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## Identity in Flux: Cinematic Destabilization in Narrative and Form

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# **Identity in Flux**

Cinematic Destabilization in Narrative and Form

by

**Eli Steenlage, B.S.**

**Thesis Project**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

DePaul University

in Partial Fulfillment

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## Abstract

### Identity in Flux

#### Cinematic Destabilization in Narrative and Form

By

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DePaul University, 2013

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This thesis explores the current transitional moment in culture as cinema, identity, and a mediated society interact in a state of flux. My film project, *Photostoria*, was produced to addresses issues of memory, history, and identity in a digital, socially networked age, through the relationships of the characters/actors and through cinema's unique aesthetic language. The film uses a convergence and remediation of media to reflect the confusion and destabilization of identity formation in cultural terms. Specifically, time travel narratives create a metaphor for the experience of displacement in a hypermediated society. *Photostoria* is analyzed by way of narrative theory, new media studies, genre theory, and cultural studies in order to expose the affect in on and offline identity as consumer and producer fade into one another. The transmedia and collaborative element of the project presented through the connected website and Kickstarter campaign demonstrate the way that the narrative fluctuates between virtual and non-virtual worlds.

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## Introduction: Identity in Flux

Cinema has long held the potential to radically represent in narrative and aesthetic terms the increasing influence of a mediated society. Besides a few anomalous experiments or short-lived movements (French New Wave, German expressionism, French surrealism, etc), filmmakers have until now only hinted at shifting cultural identities. With the democratization of film in the digital age, there is an opportunity for cinema to use media convergence to speak to a fragmented social condition at the levels of production and representation. Our contemporary lives are so saturated with media that we are to some degree already participating in this shifting process. Our media is poised to speak back to us in the midst of our transitional identity. My film project addresses issues of memory, history, and identity in a digital, socially networked age, through the relationships of the characters/actors and through cinema's unique aesthetic language. Additionally, a website connected to the world of the film allows for participation at the levels of production and reception in order to create a third space between fiction and non-fiction, on and offline. Combined, these narrative elements and the production process interact with the "real world"(non-virtual) and mediated cultural identity formation as a point of analysis.

Throughout the history of media and mankind there has been a near constant flux in the relationship between technological development and the individual in culture. With the recent surge of digital and social media, the influence on established media like cinema is at an unexplored juncture. What we currently call "new media" certainly heralds fundamental changes to personal and cultural identity, yet cinema as a medium is making only slow inlets into representing and processing these changes in cultural identity. Cinema has always "sampled

time” by way of 24 frames per a second, forging a path to digital new media where time can be managed, analyzed, and manipulated with more control (Manovich, 66-67). With more control of our media comes greater control of self. Identity is understood through the particular characteristics of an individual, expressed through relational and contextual terms. This concept of identity is conceptualized in association with culture and groups (location, gender, race, history, religious beliefs, etc). Personal and cultural identity are in flux with the now perceived rapid changes of time and culture in a heavily mediated and globalized society. This project focuses on the time travel narrative as a genre and the corresponding relationship to current experiences of being caught between time and space in a mediated culture.

At the level of production, my film project, *Photostoria*, utilizes convergence in the identity of the film through transmedia, improvisation and documentary techniques. Encapsulating this convergence, in one short scene in the film, the characters of Rita and John use a smart phone to take a "selfie" (self-portrait) of themselves as a couple, demonstrating an improvised document of life that John posts online through social media, adding to the diegetic narrative of their online identity. That moment is a contrast between an offline, non-virtual present and an online, virtual representation of the present.

The "selfie" photograph represents the instantaneous moment where a person contemplates their identity in relation to media. They are in the moment of the mobile phone photo looking at past, present, and future as they consider sharing the moment with their online community and how that moment will be perceived from a future date. The photo gives the impression of the present as it shows what is happening at the moment, but this still life captured holds little presentness for the person because they are so focused on the perception in other

times and spaces. The paradox represented by the "selfie" photo is a simple product of the larger and more complex associations between cultural identity and media. A still photo captures a story about who an individual is in connection to a particular moment in time and place. My film project builds from this premise to consider the narratives that form around media objects such as photographs. Specifically, the film focuses on photos perceived through online media sources, such as websites, blogs, and social media.

The cinematic narrative and style of my film project juxtapose the manner in which modern culture has come to experience time and memory as a form of social structuring and consciousness, and how identity functions when broken down. Cultural identity in the digital age means an accedence to dual identity formation in both mediated and non-mediated realities, and the reception of such identities is subjective and prone to remediation and re-presentation. As Stuart Hall clarifies, history and culture are tied up in identity not as a stable formation, but as ongoing and evolving. At the level of culture, Hall sees a power play as individuals are both producers and consumers in a struggle for dominance or resistance ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora"). *Photostoria* emphasizes the dichotomy of identity in contemporary life and the self-revelation of identity in multiple cultural contexts.

Additionally, a sense of place is a factor in cultural identity formation, creating an environment of expectations in the form of localized histories and symbolic meanings. My film, set in a Midwestern space, depicts a place in a transitional period between rural/urban, traditional/progressive, and nature/technology. Iowa represents a specific setting for contradictions of identity and culture that ground the film in reality.

As individuals share their lives through media outlets, a narrative of personal identity becomes located within particular cultural groups. Though Marshall McLuhan wanted to exclude the narrative from cultural impact by focusing on the discourse, it is becoming clearer that narrative and culture can work in a kind of feedback loop to comment on the relationship between media and identity (McLuhan, 8). These new narratives shape culture at the same moment that they create culture, blurring the distinction. Jodi Dean sees this loop as a trap that must be interrupted in order to awaken culture from an unseen identity crisis, but can we also use cinematic convergence as an agent of transcendent revival (Dean, 121)? Cinema contains a latent power to express time and space in the movement of a shifting media landscape. As culture seeks to navigate a loss of meaning in a world of symbolic overload, cinema in conjunction with digital media can reflect back the confusion of self-referential affect. The film portion of the project utilizes non-linear editing to emphasize instead of hide the gaps, jumps, and expansion of time and space. This cinematic experience demonstrates the emphasis on individual and shared cultural memory in a globalized society.

*Photostoria* presents a layered examination of the way that cultural identity, memory, and history interact in a transitioning, mediated society. Cultural identification is explored through the use of three main characters who each represent a variant level of investment in and handling of a mediated society. Hall's concept of the ways that the meaning of a message is decoded through dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings of media parallels the relationships between the three characters in the film ("Decoding/Encoding"). These characters illustrate differing perspectives on the identities that form in a hypermediated culture. John is a heavily invested, lifelong media user who writes and creates online content. Rita is similar to John as

she writes in the social media world, but is more self-aware of her investment in culture. Finally, Malcolm is completely outside of contemporary mediated culture since he is originally from the past (1940's) and cannot handle the drastic transition to being stuck in the present. Respectively, the perspectives are an affective ascendance to culture, an awareness of but participation in the digital networked world, a rejection of mediated culture. For example, Malcolm is a wanderer and time traveler who calls into question a stable state of time, space, history, and memory, much in the same way that a mediated, networked, and "always on" culture influences new conceptions of linearity. However much we attempt to control our self-representation, either on or offline, our identities are subject to the mediation and reception process. Increasingly with the persistence of media and data, we lose control of our identity and confuse memories with social media saturation (Rushkoff, 70-71). The structure of the film is informed by the way memory influences concepts of history. Through lyrical, non-linear editing the perception of the memories of the characters are given precedence, resulting in a narrative puzzle of cultural and individual history. Being lost in the subjectivity of memory is contrasted with the confusion of time travel. The rise of reception studies has taught us that author and identity is fluid and dependent on a new level of participation (Hall, 15-18). Though it can appear that technology and media are influencing identity and cultural shifts, the reality is a complex interplay between individual and/or group interaction with technological changes.

Therefore, filmmaking holds the potential to demonstrate and reflect the participatory, transitional, and convergent reality of mediated cultural identity. My film interacts with cultural identity formation in a hypermediated society through transmediated storytelling, improvisation, participation, and narrative and formal experimentation. The film and production process reflect

the fragmentation and convergence of mediated identity that has augmented, confused, and reformulated our interpersonal relationships and global connectedness. I define “transmedia” along the lines of Henry Jenkins, wherein “integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101"). For the purposes of this project, I am looking at the looser way that transmedia narratives spill over into the non-fiction world to interact with culture in a direct manner. The actors in the film inform their characters with their personal experiences, stories, and personalities. A collaborative approach to the production process brings intentional connection to the actors' "real" identities, blurring the line between on and off camera as well as on and offline identity.

Connected to the film is a website belonging to one of the main characters, John Wright. The website is filled with stories infused with real personal details by various authors. Presented through the internet the project reflects an element of the fictional world seen in the film, allowing for participation within and without the world of the film. Collaboration in the production and narrative process are emphasized in the project as a reflection of social media interaction at work in the real world. Individuals now have their own voice while at the same time becoming lost in all the digital noise. What then could be more appropriate than using our media to speak to our current condition, both translating and contributing to the meaning-making in reflection?

