Inconsistent Cinema:

Paul Thomas Anderson, *There Will Be Blood* and the Postmodern Filmmaker

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ABSTRACT

Paul Thomas Anderson's early work up to and including *There Will Be Blood* (2007) are examples of incoherent, postmodern cinema. Anderson's formative years produced four critically acclaimed features, *Hard Eight* (1996), *Boogie Nights* (1997), *Magnolia* (1999), and *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), all of which presented related themes and aesthetics. Though *There Will Be Blood* does depict a complex father-son relationship similar to that found in *Hard Eight*, *Boogie Nights*, and *Magnolia*, the film is stylistically a radical departure for Anderson. While certain experimentation occurred in *Punch-Drunk Love*, *There Will Be Blood* is the start of the next phase of Anderson's career, one which reflects a meditative sensibility. For instance, in place of kinetic cinematography, rapid cutting, and multiple narratives are longer takes, extended tracking shots, and a leisurely editing style. Finally, contextualizing Anderson's career within the era of "Indiewood," a fusion of studio and independent filmmaking, key visual techniques employed during his early work emphasize the shift in his aesthetics, highlighting a singular, postmodern voice in Hollywood cinema.

INTRODUCTION

FREDRIC JAMESON WROTE that postmodernism is a concept which "allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features" (2). Sezen Kayhan also describes a range of coexistent and subordinate features within postmodern cinema, such as "themes and techniques of historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, simulation, pastiche, play, black humor, irony and pluralism" (34). Contemporary filmmaking is rife with the elements Kayhan highlights, which, perhaps, ingrain a feeling of repetitiveness. Critics note that postmodern cinema places an emphasis on "style over substance, a consumption of images for their own sake, rather than for their usefulness or the values they symbolize, a preoccupation with playfulness and in-jokes at the expense of meaning" (Levy 57). However, there are filmmakers who have crafted distinctive careers utilizing intertextuality, irony, playfulness, and in-jokes to great effect, and Paul Thomas Anderson is one of the most accomplished directors working in contemporary Hollywood cinema to do so. The primary focus here is to identify the key elements of the aesthetic in a majority of Anderson's work that make him distinctive, particularly within the postmodern frameworks noted above. Catherine Constable states that postmodern filmmakers "do not form a coherent body of work" (2) and this notion is applicable to Anderson's filmography. I will discuss recurring techniques that feature throughout his early films *Hard Eight* (1996), *Boogie Nights* (1997), and *Magnolia* (1999) to demonstrate a collective body of work that makes reference to the cinema of 1970s New Hollywood. Ostensibly, Anderson maintains the spirit of the 1970s filmmakers but rather than simply reiterate their work, he refashions similar visual, narrative, and character traits that reflect a contemporary, personal style. Examining the minor shift in aesthetics and experimentation in *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002) precedes the contention that *There Will Be Blood* (2007) is the key work in his career thus far. The film has a substantial modification in style that sets a new foundation for Anderson's subsequent films, *The Master* (2012), *Inherent Vice* (2014), and *Phantom Thread* (2017), one that presents maturity in Anderson's approach to narrative, character, and visualization.

Born in 1970, the son of Ernie and Edwina, Anderson grew up in North Hollywood. A showbiz personality in Cleveland, Ernie created the persona "Ghoulardi," who wore a "fright wig and lab coat to introduce late-night schlock horror TV" (Waxman 84). Anderson was raised in a large family with eight other siblings, Paul being the third

Anderson replicates his deteriorating mental state by combining fast tracking shots, whip pans, crash zooms, and rapid editing.

youngest of nine children (Hirshberg). Adoring his father, but distant from his apparently cold mother (Waxman 85), Anderson displayed an interest in filmmaking at a young age. He directed the *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) ---influenced short mockumentary *The Dirk Diggler Story* (1988), which was later expanded into *Boogie Nights* without the faux documentary aesthetic. Infamously, Anderson attended the prestigious New York University film school for only a few days before dropping out after receiving a C grade on a writing assignment in which he plagiarized David Mamet's screenplay for *Hoffa* (1992) (Sperb 20). Later, he worked on a variety of production jobs as a crew member, including the quiz show *The Quiz Kids Challenge* (1990) (Richardson), an experience that fed into the screenplay of *Magnolia*. Using the tuition fees refunded by New York University, as well as funds from his father and others (Richardson), Anderson invested the money into his short film *Cigarettes and Coffee* (1993). Starring Philip Baker Hall, who would become a frequent collaborator, the film displays early hallmarks of the director's narrative traits. *Cigarettes and Coffee* features an array of characters, multiple storylines, and an elder father-like figure (Hall) espousing wisdom to a young protegee (Kirk Baltz) as a twenty-dollar bill is passed from person to person. In a tight 23-minute running time, Anderson visualizes the narrative in tight close-ups and two shots with minimal camera movement and utilizes a swift editing style that punctuates the rapid exchanges between the characters. While undeniably flawed, the short film demonstrates Anderson's primary interest in character and performance.

