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Neo-Raconteur:  
Allocating Southern-Gothic Symbolism into Design Media

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A Thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Art & Design  
East Tennessee State University  
In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design

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by  
Mark Daniel Compton  
December 2011

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Keywords: Time-Based Media, Southern Gothic, Cinema, Narrative, Neo-Raconteur

## ABSTRACT

Neo-Raconteur: Allocating Southern-Gothic Symbolism into Design Media

by

Mark Daniel Compton

I created the term Neo-Raconteur to convey my interest in medium theory to support the artistic custom of revealing cultural conventions for allocation into artistic genres. The term evolved from the French word “Raconteur,” meaning: somebody who tells stories or anecdotes in an interesting or entertaining way. In the past a Raconteur’s anecdotes were verbally volleyed, ever voluble, yet quip. Neo-Raconteurs may decide not to speak at all—choosing their anecdotal expression to manifest itself through singular or multiple means, manners, or methods of design and technology as well as or involving more traditional techniques of extraction to convey the narrative. I demonstrate how it applies to my work in time-based-media within the realms of Southern Gothic symbolism – which rely on the supernatural, physical geographic settings, instances of the grotesque and irony along with visual and/or psychological shadow(s) of foreboding caused by tradition or hidden truths, occasionally both.

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## CHAPTER 1

### NEO-RACONTEUR: TO TELL A STORY

Having to find a term or phrase that most suits or some might say defines me as an artist has been quite interesting. The need became apparent when a very influential artist and friend informed me that she had a difficult time explaining to others what my profession exactly is. Am I a Director, Producer, Writer, Cinematographer, Art Director, Graphic Designer, Urban Designer, Fashion/Costume Designer, Cultural Promoter, Tourism Developer, or Educator? All of which I am capable and have trained or studied for and have practiced or attempted the practice in some capacity over the years. Apparently a single title is needed for the populous within the business and marketing flanks of the world for polymathic individuals; and like the motion picture industry, they prefer your professional title to be no more than the amount of words used in movie titles. Whether or not the title is successful or not can be easily tested by changing the phrase “Let’s go see...” followed by the title (as used in the motion picture industry) to “We need a...” followed by your title (used by a possible patron or employer). Evidently a person being able to excel at more than one or two endeavors seems alien or sacrilege within contemporary Western culture. Being a general practitioner, even in medicine, has lost its favorability to the preferred specialist practice. Understanding that it is fruitless to fight the powers that be; pigeon-holding individuals under labels is an act as old as civilization, with your final label coming from historians. Thus I find it best to do one’s own labeling unless you wish someone else to do it for you.

I glimpsed into the worlds of Transmedia and Multimedia, art genres used by some to describe the intricate mingling of various artistic genres and/or mediums. They

are art forms that tend to be more public performance integration based- and/or instillation minded;<sup>i</sup> though I am interested in the art forms, by no means at this moment would I call myself a practitioner of either, though I plan on experimenting with both genres in the future. Continuing my search, I needed an umbrella term that conveyed my interest in multiple art practices that supported the artist custom of revealing the conventions of culture while being able to allocate a subject to (an) artistic genre(s) that best suits for the greatest appeal to the modern audience. The closest idiom I could find to these artistic sensibilities is the French word “Raconteur,” meaning: somebody who tells stories or anecdotes in an interesting or entertaining way.<sup>ii</sup> (Encarta) I prefer this term due to the leeway it allows in the forms of storytelling and the restrictions it also has of being interesting or entertaining. Educational material, whether its presented in time-based media, lecture, or literature, is more palatable if it is interesting or entertaining, hopefully both. In the past centuries a “Raconteur” was usually someone hired to speak at private society functions, conventions, or traveling lectures and resembled individuals contemporarily referred to as motivational speakers, or could possibly be thought of as “toastmasters;” their anecdotes being verbally volleyed, ever voluble, yet quip enough to be memorable. Then they were regulated in their acts of storytelling by their verbal scope and the physical confinement and restraints of any given performance space. But a modern Raconteur may decide not to speak at all- choosing an anecdotal expression to manifest itself through singular or multiple means, manners, or methods of design and technology as well as or involving more traditional techniques of extraction to convey the narrative. An individual capable of expressing a story or anecdote (linear thought) by traditional techniques but is also capable of telling a story and/or anecdote via use of



multiple artistic genres and/or schools of design by linear and/or non-linear means is a Neo-Raconteur. It is because of my massive liberal arts education combined with multiple studies in the fine arts that most of my work is designed to convey a story, which is why I now refer to myself as a Neo-Raconteur. There are predecessors who I feel practiced the art form, but are given general historic era titles or are addressed under a single artistic practice. “Renaissance Artist,” Leonardo Da Vinci, not only practiced painting, he was a sculptor, architect, inventor, musician, and writer to name a few of his gifts. “Post-Modern Artist,” Andy Warhol was more than a printmaker; he was a painter, photographer, filmmaker, publisher, music producer, and writer along with other artistic practices. What they share is they selectively implemented a specific art form in which to convey their chosen narratives, not to mention their ability to market their name brand.

It could be argued that neoexpressionist express their own anecdotes by way of painting their inner experiences onto canvas or some other palette. Though I paint, I’m not singularly devoted to painting as my way of expressing my inner emotions or thoughts; and though neoexpressionist reveal a story in their work, it is more of a snapshot of an emotional outburst that hints at the panicle or story’s end while seldom revealing a tales beginning. The story is thus incomplete or fully revealed, forcing the audience to contemplate and create their own tale, which maybe the artist’s intent when using this medium. This is not limited to neo-expressionism- for example the Mona Lisa has inspired many to create their own inner tales as to the subject’s smile. The difference is the singular art piece allows the audience to tell the tale, whereas a singular work by a neo-raconteur does not relinquish the tale, there is a beginning, middle, and end, which can be closed or open-ended. This is why the cinematic art forms lend themselves more

easily to the neo-raconteur, but it is not exclusively the only art and design form on their pallet that can or could be used by him or her.

As a devil's advocate in love with the symbolism, especially visual literacy, symbols of grammar, as well as the language of metaphoric symbolism within literature and cinematic prose, I deem it an achievement if my audience laughs nervously when I expose an unexpected truth. Laughing in the face of tragedy is like laughing in the face(s) of god(s), especially if the laughter breaks through suppression due to the political reality enforced by contemporary mythology. Yet in the end I just want to make people think and question convention; I do not care what conclusion or whom the audience questions, no one can control that. Nor do I want the moral of the story to be misconstrued as dogmatic or gospel, just bear it in mind, and think about it. If I've added my own special, often-quirky take on what is misconstrued as the ordinary and transformed it into the extraordinary, the work is successful. If I've introduced someone to a new reality or way of thinking about humanity and our process of living, I feel I have succeeded. Reflective, I believe in genetic fate- ancestors, where does it lead?