The first section of this analysis explores relevant cinematic experiences of the time travel or time displacement genre in connection to conceptions of history and identity in culture. The French New Wave is a touching off point in cinema history and theory as a time and place in

transition. A perspective on more contemporary trends in cinematic time displacement then leads into a genre perspective on the film project in connection with cinema history.

The second section places the *Photostoria* project in perspective to narrative and identity theory. With a focus on cinematic form, "puzzle films" and the time travel genre are considered with respect to new media structures such as networks through blogs, websites, and mobile technology. Connections are then made between new media theory and cultural theory in order to understand identity formation within these new structures. Thirdly, the collaborative production process of the film project is analyzed through the lens of the previous discussions, including the connected website and crowd-funding promotion.

## Section 1: Cinema and Identity in Transition

Western society has reached a level of technological innovation and adoption once only found in science fiction, both expanding and confusing our sense of time and space. Time travel is more technologically possible and more absurdly paradoxical than any other moment in history. Cinematic technology has played a role in communicating the transitioning identities in culture through the last century of history. In the French New Wave period filmmakers used hand held cameras and techniques that freed them from traditional concepts of identity and history itself. Later in the 1990's, video technology freed independent filmmakers to make any kind of movie they wanted. With social networks, blogs, websites, and journals a person's history can be recorded and reflected through multiple online profiles. The longing for the past to be alive in our present or the ability to edit the past is a near constant in the time travel narrative,

though we have now reached the point of a new manifestation within the time travel narrative. In Woody Allen's biggest commercial success, 2011's *Midnight in Paris*, Gil stumbles onto one of cinema's most fluid passages back and forth in time and space. No longer does he need the cumbersome mechanical devices of most time travel (a 'flux capacitor,' e.g.) or even the rigor of scientific theory dressed up in quantum physics. All that Gil requires is a sleek 1920's era car to pick him up on the way to the golden age of Paris that he idealizes, with no explanation or rules by which to abide.

As an aspiring novelist, Gil is able to meet all of his literary idols, inspiring his creative work in an era in which it can be appreciated. Quickly Gil begins to see the fracture in the two lives that he is living, one in the blissful and invigorating simplicity of the past and the other in the compromised comfort of the present. It is not important to understand the how of his time displacement, but simply the experience of the two sides of life. Nostalgia is at the core of *Midnight in Paris* as Gil confronts the reality of his longing for a better time and place. Being in a particular place allows him to be swept up in time so that the present collapses into the past of his dreams, on the borderline of a day's time. Midnight comes to stand in as the limbo between his life-times. The character of Gil represents the evolution of the time traveler as a personally and philosophically empowered human who wills time and space as a mechanism of personal historical change. Though the understanding of the how is now secondary, he bends and collapses time as needed to shape a new narrative. *Photostoria* is also unconcerned with the how of the time travel apparatus, relying on the techniques of film to transport the viewer through time and space. In practical terms, the experience of this narrative phenomenon is located in the

power of cinema to transport and transcend narrative constraints in the socially networked experience of contemporary society.

A clear trend is seen in the popularization of cinematic nostalgia in the last few years. The 2011 awards favorite, *The Artist*, along with *Hugo*, *War Horse*, *Super 8*, and *My Week with Marilyn* display a keen return to the fondness for a time lost and a self-reflection on classic cinema. As much as Western culture is preoccupied with modern advancement, it is also in love with the past and bringing the past into the present as a new state of being, or mapping present perspectives onto the past. Because culture is becoming exponentially networked in the digital age there is an all consuming sentiment that past, present, and future is perpetually within grasp. More than ever there is a sense that the future is now, or at least closer than ever. Narrative has evolved to accommodate this shift in the cultural commodity of time. In a shift from the dominant “authentic” histories of the past taught in schools, Pam Cook discerns “postmodern histories” as empathetic identifications with reconstructed historical events through subjective memory. This imaginative reframing of the past by way of nostalgic memory may appear inauthentic, but in the end brings the spectator closer to the past, producing powerful emotional affect (Cook, 2). This new experience of the past produces a fresh approach to history and inspires a growing understanding.

In the roots of cinema is a direct connection to the ability to express and experience time and space more than any other medium before. Cinema by definition is images in time and space through the perception of movement. Of course, the relationship cinema holds with the vision of time in its many expressions is often schizophrenic and inconsistent. Just as Gil in *Midnight in Paris* is able to jump to specific moments in time seamlessly, cinema itself holds great power in

moving the viewer through time with only the shift of a frame, though they share a unique disorientation as well. As the discussion of cinema's theoretical basis in time and space shows, the very act of time displacement displayed in cinema inevitably draws attention to the cinematic medium itself. The historical and creative impetus experienced by Gil in a reordering of time can also be revisited in the journey of cinema as filmmakers interpreted a dislocation of time into cinema.

### The Origins of Cinematic Time Displacement

Time and space have been essential elements of cinema since the inception of the medium. Quickly though, cinema's form and structure fell into traditional Western conceptions of linear temporality, concrete space, and chronological history (Bordwell, 6, 42-44). There are moments of subversion of these classical cinematic norms which appear in the narrative and technique of particular films and periods. Specifically, innovations have been made in the unique time travel and memory displacement narratives of the French New Wave. It is my intention to discover the historical and cultural factors which provided the space for the experimentation with the cinematic mechanism as a means to new narrative themes. These themes and techniques are instructive in understanding conceptions of historical perspective and the possibility of the subversion of forms of time.

The discussion of the implications involved in the cinematic subversion of time as a historical system begins with looking at the beginnings of cinema in mechanical formation. From there we can move to points of divergence and disruption in cinema history, with particular focus on the convergence of themes and technical experimentation in the French New Wave

period. René Thoreau Bruckner clarifies the role the cinematic apparatus has in solidifying modern modes of temporality whereby the notion of “flicker” becomes representative to culture (61). A model of a selective and discontinuous time is present in the progression of successive instants in the present tense through film, with gaps of empty space. Bruckner considers the cinematographic image playing an integral role since the 1890s in visualizing an understanding of temporal discontinuity. This cultural production through cinema is realized in “flicker-time” in the way that films trick the eye into believing motion exists through singular instants in succession. The subjective perspective and editing of time leads to an objective perception of moments captured and in the process develops an imaginary conception of time in Western society (62).

Bruckner links time travel narratives with the actual origins of cinema’s apparatus and experience. In considering some of the first narratives dealing with time travel, particularly H.G. Wells’ novel *The Time Machine*, Bruckner finds connections between Wells’ depiction of time travel as a visual experience through the flickering passage of time (night and day). Even further how this concept of time as a space (fourth dimension) allows for an experience of time in travel (movement) as only a spectator watching time pass before them. In much the same manner, the spectator of a film loses themselves invisibly in the experience of the film with an imaginary sense of control over the events moving in time. A viewer understands that when they sit down to watch a film that the narrative is a produced representation of events and that they have control of the narrative as they add meaning between the narrative gaps.

Similarly, Paul Coates highlights the time travel narrative’s emergence in literary and cinematic terms at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but sees it as a sign of the need to colonize or

dominate new blank spaces, thus the invention of new forms of temporal conceptualization. Time travel becomes the possibility of traversing the uneven development of spaces in our current reality for a projection onto a universe of space and time. This new preoccupation in culture with mapping “the fourth dimension” naturally translates into the new medium of film, in which the viewer is enabled to travel invisibly through time and history. Bruckner agrees with Coates’ connection to cinema as the preservation of moments in time and space, the “syncopation of history” resembling the editing of film, and the invisible identification with the encapsulating vision on the screen. For Coates, these concepts are best represented in Chris Marker’s *Le Jetee* where still images create a recurring time motif and transforms linear time into circular time as narrative. The film stands as an example of philosophical insight in the science fiction genre where the mechanisms of cinema actually accentuate the spiritualism of the medium’s possibilities. Coates and Bruckner bring out the transcendent quality to time travel narratives, which has inherent connections to cinema as a new experience of time.

*Photostoria* owes a great debt to *Le Jetee* in establishing an emotional and relational core to a narrative that shifts between time and space on a screen with little prompting. Though both films show the mechanism of time displacement at some point in the narrative, it is the relationship of the characters that propels the narrative. Memory in both cases functions as the primary structuring technique as the characters, and therefore the audience, put together a narrative form. *Le Jetee’s* use of still images in the cinematic medium of movement foregrounds the gaps in time of both the cinematic form and the narrative itself. The audience is forced to fill in the gaps between the still images in much the same manner as the network of images encountered on social media sites. *Photostoria* reflects on this phenomenon in the museum

scene where the characters of John and Rita peruse the exhibits, seen in still images, highlighting the experience of snapshots of cultural history and personal memory. The presentness of the moment is emphasized just as Instagram is a constant stream of images rendered in nostalgic photography filters and recorded as memories, building to a narrative of someone's life. In simple terms, a co-worker's impression of my personal narrative involved my family eating sushi all the time because whenever we had sushi I would post a photo of the food on Instagram. Memory is an incomplete and subjective representation of history so that these gaps in images raise awareness to the cinematic presentation of identity in time.