NEW HOLLYWOOD, INDIEWOOD, AND ANDERSON

The stylized dialogue of *Cigarettes and Coffee* reflected the cinema of the time. Anderson and his contemporaries, such as Quentin Tarantino, Steven Soderbergh, and the vastly underrated Mary Harron, each owe a debt to New Hollywood, or the "Hollywood Renaissance," of 1960s/1970s. The Hollywood studio system of the 1960s was "a period of declining and fragmenting audiences, crisis and readjustment within the film industry" and the response from studio chiefs was to provide support to young filmmakers "in an effort to recapture cinema's lost mass audience" (Symmons 2). New Hollywood "was the outcome of a conjunction of forces: social, industrial and stylistic" which provided a "measure of freedom" (King 48) within the studio system at that time. Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman, and Jonathan Demme benefitted from this new regime, producing works as diverse as *Taxi Driver* (1976), *M*A*S*H* (1970), and *Melvin and Howard* (1980) respectively. Though *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) represented a drastic shift of onscreen violence and depiction complex anti-heroes, it was *Easy Rider* (1969) that truly cemented the era of New Hollywood. Its narrative of two drug-smuggling, hippy motorcyclists tapped into the counterculture of 1960s North America. What blossomed was a "cinema of loneliness," to borrow Robert Kolker's term, where "American filmmakers became thoughtful about their films" (10). The early days of New Hollywood were very much focused on character studies than narrative-driven cinema. The French New Wave (Nouvelle Vague), particularly the works of Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, were an influence on the filmmakers breaking through the studio system of the 1960s/1970s. The long takes of Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967), for instance, inspired several scenes in *Taxi Driver* to delve deeper into the psyche of troubled anti-hero Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro), demonstrating an intertextual, referential mode of filmmaking. Contrastingly during this period, the birth of the blockbuster began with the release of William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). Given a sizeable investment from Warner Bros. for the time (and for a genre film), it grossed $193m from a $11m budget (*Box Office Mojo*). It was Steven Spielberg who cemented the blockbuster with *Jaws* (1975), and science-fiction became popular once more due to George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977). Both these films "fueled Hollywood's commercial recovery in the later 1970s after three decades of steep decline" (Schatz 128). As audiences flocked to these escapist fantasies, the smaller, character-driven films were slowly fading out. *Heaven's Gate* (1980) was the film notoriously cited for ending the personal, character-focused cinema of this era, bankrupting United Artists, the studio that financed it, as its budget ballooned out of control (Abramovich 68). During the 1980s, Hollywood found success with sequels and more big-budget B-movie extravaganzas, while independent cinema was getting politicized in response to Reaganism. To a certain extent, Scorsese, Altman, and Demme struggled in the 1980s to maintain their character-driven cinema, but in the 1990s they found another wave of creativity that tapped into the public consciousness.

Anderson emerged during a period of similar revitalization in 1990s Hollywood cinema, an era known as "Indiewood," which Geoff King observes as where the independent sector and studios blended together (1). Many of

the major studios set up "independent" branches, such as Fox Searchlight Pictures (20th Century Fox) and Paramount Vantage (Paramount Studios), to distribute films that were "still be perceived as a specialized product catering [to]audiences not associated with Hollywood blockbuster and franchise films, without alienating audiences that do watch and enjoy these films" (Tzioumakis 49). Many characteristics of Indiewood cinema can be found in what Jeffrey Sconce considers to be "smart cinema," where films

> frequently trade in a number of shared elements, including 1) the cultivation of 'blank' style and incongruous narration; 2) a fascination with 'synchronicity' as a principle of narrative organization: 3) a related thematic interest in random fate. 4) a focus on the white middle-class family as a crucible of miscommunication and emotional dysfunction; 5) a recurring interest in the politics of taste, consumerism and identity. These elements do not necessarily appear in all of the films at the core of the irony/nihilism debates. (358)

Anderson certainly demonstrates a propensity towards depicting "random fate," "middle-class families," "dysfunction," and "identity" (with many elements of "irony/nihilism" peppered within his characters). As noted above, Indiewood was, seemingly, the crossover of independent cinema and studio production. However, independent cinema has been described as "the antithesis of a Hollywood studio film" (Ortner 2), so this merging of the two "systems" would be an altogether different venture which, as indicated by Tzioumakis above, was not too avant-garde in the manner of certain New Hollywood productions (for example, Hopper's second feature *The Last Movie* (1971)). While still undertaking certain risks with regard to characterization, subject matter, and visualization, Anderson found a place to develop his filmmaking in this environment, one which would not be too alienating for "blockbuster and franchise films'" audiences but would serve his referential, intertextual style.

RESTLESS AESTHETICS IN *HARD EIGHT*, *BOOGIE NIGHTS* AND *MAGNOLIA*: VISUAL/NARRATIVE AMBITION

Brian Michael Goss notes that when examining a filmmaker such as Anderson, it is central to understand "what a director's corpus of films say, how they say it, and what slippages and elisions are evident in doing so," as well as "the thematic motifs that resonate within the time and place of the film's production" (173). From the start of his career, Anderson explored themes that would resonate throughout his films, including complex father-son relationships, abuse of power, betrayal, extreme masculinity, redemption, and forgiveness. Anderson's debut, *Hard Eight*, depicts a complex relationship between a surrogate father-figure, Sydney (Philip Baker Hall) and John (John C. Reilly) - echoing a similar dynamic in *Cigarettes and Coffee* between Hall and Baltz - as they navigate the Reno gambling world. Influenced by the crime dramas of Jean-Pierre Melville, dialogue similar to neo-noir *Pulp Fiction* (1994), and stylized like a Scorsese picture, *Hard Eight* lay the groundwork for Anderson's next three films. There are also notions that Anderson's early films can be understood as "Tarantinoesque," a "byword for both pop-culture reference and popular post-modern cinema" (Woods 5), with an emphasis on snappy meta dialogue that reflects the influence of Tarantino's screenwriting. As with many feature-film debuts, *Hard Eight* reflects Anderson at his developmental stage. The film is less thematically and narratively dense than both *Boogie Nights* and *Magnolia*; however, it "has a quiet narrative drive and accumulative mood that lingers long after the film ends" (Sperb 65). The deepening relationship between Sydney and John is complicated by the introduction of Clementine (Gwyneth Paltrow), a cocktail waitress and prostitute who John falls for. An additional challenge to their bond is John's friend Jimmy (Samuel L. Jackson), who later becomes an antagonist of sorts toward Sydney. Anderson previsualizes this antagonism by framing, in wide shot, the dynamic between Sydney, John, and Jimmy (Fig. 1).