## CHAPTER 2

### SOUTHERN GOTHIC: BY THE GRACE OF ANCESTRY

As I mentioned earlier about my search, I, like many artist, am drawn to the custom of revealing the conventions of culture. In my case, I am Southern, a born and raised South Carolinian to be more exact. I am one of the last generations to have known individuals who knew the world before radio and television entered the fray and began the process of creating a nationally uniting cultural influence. Independent in their minds, these were individuals who were born during Reconstruction by parents who where participants in the U.S. Civil War. Of course I have a child's perspective of these people, but as a child it and they seemed magical. Their Southern voices moved in waves, light white to dark black, rising and falling like the sea, elongating vowels until they crashed into a consonant before rolling in repeating reductive waves out onto the sand till sentence end. These old wrinkly faces with white hair sat amongst their selves and spoke of an evil Mr. Lincoln, (I do not ever remember them referring to him as President) and how he destroyed the South and that he was the reason why we were once the richest state and are now such a poor state. I met these people because my grandparents would take me to funerals; I liked them, funerals that is. Being a child and having no attachment to most of those dead, funerals were where I observed mass behavior outside of family and church, which in most cases weddings and funerals in the South are an expansion because of the concepts of God and Spirit. I contend that God and Spirit were the beginning exercises to my imagination. It is just natural to create images of Beings we cannot see, hear, smell or touch. This said, touching dead bodies was not the only reason I enjoyed going to funerals as a child, it was also what seemed to me to be a party that

would always follow. Only at Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas was such food and sweets rolled out, and be that I was with my “Grandma” (Minnie Ruth Berry Compton) or “Papa” (Norman Newton Compton, Sr. called jokingly “Comrade” by his old Army buddies or “Bootsie” by his side of his family) or if I were with both, we would be around where the food was gathered. I would listen to folks with sparkling eyes and white hair and in the case of my grandfather, no hair at all, talk and tell tales of the individuals who had just passed or other friends and relatives who were long gone, but somehow the dead sealed a bond between those gathered with memories that brought on laughter and/or tears.

I was dressed like a little show pony, never the same clothes twice at such events, but always dressed sharp in a tie, with short hair combed and washed behind the ears neat and clean. (I believe this is why I have a degree in Fashion Design and Illustration and also why I feel just as comfortable in a suit and tie as I do in jeans and t-shirt.) My grandmother kept a memory book of black and white photographs with splashes of color in which my early life was visually detailed; photographs are a said benefit to being the oldest grandchild.

The luckiest day of my life was the day they decided to integrate the public school system in my home state; I am the first class to go from first to twelfth grade in South Carolina in integrated schools. No Senator Thurmond, the water tasted no different drinking after a black person than a white person, but of course you had dipped into that well and knew that already. (Yes, I talk to dead people; I would not be Southern Gothic otherwise.) Because of this forced integration on the heels of “Evil Mr. Lincoln Class 101” as a child I could see that black and white, male and female, young and old had the

ability to be good and evil. Exposure to the wide breadth of humanity and its varying cultures was an experience that propelled me into thinking and more importantly questioning so called truths and/or conventions. My tendency to be on the outside looking in began its development because of my family's and church's insular belief systems. As a boy I was taught that my loyalties should follow thusly in order of importance as written on a Sunday school blackboard: To God, (meaning the Trinity), my soul, (meaning the Church), my family, (Mother first), my state, (South Carolina), the South, (in order of succession), my friends (schoolmates, teams), and then my country (USA). My Papa corrected this list and placed country before friends.

Being a Southern Gothic artist goes beyond what some refer to as grotesque cultural exposure, it involves the ecological environment just as much as observations of socioeconomic customs. Beyond the Agrarian culture predominate on my grandmother's side of the family, my grandfather's family (a matriarchal line of Jewish pig farmers, funny but true) was linked more to the water; during the first five years of my life, starting at two months, whenever my grandfather was fishing, I was with him. Placed on his lap and behind the wheel of his truck as a lad, I would steer the wheel that lead through live oaks overflowing with Spanish moss and the farming lands of my grandmother's people; fields of black soil sprigged with green in the spring, followed by high green crops of every sort in the summer, white cotton in the fall, until green turns to brown in the winter, and wild yellow dogs scour the fields for their meals of rodent gleaners. We would arrive at Potato Creek Landing on Lake Santee to fish early morning to setting sun, stump hopping in a small bass boat for "crappie" (fresh water perch) summer though the winter and along the lake's edges and coves in the spring fishing for

blue gill or brim. Seasonal skies reflected on fluid black glass with wildlife everywhere: insects, birds, turtles, and snakes moved through the black cypress waters, making the only sounds other than a fish being pulled out of the water (followed by a note of its size), an occasional boat zooming across the lake to its next stump, its wakes slapping other boats, partially sunk trees, and shore alike, or the even rarer roar of fighter jets from Shaw Air Force Base shooting low across the lake making their maneuvers before flying out of view. Finally boredom would get the best of me and my urticant curiosities flowed in questions to my grandfather that were answered in regional histories and family lore.

The Southern Gothic artist are often bound by internal burns and scars caused by the true Southern “B” attitudes: bias and brutality, bravado and beguile, plus beauty and benevolence; these experiences that transport the Southerner into new realities, if he is artistically inclined, forces the individual into a response, in my case by Gothic expression. I define “Gothic” as an artistic genre characterized visually by darkness and shadow and emotionally by despondency and pessimism, often involving the grotesque or supernatural in an isolated and/or peculiar local. I have found through my own personal relationships and those of most of my friends that the experience that often leads to Gothic expression by the artist is but baggage to the philistine.

Oh the philistine, I have witnessed the philistine in action; I have even lived amongst them. It’s not too hard to come upon this species of humanity, no matter what the region in any country. No social class can be immunized from the philistine, like homosexuals (also not immune) they flourish in every social class and in every race. Artists and high art are complicated and most human beings appreciate the complexity and depth of expression; some citizens even pay the artists for their inspiration, but not

all. There are those who just cannot see past the instantaneous and/or probe the possibilities of perhaps. These individuals are known as “the philistine;” they are the fuel for fads, a mine for a magnitude of monetary waste, and have filled my life with moments of misplaced superficial meanings as to the keys of life. Pearson says of the Sitwells, an early 20<sup>th</sup> to mid century English family of letters and the benefactors of many Modern era artist, as having “been at war for years-with their parents, with the Golden Horde and the philistine, with all those malevolent black forces which had been threatening their comfort and their ideal world of beauty.”<sup>iii</sup> For me it is the philistine of the American South that have astonished, dazzled, and even traumatized me so that I can’t help but to express myself.

Like Marley in Dickens’ Christmas Carol, "I wear the chain I forged in life, I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?"<sup>iv</sup> The first chains I forged were in South Carolina where I was privileged to witness the full macrocosm of the socioeconomic system in an isolated small town setting, as well as the last days of the Southern agrarian culture that is now corporate, not to mention the religious, political, and social structures that faded and/or were revived with the civil rights movement. I am a bridge between the Old South and the New South, Southern Gothic by the grace of ancestry and time and by the affects of those who believe in a God with Southern “B” attitudes.

## CHAPTER 3

### INFLUENTIAL ARTIST - FLANNERY O'CONNOR:

#### WRITING WITH A PEACOCK'S FEATHER

When I teach an English class, no matter the course, I always insist on every student reading *Good Country People*, by Flannery O'Connor. Salman Rushdie said, "Probably the cruelest short story in the English language is Flannery O'Connor's *Good Country People*." <sup>v</sup> Truly there is no one who can reveal a story more beguilingly and as viscous; she strikes at the social fiber of the American South like a gin pulling seed from the cotton. Whether the protagonist or antagonist, O'Conner's characters strip away society's layers revealing polite violence, savage good intentions, and/or an antihero who's life is a self-created delusion. If the character is a God fearing zealot, it is a signal of a flaw. Characters such as Manley Pointer in *Good Country People* or Onnie Jay Holy in *Wise Blood* know how to make a buck in Jesus's name. Like O'Conner, I create characters with underlying motives that use religion to obtain their goals. Joy/Hulga Hopewell in *Good Country People* makes many assumptions under the belief that Manly Pointer was a Christian. Hulga falls into Manley's trap and his motivation is divulged (Collecting her artificial leg) and he reveals she was not the first (He stole another woman's artificial eye). Of course all of these "Godly" characters depend on individuals to make the assumption that their motivations are pure and holy. From O'Connor's Roman Catholic view, the consequences of the 'holy' characters' actions are not realized until their victims bare the scars allowed by their own assumptions that all Calvinistic Christians that carry the banner of God are good.