Domenec Font makes slightly different connections with cinema's handling of time and space, highlighting a psychological element present in French New Wave films. He sees stories of amnesia or accidents of memory creating a space for a cinematic metaphor of forgetting the past or accommodating gaps of memory. This device allows cinema to break with (or forget) traditional narrative schemes and move past in an alternative network of aesthetic systems. Font believes that the reason cinema has difficulty negotiating time is because it is so built into the fabric of time as a necessary agent of the narrative for the medium. Because cinema displays movement of images in time the medium lends itself to a constant flow in time. Cinema both records, replays, and recalls history as a constant in the present. For films dealing with the negotiation of memories, whether lost or implanted artificially, it becomes clear that through the temporal structuring of cinema itself, characters are given a second chance or a rebirth. In *Le Jeteé* the main character is able to go back to moments in his life with the choice of how his experience will be different the second time around. The framing scene of *Le Jeteé* on the platform is an opportunity to relive history for the main character, just as in *Photostoria* there is a

chance at re-experiencing moments in time. There is a possibility of regaining something in the power of time displacement. The character of Rita sees an opportunity in time travel to escape the present, prompting a reflection on her history as a story and containing narrative structuring. She is able to envision the ability to restructure her history and memory because of new possibilities in social media and networks.

Again with Font, there is a transcendent quality to the process of a journey through the disjunctive nature of memory and time as it is filtered through cinema itself. Whether it is a narrative of time travel or passage through memory, these films tend to focus around a post-mortem or second-life experience wherein a search for identity among lost memories is an essential part of the narrative equation. For Font, French New Wave directors such as Marker, Renais, and Godard were interested in the persistence of the past in the present with memory as a prime component, but later filmmakers who were inspired by Philip K. Dick saw memory subversion as a manipulation of technology and the future other (*Blade Runner; Minority Report, Existenz*). Therefore cinema accommodates first a reconsideration of the temporal memory of history, then in later periods the technological invasion on memory and identity.

#### Innovation In The French New Wave

Located in film history are points at which particular historical factors converged with a cultural consciousness thereby informing new representations of cinematic time displacement through narrative structure, whether they be specifically time travel or not. One of the most creative and experimental phases in cinema for the concept of the time travel narrative, in the loosest sense, is the French New Wave movement. Bringing together contributing factors of a

political, psychological, and philosophical nature along with a creatively adventurous ethos, this period of cinematic output helped redefine the experience of time and place itself. Ingrained in cinema is a barometer of society and culture, as filmmakers and audiences help define their world and give it meaning by containing it in a narrative that is experienced in time and space. When traditional structuring of the world (Classical Hollywood style) is challenged we must ask why, and what are the influencing factors to spark new forms of narrative. For these questions, the French New Wave, with Chris Marker, Jean Luc-Godard and Alan Resnais as primary figures, is key in establishing a precedence for cinema's potential in narrative dislocation. Little has been already discussed in relation to this period as a nexus for a theoretical formation in the specific area of meaning surrounding time travel narratives, although the French New Wave is well known for non-linear experimentation.

Additionally, there are comparisons between the experimental consciousness of the French New Wave period and more recent occurrences of cinematic time dislocation through narrative structuring. A clear connection can be made with *12 Monkeys* and Chris Marker's *Le Jete* as points of divergence in structure and historical consciousness. As well, films such as *Donnie Darko*, *Run Lola Run*, and *Source Code* provide unique exceptions in contemporary narratives. These examples expose shifting Western conceptions of history, understandings of identity within society or a global community, and the nature of the stories that we tell ourselves to make meaning of our world. As history shows, cinema has already become a prime means of translating time as a historical experience linked with memory formation. What can we learn about our cultural experiences of time, space, and memory through films that directly address temporality, as the Western world shifts into a digitally, hyper-mediated culture? No doubt,

paradoxes of temporal experiences will appear in the cinematic mechanism just as our shifting cultural experiences calls for disjointed renegotiations. A direct link is at work in cinema between the subject of temporal engagement and cinematic apparatus empowering the experience of time. The two sides feed off one another in a cultural and philosophical temporal loop, requiring a narrative examination to see how we experience our world.

Specific historical factors influenced filmmakers to experiment with non-linear formal structures through time-travel narratives from the time of the French New Wave to the present. In looking at the perspectives already explored in this area, certain ideological frameworks were being challenged through the experimentation and renegotiation of temporal ordering during the 1950s and 60s. In particular, critics and directors coming out of the Cahiers De Cinema's theoretical environment subverted the formal chronology in linear cinematic storytelling established by the classical Hollywood tradition. Politically and philosophically motivated by revolutionary moments in recent history, these blossoming auteurs introduced a cinema fully engaged in re-presenting time as a cultural experience. These young filmmakers found themselves in a post-World War II France destabilized economically and politically as a country causing a default to the dominant pre-war traditions. The combination of the confusion around student strikes, civil rights, and the Algerian War led to a cinematic revolt against the smoothing over of history in classic "Tradition of Quality" style of popular French cinema (Ostrowska). For those associated with the French New Wave, time travel narratives and the play of narrative temporality held significant implications for displaying a radical philosophical consciousness to society. Further, there is a shift as temporal subversion in cinema is revived around the turn of the century where technological realities and mediated identity perpetuates new experiences of

time in the cultural consciousness. Though cultural conceptions in relation to humanities' connection to existence in time and history continue to be of a philosophical nature, new questions are arising in cinematic narrative and aesthetic terms.

The movement from the groundbreaking experimentation of the French New Wave to more current variances of cinematic temporality and the historically influential markers along the way span the length of my study. The critically minded filmmakers and theorists of the French New Wave are clearly influenced by the new theoretical developments that fed into political action. The cinematic outpouring by Marker, Godard, and Resnais links to the philosophical and theoretical changes running through the undercurrents of Western culture. The science fiction genre and temporal play specifically are prime outlets for filtering the manner in which theorists were rethinking the process of memory and historicism of culture. The influence of Modernist literature and philosophy on cinematic form corresponds to the networked, participatory, and democratized digital aesthetic now transforming the film medium. Narrative and generic structures involving time displacement were embraced by French New Wave filmmakers in order to question traditional views of memory, history, and identity. An analysis of historical media transitions speaks to the current cultural space and the mediated identities represented therein.

Chris Marker's *Le Jetee*, Alan Resnais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, and *Je t'aime, Je t'aime* represent primary French New Wave texts for their full interaction with narratives of temporality, non-linear structure, and aesthetic experimentation. In looking at more current examples, texts include Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*, Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* and *Southland Tales*, and Shane Carruth's *Primer* and *Upstream Color*. These two periods of film display the difference in level of experimentation and engagement with ideological frameworks

present in contemporary culture. The French New Wave stands as a more experimental and subversive approach, while recent examples start from more of a mainstream position. Overall though these cinematic narratives address temporal structuring as signals of the filmmakers interaction with culture and the conventions of genre.

Elena Del Rio and Corinn Columpar have already written on the links between *Le Jetee* and *12 Monkeys* as they influence one another from different periods and in changing notions of cinematic experimentation (“The Remaking of *La Jetée*’s Time-Travel Narrative”, “Re-Membering the Time Travel Film: From *La Jetee* to *Primer*.”). *12 Monkeys* is more concerned with a linear presentation of time than *Le Jetee* as far as time travel narratives, emphasizing the linearity of history in Western conceptions by maintaining a consistency and commitment to a clear understanding of movement through time. *Le Jetee*, as stated, is motivated by memory and relationships, becoming less concerned with narrative clarity. The two films are divided by their formal qualities where *Le Jetee* uses a modernist, cubist approach creating a new perspective on a moment. *12 Monkeys* jumps in time but values a chronology of the past and present (future), choosing to destabilize identity through narrative elements such as a stop at a mental hospital instead of the cinematic experience itself.

Initially, it was Godard who paid little attention to Hollywood's demand for clear structuring of time and space. *Breathless* famously disregarded linear editing with jump cuts and long takes alternatively. The film is not preoccupied with making clear connections between locations and time, but focuses on an energy and fluidity of experience inspired by the younger generation at the time. Influenced by Brechtian concepts, Godard and Resnais brought the cinematic form to the audience’s attention, forcing the audience to interact with the narrative as a

film form. Godard's use of music repetition in fits and starts reminds the viewer of the artificiality of the film medium. This technique brought the producer and consumer of narrative into a mutual relationship of meaning making, prompting reflection on changing views of identity in a cultural landscape (Marie, 92, 95).

