Slacker Joyce: James Joyce, Richard Linklater, and the Silent Re-Canonization of the Masterpiece

Layne M. Farmen

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Slacker Joyce: James Joyce, Richard Linklater, and the Silent Re-Canonization of the
Masterpiece

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Liberal Arts
Department of Verbal and Visual Arts
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Date of Approval:
October 26, 2016

Keywords: Modernism, Richard Linklater, James Joyce, Adaptation theory,
Appropriation, Film studies.

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Abstract

The filmography of Austinite Richard Linklater (as in, one that comes from Austin, Texas) is incredibly Joycean, and my argument is that Linklater makes Joyce’s work contemporary in both the realms of independent and big studio film-making. He is the greatest interpreter of Joyce in the 21st century, and he never mentions his name. Linklater both introduces Joycean themes to mainstream audiences who would never dream of taking on *Ulysses*, and encourages those familiar with Joyce to take a second look. Whether the best way to “save” Joyce study is through a focus on the source texts or their appropriations, Linklater chooses both options to great measure. While the regression into naming literary periods is somewhat cliché, Linklater demonstrates the malleable nature of the modernist text by “making it new” formally and ideologically. Linklater is extending the modernist project (specifically Joyce’s) by using explicit symbols and references to Joyce’s work, but with an entirely new form. Using the framework of adaptation provided by Linda Hutcheon in her seminal text *A Theory of Adaptation* will show that Linklater’s adaptation of Joyce is successful. However, in a stark difference to many of the adaptations discussed by Hutcheon in her text, Linklater’s appropriations are hidden by a shroud of interpretation and thus, the Joycean connections have never been discussed at length. What Linklater has done with Joyce is reminiscent
of what Joyce did with Homer. One should remember that Joyce intentionally removed
the chapter headings to *Ulysses*, shrouding for his audience the systemization of his own
text. Linklater does the same with the work of Joyce across all of his films, but most
specifically with *Slacker, Waking Life*, and *Boyhood*. 
Introduction: Grasping Hands With a Bloomsday Champion

“Today 16 of June 1924 twenty years after. Will anybody remember this date”—James Joyce

“...I mean there’s just this one instant, and that’s what we’re always in. And then she tells me that actually this is the narrative of everyone’s life—that, you know, behind the phenomenal difference, there is but one story, and that’s the story of moving from the ‘no’ to the ‘yes.’ All of life is like, ‘No thank you, no thank you, no thank you.’ Then, ultimately, it’s, ‘Yes, I give in. Yes, I accept. Yes, I embrace.’ I mean, that’s the journey—I mean, everyone gets to the ‘yes’ in the end, right?”—Waking Life

“Joyce, is good. He is a good writer. People like him because he is incomprehensible and anybody can understand him”—Gertrude Stein

Hailing from Austin, Texas, filmmaker Richard Linklater is perhaps the best interpreter of Modernist icon James Joyce that is working today. Intertextually standing on the shoulders of a literary giant, Linklater grasps hands with a Bloomsday champion to stage epics in a new, thrice-removed venue. The Ithacan hero of epic tradition has leaped from the ancient manuscript to the modernist novel, and now makes his way to the silver screen; Ithaca begat Dublin begat Austin (Texas).
While the regression into naming literary periods is somewhat cliché, Linklater demonstrates the malleable nature of the modernist text by “making it new” formally and ideologically. Linklater is extending the modernist project (specifically Joyce’s) by using explicit symbols and references to Joyce’s work, but with an entirely new form. Using the framework of adaptation provided by Linda Hutcheon in her seminal text *A Theory of Adaptation* will show that Linklater’s adaptation of Joyce is successful in that he does not appeal to “fidelity” to an original source, but instead to his own “creative autonomy” (20-21).¹ I am in complete agreement with Hutcheon and will make even more explicit the claim hinted at here and throughout her *Theory of Adaptation*: Fidelity to the source text in an adaptation is not criteria of success, but the first sign of failure.⁵ However, in a stark difference to many of the adaptations discussed by Hutcheon in her text, Linklater’s appropriations are hidden by a shroud of interpretation and thus, the Joycean connections have never been discussed at length. What Linklater has done with Joyce is reminiscent of what Joyce did with Homer. One should remember that Joyce intentionally removed the chapter headings to *Ulysses*, shrouding for his audience the systemization of his own text. Linklater does the same with the work of Joyce across all of his films, but most specifically with *Slacker, Waking Life*, and *Boyhood*.

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As an American studying James Joyce, attending Bloomsday in Dublin was an inevitability that came to fruition in the Summer of 2016.

Before my wife and I attended Bloomsday I was filled with a sense of inauthenticity and trepidation. Was I just some “yank” with my own ideas about their national treasure, unwelcome at the table of ideas because of my lack of knowledge of
Irish history and politics? I arrived having read *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, but I was merely halfway through *James Joyce*, the groundbreaking Ellmann biography. I was not quite up to date with my feminist critiques and lacked nuanced knowledge behind *Ulysses* on trial. I had read the “dirty” letters, but none of the others. My memorized passages consisted of the words “riverrun,” and “yes I said yes I will Yes.” My sometimes encyclopedic knowledge of Joyce’s early life (gospel as according to Ellmann) was surely mismatched with my general lack of knowledge of the terms of his death. How long would I be able to fake it?

Upon our foray into Ireland, commencing our immersive literary pilgrimage, we quickly stumbled upon one truth about Joyce’s work: No one reads it. Even Joyce fans do not read it. Every live-reading we attended was prefaced with the same confession: “I have not read *Ulysses.*” Members of the crowd of bouncing boater hats always laughed at this self-aware admission of guilt. They of course, had not read it either. Perhaps they would fail to provide the name of the character who dons the signature hat in Joyce’s masterpiece (hint, not Bloom). We attended a Bloomsday interview that began with the participants wearing the boaters, but then quickly discarding them. They followed this symbolic act with a discussion that covered a myriad of topics in front of a full house of excited hat-wearing Joyceans. The topic of Joyce was avoided like the plague.

To be fair, the wonderful members and workers/volunteers at the Joyce center⁶ had (mostly) read *Ulysses* in its entirety. Despite this, we never met a single Joyce scholar while in Ireland. After taking an immensely informative bus tour accompanied by performances of entire episodes of the text, I posed the soon-to-be-revealed-as-naïve question as to what scholarly work the guide had written on Joyce. With a laugh the
guide replied, “Oh, I work in Anthropology.” We met many Joyceans, and many scholars, but never the twain met. Their Stephen Dedalus-esque intellectualism pointed in other directions, but their Leopold-Bloomish passion embraced the work of his creator.

Is the lack of readership a problem? Though many have attempted to capture the active process of thought, (and many since have done this in ways Joyce does not) it can be argued that Joyce was the first to do it in such an audacious, bold, and raw manner. In his strange and effective “looking glass” he both glorifies his subject and empowers the “common man,” whilst putting his society’s faults on grand, sometimes embarrassing display. His monument to humanity is nuanced and in equal terms ugly, beautiful, sublime, real, and true. The ethical ramifications that would come from Joyce’s work being more widely read are staggering. One cannot help but imagine a more self-reflexive, mentally active, communal, and honest world.

In addition, Joyce excels beyond the pitfalls of the modernist movement that many place him in and works through the past problematically and thoroughly, in a sort of Lyotardian ritual. He refuses to indulge in the elitist isolation and historical rejection of the others who are being erased by history and devalued based on their out-of-date ideologies. In the age of Ezra Pound’s anti-Semitism, Joyce’s hero is a Jew. Joyce gravitates towards the marginalized instead of condescending to them. But his book is too damn difficult to escape its fate of relative obscurity. Like Infinite Jest, everyone has a copy of Ulysses, and no one has read it. The ethical contributions Joyce’s texts are currently making are limited, if not nonexistent.

The filmography of Austinite Richard Linklater (as in, one that comes from Austin, Texas) is incredibly Joycean, and my argument is that Linklater makes Joyce’s
work contemporary in both the realms of independent and big studio film-making. He is the greatest interpreter of Joyce in the 21st century, and he never mentions his name. Linklater both introduces Joycean themes to mainstream audiences who would never dream of taking on *Ulysses*, and encourages those familiar with Joyce to take a second look. Whether the best way to “save” Joyce study is through a focus on the source texts or their appropriations, Linklater chooses both options to great measure. It must be said that the degree to which Linklater’s films can be called “adaptations” of Joyce’s work is rather dubious. The three films that most directly embody the work of Joyce do not quite fit the definition of an adaptation as provided by Hutcheon as: “An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works” (8) in that the work Linklater “adapts” is not directly recognizable as an adaptation. To the same effect, as mentioned before, Linklater’s work has not been generally “acknowledged” as a series of adaptations of the work of Joyce. The influence of *Ulysses* as a model of the literary derivé has been pointed out by Rob Stone in *The Cinema of Richard Linklater: Walk, Don’t Run*, and Luke McKernan points out in his “Joyce, Film and Metaphor” many Joycean connections in Linklater’s “Before” trilogy. A review of the film *Boyhood* written by Sophia Stein for *Cultural Weekly* bears the title “*Boyhood*- Linklater’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.” Despite these recognitions, Linklater’s work will never be attached to Joyce in the way that Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* is forever connected to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, or in the way *10 Things I Hate About You* is recognized as a contemporary *Taming of the Shrew*.

Hutcheon provides a different criterion for adaptation in which Linklater’s work fits much better: “An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (8). It
also fits better with the definition of “paraphrase” given by John Dryden, also provided by Hutcheon in her text: “John Dryden is quoted as defining paraphrase as ‘translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view… but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified’” (17). The difference here is that the author is kept in view by the film-maker alone, nigh undetectable by the audience.

Linklater takes the “sense” of Joyce, but almost none of his words. The brief connections others have made between Linklater and Joyce are merely scratching the surface, as the entire filmography can be described as a series of clouded appropriations just as Joyce’s work was to Homer’s Odyssey. Is this hidden adaptation, or silent enunciation the best way for Joyce’s work to reach new audiences? Perhaps the best way to encounter Joyce is to not encounter him at all. Some people own Ulysses. Much more have seen School of Rock.

The main thrust of the argument will follow Slacker, Waking Life, and Boyhood, each as the “working through” and re-canonization of Ulysses, Finnegans Wake, and Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man respectively. Slacker, Linklater’s first successful piece, itself an example of the “cinema derive” largely inspired by Joyce’s work specifically, also includes a scene where a band of men, one recently spurned by a former lover, read from Molly Bloom’s soliloquy before throwing a tent and a typewriter into a lake. The film moves about much like the episode “The Wandering Rocks” in a sort of relay, moving from conversation to conversation in a drift around Austin; this cinematic encapsulation can even more boldly make the Joycean claim that the city used as subject can be rebuilt using art. Using Brian McHale’s essay entitled “Constructing (post)modernism: Ulysses” as a framework for interpreting Slacker shows that both
works bridge the gap between modernist and post-modern text, as well as providing interplay between “two world-versions, the authoritative one and the one constructed by the character’s consciousness…” (45). While Ulysses provides this interplay between the sometimes authoritative exposition and the projections of Bloom’s interior monologue, Slacker consistently demonstrates this interplay through dialogue, as there is present in every discourse in the film a figure representing creative constructions of the world, and a figure (often bored or half-listening) representing the authoritative, established worldview.

In Joyce’s legendary and daunting work of esoterica Finnegans Wake, which would have proven impossible for this aspiring academic to read if it were not for the early work of the Luke-Skywalker-toting-monomything Joseph Campbell, the collaborative online project Waywords and Meansigns which sets each section of the anti-novel to music, and the rapid rendering of the novel by Patrick Healy, finds its home in Linklater’s philosophical rotoscopic odyssey Waking Life. Not only can both works be combined in a sort of cute way (“Finnegans Waking Life”), but both are remixed versions of both of their ideological predecessors which take place during the course of one day (Ulysses and Slacker). These works take place at night, in the language of the dream. As metaphor and symbol are always shifting in Finnegans Wake, ideological meaning and philosophy ultimately fail to pin down Wily Wiggins’ character in Linklater’s film.

In the interest of composing a coming-of-age narrative that in equal parts avoids the clichéd beats of past cinematic exploits (there is no “standing up to the bullies” to be found), and celebrates the slow-but-fast shift of time in a subtle, more non-linear way, the
connection between Linklater’s *Boyhood* and Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is not difficult to argue. Indeed, the resemblance is unmistakable. Though the *Portrait* is divided into chapters, each chapter comprises years without distracting exposition. The general lack of conventional exposition is the main factor which unites both of these works, as the subjects within breathe to life more readily. We forget the storyteller because he refuses to interject. The crucial difference that this later chapter will further develop is that the *Portrait* is an ode to the future, setting up both Joyce himself and his character Stephen for the greatness yet to come (for Stephen this greatness is self-reflexively called into question). Linklater with his *Boyhood*, staying consistent with the critical through-lines found in his entire body work by scholars Rob Stone and David T. Johnson, crafts a love letter to the present, a celebration of the “now.”

It is worth noting that to argue for the reintroduction of past art through interdisciplinary means in no way diminishes the importance, beauty, and need for the original texts being re-contextualized. It has been a personal project of mine to convince others in the university system, students and professors alike, to take on the challenge of Joyce’s work, as I truly believe no other expression of language has achieved quite what Joyce has therein. Just as an extended episode listening to “The Beatles” exclusively has somewhat unfortunately (perhaps permanently) done considerable damage to the rest of the repertoire on my iPod, what Joyce has done in my life, for better and worse, is to initiate the process of retroactively and pre-emptively daring other texts to affect me in the same overwhelming capacity. To suggest a new audience through interdisciplinary means and the adaptations of a newer artist is a way to assert the power of the old, not to
take its place. This is argued by Hutcheon as she states: “Stories also evolve by adaptation and are not immutable over time” (31).

**Rescuing Joyce From Obscurity**

In the effort to introduce a new method to shift the focus of Joyce study to new audiences, it must be recognized that many such attempts have been made to “rescue” Joyce from both the exclusively-educated and from flat-out obscurity. Most notably, critical companions by Anthony Burgess and Declan Kiberd reframe the book back into what they see as its actual context: the epic for ordinary people. Kiberd focuses on the idea of the text as a piece of “wisdom literature,” in his well-informed critical piece *Ulysses and Us*, suggesting that Bloom is a model of the “blend of imagination and practicality, of theory and practice.” *Ulysses* is a book which “suggests concord rather than eternal enmity between poet and citizen” (13). Following the provocative, albeit obviously titled opening essays of the text, Kiberd goes on to his analysis of each of the eighteen episodes, each categorized into a series of tasks that are facets of ordinary life (Learning, Walking, Waking, Dying, Reporting, etc). Kiberd’s incredible wealth of knowledge about Joyce and Irish history among many other realms is undeniable, and for the already “converted” it serves as a wonderful and informational reminder of how seminal a text *Ulysses* really is. I personally love Kiberd’s text, as he consistently looks at the eighteen episodes from refreshingly new and exciting angles. But with this said, questions of audience linger in my mind throughout the entire journey: is Kiberd telling other scholars how helpful *Ulysses* can be to ordinary people? If the average citizen isn’t going to read *Ulysses*, a book of commentary on Ulysses, no matter how laymen-friendly,
seems like a hard sell. It is reminiscent of the Coen brother’s film *Barton Fink*, in which a playwright writes drama about the common man, for elite audiences.

Similarly, Anthony Burgess, in a much earlier example, writes his own book, *ReJoyce* about how Joyce should be read by ordinary readers. Unfortunately, his audience seems to be the scholarly community as well. He states that his “book does not pretend to scholarship” (9), but again, it is not difficult to imagine the actual audience for a text that begins with jokes about Norse mythology, Marxist allegory, and the “misuse of stretto in the ‘Sirens’ episode” (9). In Burgess’s words: “Joyce’s aim was the ennoblement of the common man, and this could best be achieved by letting the common man speak for himself….It is this preoccupation, even obsession, with the ordinary that should endear him to ordinary readers” (25). Ordinary readers should read *Ulysses*, Burgess says, to his scholarly audience. One imagines scholars using this text as an inspiration to a sort of religious evangelism, going door-to-door and passing out tracts to produce converts to the new Bloomusalem. It could be argued that the process of introducing students to Joyce’s text is one way that the university can introduce society to one of its greatest benefactors. Indeed, one of my long-term academic goals is to teach exclusively on Joyce and appropriation. However, it must be mentioned that higher education is an expense that many cannot afford. Do only certain classes in society have access to the benefits of Joyce scholarship? And even if the lectures are public and not exclusive to the university, will Joyce lectures find audiences beyond the category of those already educated enough to want to attend such lectures in the first place?

The process of writing books to suggest to scholars all of the reasons *why Ulysses should be read* by the non-scholar is simply an ineffective way to rescue Joyce from the
death of canonization and obscurity. This discussion thus far, as well as the two aforementioned books, hinge on the problematic binary of ordinary/scholar, which seems to recall some of the modernist elitism that *Ulysses* denies. The project of rescuing Joyce’s work from the realm of the university takes the risk of re-inscribing the binary between ordinary/scholar, smacking of a sort of regressive Robin Hood vigilantism of stealing from the “rich,” and dispersing to the “poor.” This begins to explain the confusion of audience that can be found in both *ReJoyce* and *Ulysses and Us*. In their attempts to bridge the “common” to the “academic” they reinforce the power relation between both. Because of the difficulty of Joyce’s work it seems an impossible task to introduce it to a wider readership without reinforcing the very dynamic that is attacked in his masterpieces of language. To be fair to Kiberd, the plight he describes is not simply that of “rescuing” Joyce from the university. He describes that Joyce’s work is being lost on academia as well:

> It was first lost to those readers even as it triumphed in bohemia and then in the academy; but today it is lost also to most students, lecturers and intellectuals. Many of the people who read Joyce now are called “Joyceans” and appointed as specialists in university departments, most of whose other members would never dream of attempting *Ulysses* (7).

While this expression of the trepidation surrounding the text in university departments undermines Kiberd’s larger point that *Ulysses* should be reclaimed by the “ordinary readers,” his diagnosis of the lack of the relevance of Joyce to the uneducated is right on target. What Linklater demonstrates is that adapting source material in a shrouded manner is a much more effective way to reach new audiences with the ideological
benefits and stylistic innovations of an earlier genius. He is, in essence, standing on the shoulders of a giant, while wearing a tremendous trench coat. It takes the process of deeply looking to see Joyce standing underneath.