“While the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted.”<sup>vi</sup> (O’Conner, 44) What I borrow from O’Conner is that the ultimate demise of the protagonist falls under the shadow of the “religious” antagonist. In my screenplay *Lord Have Mercy* (<http://www.lordhavemercyfilm.com/>), the central character meets his fate due to his introduction to the religious practice of feet washing, a monthly ritual at his grandfather’s church. The same can be said of Hazel Motes, the anti-hero protagonist in *Wise Blood*, his tragic end begins upon his return home and also being drawn into the business of religion. In both stories the protagonists are haunted by their belief systems and their deaths can be directly linked to religion. In *Lord Have Mercy* and my short *From An Elevation*, religious overtones become the devices that pilot my work into the realm of Southern Gothic, a genre where the drama is so scandalously outrageous it loses the drama and at times becomes atrociously comical. This sometimes includes how characters are named. Now Flannery O’Conner was not the first and she won’t be the last, but like her I name my characters based on their character. O’Conner did this often, sometimes even explaining the character’s name, sometimes letting the name speak for itself: Manley Pointer, Hazel Motes, Mrs. Hopewell, etc. I too name characters to indicate something about their characters: Randy Lee Earnest and Sweet Ride are characters from my screenplay *Lord Have Mercy* and my novel *Fruitcake*.

I have traveled to Savannah, Georgia to lay flowers at the steps of O’Connor’s birthplace. Her stories were and are still a slap of cold water in the face of the Southerner, testing their sensibilities concerning their identity due chiefly to her ability to elevate a hidden moral or reveal an ugly truth that collide with shaded hypocrisies that often originate from the pulpit. She held up a mirror to her contemporaries and to future

Southerners who she knew would be contaminated by the harsh, cold, black and white philosophies of Calvinism and its Protestant siblings. I own that mirror.

## CHAPTER 4

### INFLUENTIAL ARTIST - LOUIS MALLE:

#### CONVERSATIONS AND THE LOST OF INNOCENCE

“The Southern Bible Belt is a place and it is a condition; it is here that all Flannery O'Connor's stories are located.”<sup>vii</sup>(Forman) Although not all of my stories begin in the American South, they all end there. In my opinion it’s all about location, location, location... this is not an attribute that falls solely on the regional literary artist. For example, John Waters always situates his films in Baltimore. The French New Wave filmmakers were famous for filming on location. Again, Forman said, it’s not just a place or a location but the South is a condition. The condition of any location legislates to the actor and the director the boundaries of reality in making the shot but also how the story will be revealed climatically as well. I found this to be true especially with three of my shorts, *Folly*, *From An Elevation*, and *A Preacher’s Portion*, where the locations are just as important as any character as far as revealing the story. *Folly*, as a short, falls at every turn into the Southern Gothic tradition, dark in content and mood; it is predominately reliant on location to convey the story. Location shooting as mentioned is a preponderate in the French New Wave whether one is referencing the “Left Bank” group who were centered on political/sociological issues or the “Cashiers” group that are limited to the critics who wrote for theorist and film critic André Bazin’s *Cashiers du Cinéma*.<sup>viii</sup> (Temple & Witt, 183.) Location is essential for the conveyance of the Southern Gothic genre, especially exteriors where time and environment are exploited for mood and character development.

Of the filmmakers from the “Left Bank” of the French New Wave, I have to say I am most intrigued with Louis Malle. Louis Malle, more than any other director (possibly ever), knew the purpose of the camera. He was Jacques Cousteau’s cinematographer and co-director of *Silent World* (1956), the deep-sea documentary that won both an Oscar and a Palme d’Or.<sup>ix</sup> His images from *Les Amants* (The Lovers, 1958), starring one of his favorite actresses, Jeanne Monreau (*Elevator to the Gallows* - 1957, *Viva Maria!* - 1965), were considered so sensual and erotic that the Ohio theatre owner, Nico Jacobellis, was fined \$2,500 for obscenity in 1964 for screening the film. Jacobellis filed an appeal and won the 1968 Supreme Court case *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, which Justice Potter Stewart uttered probably the most famous line from any court decision, “I know it when I see it” in reference to obscenity. The court sided with Jacobellis; it was a decision that has completely changed cinema in how a story could be told visually.<sup>x</sup> Today the images from *The Lovers* seem commonplace, but when compared with the majority of movies coming out of the Hollywood studios during the same period (late 50s, early 60s), they have more vitality driven by reality. Louis Malle’s pacing changed with the subject matter of his films; one can’t find a pattern to his style in his earlier work. *Elevator to the Gallows* (1958), a suspense/thriller, is parallel to Hitchcockian fare, *Viva Marie!* (1965) is a star vehicle for Brigitte Bardot and Jeanne Moreau with comedic timing similar to Barbara Streisand and Goldie Hahn films of the time. The opening of *Viva Marie!* is very shocking post 9/11; a young girl around age four is walking in a park with what seems to be kite string, it is actually a fuse for an Irish Liberation Movement bombing. Having seen most of Louis Malle’s narrative work, this has undoubtedly the fastest pace of his films I have seen, appropriately so considering the subject matter. *Murmur of the Heart*

(1971) begins a stylized pattern for Malle, from now on his work is character based, driving by the pace of the chief character which is the storyline. With *Murmur of the Heart*, Malle enters into the realm of the “Grotesque” and with the exception of *Atlantic City* his narrative films deal with the dynamic of family and/or situational impacts upon a character in his or her youth. His later work in his native French could arguably be labeled Modern French Gothic, autobiographical, cinematically dark and gloomy, it relates to his experiences set during WWII and German occupation.

Malle was obviously obsessed with the loss of innocence, *Zazie dans le Metro* (1960), *A Very Private Affair* (1962), *Murmur of the Heart* (1971), *Lacombe Lucien* (1974), *Black Moon* (1975), *Pretty Baby* (1978), *Au Revoir les Enfants* (1987), and *Damage* (1992) are all arguably centered on the subject. The subject matter intrigues me as well and often has been at the center of my writings. *From An Elevation* is the first of my stories to be transformed into the cinematic that embraces the transformative moment of innocence lost. Parallel in thought is the recognition that innocence lost is not always the act of sex; often sex is a reaction that helps the lost to be more palatable.

Malle also in absorbed with the art of conversation. Most notably are *The Fire Within* (1963), *My Diner with Andre* (1981), and *May Fools* (1989). Malle adapted many literary works to the screen, and unlike many adaptors Malle didn't cut huge chunks of dialogue in order to interject visual metaphors; conversations were a device that became as important as any cinematic method used to tell the story. What did vary with Malle were the subjects of these conversations, he addressed social conditions and the politics between family, church, class systems, national and world affairs of state. Like O'Connor, he had the ability to disturb standard bearers of contemporary conventions

with his tales that stripped away the veneer of regional and national belief systems not just with images but with the art of conversation as well.

## CHAPTER 5

### INFLUENTIAL ARTIST - JOHN WATERS:

#### THE FATHER OF INDUSTRIAL SOUTHERN GOTHIC

John Waters (like O'Connor) uses his location to create grotesque cultures that propel the circumstances that are inherent to a region. Waters differs from O'Conner in that his characters are urban whereas O'Conner's trounces the rural. The outrageousness of Waters's characters are linked by their very actions to the Southern Gothic traditions- the difference being O'Conner amuses her audience with the recreations of Calvinist Christianity while Waters is absorbed with the misgivings of Roman Catholicism.