The narrative is slight, and dramatic action is confined to two scenes: 1) John requests Sydney's help to get rid of one of Clementine's *johns* when the man refuses to pay and has subsequently beaten her; 2) Jimmy reveals that he knows about Sydney's murderous past and blackmails him in return for silence. Each of these scenes occur at later stages of the film. Anderson deliberately postpones dramatic action until the latter half of the narrative to engross the audience in Sydney, John, and Clementine's world, a delay "that would not usually be expected in the mainstream" (King 78). While each of these dramatic scenarios are resolved, their primary function is not necessarily designed for advancing the plot, but rather for extending the character dimensions. Anderson's manipulation of audience expectations is reinforced visually. The film features extensive tracking shots, a trait developed and utilized throughout Anderson's career in different contexts, is an essential component of his aesthetic. The Steadicam, a rig that "isolates any shakiness caused by the movement of the operator, allowing for almost unlimited freedom of movement" (Mercado 160), is employed as Sydney traverses through a casino, juxtaposing his "dynamic movement against other gamblers seated like zombies at their slots and screens" (Lee). The shot here follows Sydney as he explores

Fig. 1 | Jimmy on the left, Sydney centre, and John on the right. Sydney literally and figuratively obstructs Jimmy's friendship with John in this scene, 00:26:01. *Hard Eight* (Rysher Entertainment, 1996).

his natural environment, in deep reflection, becoming the action within the frame. Rather than conventional cutting together of coverage – wide-, mid-, and close-up shots – the Steadicam remains fixed on Sydney (Fig. 2). The film pauses in this scene to focus on the minutiae of the character's day-to-day routine, a scene that would be excised in mainstream cinema.

The central role of the Steadicam in Anderson's aesthetic is expanded in his next feature. *Boogie Nights* is the first of period-set films Anderson directs, with *There Will Be Blood* (late-19th/early 20th century), *The Master* (1940s), *Phantom Thread* (1950s) and *Inherent Vice* (1970s). *Boogie Nights* demonstrates Anderson maturing as a filmmaker in all aspects. Both the aesthetics and narrative approach are more ambitious. The opening shot features a long, Steadicam shot through a nightclub. The shot was influenced by the famous single, long take through the Copacabana nightclub in *Goodfellas* (1990), a shot Kolker argues Scorsese utilizes to demonstrate his visual capabilities rather than as a narrative function (197). However, Anderson's approach was to fuse both his visual abilities with a narrative function. It further demonstrates Anderson's postmodern sensibilities via its intertextuality, not only as a visual reference to a previous film, but also as a form of interaction with the viewer, providing them with "an active role in interpreting the text" (Kayhan 36). In essence, the sequence represents an Easter Egg for the audience, whereby with prior knowledge of the shot in *Goodfellas*, one would know Anderson's influence and therefore be further engrossed in the world of *Boogie Nights* (and, perhaps, have a deeper connection with the filmmaker).

Boogie Nights's opening shot not only references Scorsese but also introduces the main characters in a non-conventional style, or as Gavin Smith recognizes, "the erotic abandon of cinematic form, pure or impure as it gets" (170). If we compare the opening shot of *Boogie Nights* (Fig.3) to *There Will Be Blood* (Fig.8), we can see that the former's "erotic abandon" would be replaced with distilled, restrained visualization in the latter. Gone is the glamor of 1970s, blasting pop music on the soundtrack, and a roaming camera. *There Will Be Blood* begins on the hills in New Mexico, and rather than an array of people queueing to enter a nightclub, we descend into the earth to see only one man, Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis). The restlessness of *Boogie Nights* juxtaposed with the restraint of *There Will Be Blood* present a stark contrast. However, before discussing this divergence in visualization, we must continue examining the expansion of the filmmaker's style.

Anderson's growing technical competence is complimented by his capabilities as a screenwriter in utilizing a multistranded narrative with numerous characters and plotlines. Ostensibly, the film is a rise-and-fall narrative, much in the same vein as *Goodfellas*. Dirk Diggler (Mark Wahlberg) becomes a protégée of porn director Jack Horner (Burt Reynolds) who introduces him to many stars, all of whom later become Dirk's surrogate family. Dirk's swift rise and rapid fall is very much in line with classical narrative structures, or that of the "formulaic biopic (rising, falling, and rising again) and giving it an ironic twist" (Sperb 70) in that the film is set in the 1970s San Fernando Valley world of pornography. There is a degree of nostalgia for this period and Anderson's steadfast referential visualization, arguably, can be categorized as what Jameson considers a "nostalgia film," where the glossiness of *Boogie Nights*'s images produces "more complex 'postnostalgia' statements

Fig. 2 | Sydney takes in his environment as Anderson follows with a Steadicam, 00:29:23. *Hard Eight* (Rysher Entertainment, 1996).

and forms" (180). The romanticization of this era is short lived. As the film progresses, and as more characters are introduced, the visuals become much more erratic and complex. Dirk descends into drug abuse, and Anderson replicates his deteriorating mental state by combining fast tracking shots, whip pans, crash zooms, and rapid editing. The aesthetics make refence not just to Scorsese, but Max Ophüls, François Truffaut, and Demme, particularly the use of close-ups. The most intense sequence occurs when Dirk and his fellow drug abusers, Reed Rothchild (John C. Reilly) and Todd Parker (Thomas Jane), attempt to rip off local drug dealer Rahad Jackson (Alfred Molina). Anderson builds suspense by slowing down the camera movement and employing longer takes. There is a specific instance of a medium close-up on Dirk (Fig .4) as he battles between being in the moment and drifting away within his drug-addled mind.