**The “New Pluralism”**

Using a Joycean lens to interpret Linklater’s work and reciprocally looking at Joyce through the work of his most direct interdisciplinary successor is a cogent exercise in the *now* because of a new openness of film criticism: the resurgence of the plurality of ideas. The project of looking at Linklater’s work through a modernist, specifically Joycean lens, is becoming recently more compatible with the growing sense of plurality in film criticism. David T. Johnson, author of one of the three books exclusively concerning Linklater’s life and work, contributes an article to the *Film Quarterly* dossier on the filmmaker, in which he uses the overall attitude demonstrated by Linklater to establish what is necessary for success in the “new pluralism” in film criticism (38). To define the idea of “pluralism” he cites Miriam Bratu Hansen, who writes in her foreword to *Cinema and Experience*, that “there no longer seems to be any ruling paradigm, but rather a plurality—and healthy eclecticism—of theories and methodologies, ranging from phenomenological to Deleuzian, Wittgensteinian, Cavellian, cinemetrical” (37). Johnson also notes this new attitude towards film criticism in Robin Wood’s chapter on Linklater’s *Before Sunrise* in the text *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond*. Johnson hears in this chapter “a willingness to accept more than one perspective on the film” which also corresponds to Wood’s more famous “Ideology/Genre/Auteur” in which he “argued for a mode of ‘synthetic’ criticism’ that would allow for multiple, if
incompatible voices, in its attempt to use, in the same study, the three main critical traditions named in the title” (38).

Johnson thinks Linklater’s work is extremely important in navigating this new pluralism, or synthetic criticism, because Linklater sees the importance of the “glorification of the amateur’s sensibility and the need for the professional’s guidance” (38). By embracing this duality in his own films, he represents an openness to the importance of varying ideas simultaneously. What Johnson is looking towards in his optimistic vision for film criticism is the idea of “allowing the space for pluralism, but encouraging, equally, the impulse toward exchange.” He also remarks that “a mindset, or a temperament, of cross-disciplinary curiosity, one that, short of initiating such dialogue, would at least require more active and attentive practices of reading and listening well outside one’s own immediate interests” (40). Applying fields outside of one’s immediate interest opens the door for Literature to speak in the realm of film, and vice versa.

Johnson uses the through-lines of temporality and Romanticism to discuss Linklater’s work in Richard Linklater,²⁰ and Rob Stone in the text Walk, Don’t Run views each of Linklater’s films as “a Cubist portrait of the cinema of Richard Linklater with each film a fragment and all those fragments resulting in inevitable incompleteness” (191). My through-line is to track Linklater’s filmography as a series of shrouded adaptations and interpretations of the work of James Joyce. According to Wood’s “synthetic criticism,” the sometimes incompatible voices of Romanticism, Cubism, and Joycean critique can combine in a profitable conversation about one of America’s finest, most diverse and prolific auteurs working today. Of course, though the studies of Johnson and Stone track Linklater’s entire filmography, this study only looks at three of his most
recognized and significant works. And though *Slacker, Waking Life,* and *Boyhood* are admittedly more independent ventures with smaller audiences than Linklater’s big studio fare, the same Joycean elements at play in these three are also important in his mainstream work. This will certainly need to be a feature of a different study.

**Linklater as Appropriator**

The reason Linklater’s use of Joyce is particularly significant is due to its silence: the appropriation is guised, only to be found under the surface. This allows the modernist text to live and breathe in big studio comedies, targeting audiences that would never purposely encounter *Ulysses or Finnegans Wake.* In terms of adaptation theory, there are several differences that set Linklater apart from others engaged in adapting/appropriating the work of others. In a provocative contribution to the text *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation,* Douglas Lanier, using a framework from Deleuze and Guattari (DG) divides adaptations into two groupings: the “rhizomatic,” and the “arboreal” (27-28). He explains the distinction succinctly in this way:

An arboreal structure—or, as DG would have it, ‘the root book’—traces its ideas and forms back to a single source: a master author, a classic text, a foundational idea, an historical reality…A rhizomatic structure, by contrast, has no single or central root and no vertical structure. Instead, like the underground room system of rhizomatic plants, it is a horizontal, decentered multiplicity of subterranean roots that cross each other, bifurcating and recombining, breaking off and restarting (28).

The appropriations of Linklater exist dubiously between the idea of “arboreal structure” and “rhizomatic,” and it is important to note that these terms shift significantly when we
are talking about Joyce instead of Shakespeare. Lanier notes when discussing his framework that “If we conceive of our shared object of study not as Shakespeare the text but as the vast web of adaptations, allusions and (re)productions that comprises the ever-changing cultural phenomenon we call ‘Shakespeare,’ the rhizome can offer a compelling theoretical model” (29). However, I would argue that when we discuss Joycean “adaptations, allusions and (re)productions” we are pulling from a web that cannot be described as “vast.” Joyce does not possess the sheer cultural capital that Shakespeare does and applying him to the same framework cannot work in the same way. When Lanier exclaims that “Shakespeare’s imbrication with cultural processes of adaptation is, in other words, visible to modern audiences as never before” (23), I cannot help but bemoan the fact that this cannot be said of Joyce at this cultural moment. Thus, Linklater’s films cannot be placed firmly in place between the binary “arboreal/rhizomatic,” but they do tend to lean one way or the other.

As explained before, Linklater’s work cannot be defined as “adaptation” under the criteria given by Linda Hutcheon, but it does fit a similar description to the “rhizomatic work” Strange Illusion, described by Lanier as being “rife with resonances of Hamlet” despite the fact that it “never cites Shakespeare’s text directly” (32). To make the comparison with Linklater I would argue that Slacker, Waking Life, and Boyhood are “arboreal” to the effect that they derive their structure and ideology in large part from one source text. However, they appear more “rhizomatic” to the effect that they are “rife with resonances” without explicitly suggesting Joyce (with the exception of the direct use of Ulysses in a scene of Slacker). On the spectrum of intentionality (which matters little), it can still be said that the three films given focus in this study directly connect with a
respective text from Joyce, whereas the rest of Linklater’s filmography interacts more rhizomatically with Joycean elements. Though *Slacker* operates much like *Ulysses*, *School of Rock* is simply connected to Joyce through Linklater’s wandering camera, and the joyous bucking of the establishment. For Lanier and DG, “Rhizomatic relations involve ‘the apparallel evolution of two beings that have absolutely nothing to do with each other’ (10)” (27). *Before Sunrise* has nothing to do with the work of Joyce, but it takes place on Bloomsday, the day that James and Nora first fell in love. It therefore evolves towards Joyce’s work and allows Joyce’s work to evolve towards itself, without being connected to a single source text.

Though this project only tracks Linklater’s more “arboreal” Joycean influence in three of his major works, the question needs to be addressed in full: why does Joyce need appropriation into new art? What specific benefits can society garner from Joyce’s body of work, and in turn Linklater’s? In the Introduction to *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin discuss appropriation as an ethical act that involves a certain responsibility:

> We notice that conceiving of ethics as a practice puts just as much, if not more, burden on reception than on production, in keeping with Levinas’s claim that the ethical subject reacts and responds. Not only those who act but those who watch and hear are charged with ethical responsibilities; it is the audience who, upon exiting the theater and its presentation of make-believe action, must use their interpretive experience to make choices in the world (7).
The fact that Linklater’s mainstream work connects to a much larger audience than those who encounter Joyce, coupled with the reality that Linklater’s filmography specifically has a distinct relationship to ethical living in society, makes him Joyce’s most important interpreter. Just as Joyce felt that his work was an expression of tough-love, a looking glass for his people to look into that revealed both beauty and ugliness, Linklater is extracting what he sees as good culture by portraying his homeland objectively, with the same love/hate sort of idealism. Through the visceral, the crude, and the authentic rendering of the human spirit, Linklater and Joyce are both passionate defenders of the ethos of their time. What can be left to other studies is to track this same Joycean projection through Linklater’s more mainstream, rhizomatic works, to argue even further for his embodiment of Joyce’s cultural relevance. We see Linklater’s idealism through his fascination with baseball, and his respecting of progressive American sentiments such as multi-culturalism, functional single-parent homes, empathy, and the devil-may-care attitude displayed as a condition of youth in *Dazed and Confused*. He fights from multiple angles, striking down the horrific consequences of industrialization and the commodification of American culture in *Fast Food Nation*, and attempting to resuscitate the both dazed and confused education system of modern times with a Jack Black-sized defibrillator and a healthy dose of Metal. He uses Joyce without enunciation and thus, in a sense, tricks his audiences into Joycean study over the course of twenty films. This study will track three, and seventeen remain for further study.
Chapter 1: Dublin/Austin, Authoritative/Constructed

“It’s like, you’re just pasting together these bits and pieces from your authoritative sources. I don’t know, I’m beginning to suspect there’s nothing really in there.”—Has Faith in Groups, from Slacker

Richard Linklater’s *Slacker* is a re-working of Joyce’s *Ulysses*: bringing the ideological implications of the internal monologue to dialogue, but mirroring its progression from day to night, from stability to chaos. Though *Slacker* is an indie film with a much smaller audience than Linklater’s big studio fare, it puts Austin, Texas on the map artistically, existing as a cultural encapsulation similar to what Joyce has done with Dublin, and in this way finds new audiences using Joycean methodology. Linklater is demonstrating the process of what Joyce appropriation looks like in the twentieth century and beyond, by re-creating his work in a different spatial context. In this way he brings Joyce to new places, new audiences, without taking them through the actual work directly. Because of the difficulty of modernist text, as well as some of the elitism found elsewhere with other artists (but sometimes with Joyce, especially in *A Portrait*), what Linklater is doing, capturing the *sense*\(^{22}\) of Joyce without an abundance of direct references, is the best way to breathe fresh life into work from this period of experimentation. Using Brian McHale’s model for a hybrid reading of *Ulysses* will provide the stylistic framework in which *Slacker* can be compared as an appropriation. In
addition, using the work of several scholars working within adaptation theory will help to situate Linklater’s work in his use of Joycean text.

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Every time I watch *Slacker* I can’t seem to wipe the grin off my face. Throughout Linklater’s first successful film I am constantly immersed in the conversation, wishing that my drunken debates over wings on Tuesdays with friends were half as interesting as the rambling done by his Austin cast: transcribing like Dostoevsky, selling pap smears, deconstructing the “Smurfs.” So much of the movie works for me because of how close to home it hits. I always laugh aloud when character “Ultimate Loser” responds to being questioned about where he’s heading: “Oh, I’ve got some band practice in about… (looks at watch-less wrist) five hours, so…figure I’d…mosey on out.” There was a wonderful time in my life where a band practice never seemed more than five hours away, but I never had the audacity to use it as an excuse.

The whole thing is sold from the very beginning by the director himself. Linklater, or “Should Have Stayed at the Bus Station” is simply a joy to listen to, starting our cinematic journey by musing on multiple realities with a disinterested cab driver. It is almost impossible to resist the impulse to smile and nod along, and when he asks if we “know what he means,” we nod yes, even if we haven’t the foggiest. This is the proper attitude to equip for this film. Conducting an interview for *The Guardian*, Simon Hattenstone describes speaking with Linklater as “like being in one of his movies. The conversation starts in the middle, and you don’t have a clue how you got there.” He later describes: “At 55, Linklater looks little different from the young man he was in *Slacker*…Nor does he sound any different; there are the singsong sentences that often rise
towards the end, as he asks one of those big questions that have been nagging away at him all his life” (Hattenstone). The humor of the film largely comes from the seemingly purposeless wandering through such “big questions,” and the audience is in equal parts frustrated by the musing, and entertained by attentively listening along. We are torn between empathy and ridicule, and each audience member will vacillate between them differently throughout the course of the film.

Though Linklater portrays many of the characters in a humorous light, in no way does this mean he isn’t taking his subjects seriously. Rob Stone distills the message from Slacker in this way, by comparing it to the form of the dérive: “Like slacking, the dérive is a means of empowerment, a therapeutic technique and a strategy of urban occupation. The drifter/slacker does not evade duties and responsibilities out of laziness but out of dedication to more spiritual aims” (29). Stone works through the friction between empathy and ridicule throughout the film by finding an optimistic lesson, in spite of the character flaws of the many street-walkers:

Even so, self-indulgence, sloth and arrogance is exhibited by several of the characters in Slacker (as well as by Joyce’s Leopold Bloom)...Nevertheless, Slacker is ultimately an optimistic film in which street-level interaction between humans is still mostly enjoyed in a world before mobile phones and social networking websites transformed interpersonal communication (29).

If Slacker is in equal parts an anti-establishment manifesto and a gallery of court jesters, or like Stone asserts elsewhere, a warning against the dangers of free time,23 but also a testament to a pre-internet community, then it is a hybrid of many sorts. Its hybridity is
similar to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, in that this work too vacillates between ridicule and empathy, and is a testament to community and memory, both having been compromised (for better or worse) by rapidly evolving technology. Joyce’s “finely polished looking glass” (said of *Dubliners*, but carried into *Ulysses*) was difficult for Ireland to accept because it both revealed the citizen’s absurdity and dignity alike. Both this and Linklater’s looking glass are hybridizations also because they bridge a gap between modernist and post-modern text, stability and instability, reality and the dream-state.

The similarities do not end there. Just as Bloom was a middle-class extension of the epic hero, the wandering camera exists as a meta-extension of the character of Bloom. The difference for a viewing audience is that the interior monologue provided as the body text of *Ulysses* is our own to compose in *Slacker*. In *Ulysses* we hear Bloom’s internal musing on a funeral: “More sensible to spend the money on some charity for the living. Pray for the repose of the soul of. Does anybody really? Plant him and have done with him. Like down a coalshoot. Then lump them together to save time” (Joyce 113). In *Slacker* we see the character “Hitchhiker Awaiting True Call” musing on a funeral he just came from, but the judgment for the proceeding is our own. As the movie progresses, so does the shifting judgment of the audience. What do we think about the deadbeats, activists, café workers and stoned philosophy students as they linger in espresso bars and nightclubs? Just as Joyce presents us with the abstract thinking intelligencia of his city through Stephen Dedalus, in addition to the earthy, everyman Bloom, Linklater includes both the over-educated and underworked college-town inhabitants of Austin, as well as the blue collar working class, such as the two men toiling away at their cars and lending each other spark plugs. The same fate meets both of the texts, as *Ulysses* is usually seen
by its detractors as hopelessly academic because of the first three Stephen episodes, and *Slacker* is remembered more for its pretentiously verbose cast-members than for its mechanically inclined figures.

If Joyce is experimenting with form across his 18 episodes, Linklater is conducting experiments with personality, arranging his vignettes not through different forms, symbols, colors, or body parts, but instead with seemingly random assortments of colorful Austinites. Drawing the parallel between Austin and Dublin, he focuses on the idea of the wandering, as this is the only way to be immersed “in an otherwise unknowable culture” (Stone, 28). Linklater is stooing into the depths of a different sort of counter-culture than Joyce in his text, but one only needs to flip through *Dubliners* to find many examples of Linklater’s “slackers.” This chapter will showcase *Slacker* as an appropriation of *Ulysses* through its hybridity, its direct reference to the source text, and its status of acting as a bridge between modernism and post-modernism, stability and the fundamentally unstable.

**McHale and Hybridity**

The first parallel that brings the two works together is that they both take place over the course of a single day. This structure not only brings forth a comparison that is strictly narrative but one more importantly, stylistic. To look at *Ulysses* and *Slacker* both in terms of style one first has to begin with a good framework for a contemporary reading of Joyce’s masterpiece, and one of the most important contributions to the study of the text is from scholar Brian McHale in his work *Constructing Postmodernism*. For McHale, *Ulysses* is essentially hybrid, both a seminal modernist text and postmodern bridge text. McHale argues for a reading of *Ulysses* that divides the book neatly in half, representing
a sort of bridge between his more solidly modernist work (*Dubliners, A Portrait*) and his postmodern experimentation in *Finnegans Wake*. In the same way, Linklater’s film resists categorization, echoing McHale’s concern with periodization in general: “…in a certain sense, something *is* wrong with the modernism vs postmodernism opposition, and periodization in general is *all* wrong. But only in a certain sense, in terms of a certain conception of periodization” (43). For McHale, Joyce’s work represents both a breakdown of, and reinforcement of the idea of periodization. In this sense, Linklater’s first masterpiece lives in the same dubious territory.

To begin with McHale’s modernist reading of the first half, the concept and method of Joyce’s “free indirect discourse” is drawn out, focusing on two important parts: the “mobility of consciousness” and the “stability of presented world.” To fully explain:

Here the reader is shuttled between, on the one hand, sentences directly presenting what passes in the character’s mind, and indirectly presenting (or refracting) the outside world; and, on the other hand, authorial (and authoritative) sentences directly projecting that world (45).

In the first half of Joyce’s novel (crucially, during the day), the stability of the world is what makes the work decidedly modernist. While Bloom’s mind is constructing along in this way, “This is the very worst hour of the day. Vitality. Dull, gloomy: hate this hour. Feel as if I had been eaten and spewed,” it is followed by the authoritative rendering of the world: “The sun freed itself slowly and lit glints of light among the silver ware in Walter Sexton’s window opposite by which John Howard Parnell passed, unseeing” (Joyce 165). After this digression we’re right back inside Bloom’s head: “There he is: the
brother. Image of him. Haunting face” (165). The difference between this and Linklater’s film is that Joyce’s method is largely interior monologue, sometimes interrupted by an “Other” that barges in to Bloom’s space, forcing a conversation (like McCoy, in the fourth episode), or a third-person description of the setting. Of course there are episodes more characterized by dialogue, such as “Hades,” but this is not the unifying method—Bloom’s thoughts are given prominence in the first half of the novel. *Slacker* of course turns this form upside-down, trading the interior monologue for a dialogue that runs through the entire film. When characters are alone we can guess at their interior monologue, but it is never revealed. Even with this trade-off, the formula of modernism as presented by McHale is all here, albeit in slightly different capacities.

McHale’s “two world-versions,” authoritative/constructed, are represented in *Ulysses* as the *actual world* given through exposition, and *projections of that world* from Bloom’s own mind. In the first half of *Slacker* there are many examples of a dialogue between two figures, one representing the often silent observing, (sometimes failing to observe) authoritative world, and one representing the “distortions” (45) of a consciousness that looks at the world through a non-conventional lens. Investigating each of the conversations held in the film reveals both representations, to sometimes hilarious effect. This interplay is demonstrated in the first five minutes of the film and works in this way: in the first vignette a young Richard Linklater or “Should Have Stayed at the Bus Station” as named in the credits, attempts to discuss his lucid dreams and the idea of multiple realities stemming out from each act of choice in his life, with a silent cab driver. The actively constructing consciousness of Linklater often stops to ask questions of the driver, who himself represents the authoritative pragmatic view of the world.
Seemingly unfettered by the consistent lack of response, Linklater simply continues his discourse. The humor of the scene comes from the friction between the authoritative/constructed ideologies represented by both of the characters, and it doesn’t hurt that the driver looks hopelessly, amusingly bored while Linklater speaks on about the potential realities that could have been created in *The Wizard of Oz*. The driver never nods or grins.

**Figure 1: First Dialogue.** The two individuals pictured here are representative of the mobility of world-construction (Linklater on left), and the stability of the authoritative view of the world (cab driver on right) (*Slacker*).