John Waters's stories go where few films do, the observation of the American lower and working classes. Seldom are his heroes highly educated. In *Female Trouble* Dawn Davenport, the film's anti-hero, drops out of school and aspires to a life as a waitress, go-go dancer, hooker, and petty thief. Unlike O'Conner, Waters has no issues with diving into the vulgar such as when Taffy, Dawn's daughter, walks in on Dawn and her husband Gator having sex. Gator, Taffy's stepfather says, "Hey Taffy, baby, come suck your daddy's dick." Taffy replies, "I wouldn't suck your lousy dick if I was suffocating and there was oxygen in your balls!"<sup>xii</sup> I too dabble in the vulgar. For example, Ernestine Brown, a "D-list" drag queen in my short *Christmas Dip*, sings a carol asking Santa Claus for a brand new pussy while tap dancing in a skirt made of Beanie Baby kittens on the "Vicvillain's" (Victim and Villain) front porch. Waters said of his work, "Secretly I think that all my films are politically correct, though they appear not to be. That's because they're made with a sense of joy."<sup>xiii</sup> Waters ability to depict the absurd within a world that has no sense of societal norms appears in some ways to be a

non-judgmental representation of the ‘real’ working class. He is laughing at them not with them though. “Waters has turned himself into something much more sophisticated and engaging,”<sup>xiii</sup> John Lewis says in an article called *John Waters Inc.* for Baltimore Magazine.

Waters attempts to create a super-realism that can only be obtained by a presumed stance of objectivity. Hamlyn, when writing on the subject of objectivity said, “It is indeed obvious that if we are to think both generally and objectively about the world there must be something about all three things – the world, our minds and the mode of expression of our thoughts – which makes that possible.”<sup>xiv</sup> The metaphysical take on the relevance of words is that without them our perceptions could not be communicated. (Hamlyn, 96) Waters is widely known not to appreciate deviations from his script<sup>xv</sup> – his words for him appear almost to take on the realm of the sacred and to any extent that anyone can be truly objective, it evolves for Waters transcendently by the world he creates through his written expressions before it is transported into his cinematic expressions.

From attending his lectures over the years I perceive a growth in Waters’s approach and an expansion in the ways of expression for his ideas. Gone are the raw visual attributes in exchange for a more glossed over Hollywood stylization. But what is still present in his works is his wit and love of language through word play. Another thing that hasn’t changed though that we both share, a never-ending need to observe the behavior of people in excitable, stressful situations, whether public or private, and then tell people about it. *From An Elevation* contains moments I feel would make Waters



proud. As a boy in South Carolina I heard this colloquialism, “She ain’t pretty, she just looks that way.” I would say the same thought applies to John Waters’s recent work.

## CHAPTER 6

### INFLUENTIAL ARTIST - ANDY WARHOL:

#### PRODUCTS OF THE FACTORY

My friend and mentor, Raeanne Rubenstein, recently gave a lecture, “Andy, the Factory, and Me,”<sup>xvi</sup> at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, Tennessee, which leads me to my next artistic influence, Andy Warhol. What I love most about Warhol is his self-promotion. Sure we’ve all heard about 15 minutes of fame, but let’s face it, Warhol’s fame has surpassed his on time limits even before he said his most famous quote. Coming from Graphic Design and Madison Avenue he knew a great deal about selling himself. His redefinition as to what art is expanded the realm for every type of artist to come after him. He seemed to be able to see beauty in the everyday objects. He defined contemporary thinking by his very presence; if Warhol was there it was the happening event or place, or thing to have or be. Warhol’s influence went beyond just the Pop Art movement; he influenced fashion, music, film, literature, photography, and how each would be promoted, packaged, and marketed.

Being friends with those who studied, worked, and played with Warhol (Midge Soderbergh, Franne Lee, and Raeanne Rubenstien) my insight into how he managed his brand (and sometimes didn’t) has expanded from admiration to adulation. Raeanne Rubenstein explained how open the factory was in the beginning and how Warhol stocked his surroundings not just with eccentrics, but also with technicians who followed through on his concepts. According to Raeanne Rubenstein everything changed after he was shot, especially whom Warhol allowed into his personal realm.

Warhol signed his name or took credit to many pieces where he did not manipulate the paint, ink, or celluloid, though he was quite capable in all of the above mediums. What he signed his name to was the artistic concept of business. “Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.”<sup>xvii</sup>(Warhol) I am only too aware that art is business, it seems to be something a great many art schools want to forget about, but what good is talent and skill if you can’t market yourself. This is a personal grievance I have with most educational institutions. It is not just what’s on the paper “sheepskin” today; we live in a visual world, it’s about presentation.

My other fascination with Warhol was his continual expansion and exploration into other artistic genres designating their worth, notably printmaking. His perception of qualitative value allowed for a marketable re-insurgence of the Avant-Garde, for which from my associations with the gay sub-culture presumed it to be a pennant of popular culture. Maureen Turim allocates the Avant-Garde to Warholian filmmaking as part of Queer Theory, “its own philosophical statement of giving figuration to the long unspoken, underlining erotic qualities of image and pose, ...story spoke to the sea change in the conception of gender and sexuality.”<sup>xviii</sup> Maybe this was so in New York City, but from my memories in the American South, the common man on the street saw the Avant-Garde solely as a queer aesthetic and due to its association with “art-fags” applied little, negative or no value to it at all. Qualitative value is individualistic by its very nature and resonates with me as being kin to nostalgia. What differentiates qualitative value from nostalgia is that qualitative value represents the objective ideal; nostalgia represents the subjective ideal.

What all of these artist, Malle, O'Connor, Waters, and Warhol, have in common is that they were great at observation. Some artists love the minute details, others observe the big picture, either way it is the observations that lead to inspirations. Warhol said, "I'm the type who'd be happy not going anywhere as long as I was sure I knew exactly what was happening at the places I wasn't going to. I'm the type who'd like to sit home and watch every party that I'm invited to on a monitor in my bedroom."<sup>xix</sup> (Warhol) Me too.

## CHAPTER 7

### CREATIVE METHODS - *ODE TO THE FAB FIVE*:

#### THE SINGLE POINT OF VIEW OF A SOUTHERN METRO-SEXUAL

Most often cinematic endeavors involve moving the camera and relying on the cinematographer to achieve the shot. I think what is often missing in the cinematic process is a singular point of view (POV). Louis Malle's *My Dinner with Andre* proves that often it is the conversation or dialogue that carries the picture not necessarily the action. Seldom is a story told without the movement of the talent and camera in tandem. *Ode to the Fab Five* is a general exercise in blocking the movement of the actor. The script is based on a straight man's making a sixth-month video follow-up after a makeover based on a reality television series that allowed five gay men to enter into a Southern straight man's life with the predilection of making his life better. Once the camera was set, which is part of the action, it was just a matter of take after take. With the action having to take place in one take the most difficult aspect that fell on the actor was getting his lines right. Calming an actor, who is berating himself after each flub, can be difficult but it is essential. Getting to know an actor, even briefly before a shoot is crucial; just knowing the slightest history allows the director to connect with his talent and send him or her toward the emotional pulse often needed to help the scene not fall flat. I owe Gary Hinshaw (Marlboro Box) a great debt of gratitude for the use of his home and time. He had actually remade himself from living in High Victorian style to a contemporary Modern style and had a sharp reaction from friends who had grown comfortable with his Oscar Wilde persona. This was indeed part of the inspiration for the script.