The characters (and audience) are put on edge as firecrackers are continuously ignited in the background by Jackson's young friend. When the robbery is attempted, the plan goes awry, resulting in an over-the-top shoot-out sequence. The shift in tone during this sequence is similar to the narrative and genre twists of Demme's *Something Wild* (1986), wherein the film begins as a light romantic comedy before descending into a tense thriller. Jameson comments that this shift in *Something Wild* underlines its "allegorical narrative in which the 1980s meet the 1950s" (181). Anderson, however, utilizes the tense sequence in *Boogie Nights* to reflect a sense of the 1970s meeting the 1980s. Diggler, a reflection of the 1970s decadent porn world, is washed up, broke, and a drug addict. Jackson is a symbol of the hedonism of 1980s Reaganism: a consumerist drug dealer adorning a silk dressing gown in a house cluttered

There Will Be Blood is a mash-up of genres, blending period-set drama with western elements, and a new dimension: horror.

with expensive-looking materials, including a large sound system blasting pop music, as he both amuses and terrifies the would-be robbers. The failure of the robbery depicts Diggler at his lowest point. This tension between past and present results in Diggler recommencing his porn career. The film's conclusion reflects its allegory of family bonds, particularly the surrogate father-son relationship between Diggler and Horner. *Boogie Nights* is perhaps the most overt Indiewood film in Anderson's filmography. Its combination of genres – comedy, drama, and crime – flitted with rapid "Tarantinoesque" dialogue and visual cues to New Hollywood filmmakers, present a postmodern spin on the rise-and-fall narrative.

By contrast, *Magnolia* combines the visual kineticism of *Boogie Nights* with a grander narrative scale, which is where we can locate the influence of Altman and the multistranded narrative films *Nashville* (1975) and *Short Cuts* (1993). The film demonstrates a stumbling towards maturity (Olsen 80), and Anderson himself indicates in the published screenplay of *Magnolia* that it represents an "interesting study in a writer writing from his gut" (vii). While *Boogie Nights* depicted several characters, its primary focus on Dirk made him the central protagonist. *Magnolia* hosts nine, all of which are, more or less, given equal screen time. The narrative offers a balance "between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies; between a diversity

of narrative components, on the one hand, and a number of linking devices and thematic continuities, on the other" (King 86). The film opens with a prologue that details extreme forms of coincidences, outlining the numerous intersections and relationships between the vast cast of characters depicted. David Bordwell comments that cinematic coincidences "are wholly acceptable in stories *about* coincidence" (99). The aesthetics re-appropriate *Boogie Nights*'s freneticism to focus more on the chaos of everyday life, relationships, and connections. This is demonstrated post-prologue as *Magnolia* introduces "nine main characters in a stunning seven-minute montage that features rapid cuts, non-diegetic inserts, and a kinetic use of lenses and the camera" (Goss 177). While the film is continuously fast-paced, it famously pauses halfway through its 3-hour running time as the characters sing along to Aimee Mann's "Wise Up" (Fig. 5). We witness the characters "overlap each other in their shared singing relationship to the same song and take each other's place, one after another, as transmitters of the music's power to undo, to make happen" (Toles 17). Anderson shifts the fast camerawork to slow tracking shots that either pull-toward or pull-away from the characters as each one reaches a low point in their narratives.

This shift in pace from fast to slow allows the audience to take a breath along with the characters. Anderson recalls that

> I was lost a bit, and on the headphones came Aimee singing "Wise Up." I wrote as I listened – and the most natural course of action was that everyone should sing – sing how they feel. In the best old-fashioned Hollywood Musical Way, each character, and the writer, began singing how they felt. This is one of those things that just happens, and I was either too stupid or not scared enough to hit "delete" once done. Next thing you know, you're filming it. (viii)

Including a musical element adds a further complication to the film's already spliced genres, including drama, comedy, romance, and thriller to a certain extent, via Donnie Smith's (William H. Macy) subplot of attempting to rob his employer. However, visually the sequence is neither out of place, nor feels detached from the narrative. Instead, it cements the various genres and themes explored throughout the multiple storylines. The camera moves even though the characters are static. Logic, in this scene, is abandoned for an emotional/atmospheric response as indicated by the director's testimony to not excise the sequence from the script.

The film's large cast, dizzying visual style, and narrative ambitions are perhaps the cementation of Anderson's early restless aesthetics. The father-son/daughter relationship explored in his previous two films is continued here. While this theme continues in *There Will Be Blood*, it reaches its apex in *Magnolia*. The film multiplies this theme through several relationships: Earl Partridge (Jason Robards), dying from cancer, is estranged from his misogynist, pick-up artist, motivational speaker son Frank T.J. Mackay (Tom Cruise); Child prodigy Stanley Spector (Jeremy Blackman) is bullied by his father (Michael Bowen) into participating in a quiz show; and finally, quiz show host Jimmy Gator (Philip Baker Hall) attempts to mend his relationship with his daughter, Claudia (Melora Walters), who has accused him of abuse since childhood. Notably, *Magnolia* reflects a personal loss in Anderson's life. His father died of cancer in 1997, the experience of which adds a sense of realism to Partridge's narrative. The film does not conclude all of the multiple storylines but instead employs numerous ellipses. Despite the lack of finality, *Magnolia* represents a conclusion to Anderson's early visual restlessness and sprawling narratives. The filmmaker once stated, "I really

Fig. 3 | *Boogie Nights*'s tracking shot – referencing Scorsese, 00:01:33. New Line Cinema, 1997.

Fig. 4 | Medium Close-up on Dirk Diggler (Mark Wahlberg), 02:13:39. *Boogie Nights* (New Line Cinema, 1997).

Fig. 5 | *Magnolia*'s "Wise Up" sequence, 02:19:28. New Line Cinema, 1999.

feel that *Magnolia* is, for better or worse, the best movie I'll ever make" (Mikulec), and it still remains Anderson's most personal film.