Where Godard's use of music, editing, and narrative trajectory does not conform to Hollywood's rules, Resnais' techniques of mixed up memories and characters are equally disorienting for audiences. The dislocation of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* destabilizes the narrative flow by shifting the character's identities and relationships to one another. The film calls into question cultural history through the opening atomic bomb shots and personal history through the unreliable memories of individual characters. *Last Year at Marienbad* continues Resnais' confusion of truth and fiction as three characters move in and out of the same moments, bringing the past and present associations into question. Similarly to *Le Jetee* these two films balance an intimate and emotional relationship between characters with a larger perspective of the perception and manipulation of history. No longer were these French filmmakers looking at history with the polished and extravagant period film tradition in France to sweep a viewer into a specific moment in time, but instead used contemporary relationships as reflections on the confusion of history for individuals in the present. These filmmakers were finding themselves undefined by war compared to the previous generation and considering more internal struggles culturally, politically, and philosophically. The state of their cultural identity was in flux as cultural perception was in transition.

As a "new medium," cinema during the French New Wave was in a phase of technological innovation with hand-held cameras becoming accessible and economical.

Experimentation with visual art forms was bleeding into cinema in the form of new film stocks, processing, and exhibition techniques. Manovich sees this period as a stepping stone in cinema's development toward mimesis of life through technological and experimental means. In this process, the older media is revealed to be unrealistic while the newer media points toward the potential of the future (Manovich, 168-171). The sense of new possibilities led Resnais and others to create narratives around aesthetic and technological innovation highlighting cinema's non-linear development and that of history more generally. *Je t'aime, je t'aime* draws on a time travel experiment forcing the main character into reliving moments in his own history. A chronological ordering is forfeited in favor of memory where the cause and effect structuring of the past is questioned. For instance, to varying degrees the main character experiences different parts of a moment in his past snorkeling with a woman. In some scenes he is just coming out of the water, some he is getting into the water, some he starts a conversation with the woman, and later he continues the conversation. The meaning and experience of the memory is destabilized for the character and audience as the narrative relevance is mixed up through editing and sound mismatches.

The French New Wave established an interaction of cultural shifts with aesthetic and structural film techniques which reflected the changes in identity in a transitional period. Time and space displacement, sometimes directly in the time travel genre, is utilized to represent the destabilization of identity that the filmmakers were experiencing as a cultural condition. They found more relevance in the perception of disjointed time in modernist literature and art than the previous generations attempts to smooth out history in clean linearity. Expression of this disconnect came through an acknowledgment of the breakdown in film form, resulting in

revitalization of the cinematic experience. These filmmakers and theorists wanted to inspire a spillover into culture as a whole, redefining cinema, cultural identity and concepts of historicity.

### Time Displacement in Contemporary Cinema

In a similar manner, more recent filmmakers explore through cinematic terms the need to reevaluate Western (and Global) concepts of identity in light of a technological, hyper-connected cultural progression. The new experiences of time and memory formation in technological terms find expression in the science fiction genre and narratives of time displacement. Culture lives out its identity through negotiations of memory experiences and historical models. These experiences get challenged in the natural flow of cinematic structuring, both narratively and aesthetically.

The 1990's brought about another phase of aesthetic and technical experimentation from various locations and influences. The Dogme 95 film movement, originating out of Denmark and popularized by Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, consisted of a call for cinema to break from the invisible nature of the Hollywood studio form with special effects and post-production polishing. The Dogme 95 Manifesto and "Vow of Chastity" defined the terms and rules filmmakers must follow in order to allow for a more natural and narrative focused approach to film. Though the rejection of technological manipulation in the production is emphasized, it was new innovations in digital video technology that allowed for inexpensive productions free of the studio system. Just as hand-held film cameras and documentary techniques allowed French New Wave directors to work quickly and spontaneously, digital cameras allowed independent filmmakers in the 1990's to capture improvised moments and create naturalized characters.

America also saw a rise in independent film in the 1990's that took advantage of video technology to sideline the studio system. Steven Soderbergh's first film, *Sex, Lies, and Videotapes*, used these new democratizing technologies in the production process as well as bringing cultural saturation into public view. Because video recording was so much cheaper and faster to work with in production and post-production, time on screen could be manipulated and experimented much more fluidly.

By 2013 with the release of his second film, *Upstream Color*, Shane Caruth was able to handle every aspect of the cinematic process at the creative and industrial level himself, therefore creating a rare harmonious union of the medium and message (Adams, "Shane Carruth on self-distributing *Upstream Color*"). Caruth's approach to filmmaking and distribution represents a clear step in the direction of converging not only media, but also the convergence of contemporary cultural identity with media production. In a similar manner to Caruth, my film allows for both direct authorial control and audience interactivity that bridges old and new media techniques (Brandom, "Showing Hollywood the way"). I was able to act as writer, director, cinematographer, producer, and editor because of the development of digital technology. Though the whole production was a collaborative effort, informed by other writers, the actors, and a small production crew, it is still more feasible than ever to have a direct relationship between producer and media product. The "selfie" photo and high definition videos edited on smartphones as a part of the social network represent the ability for anyone to produce their own media content. These digital phenomena prompt cinema's changing role in culture.

Coming out of the independent film movement in the 1990's and digital innovation through consumer participatory practices, a new kind of collective filmmaking has emerged

outside of the Hollywood system. The processes and forms of films made by filmmaking collectives, such as Borderline Films (*Marcy Martha May Marlene*, *Afterschool*, *Simon Killer*), Court 13 (*Beasts of the Southern Wild*) point to a purposeful and ideologically minded transformation of American cinema. These filmmakers are using means outside the studio market system such as digital video and online distribution. Focusing on identity in a generation destabilized by a fragmented society and confused narratives, this filmmaking trend correlates to the French New Wave movement. Though less unified and systematic than the New Wave, connections between ideas and filmmaking techniques are still applicable to current times. These films address culture and identity with subtle political activity and social intervention but through cinematic narratives that are not being presented by the dominant media.

Focused collaborators like Zal Batmanglij and Brit Marling (*The Sound of My Voice*, *The East*) are taking steps to create the kinds of topical and formally innovative films that Hollywood is not producing. After becoming frustrated with the kinds of female roles being offered from the studio system, Marling simply wrote roles for herself that she could connect with. Together these filmmakers and films address cultural issues that at their heart are related to the frustration of fitting into particular cultural norms or a loss of symbolic meaning. Often there is a confusion of identification in society as characters begin to drift. The young woman played by Elizabeth Olson in *Marcy Martha May Marlene* is seeking a cultural group she can fit into, but instead finds herself in a cult. Though the group is harmful, she is torn between the accepting community she finds in the cult and the pressures and emptiness of contemporary life. *The Sound of My Voice*, works from a similar premise where a supposed cult is investigated from the

inside, but instead of an expose of cults these two films focus on characters who are torn between a loss of meaning and the desire to believe in something.

Connecting all of these films by independent filmmakers are the characters that are experiencing the destabilization or complete loss of their identity. Olson's character and as the film's title suggest, is caught between multiple expectations and identities, so that she does not know who to be at any given moment. She is portrayed as unfeeling and almost sleepwalking through life, unable to find a grounding for her emotions. Caruth similarly stated in interviews that he started with an idea for his film *Upstream Color* with characters who have lost their identity and what that might look like in our current times. The character of Chris is robbed of her memories and identity by means of a biological drug, leaving her also to sleepwalk through life until she can find someone to connect with and find meaning for her life.

To convey the confusion of identity, all of these filmmakers employ a disjointed narrative technique through the editing process where moments in the films are not motivated by cause and effect chronology but based more on a flow of memory. Specifically, *The Sound of My Voice* and *Primer* use time travel as a component in the narrative and character complexity. A commonality between all the films is the way that personal narratives and timelines become mixed up, confused, or fused completely. In *The Sound of My Voice*, the ending is left open as to whether the cult leader is actually a time traveler from the future and in *Primer* the complexity of the timelines leaves the viewer wondering where and when the real or original characters actually exist. The timelines between past and present in *Marcy Martha May Marlene* shift through editing by matching the composition of shots between times. The editing of *Upstream Color* in particular is disjointed and lyrical, where conversations flow between locations and

times. In one sequence the two main characters even mix up their childhood memories, fusing their identities together, questioning the integrity of our concept of identity completely. The jumps, skips, and gaps of the film medium are here used to imply the fragmentation and instability of identity in a time of constant flux and rapid change.