When watching the film you will see that Morgan Strange directed it. Morgan Strange is my pseudonym. Due to the often-controversial subject matter of my work I created the identity because of my family's adherent love of their anonymity and to stave off any embarrassment that my work may cause due to its biographical nature and/or their religious temperament. As time has continued I have separated the personas between the visual artist, M. Morgan Strange and the businessman/academic, Mark Daniel Compton. Strange is a family name but also it has long been a word that family, friends, and acquaintances have used to describe me. Morgan comes from the privateer, Captain Morgan, who through my grandfather's family lore was a great uncle many times removed. The M stands for Mark, which threads the two identities together and also acts as an action verb to make a complete thought, Mark Morgan Strange. The short was the second time I formally used the name, the first being as a film reviewer for the Nashville Film Festival. *Ode to the Fab Five* made the top twenty internationally on iTunes U according to William Stephanos, the ETSU – iTunes U coordinator. To view this short of four minutes follow this link. <http://elearning.etsu.edu/markcompton/fabfive.htm>

## CHAPTER 8

### CREATIVE METHODS - *WHATEVER* - *THE BOGUS MAN*:

#### PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

The religious perceptions of Logos, as it contains to the omni powerful energies attributed to intangibles such as words and metaphors, churned in my mind for exploration. Also, is there no other universe other than the subjective human universe as Sartre suggests?<sup>xx</sup> These thoughts were a springboard for my creativity when I first created the time-based media poem, *Whatever*, (in constant revision like a poem in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*), I at first wanted to convey colloquialisms visually, word by word; some are as follows: "Whatever you do, don't! "; "Life is a gamble"..."; "To gamble is sin. " Inspired by the opening of D. A. Pennebaker's documentary *Don't Look Back*, also contemporarily known as Bob Dylan's music video for *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, I wrote each word of the colloquialisms on an individual 4x6 inch note card revealing each expression with the turn of four cards. I wanted to give each individual word a sense of power; to accomplish this I chose to convey a supernatural presence to emphasize the authority, influence, and power each individual word conveys in the formation of knowledge. Often, when the next colloquial phrase was displayed over the last, an unintended turn of phrase would appear card by card and formed new idioms. Most often the sayings were incomplete, but still the process for me created a surreal tension with each word revealed. Thrilled and a little spooked by this development, the presentation transformed the colloquialisms into mantras and each word became part of an invocation, each word's essence revealing a life, soul of its own.

I needed an anthropomorphic persona who would project both rational and emotional reality based on each idiom, an incarnated **mana**: a Polynesian term for supernatural power that may be good or evil, beneficial or dangerous, which may be ascribed to persons, spirits, or inanimate objects.<sup>xxi</sup> This character would feel right at home in a Fellini film or the surreal dreams of Agent Cooper in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. I knew I could achieve this by having the character say nothing but project his thoughts (decisive or ambivalent, angry or tranquil,) through his facial reactions to the written expressions. The character had to be more than a flat character, which Renée Harmon defines as a character with few attributes.<sup>xxii</sup> As the Director I knew I needed to create a simple character that could convey judgment, whimsy, and mysticism without speaking a word. Fellini accomplished this in the opening dream sequence of *8 1/2* where a dark suited spirit takes flight like a kite held to earth by a string. David Lynch, like Fellini, often achieves this by the casting of character actors that embody a strong sense of mana or paranormal essence. I also knew that the actor who played the role had to have a mysterious charisma. As Harmon says, "Charisma has little to do with physical beauty...Charisma pertains to the viewer's purely subconscious response to an actor."<sup>xxiii</sup>

For that role I called on Trixie Trash, an actor whom I had directed in my Southern Fried, Sci-fi adaptation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Having witnessed some of Trash's drag performances I knew he was daring and capable of transforming into whatever I needed. This character had to be a counterbalance to the often-provincial colloquialisms that are the bones of the textual structure and transfer the time-based media poem into an anomie that questions societal norms. Visually the final character was powdered white with bright red lips, dressed in a black suit with no shirt,



his hair cut extremely short and yet on the edge of androgyny a la Annie Lennox in the Eurhythmics' *Sweet Dreams* music video, minus her red hair.

“I have no idea where this will lead us, but I have a definite feeling it will be a place both wonderful and strange,” David Lynch wrote for Kyle MacLachlan as Special Agent Dale Cooper in *Twin Peaks*.<sup>xxiv</sup> With this distinctive costume and make-up in place the approach would obviously be *mise-en-scène* in order to have the punch I wanted. *Mise-en-scène* usually involves some planning; setting, lighting, costume, those aspects of film that overlap with theater.<sup>xxv</sup> The set simply needed a mid-century modern vibe once again to counter the idiomatic roots of the script. In the past I would shoot in interior design boutiques; during my first film (*Nausea*) I was able to use Laws Interiors in Knoxville. It was like working in a studio setting. With Laws no longer available I turned to a friend who lived in a Modern aesthetic; the space had strong primary colors as well as black furniture to form contrast, his living room fitted the bill as to what I needed. These color elements are extremely important when shooting on a digital format; if I were to decide to enter the film into the festival circuit there would be a strong possibility of the images being grainy upon projection onto a large screen.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The production took two days; a chunk of time was spent finding Trash an affordable suit that fit. After the suit was found it was decided that he would have to shave his chest; Trash had retired from the gay (drag-median) stand-up circuit and had developed quite a hairy chest. A shirt and tie defeated the otherworldly specter I wanted to achieve with the character. In post I realized that I was right upon insisting Trash shave his chest. Once the shots were lined up everything went smoothly although I wish I had

shot more cut-a-ways when it came time for the edit, mainly for variety of selection's sake.

As D. B. Gilles says, "First get the story, then worry about how to tell it."<sup>xxvii</sup> I edited the piece on iMovie, but even with laying Roxy Music's *The Bogus Man* as the soundtrack, it still fell flat and I was unhappy about the end product. Then it hit me as to what the problem was; although the phrases are colloquialisms that the average guy can understand, the image of an androgynous specter flipping cards though interesting at first, becomes a huge disconnect. Also, not all, but in general it has been my experience that most Americans hate subtitles; I witnessed this when watching *Inglorious Bastards*, which was only partially subtitled at the theater. Audience members cursed when they first appeared; vocally complained the subtitles moved too fast, and many left the screening because of it. How was I to expect an audience to sit through nine minutes of reading, even if it were at a dyslexic's pace? The solution came to me, instead of trying to create a quirky fantasy I was going to create a visual poem. I needed more than just idiomatic sayings, and I needed natural, everyday images to follow each phrase thus alluding to hidden meanings not only within the revealing of the colloquialisms but also from viewing the images themselves.

Influenced by Agnes Varda's documentary *The Gleaners and I*, I added images of found recordings that I have shot throughout the years and continue to gather. To do this I had to think of each colloquialism as a category. In theme, Aristotle's *Thesis I* animated this idea further, "Categories are not merely a framework for concepts, but they are themselves real concepts, extramental independent beings."<sup>xxviii</sup> Each colloquialism became an individual, free from the previous concept by providing a pageant of notions

and nuances generated by imagery metaphors and similes for contemplation and understanding.

The pageant became personal, being originally from South Carolina, snow falling still has a magical essence to me and appears often in *The Bogus Man*. Snow for me signifies a great deal in the human psyche: cold, death, peace, Christmas, etc. Images of children playing, waterfalls, trains coming and leaving the station, fires, building remains, found objects and forms in out of place settings appear because of a single word or from the idiom and the conceptual associations I have placed on them.