Of course it is impossible for either figure to actually represent the authoritative world, but one could also argue that is impossible to argue for the existence of the “stability of the presented world” anyway; however, according to McHale one must presume this stability in order to engage with modernist text: “The corollary of mobility of consciousness is stability of presented world: if the presented world outside consciousness is not presumed to be stable, we have no background against which to
gauge the relative motion of consciousness, and our sense of its mobility is dissipated” (45). In *Ulysses*, the stability of the outside world is what allows for our enjoyment of Bloom’s projections. In *Slacker*, the stability of one figure in the dialogue (cab driver) consistently is what allows us to enjoy the projections of the other one (Linklater). Stability is always present in the dialogue while mobility is allowed to bounce across ideas.

Not only does the interplay between stability and instability discussed above allow the audience to witness a huge variety of attempts at world-construction and meaning-making, but it creates the humor that drives the film forward. The audience is in equal parts intrigued by the constructor, and amused by the silence of the subject representing the authoritative. Just as Joyce bounces back and forth between the stable world and the mobility of consciousness, the audience, while viewing *Slacker*, can bounce between both representations based on their own beliefs about meaning and the world. Perhaps we are on board with Linklater’s musing about the possibility of multiple realities, but completely turned off later in the film by a JFK conspiracy theorist, and choose to view the world through the silent authoritative lens. Examples of this interplay drive the film, and abound as we drift from conversation to conversation as if we are involved in a theoretical, non-linear relay race around the city of Austin.

**Linklater’s Telemachia**

Directly after Linklater’s character emerges from his taxi, he witnesses the most disturbing scene captured in the film. An older woman is killed in a hit-and-run incident by a man revealed soon after to be her son. The Joycean connection has been pointed out before by Rob Stone, but characteristic of Linklater’s other Joycean connections, it is not
dwelled upon by Stone for a terribly long time.\textsuperscript{28} The perpetrator returns to his home after
the violent act, and proceeds to attend to a series of mundane tasks that together result in
a sort of Joycean ritual. The man first answers a phone call concerning the incident, and
after doing a terrible job of feigning ignorance and concern, hangs up the phone to attend
to other matters. The personal details of this man’s problems with his mother are never
disclosed, but his denial of any involvement in the matricide is similar to Stephen
Dedalus’s attempts to absolve himself from the guilt involved in his mother’s death. The
difference is, regardless of what Buck Mulligan would have us believe (“Etiquette is
etiquette. He kills his mother but he can’t wear grey trousers” \textsuperscript{[6]}), Stephen’s refusal to
kneel and pray to God was not actually the cause of his mother’s death, and the jilted son
in \textit{Slacker} is seen by the audience as he kills his mother and drives away. The son is next
seen cutting pictures out of a yearbook to set them on fire, presumably in effigy. The
almost religious ritual is akin to Joyce, as some would argue,\textsuperscript{29} while the cutting and
pasting may remind an audience (one admittedly, specifically looking for Joycean
parallels) that Joyce himself described his vocation as that of a “scissors and paste
man.”\textsuperscript{30} The son then sits on the ground with a journal and a voice recorder, one may
think to record some of his thoughts for whoever discovers him in the wake of his grisly
crime. Does this indicate artistic aspirations?\textsuperscript{31} However, as police sirens are heard
outside, the son places his journal on the windowsill and instead turns on a projector,
which plays footage of him and his mother playing outside when he was very young. This
visual representation of his memory in film—a medium that Joyce was always interested
in but never directly involved with as creator\textsuperscript{32}—is what will be left for the
investigators. The man leaves as his legacy a recurring loop of his own personal history.
History, as another son who lost his mother once stated, is the “nightmare” from which he cannot awaken.\textsuperscript{33}

We have a denial of guilt, a candlelit ritual, pictures burnt in effigy, a journal on the window-sill, and a projector left running for others to discover. We see a disoriented son, a dead mother, and a writer. Using a surrogate Stephen Dedalus, Linklater has crafted his own version of Joyce’s \textit{Telemachia}, over the course of a couple of minutes.\textsuperscript{34} His Stephen Dedalus has a physical run-in with the police, much like Joyce’s, though this one is neither drunken or defiant. He exits his house compliantly, and is put in handcuffs. The camera stops following the three men as they leave, instead choosing to linger behind a new subject. The Bloomish drift of the camera can begin, now that Stephen Dedalus is out of the way.

Though we have most of the elements of Joyce’s \textit{Telemachia} in place: matricide, disorientation, and the nightmare of history, we still need a “Proteus” to make it complete. Linklater’s version of the chapter that scares most readers away is achieved in the following scene within a local café: we overhear a conversation as our subject walks in that both resembles Stephen’s existential and philosophical crises that spin and collide across different plains of interior narration in the “Proteus” episode, and also serves to exemplify McHale’s authoritative/constructed idea applied here to two subjects involved in conversation. Just as seen before with Linklater and the cab driver, one party represents the silent, observing, uninterested, pragmatic and authoritative world, while the other desperately attempts to construct meaning. “Dostoevsky Wannabe” is speaking when we enter, and eventually asks his friend, “Looking for Missing Friend,” to “take his
dictation.” The largely uninterested friend does no such thing. Again, Linklater crafts a
great deal of humor from the proceedings. The dialogue is as follows:

Dostoevsky Wannabe: ...number three: opportunistic celibacy; number
four: renunciation of all human endeavor; and fifth and final “pillar of
euphoria”: a full-circle aesthetic reevaluation. My current response to
every worldwide or personal tragedy is...disgusting. I love it! I hope it
gets even worse! Okay, I’m Dostoevsky, you’re Anna, writing The
Gambler, take my dictation. Who’s ever written the great work, about the
immense effort required, in order not to create? Intensity without mastery.
The obsessiveness of the utterly passive. And could it be, that in this
passivity, I shall find my freedom?

Looking for Missing Friend: Well, I’m heading over there. (Slacker)

The rhetoric here is reminiscent of Dedalus’s wandering mind in the third episode of
Ulysses. “The obsessiveness of the utterly passive” always reminds me of “Ineluctable
modality of the visible” (Joyce, 37). If the character here is a “Dostoevsky Wannabe”
then Joyce’s Stephen is a wannabe of a different sort, thinking of his past aspirations as
he walks down the beach:

Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to
be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including
Alexandria?...When one reads these strange pages of one long gone one
feels that one is at one with one who once... (Joyce, 40).

Dedalus is clearly self-aware about his past artistic delusions of grandeur in a way that
“Dostoevsky Wannabe” is not, but the rhetoric and artistic aspiration is something they
have in common. Just as the cab driver existed as the silent observer to Linklater’s musing, the friend of “Dostoevsky Wannabe” in the café is our window into the active, verbal world construction of his verbose companion. His disinterested response is as humorous as the cab driver’s silence. After this exchange, we leave Dedalus and hang with the Bloomish camera for the remainder of the film.

![Figure 2: Coffee Shop.](image)

The deliverer of the discourse, or “constructor” (C) is here on the left. The authoritative listener (A) is just out of focus on the right, just as before (*Slacker*).

This interplay between the constructing speaker and the authoritative listener happens throughout the film. There are times, as in the following scene, where a character who once served to represent the authoritative conception of reality serves yet again, while a different constructor emerges. After the disinterested friend from the previous scene exits the café, a man in a “Batman” t-shirt quickly accompanies him and offers a fascinating, in-depth, and delightfully conspiratorial discourse. Just as before, the recipient of this onslaught remains silent, with the exception of monosyllabic grunts,
nods, shakes of the head, and brief disinterested observations. Other examples happen throughout the film, and are presented below:

**Figure 3: Batman T-shirt.** Again, in the dialogue just mentioned, constructor is on the left, authoritative is on the right (*Slacker*).

**Figure 4: Bush Basher.** Another example, as “Bush Basher” delivers a political monologue to his friends, who are playing some sort of game involving a comb and slapping each other on the hand (*Slacker*).
Figure 5: Conspiracy Theorist. “‘Conspiracy A-Go-Go’ Author” on left, uninterested “Believes in Groups” on right. (The speaker begins on the right, but shifts to the left as the listener loses interest) (Slacker).

Though there are conversations in the film that do not fit into the binary structure of constructed/authoritative as represented in the pictures above, they still bear Joycean connections. When “Ultimate Loser” runs into “Stephanie-From-Dallas” their conversation quickly turns into paternal angst:

Stephanie-From-Dallas: I was in the hospital for a while. It was really awful.

Ultimate Loser: Parents, probably?

Stephanie-From-Dallas: Yeah, you could say they put me there. (Slacker)

In a similar way, when “Nova” and “GTO” pick up “Hitchhiker Awaiting True Call” they discover that the man has just come from a funeral for his step-father. When they express their condolences, “Hitchhiker” retorts, among other things, “I’m glad that son-of-a-bitch
is dead. Thought he’d never die. He was always getting loaded, beating up my mom, dragging us kids all over creation...yeah...I couldn’t wait for the bastard to die. I’ll probably go back next week and dance on his grave.” Paternal angst demonstrated by the dialogue above is the central theme driving the two protagonists in *Ulysses* as well, culminating in their meeting in which Bloom finds a son, and Stephen a surrogate father. But unlike *Ulysses* which resolves in this regard, the culminating meeting taking place across the episodes “Eumaeus” and “Ithaca,” in *Slacker* there is no resolution to the parental angst, no answer given to end the wandering. We meet many sons without fathers, but this is never solved. Instead of a solution to the “problem” of wandering, we learn at the end of *Slacker* that wandering is the point.

**Guy Who Tosses Typewriter: Linklater’s Take on Appropriation**

The most obvious Joycean connection in the film is a scene in which characters literally read from *Ulysses* symbolically as part of a ritual to get over being spurned by a former lover. This is significant not only because it provides clues to the other Joycean connections, but also because the passage read itself can be applied as a method or attitude of adaptation/appropriation. When “Guy Who Tosses Typewriter” (the man who came up with the idea) encourages his heartbroken friend to read from *Ulysses*, he is met with the humorous exclamation: “I’m not going to read it” among other objections by him and a third buddy they bring along. Lucky for us, “Guy Who Tosses Typewriter” is also “Guy Who Reads *Ulysses,*” and “Guy Who Provides us with Richard Linklater’s Attitude Towards Indirect Appropriation.” The passage is read as follows:

> To reflect that each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas he is always the last term of a preceding series even if the first
term of a succeeding one, each imagining himself to be the first, last, only
and alone whereas, he is neither first nor last nor only nor alone in a series
originating in and repeated to infinity (Joyce, 731).

Though the characters are using this to get over heartbreak, Linkater is using this passage
as an explanation of his place in a different line of succession. Linda Hutcheon brings a
similar idea up in her *Theory of Adaptation* by quoting Edward Said: “In *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Edward Said argues that literature is ‘an order of repetition, not of
originality—but an eccentric order of repetition, not one of sameness’ (1985:12)” (113).

Similarly, Douglas Lanier in his “Shakespearean Rhizomatics” brings up the idea from
Deleuze and Guattari that the reality of a work is not “the identity that thing might
momentarily seem to take at a moment in time” but instead “what a thing might become
through the inexorability of difference and desire” (27). The section read from *Ulysses*
can thus be read as Linklater’s understanding of the fluctuations and instability of a given
text. His creation is part of *Ulysses*, and here he seems to invite other appropriators to
continue his work.

Linklater’s appropriation of Joyce’s work is different in key ways from many of
the adaptations covered in Hutcheon’s text. Hutcheon structures *A Theory of Adaptation*
through a series of questions, one of which is simply “Why?” Or, “What motivates
adapters, knowing that their efforts will be compared to competing imagined versions in
people’s heads and inevitably be found wanting?” (86). This “Why” chapter is the section
that most firmly separates Linklater’s work from the rest. Firstly, because the readership
of Joyce is so low, and Linklater’s appropriation is in large part so veiled, it can be fairly
definitively stated that *Slacker* is not often “compared to competing imagined versions in
people’s heads” of *Ulysses* (86). But to be fair, Hutcheon is mostly talking about direct adaptations, and Linklater’s work is at best a vaguely arboreal appropriation, to borrow Douglas Lanier’s terminology (itself borrowed from DG). Christy Desmet introduces a different question than Hutcheon’s “Why” in terms of adaptation in the article “Recognizing Shakspeare, Rethinking Fidelity.” The question she poses as more important, is “How,” or: “Under what circumstances, and in what physical, psychological, or cultural conditions, does the resemblance between one work and another ‘click,’ convincing us that they are engaged with each other in a relationship of appropriation” (54)? Though the Joycean connections abound in this film, the “click” occurs once his text is directly read. This scene can be compared to another film Desmet discusses, Geoffrey Wright’s *Macbeth*, one that Desmet argues contains an interplay between fidelity and infidelity to the source text. In a crucial scene in the film, the text is directly quoted: “Suddenly, if belatedly and only temporarily, we are anchored to the Shakespearean parent text by a single utterance, a ventriloquism of Shakespeare’s (or Macbeth’s) line amidst the cinematic flash and gore” (53). In the same way, we are anchored to *Ulysses* by the utterance of the text, and this unlocks the line of interpretation throughout the rest of the film.

Between the explicit rendering of *Ulysses* and the second part of the film there are wandering sons, anarchists, more constructors of world-view, (for some reason, continually appearing to the left of their listeners) and a series of quotable sentiments. Two of these mantras really give way for the second part of the film, the first expressed by the character “Old Anarchist,” as parting advice for the “Burglar” who was found in his house: “Remember, the passion for destruction is also a creative passion” (*Slacker*).
Secondly, character “Having a Breakthrough Day” asserts close to the end of the daytime episodes that “time doesn’t exist” (*Slacker*). Both the passion for destruction and the dismantling of time are instrumental in the second parts of both *Ulysses* and *Slacker* and also give way for the following projects, *Waking Life* and *Finnegans Wake*.

**The Bridge from “Day” to “Night”**

Other transitions exist in the film, but the only really noticeably jarring hard cut in the proceedings happens between day and night, further grounding the claim that, like McHale’s synopsis of *Ulysses* as “a text fissured and doubled” (44), *Slacker* also is neatly cut into two parts. It should go without saying that the medium of film as it is presented in *Slacker* during the day already argues for the stability of the natural world in a way that Joyce cannot so directly present in his novel. However, both *Ulysses* and *Slacker* challenge this stability as day turns to night. As McHale explains in regards to *Ulysses* in the second part, “discourses” now “have no personified verbal source within the *Ulysses* world” (51), which implies a “parallax of worlds” (54). He also states that “the ‘other’ *Ulysses* parodically substitutes a *mobile world*” in place of the “stable world” from before (51), and cites Hugh Kenner as describing that the lines between hallucination and reality in the “Circe” episodes are indistinguishable (50). While at first, *Slacker* seems to be carrying on in the same conversational way as it did before, there are differences from here on out. As day turns to night, we now are observing tables in bars and nightclubs, covered in empty beer bottles and burnt out cigarettes. Replacing the sober dialogue from before is a new focus on different worlds and the afterlife, from Scooby Doo, to Krishna, to a repetition of the word “Hell”: 
S-T-E-V-E With a Van: Cause I mean, you know, that’s kind like, you know, some sort of spiritual Hell to parody yourself at the height of your ridiculousness...No, because women are from Hell...are you making anybody’s life Hell right now?...Wanna make somebody’s life Hell?

*(Slacker).*

When “Cousin from Greece” and “Sitting on a Ledge” descend into a night club, the perspective changes from third-person-observer, to first-person. We can only see this underworld through what a voice calls “pixel vision,” a distorted, dynamic visual landscape that blurs the lines between reality and hallucination, especially coupled with the abundance of substances taken in the night. Though we first begin with the owner of the camera, he instructs the new arrivals to the club in this way: Pixel Visionary: “Shoot whatever you want, pass it around, and we’ll see what we come up with later on, okay? But I want my camera back alright?” As this last request fades into the background, what we have next is a disconnected discourse of abstract sights and infernal sounds. This is Linklater’s “nighttown,” the mobility of world in *Ulysses*’s second part is reflected here through the mobility of perspective.

In Joyce’s “Circe,” the mobility of interior monologue experienced in the first half of the book turns to a mobility of world. At one moment, Bloom is crowned king: “God save Leopold the First!” (Joyce, 482). At the next, he is dominated by Bella Cohen, and turned into a woman. Inanimate objects come to life and converse with Stephen: “THE CAP: *(With saturnine spleen.)* Bah! It is because it is. Women’s reason. Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet. Death is the highest form of life. Bah!” (504). Significantly, the boundary breaks between the living and the dead, allowing for the emergence of
Paddy Dignam, Shakespeare, Bloom’s father, and Bloom’s son: “The beagle lifts his snout, showing the grey scorbutic face of Paddy Dignam. He has gnawed all” (472). In Linklater’s version of nighttown, we can assume that we remain in the same world—our mobility is that of time and perspective. We never know whose hands the camera is in as we move aimlessly and randomly around the hazy night life of the Circean landscape. Found objects like giant water jugs are used as percussion to foreground an unrelated political discussion, one that could have been focused on unhampered as a daytime vignette earlier in the film. Continuing along the thematically infernal lines of dialogue pointed out above with the repetition of “Hell” and the afterlife, one discourse captured by the “pixel vision” concerns the Masons and their control over the sweep of history. The film cuts rapidly from one figure to the next, tearing the viewers out of the softly wandering journey we have been on thus far. One interpretation of the quickly moving shots is that the owner of the camera, “Pixel Visionary,” already edited them together and we are watching it on his television screen, in effect ripping us out of the film and time itself. Even this theory is problematized by the notion given by a figure at the end of the sequence: “Man, there ‘aint no film in that shit” (Slacker). Linklater’s “Circe,” where hallucination and reality bend together, embodies the second half of Joyce’s text in that mobility take the place of stability, certainty is trumped by hallucinatory confusion, and clarity of vision is usurped by pixelated distortion. We lose track of who carries the camera, and we lose track of where we are in time. Carrying along the lines of the defiance of traditional temporality, character “Masonic Malcontent” states this apocalyptic end-goal: “The slate of American history needs to be wiped clean. We need to start all over again” (Slacker).
Night Back into Day

McHale notes that ultimately figuring *Ulysses* as a “transitional text” between modernism and post-modernism is a line of thinking broken down by the fact that Joyce’s masterpiece works its way back from hallucinatory destabilization in the final three episodes (55). The same can be said of *Slacker*, as night eventually does fade back into the day. However, instead of ending in the same way that he began, Linklater ends his film with an astonishing scene, described effectively by Eric Hynes of *Reverse Shot* as “a Richard Lester film, like *A Hard Day’s Night* or *Help!*” (Hynes). The perspective shifts rapidly as jubilant, playful music soundtracks a group of twenty somethings driving to a lake. In a break from both the softly wandering camera of the daytime section, and the distorted, Hellish instability of the night, Linklater synthesizes both for the ending. Hynes continues to explain: “With a break from the past that is both rebellious and responsible, a young man flings the old camera into the lake, yet it’s beautiful, blurry, and exciting moving images continue for a few moments longer” (Hynes). In a symbolic ritual much like his most explicit Joycean connection from before, Linklater casts the camera into the lake, forsaking meaning for anarchy, linearity for fluidity, order for chaos. Just as Joyce exasperated language so thoroughly in *Ulysses* that he had to invent a new dialect for his next bewildering work, Linklater has exhausted the cinematic perspective, and there is nothing to do but cast it into a lake. If Linklater wanted to ever again make a film like it, it would have to be in the context of a dream.