It is worth mentioning here time travel films on the uprise lately with *Safety Not Guaranteed*, *Looper*, and *The Time Traveler's Wife* which address a cultural desire to rewrite personal history. With variable approaches these films look at the ways that the choices we make affect the course of our lives. In a long tradition of time travel narratives, these new narratives apply the idea of returning to our past as a way to understand who we are now. The present identity pays a debt to the past and with the flexibility of social media records and digital technology, individuals can find the ability to re-edit the past to change the present. The metaphor and impossibility of time travel in *Safety Not Guaranteed* becomes literal in the end as a moment of optimism for all of the characters. The character of Jeff returns to his home town to find his old girlfriend and reflects on the difference between his current cynical, fast-paced identity and his former, simpler life. Where all the characters go through some kind of reflection on their identity in the current cultural landscape, Darius and Kenneth actually get to travel back in time as an answer to resetting their timeline and the possibility of their identities.

My film project arrives out of these cinematic traditions through the amalgamation of critical cultural and identity analysis, technological innovation, and the time travel genre. As with *Le Jetee*, *Photostoria* is framed by a moment in time that represents a significant shift in relationships and personal history. The characters of Rita and John follow the Malcolm character to the location of the time travel anomaly in the opening of the film and in the end of the film the

moment is returned to in an extended sequence where Rita disappears, displaced in time. At the heart of the film, similarly to *Last Year at Marienbad*, is a moment where Rita and Malcolm run into one another while Rita is time traveling. This being Malcolm's past, John is also present at this moment as he periodically follows Malcolm to find out where he disappears to. The shared moment between the three is confused by the level of knowledge and history associated with the past, present, and future experiences depicted at various times throughout the film. Just as a media product is sent into the digital world and left for interpretation, this moment in the film contains different meanings and associations for each character, and depending on when they perceive the moment. For example, when Rita first meets Malcolm in her normal present timeline she does not recognize Malcolm, but it is in his past when Rita ran into him so that Malcolm does slowly recognize her. Yet, Rita sees that there is a photograph of herself on the wall in a moment in which she does not remember, prompting her to entertain new possibilities of time chronology.

*Photostoria* has a rich and complex cinematic history that informs the genre and narrative style and form. As is explored further in the following sections, recent complex film trends are not so revelatory or disconnected from past considerations as some critics and theorists imply. My film project utilizes non-linear editing, jump cuts, new filmmaking technology, time displacement metaphors, and disjointed narratives, yet only intones a small representation of the complexity of identities in transition. The cinematic trends previously discussed all contribute to the experimentation in cinema of time and space displacement as a cultural experience. This is a movement as a progression, not as a rupture with history.

## Section 2: Narrative and Identity Destabilization

*Photostoria* as a film and transmedia project engages with a narrative complexity that has connections with narrative, genre, new media, and cultural theory on various levels. Firstly, the shape of the film project narrative is considered through the puzzle and time travel narrative structures. Next the narrative shape is overlaid with real world narrative forms as networks of information and media. Websites, blogs, and social media bring new media theories through the form and affect of media outlets in our culture. Finally, cultural and reception theory, by way of the meaning making that occurs in a mediated society, clarifies how identity functions in online and offline identities through the actors and characters in media. The underlying mechanisms at work in society find their way into the circumstances of production.

Because the focus of the study is on narrative and aesthetic style in combination, and of a narrow and rare kind, genre study brings the two elements together in the science fiction time travel genre. Primarily, the texts considered are associated with the science fiction genre because of their central approach to time as malleable and the necessity of technology. Of course, the play and fluctuation with genre is an integral factor in what comes to define their correlation to the historical variables affecting a particular narrative. With the displacement in time and space, genre is given the opportunity to shift in the spectrum of narrative styles. Many extra-genre elements creep into time travel narratives, such as romance, historical drama, and the period film. All of these genres have meanings culturally and historically as to why they may be significant. Considering similar plot structures and generic conventions displays the cultural environment surrounding the production.

One such example, as I have mentioned, is the manner in which Western culture has come to experience time as form of social structuring and consciousness. The United States and Europe are considered monochronic societies where time is seen as a valued resource that orders life. Cultures such as Africa and Asia use a polychronic system of time which is less focused on the precision of linearity and centered around community and relationships (Guerrero, DeVito & Hecht, 238). Cinema from its inception had the open possibility of conveying time in a linear, chronological manner or allowing the mechanisms of cinema to express time in a more organic nature. Cinema quickly adopted a particular conception of temporal ordering congruent with homogenizing and monochronic Western thought. It is a matter of ideological subversion or at least ideological engagement that runs through generic genre exercises only to twist them for new meanings. *Photostoria* demonstrates the clash between polychronic and monochronic cultural experiences. The character of Malcolm values time in relational terms instead of the rigid schedules of modern society. He can disappear for days at a time with a more fluid approach to his time, enhanced by his mixed up sense of linear movement through history. Further complicating this concept are the film's technique of shifting between montage sequences and longer takes, disjointed in time by jump cuts.

### Puzzle Films

As New Wave directors were influenced by the existential narrative freedom of modernist writers, pop culture purveyors today find a release from simple storytelling and a new ability to comprehend complexity (Ostrowska, 6-7). In the digital information age there is a heightened ability to analyze everything, multitask, and move on to the next issue. Cinematic narratives are

now often understood in terms of puzzles and networks of information, including a postmodern self-awareness. For a modern society engaged with digital technology "narrativity is replaced by something more like putting together a puzzle by making connections and recognizing patterns." (Rushkoff, 34). Yet along with this freedom comes the anxiety and cynicism of missing this existential network of interconnected possibility in our own lives. Everything in life is turned into a game in order to augment a complex story world reality. Narratives are no longer told and conveyed to society in a way that allows people to center themselves in a grand narrative. Now in a hyperlinked world people can find their own path and narrative, but often leave no room to contemplate the meaning or effect driving the narrative. The outside of the narrative is clear, but the center is fuzzy. The recent emphasis in media on self-referentiality, meta-narratives, and intertextuality highlights attempts to acknowledge the growing complexity of narrative inside and outside of media and the breakdown of the layers of identity confusion.

Warren Buckland performs a thorough examination of the distinctions in terms of "complex narratives" and his own category of the "puzzle plot." He begins with Aristotle's delineation between "simple plots" and "complex plots" wherein the complexity comes from the additional narrative elements of "reversal" and "recognition." Like Aristotle, Bordwell's definition of complex narratives, including his forking-path variation, still fall under classical plot lines because the divergent actions or events eventually integrate back into the main plotline. The actions or events which instigate a secondary causality in the end appear probable and necessary for the character and audience. Buckland sees his complex narrative definition and "puzzle plot" extend beyond Aristotle and Bordwell so that the boundaries of classical and unified plot are broken. "Puzzle film constitutes a post-classical mode of filmic representation

and experience not delimited by mimesis" (Buckland, 5). The distinction of puzzle films involves a new embrace of non-linearity, time loops, and time-space fragmentation. Inevitably though, the puzzle film is more concerned with the unity of narrative structure simply because of audience and filmmakers emphasis on solving a puzzle. Implied in the "puzzle" phrasing is a desire to make sense of the component plot elements, however divergent, in order to figure out the narrative meaning. A clear example is *Primer*, where there has been an ongoing attempt online to analyze, diagram, and interpret the timelines involved in the narrative. Upon more viewings though, the film presents a confounding inability to comprehend a unified plot structure, but does reward an experience of relational and identity drama beyond a simple puzzle to be solved. This film plays to both sides of an audience in the way that the puzzle solving becomes a commentary on the relationships on the characters as well as audience viewership. The audience and characters lose sight of more affectual responses to the narrative because of the puzzle element.

*Primer* illustrates the differing definition of "complex" used for this project, while sharing the elements of the puzzle film. *Photostoria* finds more alignment with memory films which are concerned with relational, nostalgic, and affective connectivity. This emphasis in cinema displays the current moment of shifting cinematic and cultural identity in a society navigating the relationship to new media. McLuhan foresaw this shift where:

New electric structuring and configuring of life more and more encounters the old lineal and fragmentary procedures and tools of analysis from the mechanical age. More and more we turn from the content of messages to study total effect . . . Concern with effect rather than

meaning is a basic change of our electric time, for effect involves the total situation, and not a single level of information movement (*Understanding Media*, 26).

Though individuals in modern culture attempt to form a unity out of complex elements, McLuhan states the primacy of experience over understanding. It is the affective experience of media artifacts across platforms and media that influence behavior and cultural identification. Though this approach to media focuses on the affects of technology on culture, it does point to the meaning that is lost in the larger and more immediate gaps so that all that registers is the experience of nostalgic and affective recognition as a substitute. John in *Photostoria* constantly checks and posts to the online world in an attempt to connect with something immediate, while Rita is able to function in both worlds and see beyond.