The soundtrack for *Whatever*, a longer, less manipulated version of *The Bogus Man* uses Takemitsu's *From Me Flows What You Call Time*. The composition embodies sounds from east and west and is haunting in the way John Cage and Brian Eno can be by the use of ambient, almost by chance sounds. Takemitsu borrows from and blends different ages of cultural and traditional sounds with the modern Debussy-esque classical orchestrations or isolates cultural themes between moments of eerie silence. Though beautiful, it is a slow tempo composition. Even my fellow graduate student, Maja Slavic, where English is her second language remarked on the pace being too slow. The music used in *The Bogus Man* is a medley of the Roxy Music classic from which the cinematic poem is named with the be-bop composition *One Day I'll Marry A Human* by Tar Baby. I used it as part of the score because of its Gertrude Stein-esque stream of consciences samples, which flow with sounds reminiscent of Harlem renaissance jazz; mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Cold War –Sci-fi cinematic audio samples; blended with a traditional hip-hop groove that is loose enough to give lee-way on the edit's rhythm.

With respect to Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi: Life out of Balance*, in that both *Whatever* and *The Bogus Man* are now set as tone poems and are visually rhythmically sequenced while maintaining their Lynch-esque surreal mystic qualities found in *Twin Peaks*, *Lost Highway*, and *Mulholland Drive*, all of which influenced the original theme of the fantasy concept. Both visual poems move from dark to light, serious to comic, beautiful to ugly, displays of innocents to graphic sexuality with no warning, chaotic like life. Sartre said, "The existentialist will never consider man as an end because he is always in the making."<sup>xxix</sup> Does each category and its parts when assembled create a being different from its previous self? Is the being sliced by the scalpel of time into separate samples for examination a different creature from its previous and future self based on given perceived realities of its existence? Are we capable by manipulation to recreate ourselves and/or other energies, and if so, toward what end and what concept of existence? Is time the yarn that knits realities into a whole or is time the linear line that slices reality into pieces? Is time its self a power or a tool of power? I intend to make other visually time-based poem offerings in the future; different silent characters representative of power will be developed based on the above questions; better known clichés and less known proverbs will give this creature of time a not so silent voice.

## CHAPTER 9

### CREATIVE METHODS - *FOLLY*:

#### A SOUTHERN GOTHIC SILENT FILM

I am often accused of being too reliant on dialogue, so with *Folly* I wanted to tell a story with no dialogue. Taking advantage of spring break, I descended from the mountains of Appalachia to Charleston, South Carolina to make *Folly*. Having worked one summer on a film with Moria Carr, I contacted the native Charlestonian for her assistance in producing the short. The script needed a dark brooding handsome man mourning a lost. I wanted the character to almost seem like the mythological “Wandering Jew” doomed to live life in constant penance and memory of what he had done wrong. Ms. Carr, a member of the local union, immediately thought of her co-worker Scott Alexander to play the role. Passing through Columbia, I picked up Moria and Scott and made our way down to the coast.

Shot in a day, with on-again off-again rain showers, the most difficult aspect of the shoot was for the actor. Luck had had it that Scott had never been to Charleston and he was willing to be my actor having no lines to memorize. Being from Florida where the students flock during Spring Break, Scott was surprised to see a near empty beach; this was the time of year to enjoy the warm waters before the beach got too hot in his native South Florida. The ocean’s waters of South Carolina though not frigid in March are still quite cold. And having an actor strip down to his underwear and walk out into the cold waves and dive in repeatedly for twenty bucks and dinner, well that is just miraculous. Pleased with my cinematography on location, I needed footage that would convey the memory of his lost son. In my vault of family outings, I came across fun images of my

nephew Nathan at my niece's rehearsal party, jumping and playing before the camera. I took snippets from the moment and slowed them down in the edit to convey memory, reversed some of them, and saturated the color to enhance his yellow shirt and flesh tones to draw on the cultural psychological implications of hope and youth.

In *Folly*, the environmental sounds of Charleston and Folly Beach, SC are heard where the focal character is completely silent. I had recently watched Eric Rohmer's *My Night at Maud's* (1970) and his *Moral Tales* (1963) shorts (*The Girl at the Monceau Bakery* and *Suzanne's Career*) where Rohmer only used natural sound.<sup>xxx</sup> When music was involved it was generated from the scene not an underlying score. This was reinforced after watching the *King's Speech*, in which the score dictated how one was to feel other than letting the speech move us. Instead of allowing the viewer to actually transport himself into an audible realism and enter the minds of English citizens at this pivotal moment in history, the score distorted the pinnacle moment for the viewer by emotionally creating a hero and removed not only objectivity from the viewer but a clear connection to that historic generation. This device (no score) in *Folly* lifted the environment more predominately into the scene creating a rawness most often associated with wildlife documentaries. The urban sounds of Charleston and the natural sounds of Folly Beach dominate until the final scene when a segment of music from Cibo Moto's *Theme* is introduced in *Folly* to create a magical other worldly texture of what the main characters might be hearing. Other than being accented by Foley with natural sounds and samples from Ryuichi Sakamoto's *Ulu Watu* used for a slight cold industrial audio consistency during the opening, *Folly's* script calls back to the days of silent film with a tattoo being the only insert of readable dialogue; click on the following link to view.

<http://elearning.etsu.edu/markcompton/folly.htm>

## CHAPTER 10

### CREATIVE METHODS - *FROM AN ELEVATION*:

#### KENTUCKY FRIED SOUTHERN GOTHIC

*From An Elevation* was created not only for a class project but also as a device to raise money for my feature film project *Lord Have Mercy*. A semi-autobiographical tale, I wrote *From An Elevation* as a mechanism not only to show that I could direct but also as an apparatus for Erin Chandler, Paul Kopaz, and Nic Hendrix as actors worth investment. To do this I felt the script had to match to some extent the extreme realism that exists in *Lord Have Mercy*. Metaphysically Hamlyn says, “Thus extreme realism explains that possibility (of objectivity) simply by positing the existence of independent universals of which we have some form of direct awareness.”<sup>xxxix</sup> I met with George Maranville, a local producer in Kentucky, for some advice concerning a production team. He had heard of a small team of students at Bluegrass Community College that had impressed their instructors and put us in touch with a young cinematographer and his crew who had worked as a team. The cinematographer’s name is Andrew Walton, and I owe George Maranville a true debt of gratitude for the introduction.

The communication level between Andrew Walton and myself is amazing- given the right weather conditions he can get every shot I call for, understanding my direction not only for him and the actors, but why shots are needed for the conveyance of the story. Translating my shot list into imagery which he can draw from my script; he also understands the dynamic as far as tone. Andrew works diligently to find the proper depth of field to avoid flat imagery, and comes up with the most imaginative lighting given tight spaces. Using his Canon D-5, we were capable of getting shots; sliding a full card

out and a clean card in without missing a beat. We downloaded the footage onto a laptop on set, as well as my external hard drive, cleaned the card, and had it ready just in case it was needed by days end.



Figure 1. Andrew Walton on the set of *From An Elevation* at “Polly’s Place” in Pisgah, KY.



Figure 2. Family portrait Oscar, Alice, Lisa, and Max Stone on *From An Elevation* location in Lexington, KY.

Having great actors, no matter how complicated their lives may be, is the difference between having a great cinematic effort and having a melodramatic pile of kaka. Erin Chandler is a great actress who I have known since reviewing her film *Lost at the Pershing Point Hotel* in 2000 for the Nashville Film Festival, as is her cousin, artist Celeste Lewis, the daughter of 30s and 40s Hollywood actress Mimi Chandler. During my time in Lexington, KY living and working with Erin I got to know the Chandler family. Her cousin Ben is the US representative for the district; her grandfather, “Happy” Chandler was the only two time governor of the state as well as being the baseball commissioner who integrated the sport. But it was Erin’s Uncle Ben and Aunt Toss, newspaper man and noted artist respectively, who helped greatly by allowing us to use their personal items as props and Polly’s Place as a location. Her entire family were all a delight and very supportive in the effort of making this film. To say I felt like Evelyn Waugh in their presence is an understatement. There is a great deal to be said about genetics, watching both Erin and Celeste at work was amazing. Their abilities at a



moments notice to get into their characters that were not anywhere close to their own personalities and stay focused gave me a new perspective on genuine talent.