VISUALIZING CHAOTIC HARMONY: ROMANCE IN *PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE*

The grand narrative scale and dense thematic nature of *Magnolia* was abandoned for a romantic comedy starring Adam Sandler. Anderson noted in an interview with *The Guardian* that post-*Magnolia*, his next feature would be 90-minutes and crafted to appeal to a wider audience (Patterson). While many perceived this to be a radical departure for Anderson (Avery 76) if not a substantial risk for his burgeoning career, the film revealed new complexities of both director and star. Sandler, known for comedies that received very little critical acclaim, refashions his angry man-child identity. Film critic Roger Ebert notes that, "Given a director and a screenplay that sees through the Sandler persona, that understands it as the disguise of a suffering outsider, Sandler reveals depths and tones we may have suspected but couldn't bring into focus" (Ebert). Anderson does not shy away from Sandler's previous incarnations of an insecure, quick-tempered, juvenile adult but instead reconstitutes these traits to explore a character whose "masculinity is constantly threatened by a domineering home life" (76). Indeed, Sandler's Barry Egan is in constant retreat from his 7 domineering sisters, who undermine his masculinity at every turn, referring to him as "gay boy" to stir up his adolescent rage and maintain their torment. Egan's relationship is, in part, based on Anderson's own (positive) upbringing with multiple siblings (another reflection of "writing from the gut"). However, this personal experience is subverted for dramatic purposes, depicting Egan's relationship with his sisters as more hostile to feed the character's neurosis and violent outbursts.

Punch-Drunk Love's simplicity is perhaps the greatest departure for Anderson at this period in his career. Moving from a multi-narrative, 3-hour-plus running time to a more simplistic 90-minute boy-meets-girl romantic comedy featuring a small ensemble of cast and characters liberates Anderson. There is a more abstract visual approach that somewhat reduces the kinetic camerawork to key moments in the film. *Punch-Drunk Love* opens with a handheld wide shot, framing Egan at his desk in an empty warehouse office (Fig. 6).

The shot is sustained for more than a minute, only moving when Egan rises from the desk to walk outside. This is the antithesis to the "show-off" nature of *Boogie Nights*'s and *Magnolia*'s openings that feature rapid cinematography and quick editing. Anderson is reducing the visuals to their simplicity to focus on *one* character, framing Egan in a simplistic manner to highlight and visually subvert audience expectations of Sandler. Dressed in a blue suit and speaking in awkward dialogue on the phone reveals a less confident character from Sandler. The shot reveals a banal surface, where everything seems normal. Yet, within this wide shot are the shakes from the camera, suggesting that underneath this seemingly normal individual is a rupture building to explode; Sandler will unveil the short-temperedness we associate with the characters in his oeuvre but not in the manner we expect.

Egan is introduced to Lena Leonard (Emily Watson). Reluctant at first to engage in a romantic relationship, he gradually becomes infatuated by Leonard, her kind, open nature a contrast to his domineering sisters. The central conflict occurs when Egan calls a phone sex hotline and is blackmailed by its owner, Dean Trumbell (Philip Seymour Hoffman), into giving more money, an extension of thriller genre elements that Anderson has peppered in his previous works.

Anderson visualizes the deepening romance between Egan and Leonard by interspersing video art by Jeremy Blake between certain scenes throughout the film. The artworks resemble colour bars devised by The Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) to test luminance and chroma levels on television sets. The blend of colours, stretched across the screen, appear to be a non-linear element but are vital to Anderson's tone, atmosphere, and aesthetics. While colour bars are traditionally static, Blake's works feature moving and morphing reds, blues, and blacks, each of which are colours associated with Egan (blue), Leonard (red), and Trumbell (black). The interstitial artworks, ultimately, reflect Egan's "struggle to find the vitality and beauty of life within his drab surroundings. *Punch-Drunk Love* pushes past any notion of realistic narrative representation and instead toward an affective sense of abstract visual expression" (Sperb 168). Throughout the film, Egan's tie changes from blue to yellow, to purple, and finally, to red. The cold to warm colour scheme reflects Egan and Leonard's relationship. Following Egan's first meeting with Leonard, Blake's artwork (Fig. 7) appears roughly ten minutes into the narrative, foreshadowing the change in Egan from solitary figure to one with a romantic partner. However, the blurs between the colours suggest that this transition will not be clear or straightforward.

Visual expression of Egan's rage occurs during his first date with Leonard. After Leonard enquires about a childhood story of Egan throwing a hammer through a window – due to being called "gay boy" – Egan enters the restaurant's bathroom. His rage literally takes over the scene, distorting the audio as he attempts to dismantle the restaurant bathroom. Shot in a continuous, uncut take, the rage

Fig. 6 | *Punch-Drunk Love* opening shot – shakes on the camera, 00:00:31. Sony Pictures, 2002.

The mise-en-scène is a reflection of the pessimism within Plainview.

is played for both laughs and discomfort. The humor is punctuated with a quick cut of Egan returning to the table as if nothing had happened, resuming the date. Anderson's shift between rage and romance appeals to Sandler's fans. This explosive scene riffs on similar outbursts seen in *Happy Gilmore* (1996) and *The Wedding Singer* (1998), but the camera placed high above Sandler/Egan scrutinizes the violence, implying that the audience has encouraged this to occur only to be repelled by his inability to express himself in non-violent ways.

Throughout *Punch-Drunk Love*, Anderson maintains his references to New Hollywood filmmakers by incorporating Harry Nilsson's song "He Needs Me," composed for Altman's *Popeye* (1980). Originally sung in *Popeye* by Olive Oyl (Shelly Duvall) as she longs for the titular sailorman, Anderson applies the song to Egan's need to seek companionship with Leonard. The desperation of the character adds another facet to Egan, where both his fear of and longing for a relationship illustrates a figure "who apparently has difficulty standing on his or her own two feet, is construed as an impediment to one's own desire for freedom and emotional mobility" (Toles 62). The use of "He Needs Me," therefore, functions not only as an intertextual reference but also to service the characterization of the protagonist. While romantic comedies typically assure the audience of the cementation of the primary characters' relationship, or end "with the establishment of a normative domestic order, with the female lead returning to her place in the home" (Avery 77), Anderson instead concludes his film with a hint of ambiguity. In the final shot of Leonard, arms around Egan as he sits, the audience is left to interpret how they will function in a romantic relationship, which is made more cryptic by Leonard's announcement, "So here we go." As in *Magnolia*, this final moment is presented as an ellipsis rather than a definitive conclusion.