Buckland's identification of the two levels of operation for puzzle films through narrative and narration is applicable to *Photostoria's* use of storytelling within the story world (6). All of the characters *tell* (narrate) stories within the plot, as a part of the plot, of the overall narrative. The narration of these various stories, mostly told by Malcolm as a reflection of his experiences time traveling to the past, are pieces that have to be shaped into the larger narrative. The concept of the unreliable narrator informs the film by presenting all of the characters as storytellers, yet in the end shows Malcolm's narration to be a reflection of the past as personal history. Further complicating easy classification with the time travel genre is the way that what appears to be flashbacks in the past are actually closer to a forking-path narrative. With multiple and alternate timelines in history through time displacement, the classic flashback is renegotiated. What appear at first in *Photostoria* to be a flashbacks because of the ordering in the plot, later are

revealed to be more complex combinations of flashbacks and future or simultaneous travels in time.

Allan Cameron delves into further categorization of complex narratives, or "modular narratives," in cinema. His typology of practices includes "Anachronic Narratives" (flashbacks and flash-forwards), "Forking -Path Narratives," "Episodic Narratives." and "Split-Screen Narratives." Cameron makes the case for cinema's new found complexity as a result of digital filmmaking's ability to easily remix linearity and play with temporal sequencing in a postmodern age. His argument for a drastic shift is weakened by acknowledging the historical precedence of spacio-temporal experimentation in literature, art, and film. *Photostoria* does not fit neatly into any of Cameron's categories, yet it reflects many of the techniques involved. The film is vague in its ordering and structuring, purposefully blurring the lines between techniques of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and unreliable memories. Though postmodernism often prefers to conveniently forget cultural history, I see my project and other recent films as an extension of Modernist and Postmodernist experimentation in a new cultural context (Levi-Strauss, 324). *Photostoria* is not a complete break from classical forms and structures, but a signal of a cultural transition.

The way that narrative and the time travel genre have been used to play out the theoretical questions of history, temporality, and identity in cultural transitions is explored by David Wittenberg in his book on time travel. He considers time travel fiction to be a narrative "laboratory" for experiments dealing with the fundamentals of the way that stories are told and from what point of view in culture (Wittenberg, 2). One of the distinguishing components of time travel narratives for Wittenberg is the heightened awareness brought out through the play with time and space. In narrative theory terms, he points to the paradox created between the

fabula and *sjuzhet*, because the chronology of the fabula events are confused in the representative telling of those events out of order or from multiple perspectives. Wittenberg adds an additional narrative element to these terms in order to make room for the paradoxical connection. He proposes the application of the term "paratext" to represent the self-referentiality of the time travel genre by bringing attention to the discursive quality of a narrative.

*Photostoria* and the examples referenced here bring awareness to the telling of the narrative through aesthetic and structural elements. I would go further than Wittenberg and relate this idea to the ways that culture now processes a subjectivity to social media.

The wealth of storytelling in *Photostoria* points to an awareness of the discursive element in both creative activity and the power narrative structuring holds for identity formation in a mediated culture. The characters are aware of the historicity of their lives in the act of sharing pieces of their lives through text, images, and video in the process of media communication. Because of their ability to build the puzzle pieces into a coherent story, they are hyper-aware of their own identity online in the act of sharing. This act of sharing can cause both stress and freedom as it relates to cultural identity. The central tension of the film surrounds the relationship of the characters with their desire and ability to imagine and manifest a narrative within their perception of meaning. John and Rita are trying to piece together Malcolm's story at the same moment that the viewer is attempting to put together Malcolm's history and part in the narrative. Rita begins to be driven by wanting the complexity of a life story that Malcolm represents as she discovers the photo of herself. She loses interest in her relationship with John amidst the prospect of stepping outside the ordered and stalled life she sees in John. This is the

draw of the complexity encountered online through the duality of identity as we become conscious of our producer and consumer ability.

### New Media/Social Networks

The complexity and confusion involved in cinema's connection to shifting identity in the face of new media effects contains numerous variables for analysis. The manner in which media is received, interpreted, integrated, repurposed, and re-presented personally and culturally all carry meaning. As the center point for the discussion my project demonstrates and explores the cultural impact of the cinematic form. Therefore cultural frameworks related to personal and group identity formation and affiliation are most relevant to cinematic discourse in the digital age. Specifically, new media theory as real world cultural structuring is applicable to analyze the particular conditions that my film project will be presented in and formed out of. As discussed, time travel as a genre and narrative device is utilized in my film project as a metaphor for the dislocation, confused histories, jumbled memories, and destabilization of identity. History shows that cinema has already become a prime means of translating time as a historical experience linked with memory formation (Stewart, 2008). We learn about our cultural experiences of time, space, and memory through films that directly address temporality, as the world shifts into a digitally, hyper-mediated culture.

Though recent work has been done by Paul Booth and Jason Mittell in the growing trend of narrative complexity and social participation on television, fewer connections have been presented in this area for cinema (Booth, *Time on TV*; Mittell, *Complex TV*). The condensed narrative structure of films in comparison to the long-form serialization of television provides a

snapshot of a media experience that falls more in line with the "present" tense culture which Douglas Rushkoff emphasizes (*Present Shock*, 2-3). A film may contain numerous times and spaces, but the narrative must rest within the few minutes of the cinematic presentation, as an immediate experience. Just as our cultural experience now exhibits the vastness of the world through massive networks of media communication and available information, there is also an absence of sustained connection to people and narratives that can be exhibited in cinema.

Cinema is a story world in condensed time. Narrative in film is a singular experience that contains a microcosm of possibilities. And now in the digital age, narrative is expanding exponentially from the traditional form into a network of interconnectivity. Hyperlinks, blogs, and ancillary digital media components create a transmediated experience that is expanding the definitions of cinema. In this film project, the website extends the narrative of the film world into the real world, inviting interaction from others. The character of John promotes his online identity by creating a website on which he posts his own fictional stories about anonymous pictures he finds at thrift stores. Yet, as the film develops we find out that John is borrowing the true stories of Malcolm's past, from his experiences time traveling. The act of creating histories for the photographs and the "true" historical experiences of Malcolm form a contradiction of meaning. Even further, the stories for the actual website for the project come from various authors, who inform the stories with their own histories and memories. This interaction between internet media forms such as blogs or hyperlink narratives and cinema expands the overall project narrative form to include a networked narrative structure. A direct link is at work in cinema between the subject of temporal engagement and the cinematic apparatus empowering

the experience of time. The two sides feed off one another in a cultural and philosophical temporal loop, requiring a narrative examination of how we experience our world.

With the advent of short video services with a social component such as Vine and Instagram videos, the concept of the cinematic medium is changing to fit the present tense. Vine allows the user to hold down a record button and releasing it to stop recording, implying that the present is only live when the video is recording. This method of capturing and sharing life finds the condensing of time and space inherent in the jump cuts needed to fit into the 6 second limit. Snippets of time and space are fragmented and juxtaposed, testing our skills of montage interpretation. Now there is more interest in sampling and skimming to simply get to the gist of a subject or narrative essence in order to make a judgement, prompting an understanding in fractal terms. How little visual information is needed to formulate a narrative in cinematic terms? This is the kind of question that transmedia is exploring in trying to tell a story across multiple media outlets.

Everything around us that is a moving image in time becomes the possible piece in a narrative mosaic. Purposefully disjointed and fragmentary, the *Photostoria* film utilizes non-linear editing, inspiration from real settings and improvised situations in order to allow a balance between scripted and interactive (relational) narrative creation. For instance, an actor's personal memories of almost drowning in Lake Michigan as a child mingle with the character's musings on the past. In another moment, two characters share a moment of connection over the computer game *Oregon Trail* that they played in childhood, influencing their perception of early American history. Shared cultural experiences become amplified in the social network age, causing a consciousness inspired by nostalgia, media, and affect. The film explores these experiences

through their remediation, leaving the validity of such cultural experiences to the audience. The process of remediation allows past media forms and new digital media to interact by commenting on, reproducing, and replacing one another (Bolter and Grusin, 5,53). New media in light of remediation brings the experience of the media itself into the foreground as a part of the meaning-making. *Photostoria* uses silent film titles to represent text messages and non-linear editing to demonstrate the simultaneity of modern, digital life as we negotiate multiple contexts in the same moment.

New classification is needed to envision the resonating narrative possibility found in cinema's transmediation, destabilization, and social interaction. Booth defines this new media interaction in biological terms as "transgenic media" to relate the dynamic between new media aesthetics and traditional media forms. "Contemporary temporal displacement both amplifies and mirrors the audience's reconstruction of the cultural temporal discontinuity that also emerges on our computer screens" (Booth, 4). Jodi Dean also sees this movement from old to new media in the ability to share content and participate in a democratization of information, yet sees the possibility of losing a grasp on cultural control. Though media critics were once cautious of the homogeneity of industrial media control over cultural and identity formation, Dean now expresses concern with the void left in the wake of information and aesthetic overload. If everyone has a voice, the media industry is no longer concerned with maintaining control of cultural meaning but simply shares a desire for users to keep using. In this case, the act of sharing becomes an illusion of inclusion in the cultural environment while networks of information and consumerism are expanded.

