded in Script through:</th>
<th>Schrader and Meaning in <em>Taxi Driver</em> Script</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>Subjects covered in story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voyeurism; Prostitution; Vigilante Violence; Political Corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>Explicit Allusions in Script</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schrader defines Travis as an allegory for the descent into madness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>Symbolic Meanings in Script</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schrader defines the Taxi as a metaphor for alienation and imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>Schrader's spiritual inscription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angst and Redemption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 9 The PaRDeS of Travis Bickle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Travis Bickle</th>
<th>Characterisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>Naive/Foolish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On the Surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>Out of touch with society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Actions allude to Underlying motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>Self-sabotaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>Self-loathing/Undeserving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role of Unconscious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 10 The PaRDeS of the Opening Sequence of Taxi Driver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning that can be derived from the Opening Sequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peshat</strong>&lt;br&gt;What appears on screen. Sound &amp; Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remez</strong>&lt;br&gt;Meaning that is hinted at. Script and screen each provide allusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Derash</strong>&lt;br&gt;Meaning that has been thought about by the filmmaker and requires thinking about by viewer (if it is to be perceived)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sod</strong>&lt;br&gt;Inscribed religious symbolism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 11 PaRDeS of the Mirror Scene from Taxi Driver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Editing and Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peshat</strong></td>
<td>Travis is talking to himself in the mirror&lt;br&gt;As appears on screen: Peshat yields all other levels of meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remez</strong></td>
<td>Travis's fragmented state of mind&lt;br&gt;Disjointed editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Derash</strong></td>
<td>Mirror Symbolism; Poetic Metaphor and viewer experience.&lt;br&gt;Framing; Use of Colour tones; “Real” sound and absence of score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sod</strong></td>
<td>Underlying theme of redemption through violence&lt;br&gt;“Catholic flamboyance”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 12 PaRDeS Interpretations of the Closing Sequence of Taxi Driver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Possible Interpretations of Closing Sequence of Taxi Driver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peshat</strong></td>
<td>Travis is a hero (Happy Ending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remez</strong></td>
<td>Travis is crazy (Delusion Ending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Derash</strong></td>
<td>Travis is Dreaming (Commentary of Media and Society)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sod</strong></td>
<td>Travis is Dying (Spiritual Ending)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 13 Extended PaRDeS of the Mirror Scene in Taxi Driver: The Creation of Multi-Meaning in Taxi Driver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Schrader</th>
<th>Scorsese</th>
<th>De Niro</th>
<th>Herrmann/Sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peshat</strong></td>
<td>“Travis talks to self in mirror.”</td>
<td>Physical appearance of set.</td>
<td>Physical presence of Travis Bickle</td>
<td>“Real” sound of the streets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remez</strong></td>
<td>Schrader claims that he responded to De Niro's query on what to say with, “Well he's a little kid playing with guns and acting tough.” This suggests Travis as Child allegory.</td>
<td>Alludes to previous representations of mirrors and how they are shot in the film – in a sense this re-contextualises the meaning of earlier scenes.</td>
<td>‘Actorly’ Allusions: for example, to Shane (see explanation below).</td>
<td>Quality of sound, as well as actual sound, can be used to allude to psychological and emotional states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Derash</strong></td>
<td>Narrative Structure: placement of the scene gives it meaning (explain with example). Mirror as Symbol</td>
<td>Mirror as symbol is very much added to and developed by Scorsese. Re-enforcement of use of mirrors as symbols throughout film. Editing &amp; Choice of last line, “You're dead,” - Travis is killing himself. Murder is a form of suicide.</td>
<td>Travis is aware of his own schizophrenia? The Actor becomes his own Writer. Scene and Cultural Impact</td>
<td>The absence of score as meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sod</strong></td>
<td>The effect of the character he created as the basis of the personality of Travis that is used by De Niro to develop his rant.</td>
<td>Religiosity of some shots, <em>for example</em> The director's eye: is it a reflection of self, and if so, in what way?</td>
<td>As an unscripted monologue directed at the self – De Niro is watching himself as he performs – a certain amount of unconscious material makes its way to the surface. However, as a sublime method actor, perhaps this is the unconscious of Travis. The two cannot be distinguished with any certainty.</td>
<td>The street noises are a very pure form of representation of that time and place – the location is authentic and the street noise is an unscripted ‘real’ element of the film.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

A potential Sod element in the meaning that De Niro creates is a scene from an earlier film that he made with Brian De Palma, *Hi Mom* – is De Niro aware that he his referencing his performance in that film, where he performs a very similar scene?

We, as viewers, are exposed to acting at the most creative point in the process.