Back to Ithaca: Returning to the Source
Just as we can approach *Slacker* through a Joycean lens, the appropriation can also lend us a new reading of the source text. A common complaint of *Ulysses* is that it is alienating to the reader right from page one, as Joyce begins his book with Stephen rather than Bloom. Many readers have become casualties to “Proteus,” episode three, as Stephen walks and ponders, losing just about every audience in the process. A typical reaction to a first reading is the breath of fresh air when the reader meets Bloom. Upon episode four, instead of discussing the “Ineluctable modality of the visible” (37), we get to eat kidneys with relish and mew back at cats. But though this is a typical reaction, many readers find themselves torn between the same binary of ridicule and empathy felt when watching Linklater’s first great work. But instead of moving to and fro across the experience, this interplay moves much more slowly across Joyce’s massive text.

Audiences can freely vacillate between the two while watching *Slacker*, allowing for a compelling, fluid experience. No two watches will be alike, as perhaps one might feel disdain for the conspiracy theorist during one viewing, but fascination during the next. In *Ulysses* the significant and very distinct relations that readers feel for the two main protagonists seem to change less fluidly. Pulitzer prize winning author Michael Chabon connects his feelings with Stephen and Bloom to the age he was when he first encountered them: “Reading it at twenty, I had identified with Stephen Dedalus, a grave mistake. Stephen Dedalus is a pill. Doubtless I was kind of a pill myself at twenty, but that didn’t make Stephen any more appealing even then” (Chabon). In the same way, for Chabon’s first reading, “Leopold Bloom was only an old dude, to me, that first time through; charming, touching good-hearted, but *old*: a failure, a fool, a cuckold, crapping
in an outhouse, masturbating into his pants pocket.” When Chabon returned to *Ulysses*, now ten years older than Bloom, he felt very differently:

In Bloom’s retention, into middle age, of his child-sharp powers of observation, his fresh eye (and ear, and nose) for nuance and telling detail; in his having managed to sustain his curiosity about the people and the world around him after thirty-eight years of familiarity and routine that ought to have dulled and dampened it; and above all in the abiding capacity for empathy, for moral imagination, that is the fruit of an observant curiosity like Bloom’s, I found, as if codified, a personal definition of heroism (Chabon).

For Chabon, his first reading resulted in empathy for Stephen and ridicule for Bloom. Returning to the text ten years later flipped the first reading exactly up-side-down. But while this took ten years and a good deal of life experience to occur with *Ulysses*, *Slacker* can simulate this interplay within a single viewing. So how can we return to Joyce’s text with new eyes?

Anthony Burgess suggests a compelling reading in his critical commentary *ReJoyce*, one that can simulate the same vacillation between empathy and ridicule that we find in Linklater’s first masterpiece. He argues that *Ulysses*, “is a labyrinth which we can enter at any point” (178). Rather than advocating a linear reading from beginning to end (a task that has eluded some of the best of us), he suggests perusing the text more fluidly, based on “living” with the text rather than “gobbling” it (177). In his words: “I have preferred to take it in chapters, choosing any one I fancied at any particular time, recognizing favourites—usually the episodes I liked least when I first met *Ulysses*—and,
inside those favourites, turning to certain passages again and again” (177). If we read *Ulysses* in a non-linear fashion we can take a break from Stephen before we encounter him at his most abstract, and perhaps after taking some time with Bloom, we can return more ready for Dedalus’s musing, with more empathy. In this way we can use Linklater’s work to call on others to create different pathways or roadmaps through the text, just like many life-long fans have strongly debated about the best order to watch the *Star Wars* films (I made my younger brother follow IV, V, I, II, III, VI, and I know he will thank me later). Perhaps we can begin with Bloom and come back to Stephen when we’re good and ready. Perhaps we begin with Stephen, but save “Proteus” for after we encounter Stephen theorizing more concretely about *Hamlet* in “Scylla and Charybdis” so we’re used to following his line of thinking. After we use Joyce’s work to guide us through *Slacker*, we can come back to the text in this way, and follow Burgess’s advice to allow the text to live and breathe as a nightly staple at the bedside.

*Slacker* and *Ulysses* follow McHale’s idea (though slippery) of a bridge between modernism and postmodernism, and both do it using the same unifying method: time. As both works transition from the day to the night, the form, style and tone turns from stability to instability, from coherence to fluidity. Just as *Ulysses* anticipates the movement from the “day” of modernism to the “night” of postmodernism and Joyce’s own experimentations in his book of the night, *Finnegans Wake*, *Slacker* can be read as transitory between the stability of the world, and the slippery interpretation of dreams and the meaning of consciousness found in Linklater’s corresponding work, *Waking Life*. The significance of *Slacker* to those who will never read *Ulysses* is difficult to overstate: instead of attempting the insurmountable task of directly adapting Joyce, Linklater
instead uses his ideas behind community, ideology, and the play between stability and instability to render a poignant cultural moment. *Slacker* has been heralded as an alt-cult classic, and has had a relevant cultural impact in ways that Joyce’s text could not accomplish alone in the contemporary moment. By creating by example, Linklater invites other artists to engage in vibrant, communal work, using Joyce as a model. It exists as an inspiration to look around rather than within, and every time I watch the film I am inspired to bring “Bloomsday” to my hometown, St. Petersburg, Florida.

As we invite *Ulysses* back to our bedside table, another book and another film sit and wait for a new journey into the dark. Michael Chabon remarks that after dwelling on all of Joyce’s other work he “came up against the safety perimeter, beyond which there lurked, hulking, chimerical, gibbering to itself in an outlandish tongue, a frightening beast out of legend” (Chabon). Just as *Slacker* develops a sort of ethos of time and place (a la *Ulysses*), both *Finnegans Wake* and *Waking Life* destroy any sort of stability, as characters, forms, places and ideas, both literally and figuratively drift away in the wake of the dream.
Chapter 2: Finnegans Waking Life: Rendering the Dreamscape

“He had to smelt the modern dictionary back to protean plasma and re-enact the ‘genesis and mutation of language’ in order to deliver his message”—Joseph Campbell

“There’s no story! It’s just...people! Gestures! Moments! Bits of rapture, fleeting emotions. In short, the greatest stories ever told”—Man Writing a Novel at the Bar, From Waking Life

There are many methodologies to consult when attempting Finnegans Wake. Many are the scholars who have mapped out the puzzling work, providing readers with a framework, a set of straws to grasp as they wander through the mist. But is the Wake best taken in order, like a novel, as if we are reading a story? Or is it a different kind of text? Perhaps it is considered, like Ulysses, “un-filmable” (daring the bold to attempt the challenge), because it is being read the wrong way. Though helpful, Joseph Campbell’s Skeleton Key, Roland McHugh’s Annotations to Finnegans Wake, Danis Rose and John O’Hanlon’s Understanding Finnegans Wake, and the myriad other guides to the structure of the work, all implicitly encourage a narrative reading, which the text directly subverts in its cycle. While these guides and others proved exceptionally useful to me in my first foray through the storm, the best interpretations of the text are not guides, but experiments. Fighting fire with fire, it is best to go at Joyce’s massive linguistic experiment with one of your own. John Cage provides an example in his Writing
Through *Finnegans Wake*, in which he traces “mesostics” through the text, writing poetry with the results. He also used the *Wake* to compose music, as many other musicians have done in recent years.

If interaction provides the best readings of the text, then the most vibrant contemporary reading of *Finnegans Wake* is Richard Linklater’s *Waking Life*. *Finnegans Wake* challenges not only our minds but the way in which we read. To approach it we must leave behind the conventions of the novel. In the same way, to approach *Waking Life* we must leave behind the conventions of cinema. Both works are meta-commentaries on the medium in which they are disguised. Richard Linklater is appropriating the *Wake*, attempting to render the dreamscape in the medium of cinema. His project is Joycean in its methodology, as the rotoscopic technology used for the film blurs the lines of reality like Joyce’s invented languages in the *Wake*. The difference is, with Linklater we *see*. He evolves the dream from the written page to the screen. The other main change or “update” for the current generation can be found in a quote delivered by one of the “Four Men” walking down the street in Linklater’s most innovative film. Questioning an older, bearded man who has climbed a lamppost, they conclude the following: “He’s all action and no theory. We’re all theory and no action” (*Waking Life*). If the *Wake* is made up of forward, cyclical movement, resisting any theoretical backdrop imposed on it, then it can be considered “all action,” spiraling, circling, moving continuously like the river it exemplifies with the goddess ALP. Linklater’s film accomplishes what the *Wake* does, but *Waking Life* is structured theoretically, existing as a mirror image, a polar opposite. Linklater is appropriating by inverting the *Wake*, composing a visualized dream via theory, rather than action.
James Joyce was deathly afraid of thunder. Reminiscent of the anger of God, in whom the author could never manage to completely disbelieve, Joyce’s linguistic rendering of the frightful rumbling reads:
“bababadalgharaghtakaminarronknbronntronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnska wntoohooloordenenthurnuk!” (3). It is an essentially unpronounceable sentiment, disturbing as much for its difficulty as its uncertainty. It is also on the very first page of *Finnegans Wake*, as if screaming “abandon hope, all ye who enter here.” Joyce’s fear was all but irrational, never experiencing actual peril or life endangerment from thunderstorms, and in that way it is directly comparable to my all but irrational fear of flying.

Despite this fear, I was onboard *Alaskan Airlines* when I reached the final words of Joyce’s mad book of the night. No one reads the *Wake* without a methodology in place. I had pushed my way through Patrick Healy’s audio rendition of the novel, while I read along from my copy of the text. I supplemented my reading with passages of the novel set to music, put together for the wonderful online project *Waywords and Meansigns*. I devoured Joseph Campbell’s *Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*. Every day for an entire school semester, I devoted a portion of my time to the *Wake*. I understood little, but by slowly formulating a structure with Campbell’s help, I was able to garner brief fleeting moments of coherence from the monstrous text.

With only a few pages left to go, I could not bear to leave the *Wake* and corresponding *Skeleton Key* behind while I visited my family over the holidays. The burden of being so close and leaving the *Wake* for the new year was infinitely heavier
than the five or six pounds added to my backpack, already crammed with *100 Best Beatles Songs*, my Nintendo DS, and my iPod with around four thousand tracks of music (I need many a distraction in the air). Accompanied by a vague discomfort with my surroundings, I suddenly felt as if thirty-six thousand feet was a good setting to finish my dizzying journey through Joyce’s dream. I wanted to finish while I was flying, lending my final descent multiple layers: linguistic, conceptual, literal. I began reading the final section of the novel, and came upon something like a monologue. Campbell describes it as “the elegy of River Liffey as she passes, old tired, soiled with the filth of the city, through Dublin and back to the sea” (351). I found myself reading faster, storming towards the end as the plane gently rocked like waves on a Liffey bank. I read for the first time without the benefit of audible aid, and felt the cognitive dissonance of achievement and a sort of mental annihilation when my eyes ran across “A way a lone a last a loved a long the” (352). As my journey ended, it also began.

I soon realized that any thoughts I would have at this moment on the *Wake* needed further incubation. Better now to allow the words to flow, perhaps to add music to the dream. The first song that streamed through my device was by The Beatles: “There’s a Place.” The words are as follows:

“There’s a Place/Where I can go/When I feel low/When I feel blue/And it’s my mind” (McCartney, Lennon).

Initially to speak of a direct connection with an artist who has been long dead seems like an experience involving some sort of divination. I sat vaguely afraid of my surroundings in a linguistically baffled state, slowly rocking back and forth as an ode to the safety of interiority and escapism played—a happy song, with just a touch of sadness.
Though I had read all six-hundred and fifty plus pages of the *Wake*, I look back at this final experience as the moment when I finally got it—in a sense, I got Joyce. The *Wake* is sublime, the *Wake* terrifying, the *Wake* is music, the *Wake* is the mind. The *Wake* is experience, not to be read and uncovered, learned and enjoyed like a Dostoevsky novel, but experienced in a non-linear, breathing way. To learn from the *Wake* is to play with it, to play in it, to let it wash over you like a river. Though Campbell and many others have provided a structure to Joyce’s text, the best readings I have ever seen are experimentations, interactions such as Cage’s poems and music, *Waywords and Meansigns*, or ongoing reading groups and clubs. I have gotten to the point where I read the *Wake* like I listen to “Radiohead,” not trying to understand every word, just nodding to the beat, drifting along, like Wily Wiggin’s dreamer in Linklater’s version of the dream. Watching *Waking Life*, I am drawn to the same reading, as it interacts with *Finnegans Wake* thematically, methodologically, and in its commentary on medium. The attempt to talk in a dream language in the medium of cinema is a more useful and relevant interaction with the *Wake* than a guide to its dubious narrative.

**Thematic Connections**

Much has been made of the copious usage of names of rivers in Joyce’s *Wake*, as the constantly flowing, tumultuously moving water works symbolically to represent temporality, being, and the circular sweep of history. For Joseph Campbell, the river is first and foremost used to characterize the wife of the dreaming protagonist, Anna Livia Plurabelle:

> Anna is a river, always changing yet ever the same, the Heraclitean flux which bears all life on its current. Principally, she is the River Liffey,
running through Dublin, but she is also all the rivers of the world: the heavenly Ganges, the fruitful Nile, the teeming Irrawaddy, the mysterious Nyanza. She is the circular river of time, flowing past Eve and Adam in the first sentence of the book, bearing in her flood the debris of dead civilizations and the seeds of crops and cultures yet to come (9).

This explanation elucidates several themes of the *Wake*: the recurring cycle of history, the geographical symbology, and the rendering of the subconscious as fluid rather than conscious stability. If Joyce gets to this realm of the subconscious through the layered metaphor of a river, it is fitting that the first indication that we are trapped inside a dream in *Waking Life* is the arrival of a boat-car. “Ahoy there matey” exclaims the captain, complete with a sailor hat and another passenger (Richard Linklater himself). The captain explains the “See-worthiness” of the vessel, which begins to hint at the importance of vision, and the bridge between the literary and cinematic rendering of the subconscious (*Waking Life*). Ellen Grabiner explains this, and other ways in which Linklater’s film exists as a meta-commentary on the medium of film in the article “The Holy Moment: *Waking Life* and Linklater’s Sublime Dream Time.” Grabiner explains, “‘Seeing’ is established as a primary epistemological mode for Linklater, as evidenced not only by the ways in which attention is constantly drawn to the surface of the film, but in the inclusion of not-so-subtle signs that pop up throughout” (45). The boat captain continues musing aloud in a way that suggests that the film we are watching must be related to Linklater’s *Slacker*. The connection to *Slacker* is also pointed out by Rob Stone who explains that *Waking Life* is a “…palimpsest of *Slacker* in which the repeated drift around Austin would be punctuated by all kinds of philosophical dialogues that would be subsequently
transformed by rotoscoping into an oneiric, metaphysical exploration of consciousness” (143). The boat captain’s most interesting observations contain in part a brief explanation of the circular structure of Joyce’s *Wake* when he notes, “The idea is to remain in a state of constant departure, while always arriving” (*Waking Life*). The captain provides a guide to reading the *Wake* when he explains, “the ride does not require an explanation, just occupants” (*Waking Life*). Thus, Linklater’s film is connected to the *Wake* thematically, and it offers a methodology for interacting with it.

Because Linklater’s film is structured through a series of metaphysical discourses, it is fitting that a couple of them directly deal with material Joyce is working through in *Finnegans Wake*. Specifically, one vignette in *Waking Life* challenges the Viconian framework in the *Wake* by presenting a way out of the cycle of history and evolution. Eamonn Healy as the “Shape-Shifting Man” passionately delivers a discourse on the “new evolution,” and the telescoping nature of human progression. According to Healy, evolution will no longer be seen as a slow-moving, passive process, but one that will be observable from generation to generation. Because of the synthesis of digital and analog technologies, the old regressive evolutionary traits, or the “old evolution” described by Healy as “cold,” “sterile,” and “efficient” will be replaced, and the old regressive attributes that coincided with evolutionary progress, such as power and dominance, will be de-emphasized in favor of traits such as loyalty and kindness, as the new evolution will be based on our needs, rather than existing as an arbitrary system that we are powerlessly subject to (*Waking Life*). Anthony Burgess, in *ReJoyce*, explains the Viconian cycle and its four phases succinctly as:
…the theocratic age, the aristocratic age, the democratic age, the ricorso, or return to the beginning again. It is the thunder which drives men to change their social organisations (they run into shelters, which foster the building of communities, to escape from it). Language is an attempt to present in human vocables the noise which the thunder makes... (191)

In a sense, Healy’s explanation of the “neo-human,” outside the realm of the old evolutionary model, is a way out of these four phases. But it is important to note, as Burgess does, that “Joyce did not borrow from Vico’s theory consistently,” using the cyclical model not so much as a historical chronology, but as a model for the subconscious: “it was rather in the field of the human psyche that the awareness of repetition and return could be best exploited” (191).

Repetition is used heavily in both Joyce’s text and Linklater’s film to illustrate the cyclical nature of the subconscious. Not only does this repetition work within the breadth of the source texts themselves, but it reaches out to other works by the respective artists meta-textually, and also incorporates the artists themselves in the flow. Burgess and others have found Joyce encapsulated self-critically in his text as the character “Shem the Penman”:

A seedy Satan, rolled in the dirt, stinking, blasphemous, he has committed the terrible crime of writing Ulysses, which not even he can understand: ‘amid the inspissated grime of his glaucous den making believe to read his usylessly unreadable Blue Book of Eccles’ (215).

Campbell sees this “Blue Book” as the Wake itself, but for me, the words “of Eccles” suggest otherwise, by hinting at the home of Leopold Bloom. The connection between
the *Wake* and *Ulysses* is mirrored in the connection between *Waking Life* and *Slacker*. Seeming to both condemn himself and to satirically comment on the condemnation he felt, always self-consciously victimized by the opinion of others, Joyce renders Shem physically, “Shem’s bodily getup, it seems, included an adze of a skull an eight of a larkseye, the whoel of a nose, one numb arm up a sleeve…” (169) and so on, and also hints at his exilic status: “He even ran away with hunself and became a farsoonerite, saying he would far sooner muddle through the hash of lentils in Europe than meddle with Irland’s split little pea” (171). He also comments on the obsession with the thoughts of others: “All the time he kept on treasuring with condign satisfaction each and every crumb of trektalk, covetous of his neighbour’s word” (172). Joyce’s self-inclusion in the text both serves as self-criticism, and also models artistic and aesthetic power at the cost of physical strength and earthly status. He presents both sides represented by the brothers Shem and Shaun, discussed by Campbell at length:

Under the title of Shem the Penman, he is the seer, the poet, Joyce himself in his character of misunderstood, rejected artist…The character of Shaun…the folk-sheparded brother, the political orator, prudent, unctuous, economically successful favorite of the people, policemen of the planet, conqueror of rebels, bearer of the white man’s burden…He is the contrapuntal opposite of Shem… (11).