Dean and Rushkoff agree that individual awareness and action must happen to maintain meaning and effectiveness in this transgenic media landscape where we are all pressured to participate at an increasing rate. Though Rushkoff can come across as more of a determinist alarmist, he and Dean also see the natural progression of technology and society, emphasizing a active comprehension of the media system at work in culture. Hall would frame the cultural landscape in terms of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional stances, finding many identifying on a spectrum instead of straight lines of separation. My project finds itself in the middle of this conversation as it explores the relationships between identity in cultural terms and the film in the context of the broader media culture. In this case, cinema is the method of processing cultural and personal identity with the interaction of media production, consumption, and narrative structure in the digital age. For example, in the film there is a reflection of the ubiquitous nature of smartphones and texting as common elements of conversations and daily communication. The benefits and distractions created by such technology and media is communicated through various scenes throughout the film. The character of John is often disrupting conversations, and therefore the audience, by checking his phone. Utilizing cinematic language of the past and present in a combination of form and content demonstrates relational balances now at work in culture, allowing the viewer to process the experience as they process the film itself.

Cinema has the potential to embody and facilitate the transitional phase at play between digital new media and identity. My film project speaks to the growing cinematic possibility on the levels of production and reception as the narrative style reflects the destabilization in our society. Living in a constant present tense puts time and space into a state of flux, leaving little to center the dislocation of life. Cinema, including my film project, has the ability to sort through

the present cultural context as society negotiates the persistence of media on memory and identity. The project illuminates the role that cinema plays in cultural processing of identity in relation to technological and social practices in transition.

### Cultural Identity

Dealing with the spacio-temporal displacement of unconscious dreams, *Inception* utilizes a "totem" to center the characters in the space between the traditional linearity of history. As the characters move between layers of dreams within dreams, the confusion in the perception of reality requires an object to ground them to memories in reality. In the end, the main character, Cobb, uses his spinning top totem to test the reality of his reunion with his children. Though much disputed, the ending is intentionally open as Cobb does not bother to validate the reality but instead chooses to treat the moment as his present reality. Sherry Turkle states that the proliferation of screens as an interface for communication is moving culture from a modernist culture of calculation toward a postmodernist culture of simulation (*Life on the Screen*, 11). She uses the metaphor of the "window" to express the multiple and distributed system that pictures self in many roles and spaces at once. Cinema has long been represented as a window into another reality where the self is projected into the narrative world in a double operation of looking and identifying. Now that the cinematic screen has been expanded to the computer and mobile screen reality is augmented as we literally use the screens as a second window into our reality.

Even further, Turkle sees life through the screen allowing us to project ourselves into our own dramas as producer, director, and star. But time travel narratives such as *Photostoria* picture

a reality where we can even project ourselves into others' dramas and realities. Time, space, and the window of perception are malleable. The Facebook timeline feature allows us to jump through time and space instantly through text, image, and video posted, even editing posts from the past. I can quickly scan my 5 year old son's life as documented through Facebook, beginning with pictures from 2 minutes after his birth up to his first day of school. Even more, services now can send you the posts from all of your social networks from the year previous (Timehop, On this Day), providing a brief trip in time and personal history. Similarly, with the blog section of the *Photostoria* website I discovered the convenient ability to add any date I wanted to the blog posts, altering time as I wanted the character of John to appear as though he had been posting already for months.

This dual act of being and creating through technology and social media connects to the act of cinematic viewing. Wittenberg's use of the term "paratext" expresses the new narrative complexity in personal and collective narratives. Since the world now has a second window on the "real world" through the use of screens, the remediation of our lives through media and the internet becomes paratextual. As in the layers and doubling of timelines in time travel narratives, we are now able to look back at ourselves and from multiple perspectives or congruent identities. The self is de-centered, occupying several contexts in the same moment. This operation can be as simple as when John is texting while simultaneously having a conversation with Malcolm. Or it can be more literal and complex as when Malcolm is seen at the time travel spot and the viewer is left to interpret the context in narrative time and space. As displayed in the ambiguity of the ending of *Inception*, people are now more willing than ever to live within the ambivalence of contextual identification if it means they can create their own reality.

In this system of processing cultural messages at the level of identity, Hall believed that the audience is not a passive recipient of meaning. Though Dean, Rushkoff, and others warn of identity confusion and manipulation in the jumble of digital information, Hall argues that meaning is not fixed or under complete control of the sender of the message (Encoding/Decoding). Dean takes the route of stating that not only is the hegemonic message challenged by new conceptions of participation and manipulation of the message signs, but in the end also destabilized and muddled by the remediation and remixing of the message (151). In the information age where there is a niche audience to receive a message, there is also a niche producer appropriating the signs and symbols specifically for that audience. The new hegemony means everyone has a voice where the cultural narrative becomes a kind of contradiction of connection. Everyone connects through media, but the symbols are confused, negating meaning and a traditional form of hegemony.

In *Photostoria*, John and Rita are participants in the media environment both as consumers and producers, yet become disconnected from one another and a meaningful, coherent identity in their current circumstances. The delineation that Hall uses for the three kinds of readings of a text further distinguish the identity conceptions in relation to media for the characters in *Photostoria*. The dominant reading connects to the character of John as he participates and contributes to the media landscape yet does not challenge or disrupt the predominant ideologies. His identity therefore becomes predisposed to the hegemonic cultural environment. Rita on the other hand, works through a negotiated code as she attempts to operate outside of the dominant reading, making it work for her purposes. In the end she moves toward a more oppositional stance where she tries to side-step the system completely as she sees Malcolm

operating. For her, the possibility of time travel represents a negation of the hegemonic influence and artificiality. Indicative of the current cultural destabilization in a moment of transition, Rita displays a desire to bypass the standard paths and create a new meaning out of what came before for self identification. Without a clear path forward, she decides to explore the past and history, excited by the simple possibility of revisiting the nostalgic with its familiar meanings.

The prevalence of the complexity in personal, cultural, and cinematic narratives in recent time makes for a complex and multi-disciplined analysis. Just as *Photostoria* is hard to classify in any easy genre or narrative definitions, theoretical analysis is cooperative between narrative, new media, and cultural approaches. The narrative structuring and aesthetics of contemporary cinema demonstrate a complexity and destabilization as a result of the fragmentation involved in networked media activity. Narrative in cinema and cultural identity is now told and interpreted across multiple media channels, forming an amalgamation of fictional and non-virtual narrative structures. For my project, I am more interested in exploring the ways that these lines become blurred and what effects it has on our identity in a localized cultural context.

### Section 3: Identity in Cinematic Process

The *Photostoria* project explores the ways that cinematic narrative interacts and informs cultural identity in a mediated society through the experimental formal process and the concepts of memory and history addressed. Of primary concern is the interaction of the destabilization of identity played out between the film project and culture. The cinematic medium is utilized to

study these effects as media and technology play a role in the perception and formation of identity in an increasingly mediated society.

Firstly in this section, the participatory quality of the production and consumption will be considered through various outlets. In this project there is a relationship among all phases of the production including the story, narrative, and reception. The scripting, dialogue, ancillary website, and Kickstarter campaign all add to the collaborative and networked nature of the project. Next, the improvisation, non-linear editing, and formal experimentation destabilize the narrative structuring to comment on memory, history, and cultural identity. Lastly, identity displays a state of flux through the character and actor confusion, and the film process itself.

### Participatory Production

Working from Jenkins' studies on transmedia storytelling, collaborative methods stretching from the pre-production to the participatory reception side of the project will guide this discussion. Because my project leans more on the independent side of transmedia storytelling, the shape of the story could be more closely controlled across production levels and reception. I will explore transmedia concepts of world-building, co-creation, collective intelligence, cultural attractors, and audience participation (Jenkins, *Transmedia Storytelling* 101).

The project displays layers of story information that informs the *Photostoria* narrative across all levels of production to build multiple points of connection. The actual script of the film stretches back years between my brother and myself as we brainstormed a story built from the concept of old, vintage photos we discovered at a thrift store. Later we brought my wife into

the conversation of growing the story with characters and a plot. In the end, all three of us contributed to the written script, but the story and world of the project extends much further into the actual production and post-production. Because the project explores collaboration and collective filmmaking, the actors were chosen with the intention of improvisation and bringing themselves into the characters. It mattered to me that their personal stories and identities informed the character, blurring the lines between fictional and non-fictional. This technique is not new but is applied in a new cultural context to explore new identity forms in society. The French New Wave employed a “plan-of-action script” that allowed for improvisation, chance encounters and spontaneous ideas (Marie, 77-78). *Photostoria*'s script exists between a more “programmed” script and the plan-of-action script to create a flexible space to capture a naturalness and personal influence.