THERE WILL BE BLOOD AND A NEW ANDERSON

Finally, I want to focus on *There Will Be Blood*, emphasizing its shift in tone, genre, and aesthetics from Anderson's previous efforts. Certain visuals elements such as the use of long tracking shots and Steadicam are still present; however, the style here is drastically austere, meditative, and the telling is "leisurely and full of process: from the deliberately dark and fragmented prologue to the wildly excessive denouement" (Hoberman 163). Before examining visual departures, it is important to highlight the many collaborators within Anderson's filmography in terms of both cast and crew. Cinematographer Richard Elswit has been working with Anderson since *Hard Eight*; editor Dylan Tichenor joined the team on *Boogie Nights*; actors such as Reilly,

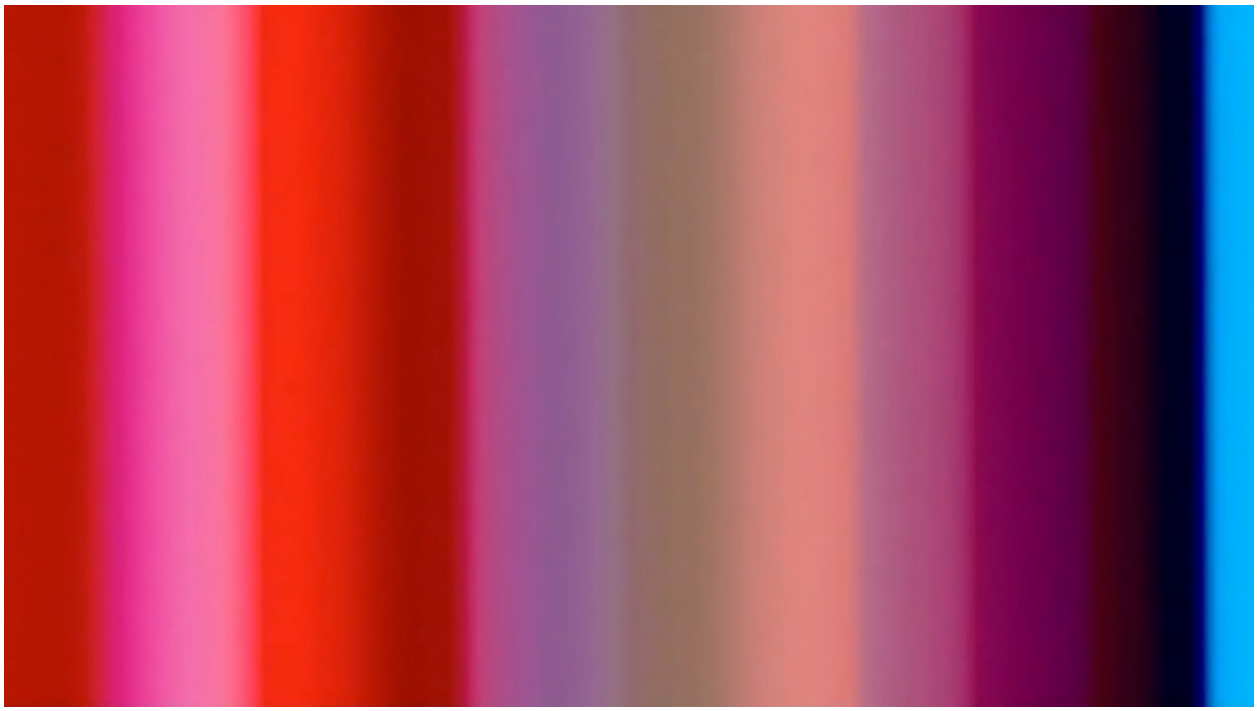

Fig. 7 | Jeremy Blake's artwork. *Punch-Drunk Love*, 00:09:57. Sony Pictures, 2002.

Hoffman, and Hall have continuously appeared throughout Anderson's first three films – Hoffman recurring in *Punch-Drunk Love* and *The Master*; musicians Michael Penn and Jon Brion produced the musical scores in the preceding works. *There Will Be Blood* marks the first collaboration with Day-Lewis, later to star in what is reputed to be his last on-screen performance: *Phantom Thread*. While Anderson's regular actors do not appear in *There Will Be Blood*, much of the crew were retained, with Elswit as cinematographer and Tichenor as editor. Brion was replaced with *Radiohead* guitarist, Jonny Greenwood, who would become Anderson's regular composer. With only slight changes in crew, a complete departure in familiar casting is worthy of note. Day-Lewis's performance is a contrast to Reilly, Hall, Wahlberg, and the ensemble of *Magnolia*. There are certain similarities to Sandler's depiction of Egan, but this is merely in the character's repressed rage that surfaces throughout.

Based loosely on the 1926 novel *Oil!* by Upton Sinclair, *There Will Be Blood* follows Daniel Plainview as he transforms himself from silver prospector to oil tycoon at the turn of 20th Century. The film is Anderson's first adaptation (later translating Thomas Pynchon's 2009 novel *Inherent Vice* to the screen) which may constitute certain deviations from his previous films. *There Will Be Blood* excises much of the source material's narrative and overt political themes, such as union organization and socialism. According to Modell, Anderson retained its examination of capitalism,

Anderson cements the two ideological elements in this scene, capitalism and religion, as one seeps into the other.

religion, and father-son relationship, adapting the first 150 pages of the book as a steppingstone rather than a full cinematic translation. The film was released during the Iraq war, which Anderson does not explicitly address, but its prescient themes of oil and religion, both depicted here as antagonisms toward one another rather than in alliance, render it his most politically minded film. As with Anderson's previous films, *There Will Be Blood* is a combination of genres, blending period-set drama with western elements and a new dimension: horror. Plainview's descent into paranoia and madness is harrowingly visualized. The film abandons the influences of Scorsese, Altman, and Demme, and instead pays homage to Stanley Kubrick, a figure who, while active during New Hollywood, was "on the margins of American filmmaking" (Kolker 106). Indeed, the film mirrors *The Shining* (1980) and several of Kubrick's other works. *There Will Be Blood* opens on a wide, establishing shot of hills in New Mexico, far from Anderson's usual San Fernando Valley locations. Greenwood's disorientating, terror-inducing score – influenced by Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki whose work featured heavily in

Fig. 8 | *There Will Be Blood* opening shot – New Mexico hills, 00:00:46. Paramount Vantage, 2007.