Figure 3. Erin Chandler (Alice) and Celeste Lewis (Tampa) on set at Polly's Place.

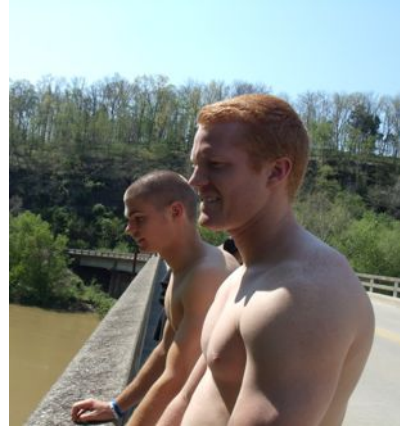


Figure 4. Conrad Frank and Nic Hendrix at the Kentucky River and Palisades.

I also had the privilege of working with newcomers to acting; none of the younger cast had ever had a role on stage or screen. The lead character played by Nic Hendrix was taking an acting course at the University of Kentucky. The content made the nineteen years old a bit nervous and he was worried about who his pal in the script might be. He introduced me to Conrad Frank, his fraternity brother who he had shared a room with during Spring break and with whom he felt comfortable in the most awkward of situations. After auditioning Conrad (his pseudonym), a UK student with desires to be a K Street lobbyist, I knew he would be great for the role. Their dynamic as friends played well on screen test and considering the material, the chemistry between them read as believable. Had I cast a stranger to play opposite an inexperienced Nic I am not sure it would have worked. Cady Holbrook played the roll of Lisa. She had been taking acting lessons from Erin and I wrote the role for her watching how she progressed after each session. Her high school buddy, Kathlyn Cummings, had rehearsed the scene of Wanda with Cady. After an actress I had cast in the role dropped out at the last minute, Cady

introducing me to Kathlyn. Watching the two work together I knew she could play the role, after getting permission from her mother, who became a presence on the set, I had my complete cast.

Last but definitely not least in the cast was Paul Kopaz. Paul was a noted rock star in the 80s and had appeared on MTV with his band, Paul K and the Weather Men, which had greater success in Europe than in the States. Having attended UK, he had a cult following still in Lexington. His resemblance to the actual person on whom the character is based was a bit spooky to be honest. He gave the production a song to be part of the soundtrack, and I'm grateful for all his time and effort.

After the filming of *From An Elevation* I took all my material and went to Columbus, OH to work with my longtime friend and Editor, Gina Wright. Her work and knowledge of Final Cut made editing quick and easy given that my crew kept great notes. I was so pleased with her work that after filming a *Preacher's Portion*, I immediately sent her the external hard drive. We communicated while I was traveling via Dropbox, it didn't take long for it to download and I was able to see the changes she made on *From An Elevation* in Atlanta as we collaborated.

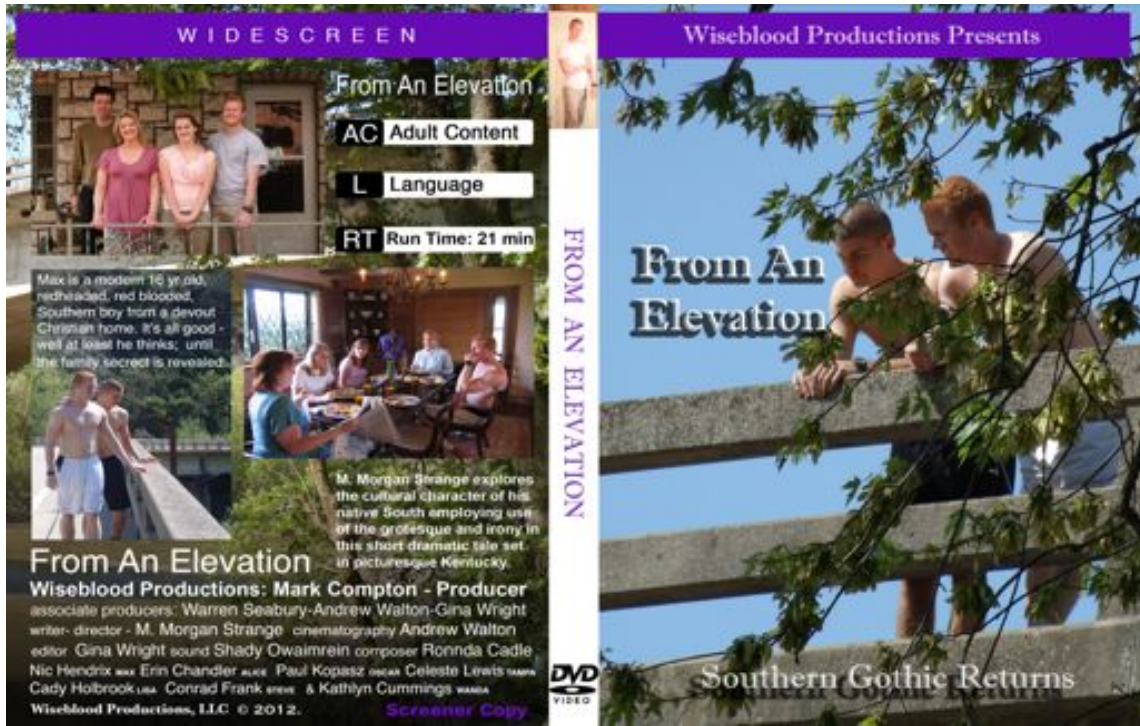


Figure 5. Festival Screener/DVD case cover designed by Mark D. Compton for Wiseblood, LLC.  
 Max (Nic Hendrix) and Steve (Conrad Frank) overlook the Kentucky River- front cover and left center back cover.  
 The Stone family, upper left back cover (lt-rt) Paul Kopasz, Erin Chandler, Cady Holbrook, and Nic Hendrix.  
 Center right back cover- (lt-rt) Celeste Lewis, Kathlyn Cummings, Cady Holbrook, Erin Chandler, & Nic Hendrix.

## CHAPTER 11

### CREATIVE METHODS - *THE PREACHER'S PORTION*:

#### BLESSINGS AND CURSES

*The Preacher's Portion* is primarily based on the first joke my grandfather ever taught me. I first conveyed the story in the form of a chapter in *Fruitcake*, which I had written for a novella course taught by Dr. Fred Waage. The *Fruitcake*, originally a screenplay short I had written many years ago, seemed right for development into a novella and though I had adapted literary works into screenplays I had not taken a screenplay and turned it into literature prose. In what is now a novel, the character's grew and developed and I remembered the joke and expanded upon it transforming it into a parable conveyed by the root doctor, Lula May, to her friend, Bonnie. Last year I submitted Chapter 5 to the Knoxville Writer's Guild, I was told it was chosen out of 1500 submission to be included in their bi-annual anthology.

While in Nashville, I ran into my old friend Andy Van Roon who chairs an organization called Film-Com. ([www.film-com.com](http://www.film-com.com)) who encouraged me to develop the *Fruitcake* into a television series. He recommended that I have something to show executives as to what I could do and so I chose this Chapter that had recently been published to develop. I decided to give the Chapter a title that I thought fit the story, gauging the content I landed on *Preacher's Portion* because it is a double-entendre.