### Table 14: 4 Filmmakers & 4 Levels of Meaning in *Taxi Driver*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Martin Scorsese (Direction)</th>
<th>Paul Schrader (Script)</th>
<th>Robert De Niro (Travis Bickle)</th>
<th>Bernard Herrmann (Musical Score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peshat</strong></td>
<td>Visually excessive (at times) style. Expressionistic style;</td>
<td>Austere Script favours character development and a single point of view;</td>
<td>Plays Travis Bickle as a “charming innocent.”</td>
<td>Music describes action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story</strong></td>
<td>Visually excessive (at times) style. Expressionistic style;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative</strong></td>
<td>Visually excessive (at times) style. Expressionistic style;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision &amp; Sound; Editing</strong></td>
<td>Visually excessive (at times) style. Expressionistic style;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remez</strong></td>
<td>Film-noir; <em>Notes from the Underground</em> by Dostoevsky,</td>
<td>Transcendental Film Style; Sartre's <em>Nausea</em>;</td>
<td>Performanc e as allegory.</td>
<td>Story on an emotional level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cinematic and Literary Allusions</strong></td>
<td>Film-noir; <em>Notes from the Underground</em> by Dostoevsky,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blood Symbolism example; Commentary on culture; media</strong></td>
<td>Use of Colour tones; Blood and sacrifice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sod</strong></td>
<td>New York &amp; Film “Catholic Flamboyance”</td>
<td>New York &amp; the Outsider “Calvinistic Minimalism”</td>
<td>New York and the Human Being</td>
<td>New York &amp; Jazz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New York as Character; Spiritual Expression</strong></td>
<td>New York &amp; Film “Catholic Flamboyance”</td>
<td>New York &amp; the Outsider “Calvinistic Minimalism”</td>
<td>New York and the Human Being</td>
<td>New York &amp; Jazz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Matrix PaRDeS Tables

Table 15 PaRDeS Interpretation of Major Characters According to Four Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Neo</th>
<th>Morpheus</th>
<th>Trinity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>God of Dreams</td>
<td>Group of Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>The One</td>
<td>The Father</td>
<td>The Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>Redemption</td>
<td>Prophet</td>
<td>The Believer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>The Light</td>
<td>The Eyes</td>
<td>The Hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approaching character through the prism of the levels of PaRDeS presents a great deal of information in a simple and easy to understand format. What PaRDeS can offer in its interpretation of character is a communication tool – the PaRDeS method says a great deal about character in a few words. The schema itself provides us with the same information as so many of the usual interpretations in a unique, simple and precise format.

Table 16 Four Ways of Reading Race in The Matrix

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>African American characters (race in American context);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>Voice of Wisdom;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>Symbol of Resistance to White Authority;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>Personal response to race/African-Americans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clueless PaRDeS Tables

Table 17 4 Levels of Connection between Film and Novel

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>(literal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>(allegorical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>(parable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>(hidden)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation of Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptation of Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transformation of Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no Novel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18 Levels of Irony in Clueless

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshat</td>
<td>Verbal Irony; Situational Irony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td>Juxtaposition of Image and Voice-over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>Irony delivered through symbols and commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td>Hidden irony (for example, mode of authorship)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**PaRDeS Tables for Josie and the Pussycats**

### Table 19 Levels of Symbolic Meaning of Character in Josie and the Pussycats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peshat</th>
<th>Remez</th>
<th>Derash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signifier</strong></td>
<td><strong>role in group</strong></td>
<td><strong>as women</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOSIE (redhead)</td>
<td>The Hero</td>
<td>The Maiden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALERIE (brunette)</td>
<td>The Smart One</td>
<td>The Wise Woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MELODY (blonde)</td>
<td>The Stupid One</td>
<td>The Child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 20 Filmmakers' Intended Levels of Meaning in Josie and the Pussycats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peshat</th>
<th>Remez</th>
<th>Derash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>literal representations</strong></td>
<td><strong>visual allusions</strong></td>
<td><strong>connecting the dots</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrounded by selling images</td>
<td>Obliviousness re. being marketed to</td>
<td>Product placement commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manipulation of mental response to image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td><strong>subliminal representation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 21 Levels of Music and Meaning in Josie and the Pussycats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peshat</th>
<th><strong>Music as Performance</strong></th>
<th><strong>Music as Narrative</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Pussycats</strong></td>
<td>Narrative in Lyrics</td>
<td>Montage; Allusions to emotional states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remez</td>
<td><strong>Garage Girl Bands</strong></td>
<td>Music as Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derash</td>
<td>'Independent' Bands</td>
<td>Music as Mind Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td><strong>Manufactured Music</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 22 Meaning Schism between Filmmakers and Film Viewers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peshat</th>
<th><strong>Meaning intended by filmmakers</strong></th>
<th><strong>Meaning made by Viewers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>satirical treatment of consumerism</strong></td>
<td>flashy entertainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cynicism of consumer culture</strong></td>
<td>one giant commercial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>anti-consumerism</strong></td>
<td>film as part of commercial culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sod</td>
<td><strong>movies as powerful function of that consumer culture; fight against culture</strong></td>
<td>filmmakers are hypocritical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>