The Shining – sets the tone for the remainder of the film and expresses the "theme of contradiction in its display of a desert suffused simultaneously by ennui and the grandiosity of Manifest Destiny" (Cobb 165).

In many ways the opening shot mirrors *Punch-Drunk Love*; however, the camera is completely static. Instead, Anderson cuts to Plainview literally underneath the earth's surface in a pit, chipping away until he obtains silver. The film associates "Plainview with the earth—he is a primal creature, and culture only enters upon the discovery of natural resources" (Worden 123). A rupture occurs as Plainview blows the pit in an effort to pillage more from the ground. However, it weakens the structure, and he plummets, breaking his leg. The character's self-determination is exemplified when he pulls himself out of the pit and back into society. When having his silver assayed, Plainview has his shotgun by his side, demonstrating his distrust of those around him, a characteristic that becomes more overt as the narrative progresses.

The opening demonstrates that *There Will Be Blood*'s visual style is more tempered than Anderson's preceding films. Gone are the erratic, kinetic tracking shots, fast editing, and pouncing soundtrack. In place are static shots with minimal editing. Anderson is observing and documenting Plainview's prospecting practices in an unobtrusive manner. The visuals espouse a classicism. A key influence of the film is John Huston's *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* (1948), which Anderson reportedly watched repeatedly during production (Pilkington). The inspiration of both Kubrick and Huston "calm" Anderson's aesthetics, and the grand, multistranded narratives no longer appear to be a storytelling function or method which the filmmaker adopts. Further emphasizing a departure from previous stylings is the lack of dialogue. The opening fourteen minutes feature scarce, inaudible dialogue, a stark contrast to Anderson's prior "Tarantinoesque" exchanges between characters. For instance, *Hard Eight* introduces John and Sydney, the latter more talkative than the former that establishes their dynamic immediately; *Boogie Nights* features overlapping, barely audible dialogue between various characters in the nightclub; *Magnolia* includes snippets of conversation aided with a voiceover; *Punch-Drunk Love* has Egan awkwardly talking on the phone, unveiling his lack of confidence. Speech is not required at this point in *There Will Be Blood,* nor does Plainview need to, as he later states in the film, explain himself. Communication becomes a central element of Plainview when building his oil empire. During an extraction of oil at one of Plainview's self-made rigs, an accident kills one of his employees. The man leaves behind an orphaned son, and Plainview adopts the baby to project the image of his business as a family operation. We first hear Plainview speak, his "son" HW (Dillon Freasier) lurking behind him, as he attempts to sell his oil extracting services to a small community. Anderson remains in medium close-up on Plainview as he delivers his speech, only to change angle after Plainsview is interrupted by the desperate community. Anderson slowly pulls into Plainview as he speaks, drawing the audience into his pitch. It is a subtle camera move that demonstrates a tempered approach in stark contrast to the fast-tracking shots in *Boogie* and *Magnolia.*

Plainview is sold a location by Paul Sunday (Paul Dano) that is flourishing with oil near his family's ranch. Plainview and HW travel to Little Boston, where they are greeted and welcomed by the Sunday family. Plainview then meets Paul's identical twin, Eli (Dano). The theme of religion seeps in at this point; Eli, a preacher for the local church, demands that Plainview pay an exorbitant

Fig. 9 | Visual Gothic in *There Will Be Blood,* 01:53:35. Paramount Vantage, 2007.

amount of money for the ranch to help fund his church. Plainview sniggers, stating "That's a good one." The animosity builds between the two, not least when the new oil rig is constructed and an explosion occurs, crippling several men, and deafening HW. The sequence is Anderson's grandest set piece, where in narrative terms "events reach a dramatic or comedic high point" (Hellerman). The scene reintroduces the Steadicam; however, in this context it is used to capture to sense of confusion, following Plainview as he tries to control the fire as much as possible, and the "photography is so artfully rendered that there is a sense of immersion into the smoke and fire of the oil well eruptions" (Heyraud 180). In comparison to *Magnolia*'s set piece, the "Wise Up" sequence, *There Will Be Blood* is much more ferocious, moving Anderson into the realms of the classic epic but in a manner that is "both fearfully grandiose and wonderfully eccentric" (Hoberman 163). Yet, Anderson restrains the visualization after this sequence to bring the film's focus back to the characters.

The *mise-en-scène* is a reflection of the pessimism within Plainview. Jack Fisk's set design is lit by Elswit to reinforce the consistent sense of dread. One of the most powerful sequences is Planview's admission of his misanthropy, which is "reminiscent of the social Darwinistic theories prominent at the time that purported the benefits of the culling of the weak from society" (McQuillan and McQuillan 272). The minimalism in certain scenes amplifies the character. Illuminated by fire, he discusses his primary motivations: his internal competition, and wanting no one else to succeed. Unable and unwilling to cope with society, he longs to get away and be by himself. Anderson focuses on Plainview's face in medium close-up. The internal rage and contempt within are not erupting in the manner that Egan demonstrated, but instead

Postmodern aesthetics lead to the auteur theory being re-envisioned. A filmmaker that references others can adopt and drop techniques as their work progresses.

are delivered calmy – and more chillingly – in a reserved manner. The camerawork throughout the film can be described as "unostentatious postcard views that punctuate and intensify the three set-piece scenes of confrontation and humiliation" (James 34). These three set-pieces are instigated when Eli blames the eruption on Plainview for not allowing him to bless the well. Plainview beats Eli in front of his oil rig workers, humiliating him for not healing HW's deafness. In retaliation, Plainview is coerced into being baptized (Fig. 9), and Eli subsequently shames and smacks him for abandoning HW, having sent him away due to his condition.