Once again calling on Andrew Walton to film, he descended from Kentucky to South Carolina where a gentleman by the name of RJ Foley agreed to produce. I expected after watching one of RJ's films that he knew how to produce, this was not the case. When I arrived in Columbia, RJ had scheduled auditions at an amphitheater in a public

park. Raining, I set under a shelter for six hours. No one showed. While waiting outside in the rain the actress I had hired to play Lula May, the lead character, called and backed out due to work conflicts, to make matters worse the actor I had hired to play the Preacher had car issues on his way to South Carolina and could not make it. I was now without any cast and filming in three days. Luckily for me, I know people in South Carolina still and I was able to call around while I continued to produce. Following lead after lead, I had hired and lost four Lula Mays, two Preachers, three sets of young Lula May and her family, plus two Yvonne's – The only character I maintained upon hiring was Bonnie, played by musician and front woman, Andrea Truesdale.

When you think things can't get worse, they can. I lost every location that RJ had secured and had to fill those as well. If it had not been for my sister, Cheri Little, coming to my rescue in finding locations and actors to play young Lula May and her family, all would have been lost. Cheri also acted as Line Producer during all of production. I cannot believe my luck, all of the script was shot, In the case of the leads I had great actors in the end, in some cases better than I originally had cast. The locations I ended up with were closer and better than the ones RJ had found in a town two hours away. The imagery Andrew got made him giddy, RJ did a wonderful job in the end on sound and he labeled the shots to make Gina Wright's job easier. But what was most special about shooting Preacher's Portion was I had Julia Halford, my high school mentor and friend playing the piano for me and providing the score, All's well that ends well.

Or so I thought, because I had to play both preachers (past and present), and not having the fortune telling abilities to film myself as the preacher during our time at the church location, we lost two scenes. Once Ms. Wright told me, I had to think of a new

way to open and close the short while remaining true to the theme of the story. I couldn't re-shoot the scenes; deadlines and financial cost forbade that, so I contacted Andrew with a new shot list that could be filmed in his home state of Kentucky. This he shot and sent to Gina Wright over Dropbox. I in turn went down to South Carolina with a new voice over script. Unsure if RJ would be able to do the audio due to booking another gig, I was bound to record the new voice over for the short to work. Lucky for me, RJ was able to record on Halloween night and Andrea was available after work. I sent Gina, RJ, and Andrea the script; it was recorded and delivered to Ms. Wright over e-mail that night. The original script was eight to nine minutes long; with rewrite, the story after editing turned out to be a five-minute long cliffhanger.

## CHAPTER 12

### CONCLUSION:

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR A NEO-RACONTEUR

Story is everything. It can be a single word imagined simply: visually, acoustically, in any use of the senses the artist can dream, or it can also easily be as complex and layered as the artist can conceive. The story consumed and translated by an individual and/or a civilization, the Neo-Raconteur conveys an anecdote in as many formats and with as countless complex meaning(s) as he sees fit. What the meaning is varies from artist to artist and from medium to medium. As the cliché in real estate goes, “location, location, location”- meaning it’s a popular place where people want to be. The same can be said of art, just replace the locations with medium, medium, medium – meaning that if you wish to reach the masses with your story/art, the artist has to express his or her self with what the public consumes. The world civilizations are as massive and varied within their own borders as there are terrains on earth. Being a Neo-Raconteur allows the artist to enter into interdisciplinary realms of modern media in order to convey the story; a message expressed in as many ways and to as many cultures within any civilization as the artist’s imagination can develop. A key element to the Neo-Raconteur is that it allows the artist to reach a wide demographic with the same story using various mediums as needed to get the tale to the intended audiences.

As a Neo-Raconteur, Chapter 5 from my original novel, *Fruitcake*, currently has been developed in three different mediums for consumption. The first form is the literary format published in the Knoxville Writer’s Guild’s anthology *A Tapestry of Voices* (December 2011). The second as a short film and hopeful pilot for a television series, and

the third is as a storyteller before a live audience, reading my work and learning how to pace the work, giving my audience a chance to laugh and breath before I continue.

The Neo-Raconteur examines the varying demographics deciding how make each story a separate offering to please his select audience; though it is not necessary to tell the same story for the purpose of creating in multiple mediums. The story is not a story unless it is told. The Neo-Raconteur in theory is meant to drive the story to as many people as it can reach. By claiming the title of Neo-Raconteur a diversely talented artist can explore the stories he or she wishes to tell in as many platforms and genres as wished to explore. Finally a term that gives the general practitioner of multiple art forms the ability to create without the limitations imposed by business and marketing.



Figure 6. Magritte influenced poster I created for my shorts presentation. The image with the umbrella down represents the traditional raconteur format; umbrellas up signifies cinema.



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VITA

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Date of Birth: October 27, 1963  
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Education:

Public Schools, Camden, South Carolina  
A.A. Theology, Florida College, Temple Terrace, Florida  
1983  
Textile Design, University of Delaware, Newark 1985  
A.A. Fashion Design and Illustration, Bauder College, Ft.  
Lauderdale, Florida 1986  
B.A. Theatre and Speech, University of South Carolina,  
Columbia 1989  
Theatre Management, University of Tennessee, Knoxville,  
1995  
Video Production, Pellissippi State Community College,  
Knoxville, Tennessee, 1996  
MALS Cross-Cultural Tourism Development, East Tennessee  
State University, Johnson City 2006  
MFA Graphic Design, (Focus: Time-Based Media) East  
Tennessee State University, Johnson City, 2011

Professional Experience: Tourism Development

- Founder SOAPIFF - The Southern Appalachian International Film Festival Executive Director 2006-2010 - Current Board Member - [www.soapiff.com](http://www.soapiff.com)  
Expanded festival to multiple cities within Eastern Tennessee.  
Devised "Festival in a Box" a traveling component that can be adapted or modified to suit the particular institutions and generate revenue.  
Sponsored the creation of modern scores for Silent Era Cinema.  
Established associations with world cinematic organizations and festivals.
- Identified, evaluated, and documented tourism strengths and weaknesses of Unicoi County, Tennessee and presented findings to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) as part of a plan for Economic Development. – 2005.
- Consultant for the Hard Knox Blues Bash music festival in Knoxville, TN.
- Consultant for Green Jack Adventures, Erwin, TN. Design & Creation of environmentally friendly outdoor theme park. 2013 tentative opening.

Professional Experience: Advertising/Graphic Design

- Conceptualized and developed (copy, print and televised) advertising campaigns for local businesses (Profit & Non-Profit) formulating priorities for publication,

- 
- store front and interior layouts, as well as logo design. Graphic Design Workshop 2007-2010.
  - Directed documentary for the TN Valley Jazz and Blues Foundation on mid 20<sup>th</sup> century R&B artist from Appalachia as part of a community outreach and PR campaign. 2010 – 2011.
  - Student Silver Addy 2009 “SOAPIFF Call for Entry Poster.”

Professional Experience: Adjunct Professor

- English Composition - College level – Walter State Community College, Greeneville, TN – 2007; English Composition – Remedial & College levels, Introduction to Humanities –Northeast State Community College, Bristol, TN, 2007-2009; Introduction to Media and Introduction to Cinema -Pellessippi State Community College, Knoxville, TN 2008, 2010-11.
- TN Consortium for International Studies– Taught Film Studies in Scotland (Glasgow and Edinburgh) while editing student blogs on cinema during the Edinburgh Film Festival and tourism while on Scottish cultural excursions.

Publications: Compton, Mark Daniel (2011). "Chapter 5 of the novel *Fruitcake*," A TAPESTRY OF VOICES: AN EAST TENNESSEE ANTHOLOGY. Knoxville, Tennessee: A Knoxville Writers' Guild Publication, pp.111-115.

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