By representing both himself and his opposite, Joyce indicates both the importance of his work, and the exilic nature of its creator.

Linklater includes himself in *Waking Life* in two separate vignettes—at the beginning and ending of the film. The purpose of Joyce’s inclusion of himself in
Finnegans Wake is to criticize himself, and to satirize others who would do so (by doing so most thoroughly himself), as well as to provide an embodiment for the martyred artist, Shem. Linklater’s self-inclusion in his film operates on several levels: it provides another in a series of repeated characters across the flow of the dream, it forges a connection with Slacker in which Linklater is the first character to deliver a monologue, and it breaks the fourth wall, contributing to the unreality of the dream-state represented. Several characters repeat across the length of Wiggins journey in the film, connecting Waking Life to Finnegans Wake with the idea of the dream as recurrence. None of the recurring characters recognize the protagonist.

“No man I don’t have a ‘boat car’” replies the captain when Wily Wiggins sees him working at a gas station later in the film (Waking Life).

Figures 6, 7. Boat Captain. Gas Station Worker (Waking Life).
Similarly, Linklater includes references and characters from his other work in *Waking Life*. One vignette, importantly including a conversation about recurrence and temporality, features characters Jesse and Celine from Linklater’s *Before* trilogy. A blink-and-you’ll-miss-it frame just before the final discourse from Linklater shows the iconic half-smile from *Dazed and Confused*.

“I mean, I’m not saying you don’t know what you’re talking about...but I don’t know what you’re talking about” replies the man playing pinball when questioned about the boat car (*Waking Life*).
In addition to these thematic connections, Linklater’s film can be read as a mirror image of Joyce’s text, showing us an opposite way to render the dreamscape. Borrowing terminology from the four walking men in *Waking Life*, Linklater’s film is “all theory and no action,” whereas the old man at the top of the lamp post (Joyce?) is “all action and no theory” (*Waking Life*). This does not, of course, mean that Joyce is known for busy,
dramatic, plots. I am considering his work as “all action” in terms of style and linguistic virtuosity. Reciprocally, I consider Joyce’s *Wake* as being “no theory,” which is not to say that it is arbitrary, or that no theoretical framework was used in its construction. Alternatively, the *Wake* defies theory because no theoretical framework can be readily and definitively applied to its interpretation, though many have attempted. It is easy to argue that Linklater’s film is “all theory,” as the structure of the film consists in the protagonist, at times literally, going door to door and becoming inundated with a series of metaphysical and ontological theories. Douglas Mann helpfully provides a scene-by-scene diagram of the film, and labels vignettes as Buddhist, Taoist, Existential, Situationist, Neo-Existential, Tibetan Buddhist, Vedantist, Post-Modern, and Nietzschean, among others. But though *Finnegans Wake* is certainly a demonstration of linguistic “action,” described by Danis Rose and John O’Hanlon in *Understanding Finnegans Wake* as “…celebrated for its puns, its double- and treble-meanings, and its multitudinous allusions to diverse and disconnected facts, songs, jokes, tags, myths and historical events” (ix), can it really be said that it is devoid of theory? The process of writing the *Wake* certainly was not arbitrary, and the thematic connection to Vico’s theory of history is undeniable. But the general disagreement of the overall meaning and specific narrative of the *Wake* among scholars suggests a resistance of the text to the application of any theoretical backdrop. Joyce himself reacted in protest to revealing all of his secrets to translators of *Ulysses*, saying, “If I gave it all up immediately, I’d lose my immortality. I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality” (Ellmann, 521). Michael Chabon, in an informed and vibrantly written
article detailing his long journey through the *Wake* finds nine possible interpretive frameworks, that can each be true or untrue alongside each other. While theories such as Vico’s inform the structure of the *Wake*, it is utterly resistant to the myriad attempts to encage it within a theoretical backdrop. In a sense, Linklater’s film also demonstrates the same failure of a single homogenous theoretical backdrop in that we never watch the Wily Wiggins character wake up, satisfied with an explanation of existence, a meaning of life. We only are able to sit idly by as he drifts off into the sky.

**Methodological Connections**

Linklater not only appropriates or adapts Joyce’s work, but strategically modifies his *methods* to accomplish the act of grasping the inexplicable and the subconscious. In *Finnegan’s Wake*, Joyce invents his own language and lyricism in order to tackle the nebulous realm of the dream state. Similarly, in his work concerning lucid dreaming, Linklater experimented with a new form of animation, one that highlights movement, abstracts conventional imagery, and is equal parts hypnotizing and disorienting. The process of “rotoscoping” is explained by Douglas Mann in his “Buddhists, Existentialists and Situationists: Waking up in *Waking Life*”: “The film was made by first filming live action with a digital video camera and then transferring the video to computers and roto-scoping (coloring over) the images to turn them into animation” (15). In attempting to describe *Waking Life*’s distinct visual style Mann arrives at the term instability:

In some scenes, we see a fairly stable human figure, often Wiley, surrounded by a fluid, undulating background of objects, buildings, and other characters. In others, the very components of human bodies and faces are out of sync with each other: a head remains stationary as its eyes
and mouth move back and forth; elements of clothing change their shape or substance; a character’s hair waves up and down without any evidence of windy weather elsewhere in the scene (16).

This is not unlike Joyce’s method of running language through a progressively dense and allusive process, as captured by Anthony Burgess in *ReJoyce*: “Joyce, however, in planning his work, did much of it in the light. It is shocking to see how much of the early drafts of *Work in Progress* makes pedestrian sense” (189). Burgess then takes us through four versions of Joyce’s language. “That’s the thing I always want to know” becomes “That’s the thing I’m elwys on edge to esk,” and “Paul Pry or polishman” turns to “Pieman Peace or Polistaman” (190). By taking us through the different versions, it shows *Finnegan’s Wake* as a process, not something created on a whim, but something carefully altered and disguised over a 17-year period.

Rob Stone explains what the rotoscoping accomplishes both visually and ideologically in *Waking Life*, explaining the pertinence of the method to convey the world of metaphysical discourse:

The use of rotoscoping for a film such as *Waking Life* and its relay discussion of metaphysics is apt because the animation adds that extra level of transcendence sought by saints and philosophers alike to the reality of the live action footage. That is to say, the original, mostly hand-held digital footage shot by Linklater and Pallotta is a record of a reality that is rendered dreamlike by the animation process (145).
Just as Linklater is capturing a “record of a reality” and then “rendering it dreamlike by the animation process” (145), Joyce began with more straight-forward language, and continuously, arduously rendered his prose dreamlike with his own dream-language.

**The End of the Novel to The End of Cinema**

Both *Finnegans Wake* and *Waking Life* are liminal works, both marking the end of an era, and the beginning of a new one. Brian McHale discusses *Ulysses* as a bridge text between the modernist *Portrait*, and the post-modern experimentations of the *Wake*. Julia Kristeva notes in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that “only certain literary texts of the avant-garde (Mallarmé, Joyce) manage to cover the infinity of the process, that is, reach the semiotic *chora*, which modifies linguistic structures” (88). *Finnegans Wake*, in Kristevan language, represents the “*process*, which tends to articulate structures that are ephemeral…and nonsignifying…” (86), that marks a different literary form than a reliance on what Kristeva calls “phenotext,” or “a structure (which can be generated, in generative grammar’s sense); it obeys rules of communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee” (87). Not only can the *Wake* be argued to “end” modernism using McHale’s framework, but using Kristeva, it can be used to “end” traditional literary form, and even language itself. Kristeva explains:

> It has only been in very recent years or in revolutionary periods that signifying practice has inscribed within the phenotext the plural, heterogeneous, and contradictory process of signification encompassing the flow of drives, material discontinuity, political struggle, and the pulverization of language” (88).
Finnegans Wake, itself a pulverization of language is thus a multi-pronged meta-text, commenting on genre, form, and language itself.

In similar fashion, Waking Life and the use of multiple digital mediums to distort reality into a dream in some way suggests the end of cinema, or at least the use of analog technology. David T. Johnson discusses this in this way:

Arriving in 2001, and using its medium so innovatively, Waking Life seemed to both crystallize and to debunk an attitude that, in the face of aging celluloid archives, new distribution networks, alternative exhibition contexts, general millennial anxieties, and, most important, the rise of the digital, was for many assured: that we had witnessed the end of cinema (56).

Because of the new form of digital technology, many films around the turn of the century play with ideas about medium, including David Lynch’s Mulholland Drive and Linklater’s Tape (released in the same year as Waking Life). Because of the anxiety involved in this transition, the use of multiple digital technologies in Waking Life contributes to the metaphysical inquiry explored within, as well as the vignettes that directly concern cinema itself. Ellen Grabiner discusses the concern of cinema in the film, showing that it is indeed a “metafilm, one that comments on the nature of cinema itself” (42). When Wily Wiggins watches TV, “The clips randomly alternate between those that elicit the dream…those that point to cinema, and those that do both” (42).

Johnson suggests that the presentation of cinema in the film, along with the animation style, creates a participatory experience, through the act of meaning-making: “The sense of an active meaning-making process in the cinemagoing experience is, in this film, tied
to musings on the experience of time, whether waking or sleeping…In addition, the constant shifting within the image, no matter the artist, reminds us that cinema is movement” (59-60). Rob Stone talks of the participatory nature of the film, as he explains that when we “correlate the dreamstate with the experience of watching a film, we end up with a particularly cinematic philosophy that sees life, dream and film in a state of constantly becoming each other” (152). For Stone, this makes engaging in cinema itself a “metaphysical act” (152).

Though Joyce’s work arrived at the very limits of language, it did not mark the end of the novel. Though *Waking Life* used multiple forms of digital technology, it did not mark the end of cinema. The question that both texts answer about their own mediums is how to engage with the dream-state itself. The answer is simply to be willing to engage, to experiment. Two quotes, one from *Waking Life*’s boat captain and the other from Michael Chabon, demonstrate the best readings of the enigmatic texts, and any other text that attempts to capture the subconscious. The words of the boat-captain concern interpretation, and the words of Michael Chabon concern creation:

“The idea is to remain in a state of constant departure, while always arriving... the ride does not require an explanation, just occupants.”—Boat-car Driver (*Waking Life*).

“If the language we have inherited, have had imposed upon us, proves unfit to our purpose in catching hold of the darting apparition of our dream book (as it always will, for the job is impossible), then we must reinvent it...The limits of language are not the
stopping point, says the Wake; they are the point at which we must begin to tell the tale.”—Michael Chabon (“What to Make of Finnegans Wake?”)
Chapter 3: Boyhood: A Portrait of the Liberal Arts Student as a Young Man.

“The features of infancy are not commonly reproduced in the adolescent portrait for, so capricious are we, that we cannot or will not conceive the past in any other than its iron, memorial aspect. Yet the past assuredly implies a fluid succession of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only” –James Joyce

“it’s like it’s always right now, you know?” –Mason, from Boyhood.

“Where was his boyhood now? Where was the soul that had hung back from her destiny, to brood alone upon the shame of her wounds and in her house of squalor and subterfuge to queen it in faded cerements and in wreaths that withered at the touch? Or where was he?”—James Joyce, from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (170).

Richard Linklater did not fix Ulysses or Finnegans Wake. In engaging with Joyce’s masterpiece, with Slacker, Linklater has given us a work that points back to how great Ulysses is, but with the understanding that most of the Leopold Blooms of society would never dream of attempting it. Slacker does not “fix” Ulysses, but it does provide a new way to read it, engage with it, and use it. Boyhood, Linklater’s twelve-year-in-the-making manifesto on the present moment of life, interacts with Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man in the same way. It is a new Portrait that does not “fix” Joyce’s work, but does suggest a good way to use it stylistically. The use of Joyce, including Katy Marre’s idea of “paired repetitions” that can be found in both texts as well as the exposition free movement unite the two artists once again. In addition, several surface-
level connections can be made that can almost lend the idea of Linklater’s Joycean
interest and influence in this work certainty, even if he never mentions it when
interviewed.

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*Boyhood* is such a magnificent film that any attempt to ground criticism of it with
a Joycean framework must be preceded with an attempt to discuss the film on its own
terms. The merits of the film are so great that one does not even need to discuss the
innovative and revolutionary approach of using the same actors over twelve years as its
main novelty. Though this is certainly more than a mere gimmick, existing as an
experimentation with time, authenticity, and narrative, the more important innovations of
the film are under the surface and have to do with theme, form, and ideology.
Implementation aside, this film is the perfect distillation of Linklater’s ultimate message
of experiencing the “now”\(^{41}\) of reality. Or, in the words of Rob Stone, “Instead of an
inauthentic, romantic, historical gaze the film pays attention to what is always present in
Linklater’s version of the ‘ongoing wow’” (71). The entire movie in this way is a wind-
up in preparation for a ten-second conversation that closes a nearly three-hour film. Four
words sums up the sentiment: it’s always right now.\(^{42}\) A common observation after
showing the film is the collective tearing up of the audience at the abrupt closing of an
emotional journey through the mundanity of life. A journey through a film that somehow
includes religion, war, the academy, the music scene, love, hate, death, and loss, without
hitting the storytelling beats that so firmly characterize other stories of its kind. Michael
Koresky of the film journal *Reverse Shot* explains the film in this way:
…this is a narrative about life at its most mundane—its minute gestures, its daily disappointments and happy surprises, its gradual forward motion—and in its unhurried, unforced observational style and humane warmth Linklater may indeed have ended up with one of the greatest stories ever told (Koresky).

What we have is a defiant treatise against the way we tend to think about life, when we dwell on its memorialization instead of the actual lived experience. There is a scene near the end of the film in which Patricia Arquette’s character Olivia begins weeping as her son Mason is packing up to leave for college. She is bemoaning the fact that the landmarks of life are now over, and the next event will be her own funeral. What perceptive audiences will notice is that none of the landmarks she mentions actually appear in the film. Rather than show us the typical clichéd subject matter, Linklater has shown us the gentle flow of time. In this way, the audience has lived through a more authentic experience than the characters. Koresky notes that “Our lives have patterns, even if we don’t see them until we take a step away and look back.” The audience, because of the distance between us and subject in Boyhood is able to see what Olivia cannot. Mason’s mother remembers the parade of significant events, but by the end we instead feel like Mason: life is always right now. As Stone remarks on this particular scene, “The mistake of looking backwards with fondness or regret is as bad as anticipating what lies ahead” (71).

The influence of James Joyce is here, but it is easy to forget his presence in the wake of the incredible film that is in front of us. We see A Portrait in the narrative structure of the film, the form used to convey the passage of time, and the use of repeated
scenarios and events to convey theme and meaning. But the narrative distance that allows us to more objectively witness the pattern of life in *Boyhood* is a main difference between this film and Joyce’s *Portrait*. We are too involved with the inner-workings of Stephen’s mind to distance ourselves from his development. Furthermore, though Stephen is an artist that eventually grows past the limitations of family, church, and nation, Linklater’s Mason is a seemingly unspectacular student simply going through life. Michael Koresky’s distinction between this character and others often seen in this type of narrative is worth quoting in full:

We’re not following the gradual formation of a lost soul; instead we're tracking an emotionally healthy, intellectually curious, and, perhaps most refreshing of all, somewhat average all-American kid who is the product of divorced parents yet isn’t defined by that; whose single mom twice subjects him to the emotional tumult of alcoholic stepfathers, yet isn’t traumatized by that; who is the younger brother of a more outspoken, overachieving sister yet isn’t particularly bothered by that; who even by film’s end has yet to find his true creative or professional calling yet isn’t distressed by that. Instead of offering one-to-one psychological readings, Linklater lightly dramatizes how the gradual accruing of experience shapes one’s character and interests (Koresky).

In *Boyhood* we have none of the potential elitism that can be extrapolated from Joyce’s text, no chosen subject that is in possession of an extraordinary mind. While Joyce systematically showcases the process of how the artist gradually grows beyond the bounds of the stifling conventions of reality, Linklater is showing us “the gradual
accruing of experience” that is involved for the rest of us. Shifting focus from *A Portrait*’s themes of a nostalgic past and a prophetic future, *Boyhood* is the culminating project to encapsulate the present, the *now*. If the two mistakes as pointed about by Rob Stone are “looking backwards with fondness or regret” and “anticipating what lies ahead” (71), then *Boyhood* solves these problems, leaving both nostalgia and anticipation with *A Portrait*, all the while borrowing its revolutionary style. Because of this focus on the “now,” accompanying *Boyhood*’s cultural capital as a piece of cinema, Richard Linklater has reached broader audiences with his version of the Bildungsroman.

**Joyce and Film**

*Boyhood* aside, Joyce’s work comes especially predisposed to comparison and critique alongside cinema. Keith B. Williams argues that Joyce’s work was crucial in the development of cinematic techniques in his article “Joycean Cinematicity in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.” He cites filmmaker Sergei M. Eisenstein as posing that “*Ulysses* (1922) be treated as a creative template for the progress of cinema itself” (88). In regards to *A Portrait*, Williams argues that Joyce’s innovations were “synergistic with key aspects of visual culture and technology, giving birth to cinematicity on screen” (89). Linklater’s project comes a century later, but it’s genealogy can be tracked back to Joyce’s work in this way. The main points that will be discussed in this section are theme, form, and perspective: the conveyance of theme by recurring visual motifs, the formal rendering of the flow of time without distracting exposition, and the ideological implications of the differences in how Stephen and Mason are represented. Just as it worked with *Slacker* and *Ulysses*, Joyce’s first novel can be used as a lens to interpret
Boyhood, and Linklater’s work will lead us back to a better reading of Joyce’s Portrait as well.

**Theme: “Paired Repetitions”**

Though Boyhood functions as an encapsulation of the present moment, it has a distinct relationship to the idea of the past, albeit one that works in different ways than in Joyce’s Portrait. In the article “About Time: Before Boyhood,” Rob Stone asserts that “Remembrance without nostalgia is a crucial sentiment in the cinema of Richard Linklater” (67). Stone later states that “Boyhood does not court nostalgia because it does not re-create the past” (71). The first immense distinction that must be made between the cinematic and written portraits is that in Joyce’s work we experience interiority, in that we are allowed to witness Stephen’s thought process. In Boyhood there is only exteriority. In other words, as Williams states, in A Portrait, “We generally see with them, rather than see them” (89). In Boyhood it is the opposite.

In Joyce’s work remembrance and nostalgia work hand in hand, and in Linklater’s the lack of interior monologue only allows for raw remembrance, and that only in subtle manner, through recurring visual motifs that softly communicate theme.