The final set-piece occurs at the conclusion of the film. Several years later, having achieved his goal of getting away from civilization, Plainview lives as an alcoholic recluse in a vast mansion, not unlike Xanadu in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941). In many regards, this is the final iteration of father-son relationship Anderson would depict, having abandoned the theme in subsequent films. Its shattering, melodramatic, and devastating iterance here is the most callous Anderson illustrates in any of his films. Having revealed the truth to HW about his lineage,

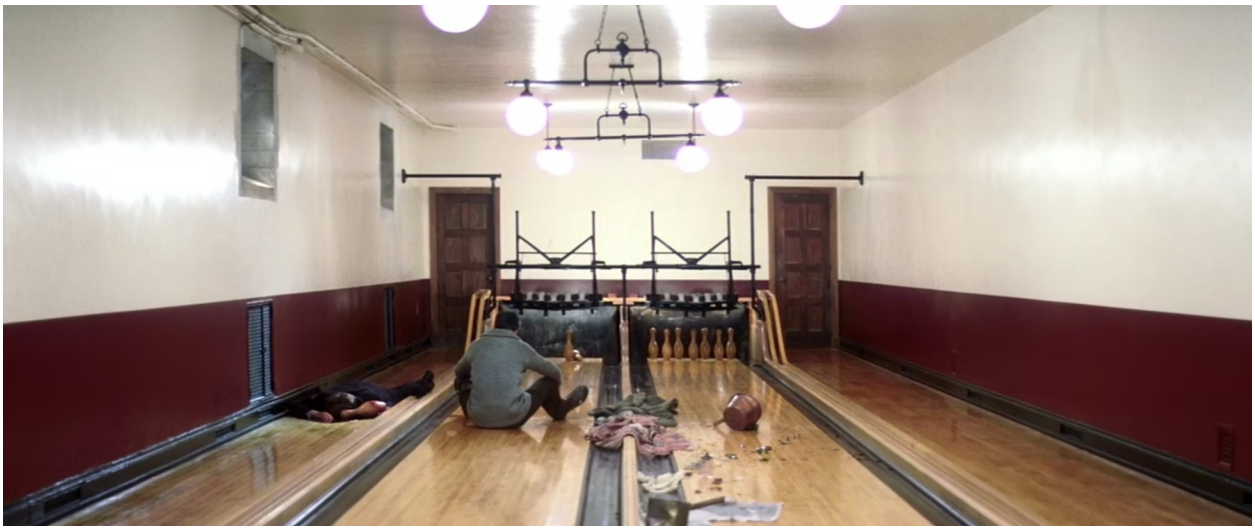

Fig. 10 | *There Will Be Blood*'s final scene – where religion and capitalism collide, 02:30:58. Paramount Vantage, 2007.

then berating him as a "Bastard in a basket," Plainview terminates their relationship. Eli visits to sell Plainview another oil prospect. Plainview feigns interest, and in exchange for the partnership coerces Eli to admit that he is a false prophet to demean him further. Plainview finally succumbs to his violent rage, chasing Eli around the bowling alley deep in the surface of the mansion, before bludgeoning him to death with a bowling pin (Fig. 10). Anderson cements the two ideological elements in this scene, capitalism and religion, as one seeps into the other as blood oozes out of Eli's lifeless body, touching Plainview's foot as he sits, out of breath. It is a stark concluding image that nonetheless refences the opening image of Plainview alone, chipping away at the earth, before a rupture occurs. The final line of dialogue, "I'm finished," leaves the character in ambiguity: Is he finished in these sense that he will be punished for the murder of Eli? Or just merely finished with this chapter in his life? In a postmodern manner, perhaps it is Anderson himself stating via Plainview we have reached the conclusion, and the possibility that the film may, in fact, finish his career – after all, *There Will Be Blood* is a profound departure from his previous work.

Anderson is one of a "new wave" of innovative, postmodern filmmakers that washed onto Hollywood's shores in the 1990s: one of the so-called Indiewood generation. Reflecting upon Jameson's frameworks of postmodernism, and the recurring characteristics of Kayhan postmodernist filmmaking, we can identify Anderson's cinema as one that is in constant flux. Though not as avant-garde or risky as New Hollywood, Indiewood's blend of independent and studio practices create an avenue for character-driven narratives to thrive. While there are intertextual references to not only his contemporaries but the New Hollywood filmmakers, Anderson is able to adopt similar visual, narrative, and character traits and refashion them into a distinctive body of work that maintains the presence of New Hollywood and "sustains it in fresh ways" (Bordwell 26). *There Will Be Blood*'s abandonment of multistranded narratives, multiple characters, and kinetic visual style. Finally, Anderson's personality is represented in the earlier work, from growing up in North Hollywood and experience of the San Fernando Valley (setting for *Boogie Nights* and *Magnolia*, to his vast amount of siblings (*Punch-Drunk Love*) that appears to be discarded in the more politically-oriented *There Will Be Blood*. *There Will Be Blood*'s multiple authors – Anderson, Sinclair, and Day-Lewis's towering, electric performance cannot be overlooked regarding the film's potency, perhaps constitute the departures in Anderson's early aesthetics. As *The Master*, *Inherent Vice*, and *Phantom Thread* continue to demonstrate, Anderson cannot be pigeonholed into one particular style or genre. ▪

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ONE FRAME AT A TIME