The concept of remembrance connects to A Portrait through the concept of the “Paired Repetitions,” as discussed by Katy Marre in “Paired Repetition as a Formulaic Element in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.” As Marre demonstrates across the entire text, Stephen’s various remembrances throughout A Portrait are conveyed simply by using similar language across time to give the sense of memory and recollection. These allow Stephen to “establish a coherent sense of himself” (208), to become “aware of seeing a pattern or meaning that was not apparent to him before” (213), and to attempt
“to understand his world” (215). For the audience, these repetitions allow us to recognize the main themes of the text, and “enhances our understanding of Stephen’s changed perceptions of things and hence his development as a character” (217). Marre explains this as Joyce’s use of Homeric “recurrent formulations…as noted by Parry, Lord, Calhoun, Slatkin and others” (211). This happens in many ways including color schemes, Stephen’s thoughts and feelings, etc. Marre points out the use of the words “grey belted suit” on pages 9 and 93 of A Portrait, the first usage describing his appearance as a child, and the second as a nostalgic rendering of his former self: “It was strange to see his small body appear again for a moment: a little boy in a grey belted suit” (Joyce, 93). She also points out the idea that Stephen is “unafraid to be alone,” on pages 171 and 247 of A Portrait, first internalized in a third-person description of his mind and feelings and secondly expressed out loud in Stephen’s discussion with Cranly in the final episode. Some of Marre’s examples are more ubiquitous than others—the motif of “apology” can be found in Joyce’s text on 8, 77, 78, 135, and 140 (224).

Boyhood, in a visual medium, eschews nostalgia in favor of the events happening in the present. Yet it still has a relationship to the past, crucially working in a similar way as A Portrait. The difference between Joyce’s usage and Linklater’s is that it can be argued that nostalgia is a key element in A Portrait, through its active rendering of the past. Williams explains it this way: “It is narrated not just as a cinematically ‘fluid succession of presents’ as the 1904 sketch puts it, but an associative shuttling back and forth along the chronological axis to fulfil its methodological propositions” (98). One example of this “shuttling back and forth” that indicates the use of nostalgia and feeling in terms of the past is the example of “a little boy in a grey belted suit” introduced above
by Marre, and also discussed here by Williams: “In a typical example, the adolescent Stephen’s review of his days of preparatory school innocence ends with a sudden materialization of his lost childhood self beside him, as virtual, oblivious and detached as a projected photographic image, but also now visible for the first time” (90). It can be seen that a present thought or scenario thrusts Stephen’s mind back to the past, and the past is rendered before him as present, which is a good working definition of nostalgia. This happens more than once, another example being as Williams points out, when “Heron teasingly cajoles Stephen to ‘admit’ an adolescent crush, simultaneously tapping a cane across his calf. This propels Stephen back four years earlier to an accusation of writing ‘heresy’ and a brutal schoolboy inquisition” (99). According to Williams, this act of moving through mental as well as physical space and time is Joyce’s main contribution to the “revolutionizing” of the Bildungsroman (101). What Boyhood borrows from A Portrait in its relationship to the past is the repetition of key images and themes that allow the audience to track Mason’s progression through life. While we do not follow Mason’s interior progression of establishing “a coherent sense of himself” (Marre, 208), we understand his world and development through the same sort of paired repetitions, through the progression of visual patterns and settings.

Examples of paired repetitions and patterns abound across the twelve episodes. The definition of a paired repetition given by Marre is “a passage repeated two or three times with slight variation or differentiation in the second and third instances” (208). To demonstrate: in the first vignette Mason hears his Mother arguing with her boyfriend and he sneaks downstairs to watch. He sees them bicker, and witnesses his Mother bitterly explain the struggles that come with being a single parent. In the second vignette Mason
and his sister attempt to eavesdrop in a similar way as their mother and father argue outside. While in the first episode, the watching is in isolation, here Mason and his sister are experiencing it together, even using a pair of binoculars from the upstairs window. In the first vignette we are watching Mason as he becomes more self-aware through the realization of his mother’s hardship, and in the second, Mason and his sister together experience the turbulent uncertainty of their position between their divorced parents. In the first scene, Mason can hear every word of the argument, allowing for an easier interpretation of the events. In the second segment, Mason and Samantha can only witness the body language of their parents, adding to the ambiguity. Mason wonders aloud: “Do you think he’s gonna spend the night?” Samantha replies sassily: “Doesn’t look like it” (Boyhood). In this way the move from the first passage to the second involves a move from isolation to the shared experience, from clear audible strife to ambiguity. As the children grow older, their conflicts grow more complex, but they experience them together.

Figures 12, 13. Mason alone. Mason and Samantha (Boyhood).

The repetitions happen through patterns of setting as well. When Mason Sr. takes the kids bowling, they discuss politics in the second vignette, and sex in the sixth. When Mason first is seen in a university classroom with his studying mother in the second vignette, he is watching his soon-to-be step-father give a lecture on Pavlov’s dog. In the
seventh segment, Mason is in a university classroom in which his mother is the teacher, and his future step-father is the student. Thematically, this illustrates the progression of Olivia from student to teacher, a parallel with her evolving independence as she cares for her family. Appropriately, the first lecture in the film, delivered by the harshly traditional, patriarchal, alcoholic professor concerns lustful automatic reactions, and the second, delivered by Olivia is a passionate rendering of the instinct to protect one’s young.

Though the film is called *Boyhood*, these repetitions help us understand other characters as well. In a wonderful performance, Linklater’s daughter Lorelei, playing the character “Samantha,” is seen growing up just as much as Mason. There are three scenes that feature the character Samantha eating a meal with Mason and their mother Olivia, across three different episodes of the film. Each of these scenes feature Samantha’s defiance, and the motif of moving. In the first scene, Olivia tells her children that they are moving, and Samantha refuses to go anywhere, smacking her lips loudly with childish abandon. In the second vignette, a breakfast scene with Mason and Samantha contains the same elements: Samantha intentionally annoys Mason, and defiantly salutes her mother when told to stop. In this second episode, though the subject of moving is broached, it concerns whether or not their father Mason Sr. is going to move back in with them. Three episodes later Samantha and Olivia are sitting at the table again, this time just after Olivia leaves her second husband after being physically abused and terrorized by his alcoholism. Also at the table sits a different young girl, singing music from Disney’s *High School Musical* with as much relish as Samantha sang Britney Spears songs to torment Mason years earlier. The other young girl at the table reminds us of the two preceding scenes featuring defiant little Samantha at the table, but this time, instead of being concerned with
moving, the older Samantha more maturely is concerned with what has been left behind. With a somewhat defiant tone, Samantha asks her mother if they will ever again see the siblings-through-marriage they had to leave with the monstrous ex-husband, and in this culminating scene of the set of repetitions, Olivia breaks down crying. We are given the visual cues to be able to remember the past scenes concerning moving, which suggest the development of Samantha from selfish naivety to empathy. But this is accomplished without the regressive interruption of narrative through flashback. There are a dozen or so other examples of these visual and thematic “passages,” and the rest will be combined together in a chart below.45
**Drifting Through Life: Time Without Exposition**

“Words are stupid”—Mason, from *Boyhood*

The second connection to be made between Joyce’s *Portrait* and *Boyhood* is the depiction of the passage of time without direct exposition. This functions differently between the two works, but accomplishes a similar sense of narration. The “shuttling back and forth” of time and space as explained by Williams is what Joyce introduced to *A Portrait* after his massive unsuccessful first attempt (or now published rough draft), *Stephen Hero*. As Williams explains, “Its conventional chronology and inert naturalism…obscured Joyce’s integral psychological and aesthetic purpose” (98). One could argue that *Boyhood* fits better in the mold of *Stephen Hero* than *A Portrait* because it never “shuttles back and forth” and stays away from flashback and the visualization of memory. But one could never describe *Boyhood* as having a conventional chronology, as Linklater’s main cinematic contribution to the structure of the *Bildungsroman* is the fluidity of the passage of time, through brilliant cuts and the use of transitional music. Just as we experienced growing up as a slow burn of barely imperceptible changes rather than a rigid, linear progression, the film shifts so subtlety at times that we do not even notice that Mason is older. Michael Koresky details the experience of watching *Boyhood* in this way:

> The film will constantly engage the viewer, forcing us to scan the screen for signs that we have leapt ahead in time. There are no on-screen title cards or fade-outs to indicate the passage of years, just the wear and tear of bodies, the shifting of clothing styles, the ever-increasing physical and emotional gravities the actors contain (Koresky).
In this way, *Boyhood* takes the “inert naturalism” from *Stephen Hero*, and the unconventional chronology from *A Portrait*.

Richard Ellmann explains Joyce’s method as essentially “embryonic,” and explains how Joyce renders the passage of time in a non-linear fashion, without direct exposition for signification (*James Joyce*). Placing this explanation directly after Koresky’s discussion of *Boyhood* will serve to showcase their similarities. The difference, is that *Boyhood* moves only forward, and *A Portrait* has a more drawn-out relationship with the past and future:

- Stephen’s growth proceeds in waves, in accretions of flesh, in particularization of needs and desires, around and around but always ultimately forward. The episodic framework of Stephen Hero was renounced in favor of a group of scenes radiating backwards and forwards. In the new first chapter Joyce had three clusters of sensations: his earliest memories of infancy, his sickness at Clongowes…and his pandying at Father Daly’s hands. Under these he subsumed chains of related moments, with the effect of three fleshings in time rather than of a linear succession of events. The sequence became primarily one of layers rather than of years (297).

In a similar way, *Boyhood* moves forward through “chains of related moments,” but never “shuttles back and forth” as Williams explains of *A Portrait*, and as Ellmann explains here. *Boyhood* is split into twelve episodes, and the transition between each one is always either thematic (visually or conceptually), or musical.
The first vignette to the second showcases a somewhat astonishing cut, as this is the first time the audience is made aware that each episode will transition to the next seamlessly, without, as Koresky notes, “title cards or fade-outs” (Reverse Shot). This is the most shocking of the transitions, in a class of its own. Every other transition happens thematically or musically, but the first is the most striking, jarring, and visual. As the family arrives at their new home, the car pulls up, and before the door opens, we see Mason running in to his room, a year older, getting ready for school. After this first transition, Linklater bookends his film with thematic transitions, and uses driving montage-ready music to shift us across three episodes in the middle.

To demonstrate the idea of a thematic connection, it is best to look at the movement from the second vignette to the third, and the eighth to the ninth. The second episode ends with Mason’s stepfather making a stop at a liquor store, justifying his purchase for the children by stating “This is just in case we have guests this weekend” (Boyhood). His son then remarks to Mason, “he always says that, but we never have guests” (Boyhood). The film then transitions to a shot of the stepfather pouring himself a heavy drink, then hiding the bottle behind laundry detergent in a cabinet. We don’t know it yet, but a year has passed. The theme of alcoholism has been traced through the passage of time, and we are given an idea of what events may be coming next. In a similar way, at the end of the eighth episode, Mason is lectured by a different stepfather, Olivia’s third husband Jim. After the lecture, brought upon by failing to meet curfew, Mason retorts, “You know Jim? You’re not my dad.” Jim responds in this way:“No, I’m not your dad. You know how I know that? Cause I’m actually here. I’m the guy with the job, payin’ the bills, taking care of you, your mom, your sister, huh? Huh? I’m that guy”
(Boyhood). In one of my favorite moments in the film, Jim then turns around, revealing the bold, capitalized, and weighty word “CORRECTIONS” on the back of his shirt.

While the monstrous alcoholism represented earlier in the film left no room for empathy, as Olivia’s second husband violently abused her and the family, this second stepfather is a character who we can mourn for. We are more aware of the difficulties of Jim’s life, his military background and fall into the pit of alcoholism due to a thankless, punitive job. The following transition to the next vignette, the next year, introduces Mason walking down the stairs, conversing with his Mother who is sitting at the table going through a pile of bills. We quickly realize that Jim is no longer “payin’ the bills” or “taking care” of the family. Just as Olivia usurps her second husband by becoming a professor herself, she usurps her third by running her own house, realizing that she does not need a man to take care of her family. From this moment, she jokes, she will be “Mommy monk. Simple. Celibate” (Boyhood). Thus, though fluid, the transitions are never arbitrary. Linklater simply chooses to bridge his episodes through theme and music rather than “on-screen title cards” or “fade-outs” in Koresky’s words (Reverse Shot).

By structuring his film through a variety of different kinds of transitions, Linklater is allowing the audience to move through the film slowly, passing through time without really noticing. The difficulty of simulating the slow movement of time through twelve different year-long transitions should not be over-stated. The rest of the transitions in Boyhood, whether visual, musical or thematic, will be put together in a chart below.46

A New Portrait

Comparing Joyce’s first novel to Linklater’s latest magnum opus is not merely to ground Boyhood in Joycean criticism, or to further establish Joyce as a game-changer in
aesthetics and the written word. Linklater not only appropriates Joyce’s work here, but he also updates it, and reaches new audiences. The unfairness Mason endures when his stepfather forces him to get a haircut is reminiscent of the “pandybat” incident Stephen goes through, and both events end up being crucial moments in the intellectual development of the characters. Importantly, Stephen justifies this experience of unfairness by comparing himself to great men that have gone before: “A thing like that had been done before by somebody in history, by some great person whose head was in the books of history” (54), and Mason simply uses his situation to bemoan how much of a “jerk” his stepfather is. Stephen, because he sees himself as great, uses history and the past to comfort him in his persecution at the hands of Father Dolan. Mason is annoyed by the infringing of his individuality by his stepfather, and appeals to his mother, in a sense defending his family by defiantly posing the question of why she married the cruel professor in the first place. While Joyce allows for his protagonist to fit in the mold of the artist, greater and set apart from society, persecuted because of his great gift, Mason does not verbally or visually comfort himself with the idea of historical grandeur when he is ill-treated. This reflects ideas of art and artist in the 21st century, as technology, access, and opportunity have allowed many more to produce, engage with, and exhibit art. If art is Stephen’s destiny, then it is Mason’s aesthetic hobby.

In *A Portrait*, Stephen grows into more of a surrogate James Joyce by the end of the novel, fully developing nuanced aesthetic theories through conversations with fairly uninterested friends: “Did that explain his friends’ listless silence, his harsh comments, the sudden intrusions of rude speech with which he had shattered so often Stephen’s ardent wayward confessions?” (232). In the same way, Mason develops into a fully-
fledged character from *Slacker* by the final three episodes, even talking more like Linklater’s “Should Have Stayed at the Bus Station” as he delivers his existential discourse. Michael Koresky of *Reverse Shot* outlines this gradual shift:

> Throughout Boyhood, as Linklater moves toward ever more confident and casual ways of capturing the beauty of human interaction, Ellar Coltrane begins to imperceptibly move toward embodying the quintessential Linklater protagonist. By film’s end, Coltrane even has the delicate manner and slight drawl of Wiley Wiggins, *Dazed and Confused* and *Waking Life’s* central dreamer. Mason has blossomed into the kind of searching, soulful youth we’ve seen in *Slacker, Dazed, Before Sunrise,* and *Waking Life,* bursting with potential but far from fully realized. It’s miraculous to watch this slow but sure spiritual melding between author and subject (Koresky).

At the risk of providing an evaluative critique, it is important to discuss why *Boyhood* is an important encapsulation of Joyce’s first novel. Joyce himself provides a critique of Stephen’s artistic ambition when we find him in *Ulysses,* not in flight, but adrift. Joyce in this way is critiquing the conventions and status of the “artist” that he himself engaged with in his first novel, especially when we (thankfully) are allowed to transition from Dedalus to Bloom (who himself is not devoid of artistic and intellectual aspirations).

What Linklater does similarly with *Boyhood* is to show his own idea of an artist: a hard-working, devoted, passionate auteur working with others to accomplish an aesthetic goal. If *Boyhood* is a *Portrait* for the current generation, a distillation of Joyce’s work for those who will never read him, it is because of the treatment of and attitude towards “others,”
(everyone that is not Mason vs. everyone that is not Stephen), as well as the view of history in each respective text.

**Aesthetics vs. Empathy**

Ellmann briefly discusses the idea of the role of “others” in *A Portrait* as part of his explanation of the style of the novel. He states that in the process of Stephen’s embryonic growth, “other human beings are not allowed much existence except as influences upon the soul’s development or features of it” (Ellmann 297). Because Joyce’s project is to show a young artist growing past the tangled nets of family, church, and state, Stephen is set apart from others, seen with a sense of heightened importance. We see this attitude reflected in the aforementioned sentiment Stephen expressed towards his schoolmate Cranly, in his annoyance with his “rude speech” that interrupts the more “important” things that are being said. He expresses a similar attitude of disdain towards his family: “His father’s whistle, his mother’s mutterings, the screech of an unseen maniac were to him now so many voices offending and threatening to humble the pride of his youth” (Joyce, 175). His more aesthetic sensibility shows through when he exits the house, and “the spirit of Ibsen blow[s] through him like a keen wind” (176).

Alternatively, Mason is not developed at the cost of any subject, and there are no “Others” cannibalized so that Mason can fly towards the sun. There are moments when Mason is taking pictures, creating his art, in the presence of his family, but it never seems as if he is creating art *in spite of them*. Mason has an aesthetic sensibility, and even encapsulates his girlfriend Sheena in his stylized photographic portraits just as Stephen captures his muse in his villanelle. But this depiction is shown after Sheena’s character is fully developed, and she is actually involved in the creation of the art. As in *A Portrait,*
angst felt towards others is present in *Boyhood*, but never in a debilitating, isolated manner. Mason explains his anger given the fact that others “control him” in a late-night party conversation with Sheena, but displays empathy towards them in the same sentence: “they’re not even aware they’re doing it” (*Boyhood*). Mason displays affection for Sheena during the conversation, and in the end, expresses how she is instrumental for the vocalization of his feelings. He is not being turned off by “rude speech” like Stephen towards Cranly, instead remarking, “I really like talking with you. I don’t usually try to like, vocalize my thoughts or feelings or anything” (*Boyhood*). In this way, Sheena is a catalyst for the expression of his thought, not a stumbling block. This example is an archetypal one in the film, as “Others” are often seen as positively influencing the development and expression of Mason, rather than getting in the way. Mason’s second stepfather buys him a camera, which allows the expression through art. His father, Mason Sr. gives his son wise life advice as well as aesthetic training, primarily through his passion for music. The film itself focuses on more than just the development of Mason. As mentioned in a section above, the paired repetitions that cue us in on the development of Mason’s character thematically, also work for his sister Samantha.

**Robert Spoo, and the “Nightmare of History”**

The aesthetic prioritizing that subjugates Stephen’s treatment of others also subjugates his view of history, as investigated by Robert Spoo in *James Joyce and the Language of History*. Spoo looks through a meta-historical lens at *A Portrait* to determine the source of Stephen’s later declaration in *Ulysses* that history is a “nightmare.” He states of *A Portrait* that:
What emerges is a complex set of images and metaphors which, as Stephen grows older, increasingly reveals an ambivalence on his part toward history and historical knowledge, an attitude of acceptance and rejection, escape and return, that in certain ways mirrors—though not without ironic distortion—the young Joyce’s unsettled views on the same questions (40).

Instead of joining the critics who view Stephen’s rejection of history as a symptom and consequence of high modernism, Spoo sees Stephen’s historical ambivalence in *A Portrait* as an “attempt to come to grips with the problem of history” and that his prioritization of aesthetics both “inevitably courts disengagement with reality” and also “hopes to make the world a more vital, habitable place” (40). This sympathetic view towards Stephen is compelling, but what Spoo later points out as the “modernist insistence on the primacy of subjective experience,” which encourages “the presentation of isolated segments of mentation, downplaying the forces of collective experience” (57) is a problem in *A Portrait* that sublimates every “Other” in the book underneath Stephen and his aesthetic development.

It could be argued that *Boyhood* has a more problematic relationship with history than *A Portrait* in that the past is discussed, but never dwelt upon, in a radical prioritization of the present moment. In this temporal primacy subjugating the past and future, can *Boyhood* be accused of a regressive ahistorical attitude? Though unconventional, Linklater’s film should not be called ahistorical. Instead, what Linklater has done fits better into what Hayden White calls “Contextualist” history, as Spoo explains: “The contextualist proceeds by ‘isolating some (indeed, any) element of the
historical field as the subject of study, whether the element be as large as ‘the French Revolution’ or as small as one day in the life of a specific person’’’ (55). Linklater’s film is contextually historical in that one subject is focused on within a particular social, historical, cultural and national context, and followed throughout twelve years. The problem of contextualism, as detailed by Spoo, is that “avoiding the usual developmental conception of a life and suppressing the narrative patterns that reinforce that conception, may risk erasing the past, or a sense of the past, from its narrative structure” (57). The erasure of the past is what many theorists, including Lyotard have accused high modernism of, and Spoo refers to this idea elsewhere as “the larger problem of high modernism and its alleged impotence in the face of genuine historical experience” (40). Though in both Boyhood and A Portrait we witness a “fluid succession of presents” (Williams, 98) we still see development, and narrative patterns in both texts, though unconventional. Indeed, it is impossible to produce a work depicting a twelve-year process without implicitly recognizing the flow of history. In Boyhood politics, technological development, and certain social issues are depicted objectively, without much commentary. If A Portrait can be interpreted as the early stages of Stephen’s working through of the problem of history, as outlined by Spoo, then Boyhood implicitly works through the past just by presenting it. By presenting us with twelve contextual vignettes or snapshots, the audience is literally watching history unfold. It would be difficult to label Boyhood as ahistorical, even given the thematic primacy of the present.

**Portraits, Problems**

Any discussion of Boyhood and history cannot be had without noting what is missing from Linklater’s account. The more empathetic focus of Boyhood cannot be
discussed without noting important critiques made about the film and specifically the misrepresentation (read: lack of representation) of race and racial issues found within. Writing for *The Atlantic*, Imran Siddiquee notes an omission of race, and that “Mason lives 12 years in America without ever having or overhearing a significant conversation about race. Not on TV, not at school, not with his parents, nor with any of his friends” (“Not Everyone’s Boyhood”). Steven W. Thrasher remarks on the overwhelming whiteness of the film as well, stating “It felt absurd to watch a movie filmed in Texas, over the past dozen years, almost exclusively about white people. Texas is, after all, about 40% Hispanic…” (*The Guardian*). Similarly, in an article for *Salon*, Grisel Y. Acosta finds two major problems with the film:

the unrealistic lack of visible Latino/a characters in the family’s Texas communities, and the simplistic portrayal of the migrant worker Enrique, the lone Latino with a speaking role, who is ‘saved’ from his life of manual labor when Arquette’s character offhandedly suggests he go back to school. ("’Racism Begins in Our Imagination:’” How the Overwhelming Whiteness of “Boyhood” Feeds Dangerous Hollywood Myths").

This problem in the film goes beyond mere critique of the film itself, as the omission of people of color in a film purporting to be an all-encompassing account of growing up assumes whiteness as a default in the American experience, as pointed out by Teo Bugbee for *The Daily Beast*: “…the insistence on constructing the familiar white suburbia of Linklater’s films as a universal norm erases all of the way in which race and racism is inextricable from childhood, especially for young black and brown children.”
Bugbee concludes that this not only hurts the film, but is an irresponsible representation: “As a treatise on the essential vacuity of the white liberal male, *Boyhood* is a staggering achievement. As a portrait of childhood in America, it is incomplete enough to be irresponsible” ("Black 'Boyhood' Is Always Black First, Boy Later").

The frustration felt due to these omissions and poor representations collides with the masterful nature of the work stylistically for many critics. Nearly every one of the critics who point out the failing of the film in its representation (lack thereof) of race begin their critique in a way that suggests, “*Boyhood* is a masterpiece.*” Siddiquée notes that “Linklater does choose to openly point out social inequities that Mason encounters on his path,” but examines *Boyhood* as an “insidious” symptom of our society, the suggestion that “it’s the norm for these boys and men not to think about race” (“Not Everyone’s Boyhood”). Jaime Woo, in an article for *The Daily Dot*, points outward to the system of criticism in Hollywood, suggesting that the overwhelming positive reception of this film unveils a disturbing set of problems with the industry at large: “There is something telling and troubling about how the film’s perception of race glides so stealthily under people’s radars.” For Woo, this raises an important question: “…what does it mean when ‘ordinary in 2014 still passes as the white experience?’” (“The One Scene in 'Boyhood' No One Is Talking about.”). If Joyce’s *Portrait* has a bit of an empathy problem that *Boyhood* updates for the current moment of more widespread artistic expression and community engagement in art, the glaring omission of race from Linklater’s vision suggests that a “perfect” “Portrait” cannot be made, any attempt at total societal encapsulation will be found wanting in some regard. After *Boyhood*, a film that addresses race more ethically and appropriately is needed to fill in the gaps.
A Portrait can be discussed as a problematic piece, more indicative of elitist modernist leanings than any of Joyce’s other works, and critiqued in Ulysses, itself a text infinitely more concerned with community and others than the insular subject of Joyce’s Bildungsroman. Boyhood is a “Portrait” for the 21st century, and it too grapples with issues of representation, with the omission of people of color. Though Joyce’s Portrait is a revolutionary text in style and substance and a critical self-commentary on the plight of the artist in a hostile society, it can be difficult to behold the Messianic depiction of the artist, and the high modernist privileging of aesthetics over empathy, even if they are meant to be difficult and grappled with. Through film, Linklater borrows the good elements from A Portrait, and tempers some of the problematic ones: including turning the prioritization of aesthetics over the “other” into a balanced aesthetic sensibility. In this appropriation, new problematic elements arise, opening up the door for another artist to right the issues that Linklater leaves unaddressed. Perhaps Linklater can address the race issue in Boyhood himself in future work, as Joyce retroactively provided commentary on his own. Once we’ve seen Boyhood it can be difficult to return to A Portrait without a sense of irony, but perhaps this is a better reading anyway. When Joyce moves from this novel to his true masterpiece, Stephen has not “flown” as it were, but is seen even more troubled than before, as if Joyce realized the problematic nature of the text between its final page and the opening of his Homeric masterwork. Linklater, as well as Joyce, saw the problem of A Portrait and did something about it: something unprecedented and monumental. After Boyhood, the door is left open once again. Perhaps after the next “Portrait,” we will return to Boyhood and it will be difficult to avoid rolling our eyes.
Conclusion: Impossible to Learn How to Plow by Watching Films

“It was about a simple day in the life of this community. And by the end of the movie, like, my lord, he used every format. For an emerging film geek, at the time, he used every format he could, like: 16 millimeter, Super 8, he had a Fisher Price “Pixel-vision” camera in there at one point”

“It was film school in a 90 minute setting”

“I walked out of the that movie and I was like, ‘I’m ready.’ You know, and I wasn’t, but, that’s what that movie makes you feel empowered man, that movie makes you feel like you can make art yourself. I didn’t walk into that theater going ‘one day I’m gonna be an artist,’ but I damn skippy walked out of that theater goin’ ‘I wanna be an artist like that guy’”

—Kevin Smith, from 21 Years: Richard Linklater.

Not only do the quotes above by filmmaker Kevin Smith illustrate a direct parallel between the various different styles used by Joyce in Ulysses and the different filmmaking formats, or “languages” used in Slacker, bridging the two artists across medium and form, but it also illustrates the inspiration felt by Smith when he encountered Slacker for the first time. In this way, the above quotes are the perfect summation of my argument: they demonstrate 1. that James Joyce and Richard Linklater are connected through adaptation stylistically (different styles and formats) and thematically (day in the life of the community), and 2. Using Joyce without enunciation, appropriating his work “arboreally” and “rhizomatically,” (to borrow terms from Douglas Lanier and DG), but without ever saying his name, has introduced Joycean content to new audiences; audiences who would never crack open Ulysses or Finnegans Wake. The benefits of
Joycean study that society is largely missing out on due to the inherent difficulty of the text consist of the empowerment of the common citizen in society, the free, active discourse of a mind unshackled by convention and societal ills, and the impulse to create after witnessing a virtuoso at his craft. Anthony Burgess notes that “if ever there was a writer for the people, Joyce was that writer” (9). Declan Kiberd agrees, and bemoans, “A book which set out to celebrate the common man and woman endured the sad fate of never being read by most of them” (7). Kiberd also notes that, “It is time to reconnect Ulysses to the everyday lives of real people” (11), and he makes the case for this reconnection splendidly. But though the case is well-made, it is difficult to imagine that it brings a significant number of new audiences to the text—perhaps scholars who had no interest read Ulysses and Us and then are inspired to give it another try, but I cannot imagine a good number of Leopold or Molly Bloom’s being won over in the same way. Linklater actually makes this reconnection, and the greatest trick of all is that he makes it wordlessly. The fact that he uses Joyce unannounced separates his appropriations from many of the films discussed in the work of Hutcheon and other adaptation theorists, and I would argue that this silence is the most crucial element that gives way for wider audiences to interact with the text. The three films of focus in this study had admittedly small audiences in comparison with Linklater’s big budget fare, but the Joycean connections operate in his big studio productions as well, albeit more “rhizomatically” than “arboreally.” This is the subject for another study, but the beginnings can be traced here.

Declan Kiberd’s notion of the “art of the everyday” as a subtitle to his text makes for an initial unification of the two artists. At the risk of being unfair to Kiberd’s Ulysses
and Us, the author himself systematizes *Ulysses*, assigning a pragmatic, succinct, one-word verb to each of the episodes in the effort to demonstrate the practical, every day nature and universal “art of everyday life in Joyce’s masterpiece.” Linklater’s filmography can each be assigned to each verb, demonstrating an (admittingly tangential) link across his entire body of work.

**Table 1: Verbs, Episodes, Films**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kiberd’s Assigned Verb</th>
<th>Episode of <em>Ulysses</em></th>
<th>Corresponding Linklater film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waking</td>
<td>Telemachus</td>
<td><em>It’s Impossible to Learn to Plow by Reading Books</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Nestor</td>
<td><em>Me and Orson Welles</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
<td>Proteus</td>
<td><em>subUrbia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>Calypso</td>
<td><em>Before Sunset</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praying</td>
<td>The Lotus-Eaters</td>
<td><em>Bernie</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dying</td>
<td>Hades</td>
<td><em>Before Midnight</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>Aeolus</td>
<td><em>Tape</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>The Lestrygonians</td>
<td><em>Fast Food Nation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Scylla and Charybdis</td>
<td><em>A Scanner Darkly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wandering</td>
<td>The Wandering Rocks</td>
<td><em>Slacker</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>The Sirens</td>
<td><em>School of Rock</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>The Cyclops</td>
<td><em>Dazed and Confused</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogling</td>
<td>Nausicaa</td>
<td><em>Everybody Wants Some!!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthing</td>
<td>The Oxen of the Sun</td>
<td><em>Live from Shiva’s Dance Floor</em></td>
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</table>
A full-length argument could be written on each of these connections, not merely with the verb Kiberd assigns, but also with the material within each film, episode, and certain relevant details Joyce and Linklater share in their respective biographies.

To conclude, I feel that it is best to first describe a helpful way to interact with the work of both Joyce and Linklater, the subjects of this project, for those who would like to more thoroughly examine the Joycean connections between the two, but also for those who would like to examine other through-lines pointed out in the work of Linklater by scholars such as Rob Stone and David T. Johnson. I never had such a guide when I began my foray into the madness that is Joycean study, and due to this, my first reading of *Ulysses* was spread across nearly six years. After the brief “how-to” digression, I will conclude my argument with a further justification of what Linklater has offered to appropriation and adaptation studies, and the importance of what his work suggests. I will couple this with some opportunities for further research.

It is no secret that the best way to read Joyce is in the order that he wrote. I can hardly imagine anyone jumping into *Finnegans Wake* and then going back to unfettered language no questions asked. Read Joyce as a crescendo to his masterpiece *Ulysses*, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dreaming</th>
<th>Circe</th>
<th><em>Waking Life</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Eumaeus</td>
<td><em>Boyhood</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Ithaca</td>
<td><em>Bad News Bears</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td><em>Before Sunrise</em></td>
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then immerse yourself in the chaotic work of the man who conquered language more thoroughly than any ever before. A guide to Linklater is a bit more complex.

**Drawing out the Rhizomatic**

Should we as an audience take part in the aesthetic and critical process of viewing a given artist’s work as a whole, all contributing to one signature impression, style, or message? The idea of the *auteur* lends itself readily to this sort of holistic criticism. In order to garner the most meaning, to *really* interact with a given director’s work, what is the best order in which to go? What treasure map allows us to get to the “X” of cultural revolution within Linklater’s filmography? Surely for a given auteur, all of their work comes from the same literal place, and with Linklater we have, somewhat ironically, a director who varies most widely between genre and subject matter, but is always looking at similar ideological matters. Whether it is obscure science fiction or drama adaptation, big budget studio comedy, real-time independent film or sports documentary, there are ideological and stylistic undercurrents that are inescapable. What happens if we trace through all of an artists’ work, regarding none as lesser or more essential than the rest? If we are hunting for this sort of connection, there is a specific order and grouping that will work better for interpretation than others. Below is one recommendation from one who has just been immersed in Linklater’s work. It certainly is not the only way to approach the filmography, but it assuredly is an informed one.

**Cornerstones**

*Slacker/Impossible to learn to Plow by Reading Books*

**Beginnings and Endings**
*Before Sunrise/Before Midnight*

**Experiments in Real Time**

*Tape/Before Sunset*

**Rock and Roll Reformation**

*Dazed and Confused/School of Rock*

**Rotoscopic Projection**

*Waking Life/A Scanner Darkly*

**True Crime and the “Proper Ethic”**

*Newton Boys/Bernie*

**American Tough Love**

*Bad News Bears/Fast Food Nation*

**The Documentaries: Monuments and Men**

*Inning by Inning/Live from Shiva’s Dance Floor*

**Two Plays On Growing Up**

*Me & Orson Welles/SubUrbia*

**Meditations on the White American Male**

*Boyhood/Everybody Wants Some!!*

*(Alternatively, watch the three *Before* films as a trilogy, and watch *Tape* with *Waking Life*, as they deal with similar themes, digital technology, and were released in the same year)*

**Joycean Production/Ricorso**

In addition to tracing the Joycean connections through the rest of Linklater’s filmography, another opportunity for further research is the analysis of Linklater’s
connection to Philip K. Dick. While Joycean connections and echoes abound in Linklater’s work, it would be reckless to assert that they are alone. Linklater is famously literate, and interested in more than sheer Joycean lip service. Joyce pulled from more than simply Homer as well. In Ellmann’s *The Consciousness of Joyce* the scholar demonstrates upon perusing the geniuses’ library, that while Joyce read thousands of books, his influences were largely traced back to two: Homer and Shakespeare. He brings out the idea Joyce read from Vico of the “ricorso, that stage in a historical cycle when the whole cycle could be known and leaped beyond” (23). *Finnegans Wake* is itself a demonstration of this Viconian cycle of history. Ellmann continues:

“Vico, in his ‘Discovery of the True Homer’, argued that Homer was not so much an individual as the entire Green people, with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* representing two stages of national development. Joyce aspired to give his own work a stature and significance for the modern period comparable to Homer’s in the classical period, as to Dante’s in the medieval one. *A Portrait of the Artist* belonged to the old stage and *Ulysses* to the new one (23).

After devoting a chapter to Homeric connections, and a chapter to those Shakespearean, Ellmann describes the sort of loose adaptation Joyce engages in, which, because it does not quite fit in either term “appropriation” or “adaptation,” deserves the distinction: “Joycean production” (my term): “Whenever resemblances become especially close, Joyce warns us that he is working with near-identities, not perfect ones, approximating each other at some remove, as a left glove resembles a right. Pressed too far, the analogies become comic near-misses, as here, rather than sober hits” (58).
description fits Linklater’s engagement with the work of Joyce: near identities, never pressed too far as to completely give themselves away. Linklater essentially has “Joyced” Joyce, and just as Joyce pulls from both Homer and Shakespeare, the closest “second” in the work of Linklater is the late Phillip K. Dick. One can draw the comparison: Homer—Shakespeare—Joyce; Joyce—Dick—Linklater. Linklater thus joins the Viconian cycle that gives the *Wake* its form. To discuss whether or not the work of Dick operates in Linklater’s films in a similar way that Shakespeare is found in Joyce is another opportunity for further research.

**The End of Straight Adaptation?**

In the end, what is being advocated is not simply the further use of Joyce’s work in new art forms. Instead, what is being argued for is a new movement of interdisciplinary production, the distillation of the old into new, different art. We can go forward calling this method “Joycean production.” Not to pretend this kind of adaptation has not already taken place, there is much scholarship within adaptation/appropriation studies that looks at a variety of works on the wide spectrum between adaptation and appropriation. However, I believe that Joyce’s model, and in turn Linklater’s, is so essential to the contemporary climate of producing art that it needs its own distinction. It is my belief that this re-mixing is ethically and ideologically superior to direct adaptation: in the wake of new and exciting art forms, coupled with the influence of new media and accessibility, artists engaging in this new appropriation, or Joycean production should veer away from the old linear methods. The audiences reached by films that directly, in linear fashion, adapt source material are audiences that already are not immediately turned off by the literary connection. The audience is limited on arrival, as if the only
members of society fit to encounter the powerful themes found in a piece of art are the ones that have encountered the art by name in the past, largely due to their socio-economic status. Of course, the assumption that direct adaptations are carbon copies of the source material is patently false, as the shift to other mediums in and of itself shifts context and meaning. But in terms of reaching wider audiences, silent appropriation, or Joyceean production is more effective.

It can be argued that artists have a responsibility to carry forward the ethically relevant ideological contributions of the past in order to benefit society, working through old texts to improve on the present (see footnote 9 to Lyotard), but direct adaptations are often not enough. The laziest adaptations, the ones that merely directly transcribe or update the visuals of a source text while adding a few fresh faces to the mix often contribute to a dangerous “golden-age” way of thinking, and in choosing to ignore contemporary issues and contexts, can support the portion of the audience that believes that these issues do not exist. For ease of reading going forward, my distinction is between “straight adaptation,” the mere updating of source material, and “Joycean production,” the interdisciplinary re-mixing of past work into the new, without the explicit claim of adaptation.

Gus Van Sant infamously created a shot-for-shot remake of Psycho (1998), which is in turn frustrating and thought-provoking. Van Sant is sophisticated enough to avoid a puzzling move such as this, so it must be read as more than an unfortunate misstep. This newer Psycho can be read as an example of vain repetition, a hard, feature-length look at the machine of influence taking place before the eyes of the consumer. Van Sant’s film is one of the only projects I can think of that has no message, no utterance of justification;
simply cold reproduction. By radicalizing this idea of straight adaptation, Van Sant has created a call to arms, whether he wanted to or not, for a mode of Joycean production: the distillation and re-introduction of ethical values through art that remixes what has come before.

Examples of this more ethical, Joycean production already abound. Coppolla’s *Apocalypse Now* is a stunning version of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, that adds war and psychotic American militarism to the horrors of colonization and imperialism in the source text. Stanley Kubrick worked directly with Arthur C. Clarke to update his novel *2001: A Space Odyssey* into a vibrant and disturbing philosophical treatise on humanity and our place in the universe in the process of evolution. Tim Blake Nelson uses *Leaves of Grass* to craft a hilariously manic cannabis-heavy film about the bliss of returning to nature. *Easy A*, was an extremely widely watched romantic comedy that explicitly plays with and remixes themes and plot points from *The Scarlet Letter*, to craft a morality play on tolerance, acceptance, and the damage of bigotry in society. The difference between these works and Linklater’s is that though the source text *does not need to be known* in the work of Coppolla, Kubrick, etc, it is still recognized either in the film with the names of characters, titles, etc, or directly referenced, as in *Easy A*. Finding the Joycean production I am noting in Linklater’s work is a more involved act of criticism than a simple viewing, requiring at least a good working knowledge of Joyce’s work in order to demonstrate the connection. The most important part is, though it can be found, audiences need not know about the connection for it to work.

*From Dublin to Austin*
It must be admitted that because Linklater’s filmography is so diverse, his odes to Joyce sometimes so subtle, (perhaps sometimes unintentional) that puzzlement is a natural reaction to the combination. Linklater himself, though interviewed consistently throughout his career, has never made clear the Joyce connection, and no one has directly asked him about it. All of my attempts to ask him about it in the past two years have not been successful, (but I have been told he may have time for an interview as the new year rolls around). The film *Double Play* conducts in a side-by-side analysis of the work of Richard Linklater and James Benning, through a series of conversations and clips of the work of the duo (also using interest in baseball and playing catch as a sort of metaphor). In one of these conversations, Benning brings up *Finnegans Wake* as a starting point of his interest in cinema and difficult art. Linklater meets his glance and nods, and they go on talking about something else. What could be interpreted as a lack of interest, perhaps should be looked at as the magician’s reluctance to reveal his secrets.

Nothing would be made of Linklater’s refusal to “bite” when the topic of Joyce’s work is breached if it were not for the undeniable connection between the two bodies of work between the Dubliner and the Austinite. The more one is immersed in the work of both, the more that claims of Linklater as a “modern-day-Joyce” seem less absurd and more of an appropriate contextualization of Linklater’s work, project, and contribution to art, film, industry and society. The lofty goal would be to adapt Linklater’s use of Joyce as a model for future campaigns to rescue esoteric art from the black hole of obscurity. Surely, Hutcheon provides a multitude of models for adaptation, but not many of them are as detached from their sources as Linklater seems to be from Joyce. I argue that this detachment is the key that truly allows for the reaching of new audiences. Perhaps using
Linklater as a model could make way for the work of Proust, David Foster Wallace, and others to be allowed to “run through the arteries of society,⁵¹” not just in the way that Shakespeare lives on in the primary sense, through interesting and innovative liberties taken with the original “protean” text⁵² but alike in the way that we speak Shakespeare’s language without ever having to know his name. Through his many films, Linklater “saves” Joyce without enunciation.
Works Cited


Notes

1 Richard Ellmann, James Joyce, 566.

2 Linklater, Johnson, 8.

3 Ellmann, 529

4 Hutcheon’s claim is as follows: “Perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptations is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one’s own and thus autonomous” (20-21).

5 Douglas Lanier comments on this somewhat ironically in his article: “Shakespearean Rhizomatics.” He states that “Indeed, the founding gesture of many an article on adaptation is that we are now in an age of post-fidelity” (22), but then remarks that the sheer amount of articles that begin this way suggests a sort of “protesting too much.” In other words, if we really were “post-fidelity” we shouldn’t have to say so as much as we do.

6 35 North Great George’s Street, Dublin, Ireland

7 “It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass” (Ellmann, 222).

8 Jeffrey Segall, in Joyce in America concisely hits on Joyce’s dissidence from the regressive views of his literary counterparts. After summarizing the problematic views of Pound, Eliot, Lewis, and the like, Segall states: “His diffidence about politics, the understated liberalism he weaves through Ulysses, his early fascination with socialist and anarchist thought, and his lifelong pacifism make him something of an anomaly as a modernist” (51).
In “Defining the Postmodern” Lyotard identifies that the Modernist “breaking of tradition” is in fact “a manner of forgetting or repressing the past. That’s to say of repeating it. Not overcoming it” (1466). The post-modern solution is to take place in “ana-lysing, ana-mnesing, of reflecting” (1468).

“‘I want the whole film to flow as a memory without a lot of demarcation,’ describes Linklater. Perhaps you will remark the resemblance of ‘Boyhood’ to James Joyce’s magnum opus, ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man’” (Stein).


All episode titles and Homeric parallels hinted at were conceived by Joyce, but first widely popularized with Stuart Gilbert’s imperative study: *James Joyce’s Ulysses*.

Campbell’s *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* was one of the first total systemizations of Joyce’s mysterious masterpiece. Campbell’s work will be used extensively in my analysis of *Finnegans Wake*.

http://www.waywordsandmeansigns.com/

See Campbell’s *Skeleton Key*: “On this revolving stage, mythological heroes and events of remotest antiquity occupy the same spatial and temporal planes as modern personages and contemporary happenings. All time occurs simultaneously; Tristram and the Duke of Wellington, Father Adam and Humpty Dumpty merge in a single percept” (3).

Stone: “…he escapes all the attempts of the dialogists to pin him down and finally floats away…no single theory dominates or concludes his search for meaning as long as his intuition and its instinctive searching elsewhere can resist” (79).

Literally “How *Ulysses* Didn’t Change Our Lives” and “How it Might Still Do So” (3, 16).

*Ulysses* (484)

This idea of stifling, dead canonization is borrowed from Jameson in “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”: “Those formerly subversive and embattled styles…felt to be scandalous or shocking by our
grandparents are, for the generation which arrives at the gate in the 1960s, felt to be the establishment and
the enemy—dead, stifling, canonical, the reified monuments one has to destroy to do anything new” (1847).

21 This signature stylistic tendency was probed into by Michael Koresky and Jeff Reichert, editors of the
online film journal Reverse Shot. The question and answer are as follows:

   RS: One thing we all agreed on when we selected you for this symposium, is that you’ve
tried out all this different stuff, but each film is unmistakably yours. In School of Rock,
there’s a certain shot where Jack Black is performing his “Band Is Mine” song for the
class for the first time, and the camera moves, floats gently backwards. I feel like this
“drift” is carried through all of your films.

   Linklater: Again, not really conscious on my part, but maybe that’s how I see things, just
this sort of floaty observation.

22 This references back to Hutcheon’s use of John Dryden and the definition of “paraphrase:” “John
Dryden is quoted as defining paraphrase as ‘translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view…,
but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified” (17).

23 Stone brings up Coupland’s text Generation X in his discussion on “slacking” in this section of his
book. Stone remarks that the “self-indulgence” seen in the characters “reflects Coupland’s warning that
‘we’re not built from free time as a species. We think we are but we aren’t’ (1996: 29)” (29).

24 To be fair, Joyce uses the same tactic on himself. See the Portrait, and the first three episodes of
Ulysses especially to showcase his self-critique.

25 The system as constructed by Stuart Gilbert in James Joyce’s Ulysses.

26 Especially in “Two Gallants,” but found in nearly every story in some way. In particular, the story “A
Little Cloud” is nearly played out beat for beat in Linklater’s subUrbia, and should be the focus of
another study.
He retracts this approach near the end of the essay: “If we insist on reading the sequence of styles as a transition, we will have to confront the awkward fact that the sequence ends not with its most radically avant-garde (or postmodernist) chapter but with a chapter which regresses to the modernist ‘narrative norm’ of the first half” (55). He concludes that to solve this problem, Helmut Lethen “argues that such paradoxes of periodization...arise from literary-historians’ retrospective revisions, or indeed constructions of modernism” (56).

“Like Ulysses, Slacker begins with a matricide that is soon shrugged off for fear that its melodramatic qualities will swamp the dérive with plot” (Rob Stone, 28).

Jeffery Segall in his work Joyce in America devotes a chapter entitled “The High Priest of Their Imagination” to those scholars that emphasized above all else Joyce’s connection with the church, and the use of ritual and spirituality in his work: “A very different view of Joyce is taken by Kristian Smidt...Smidt goes on to argue not only that Joyce’s temperament was a profoundly religious one, but that Joyce was performing priestlike functions through his art” (158). Joyce’s fascination and in equal terms disgust with religion has been covered across a multiplicity of scholarship.

This act, as well as an occurrence in a following scene involving a roommate vacating his living situation involve cutting and pasting text and/or pictures in order to either give a message or perform a ritual, not unlike both Leopold Bloom’s profession, and Joyce’s synopsis of himself as a “scissors and paste man.” As recorded by Ellmann in his biography, Joyce stated in a letter to George Antheil the following: “I am quite content to go down to posterity as a scissors and paste man for that seems to me a harsh but not unjust description” (626). The presence of the zine on the counter-culture that Linklater belongs to and represents in Slacker can be explained as the eventual result of this “cut and paste” mentality begun in modernism, but most effectively demonstrated in Finnegans Wake and other postmodern texts. Specifically the esoteric, vague goodbye series of postcards put together by the missing roommate later in the film seems influenced by the zine. It should also be mentioned that the roommate’s abrupt departure is a demonstration of “exile” a crucial Joycean motif that any Joyce inspired work would
be remiss in leaving out. In addition, the roommate adapts an alter ego: he is the “Juan Apagado,” to Joyce’s “Stephen Dedalus.” His postcards read like third-person journal entries, which set it apart from the end of Joyce’s *Portrait*, which consists of entries in the first-person.

31 It is worth pointing out that in Linklater’s first project, *It’s Impossible to Learn to Plow by Reading Books*, the main figure records his thoughts into a voice recorder in a similar manner. So audiences familiar with his first project can wonder whether the jilted son in *Slacker* is in some way connected to Linklater with a distance similar to the one between Joyce and Stephen Dedalus.

32 Joyce did, however, attempt to run a theater with some other business men (Ellmann 300-301).

33 *Ulysses*, 34

34 The *Telemachia* of Joyce including the first three episodes of *Ulysses* concerning Stephen Dedalus: he is the “son” as Bloom is the “father.” Episodes of this *Telemachia* are “Telemachus,” “Nestor,” and “Proteus.”

35 The difference between the adaptations she is referring to and Linklater’s work is brought out even more clearly when she states that “It is no surprise that economic motivation affects all stages of the adaptation process” (88). Applying this idea to Linklater’s use of Joyce would be absurd, as Joyce lacks the marketability of other properties that are typically adapted.

36 From *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (4)

37 It can be argued that *Annotations* does not encourage such a reading, but the very fact that it goes through the *Wake* in order suggests that it should be read as such.

38 “What makes a mesostic as far as I’m concerned is that the first letter of a word or name is on the first line and following it on the first line the second letter of the word or name is *not* to be found” (Cage)

39 This project is one of collaboration around the world, allowing artists to create musical, audible portraits with each section of the *Wake*. It encourages diverse, unpredictable, and radically innovative readings and renderings of the text.

40 Cited from Robert Spoo’s *James Joyce and the Language of History* (56).
41 David T. Johnson, author of *Richard Linklater* conducts a study in which he traces Linklater’s fascination with temporality, a theme that can be found in all of his work: “That approach might be summed up, generally, as the exploration of temporality, particularly one that celebrates an attendance to the present—one not divorced, it should be said, from the past or future—even as the films are as likely to explore this idea’s darker implications and consequences” (9).

42 In the article for the *New Yorker*, “Moment to Moment” by Nathan Heller, this sentiment is pointed out as an original title for the film: “In the editing room over the past few weeks, Linklater and his team had thought about titling the movie “Always Now.” Part of the film’s pathos comes from the realization that, although the actors are acting, the passage of their lives is real and irretrievable. There is no Young Mason actor who can be trotted out for interviews. But then it struck Linklater that many Richard Linklater movies could be called ‘Always Now.’ They stuck with ‘Boyhood.’”

43 Koresky notes the significance of this scene: “Near the end of the film, Arquette mentions a “series of milestones” to Mason, including “the time we thought you were dyslexic, the time we taught you how to ride a bike”; also weddings, divorces, getting her master’s degree. At this point, we realize that we didn’t see any of this onscreen.”

44 This is also noticed as a wonderful performance by Michael Koresky of film journal *Reverse Shot.*
### Table 2N: Paired Repetitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repetition or Pattern</th>
<th>Featured Episodes</th>
<th>(con)</th>
<th>(con)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existential musing</td>
<td>Episode 9: Mason and Sheena are talking alone at a party. Mason remarks: “I just wanna be able to do anything I want. Because it makes me feel alive.” They talk about how they shouldn’t care what others think.</td>
<td>Episode 10: Mason and Sheena are talking while driving to visit Samantha in college. They talk about technology, automation, and authenticity.</td>
<td>Episode 10: Mason and Sheena talk at a diner about meaning, and how nobody really knows what’s going on. Episode 12: Mason and the girl he meets in college talk, remarking among other things, that “it’s always right now”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving with Dad</td>
<td>Episode 6: Mason Sr. drives Mason out to go camping in his muscle car. Plays a song by Wilco, “Hate it Here” and tells Mason to listen to how transcendent and simple the song is.</td>
<td>Episode 8: Mason Sr. is driving with Mason in a mini-van. Mason is upset because his father sold his old car, and had previously promised it to his son. Mason Sr. gives Mason Jr. a “Beatles” mixtape, in which he “gets the band back together.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>Episode 1: Mason and his friend look through an underwear catalog together, remarking “look at those,” among other things.</td>
<td>Episode 4: Mason and his brother through Olivia’s second marriage look at pornography on the internet. Their friend shows them how, remarking “How do you guys not know how to do this?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riding bikes/Play</td>
<td>Episode 1: Mason rides his bike while loud driving music plays. He spray-paints a wall with his friend.</td>
<td>Episode 5: Mason and his siblings ride bikes as loud driving music plays. This transitions directly into horrifying domestic violence committed by his stepfather.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>Episode 9: Mason is lectured by his photography teacher to improve his work ethic, in that he has a good deal of talent and shouldn’t waste it.</td>
<td>Episode 10: Mason is lectured by his boss at a fast food restaurant, who believes that he has what it takes to make fry cook over the summer.</td>
<td>Episode 11: Mason is encouraged by his art teacher, who congratulates him on his silver medal, and tells him that college will be better than high school.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harshly traditional fathers</td>
<td>Episode 4: Mason’s stepfather makes him cut his hair so he won’t look like “a little girl.”</td>
<td>Episode 9: Mason’s stepfather (the second one) asks him if he wants to wear a purse after seeing his painted nails. Tells him that being a man has to do with having a job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flirtation/Stares from classmates</td>
<td>Episode 2: In the classroom, Mason is chastised by his teacher to finish his work instead of playing on the computer. A girl teases him right after.</td>
<td>Episode 4: In the classroom again, Mason enters with a new haircut. A girl passes him a note saying that she thinks it looks “kewl.”</td>
<td>Episode 5: Mason goes to a new school for the first time. Two girls and a boy stare at him when he is introduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Episode 1: Olivia reads <em>Harry Potter</em> to Mason and Samantha. Illustrative of family time.</td>
<td>Episode 3: Mason, Samantha, Mindy and Randy attend the book launch for <em>The Half-Blood Prince</em>. This is still indicative of family time, but with a new, larger family unit. Also the act of reading has moved from collective to individual, as each kid gets their own copy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad’s Music</td>
<td>Episode 4: Mason Sr. plays a song with his roommate for Mason and Samantha. The song is about the loss of being away from his kids.</td>
<td>Episode 6: Mason Sr. plays a song while camping with Mason Jr.</td>
<td>Episode 8: Mason Sr., his wife Annie, Samantha, and Mason Jr. sing a song about life and its ups and downs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3N: Exposition Free Transitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode Transition</th>
<th>Type of Transition</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Episode 1-2</td>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>From parking the car, to Mason running in the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 2-3</td>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>From the professor asking Olivia on a date, to Mason playing on the trampoline with Samantha and the professor's children. From first date to new family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 3-4</td>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>From Mason’s Stepfather taking a trip to the liquor store, to the Stepfather pouring himself a heavy drink and hiding the bottle. From suspicious habit, to observed alcoholism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Episode 4-5</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>A girl smiles at Mason after giving him a note stating that she likes his new hair. A Rock Alternate version of “Crank That (Soulja Boy)” fades in, and transitions to Mason and friends riding bikes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 5-6</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>From kids staring at Mason in a new classroom, we see Mason putting up a political sign with his Father. “Vampire Weekend’s” “One (Blake’s Got a New Face)” plays to issue in the episode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 6-7</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Mason urinates on a campfire as “1901” by “Phoenix” plays. This leads to the next episode, as Mason and Samantha are being dropped off at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 7-8</td>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>Mason suspiciously looks at his Mother talking to Jim, one of her students, over glasses of wine at a party. In the following scene we see an older Mason making-out with a girl in the back seat of a car. From witnessing his Mother’s potential relationship, to Mason engaging in a relationship himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 8-9</td>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>We see Mason taking pictures of a lake. This cuts to Mason in a dark-room, developing a photograph. We see his production of art taking shape through two different steps of the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 9-10</td>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>From Jim lecturing on how he pays the bills, to Olivia paying the bills in a different house.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Episode 10-11 | Thematic | From Mason and Sheena sleeping together in a college dorm-room, to Mason approaching his art exhibit, featuring different photographs and portraits of Sheena. From his relationship to its encapsulation in art.

Episode 11-12 | Thematic/Visual | From discussing moving their things out of their Mother’s house over dinner, the next transition abruptly features the “thud” of the bags in the back of Mason’s truck.

Help with song titles from “what-song.com”:


47 This explanation of Stephen’s annoyance with Cranly reminds me of the “authoritative/constructed” interplay going on in Slacker as demonstrated in Chapter 1.

48 Spoo cites this from White’s Metahistory, 17-18

49See my reference to Lyotard and “Defining the Postmodern” in the Introduction to this project.

50 “That’s who goes down in history: the body-count guys. But I find it much more heroic to have pretty much gotten away with it, and to not have hurt anybody. To me that fits into a proper ethic” (Discussing The Newton Boys in an interview with David T. Johnson 136)

51 See Burgess,’ Rejoyce

52 This term is borrowed from Stephen Greenblatt, in his “General Introduction” to The Norton Shakespeare: “The global diffusion and long life of Shakespeare’s works depend on their extraordinary malleability, their protean capacity to elude definition and escape secure possession” (1).