Daniel Newman, who plays the character of John Wright, was not an actor but was chosen because he actually fit the cultural identity markers for the character. Although he was still playing a character, he fit the hard to define “hipster” demographic which represents the complex identity elements of self-referentiality, nostalgia for cultural media, and a destabilization of meaning-making or symbolic center (Delaney). In practical terms Daniel is an avid video game player with an affinity for classic games (e.g., zelda tattoo), refers to himself as an unofficial hipster, and is an atheist with no traditional centering belief system. Similar to postmodernism, Rob Horning offers several possible definitions of hipsters as the “embodiment of postmodernism as a spent force, revealing what happens when pastiche and irony exhaust themselves as aesthetics” or “a kind of permanent cultural middleman in hypermediated late capitalism” (“The Death of the Hipster”). Not wanting to work in negative stereotypes, I knew

that Daniel would bring a naturalness to the character that an actor playing this kind of role would not. Though all these elements are not explicitly demonstrated in the film, the authenticity of the character was a part of the collaborative experiment of the project.

Collaboration in the story process includes the website of stories and images contributed by family members, friends, and those that backed the Kickstarter campaign. The website is an element in the world building not only on a level of story, but also with the website itself representing the character of John Wright and the website he works with in the film. Having the stories on the site come from multiple sources creates a richly textured history in combination with the old photographs. Some of the specifics in the stories are related in the film by the characters, giving them a reality within the diegetic film world. The path of narrative translation is complex through this process reflecting the way that narrative is communicated and interpreted in a cultural network. The photos themselves are connected to a non-virtual, historical moment, then given fictional historical context through the website stories, re-interpreted orally and cinematically in the film through the actors/characters, and finally interpreted by the audience. The implication of time travel in the film adds another level of meaning, linking back to the pretense that photographs capture a reality in time and space, but here experienced in a doubling of narrative meaning. The character of Malcolm supposedly took these photos in his travels in time as a complication of historical linearity and fidelity.

In view of transmedia trends, the narrative world in this storytelling method does more than provide information, but supplies “a set of roles and goals which readers can assume as they enact aspects of the story through their everyday life” (Transmedia Storytelling 101). The time displacement genre as a metaphor allows for the enactment of a narrative that is adopted in non-

virtual forms. As he picks up his toy lightsaber, my five year old son informs me that we are in “*Star Wars* world” or “*Portal* world” after watching the films or playing the video games as a performative act of immersion in the fictional world. *Photostoria* demonstrates this trait in representing a generation more naturally disposed to find themselves performing virtual roles through social networks like Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn. As the windows and contexts increase through which individuals enact roles and cultural affiliation, the confusion and destabilization grows, splintering a defining identity. The project does not intend to espouse a negative or positive assumption on the side of identity formation in culture in our current state, but the audience may find it leaning toward the negative perspective from the drama created between characters in the film. In a collective approach to storytelling and filmmaking there must be room for the interaction with diverse networks and perspectives.

*Photostoria* compliments the growing trend of filmmaking collectives that is based on relational networks and crowd-sourcing. Kickstarter crowd-funding is blurring the line between audience and producer allowing for a freedom and creative collaboration rarely seen in the film industry. Crowd-sourcing for funding and creative collaboration is a part of my process of engaging participation and addressing the collective, networked nature of social media. The Kickstarter for my project includes rewards for contributing a story to the project website, therefore adding to the overall narrative of the film world and directly carrying over into the diegetic world. Crowd-sourcing trends such as Kickstarter are a sign of the disconnect of social identity in the face of narrative rearrangement. More than ever because of the networked interaction of digital media society shares in a collective narrative, although it is one confused by the subversion of the traditional hegemonic narrative structure. Filmmakers use crowd-sourcing

to bypass the studio system and contractual money to tell stories unfiltered by the industrial system. This system is a direct evolution of the fandom culture which creates their own interpretations of the narratives that already exist. With *Photostoria*, backers have the potential to have their stories and photos included on the website, circulating and rearranging the grand narrative and story world. Game designer Neil Young uses the term “additive comprehension” to capture the way that new texts require revised readings of the larger narrative (Jenkins, Transmedia). Complex narratives and time travel stories require this kind of narrative rereading because of the shifting linearity.

All of these elements build to form the story world of the *Photostoria* project that bends the boundaries of virtual and non-virtual interaction and therefore narrative comprehension. This transmedia approach to storytelling provides new opportunities as well as problems. Specifically with a complex narrative like *Photostoria* it is difficult to determine the amount of participation and engagement across the layers of story world building. This project is presented more as a singular experience for each part of the narrative puzzle, where as a media franchise such as *The Matrix* contains multiple media experiences within the same world. The film portion of the project is intentionally vague, attempting to act as a “textual activator,” motivating engagement in the website, social media, and production of the film. This process involves interpretation through fan production and archiving of information, building to form a collective intelligence (Pierre Levy, 13). *Photostoria* takes into account collective intelligence in the production and reception process as a reflection of new social structures for the creation and transmission of information within a networked culture. Additionally, the website and film address this

phenomena through the character of John offering story contributions to the website, which is how Rita encounters John as her story is chosen for the site.

In this scenario of collective storytelling influenced by participatory activities, media theorists are suggesting a move away from the term “consumer” in view of the way that audiences add value and meaning to texts (Jenkins, Ford, Green, 123). Through the interaction of media networks and sharing practices, audiences are co-creators in the meaning production. As displayed in the narrative of the *Photostoria* film in reference to the website, and the actual website and Kickstarter campaign, a collective of creative interests are invested in the projects’ meaning-making. In a hypertext storytelling component, users of the Photostoria website have the opportunity to link to the stories by clicking on the homepage photos, clicking on the blog link, or connecting from a story already read. As a blog, the stories offer the ability to comment on the postings in an interaction with the writers and producers, becoming a part of narrative discourse.

#### Film Form and Content: Identity in Flux

With a rich, yet small portion of cinematic history demonstrating the power of film language applied to the destabilization of time and identity, as described earlier, I wanted *Photostoria* to explore similar techniques in a new context. In a reflection of the collective networked and fragmented nature of culture, the film project subverts conventional linear narrative. From the way that the story is conveyed on screen through aesthetic choices, to the documentary approach to narrative structure through editing, the film is motivated by fractured conceptions.

*Photostoria* elides any direct time travel reference or explicit verification of the time displacement in narrative history. The film does not signal to the viewer clearly that any character has time traveled or is out of the linear timeline beyond simple flashbacks, with the exception of the still ambiguous ending. This technique mirrors the simultaneous act of personal and cultural reflection on the past in an intentional yet unconscious manner. In everyday life we may recall and linger on past memories through the triggers of old photos, a song we hear on the radio, an iPod on shuffle, or browsing back on our Facebook timeline, yet we are not often conscious of restructuring or prioritizing our personal history. As in a cinematic narrative, the what and how, or story and discourse, of narrative perception solidifies narrative meaning. If we choose to look at our photos through the effects applied on Instagram instead of the original image, the memory has a mediated filter influencing our perception of history. Though now our smartphones take photos and videos in high definition, we often choose to filter them through nostalgic effects, simulating the washed out and hazy pictorial memory of our youth. This is the context from which the characters in *Photostoria* arrive.

The structure of the film is a balance between the script guiding a narrative through-line and leaving space for improvisation and collaborative storytelling. The approach to the production and editing opened up the opportunity for new story elements to emerge and form new meanings. The editing technique of montage intentionally allowed for unscripted moments of emotional resonance and narrative detail. By placing shots in sequence next to one another from various contexts (scripted and unscripted) the result is a juxtaposition of destabilization both for the concept of authorial control and also in narrative structuring. Many practical elements play a role in this process. For instance when Amanda Drinkall, the actor that plays

Rita, was shooting at her childhood home on a farm, she mentioned true details from her family history about her father building their home and how the surrounding area used to be all corn fields. The actor Daniel played along in character as John, flirtatiously asking more questions about her past. Similarly, when Daniel was taking a break from shooting by sitting on the lawn checking his phone, I shot him without his knowing and sent Amanda over to sit with him in character. These unscripted moments of connection and improvised dialogue are placed alongside scripted moments through editing in order to expand the scope of narrative understanding and identification. The cinematic process causes a fracturing of identity in the duality between the actors/characters and the jump cuts in the editing.

This documentary technique of allowing the camera to linger on subjects when they think they are no longer on camera captures a naturalness that may not come through in the same way while actually acting. Location played a large role in the contextual authenticity captured through this film technique. A sense of place and time lends the film a context for me as a filmmaker and also gives the actors real places to exist in, besides artificial sets. Shooting in many outdoor settings provided the actors with an interactive setting. Particularly with Bryan Bosque, the actor that played Malcolm, I was able to simply spend time with him in outdoor locations, capturing his character's relationship with nature and a past free from modern technology. In choosing Iowa as the setting, I was able to evoke my own experience dealing with dilemmas of nature/technology, past/present, stagnation/progression, and memory/history. Iowa stands in as a representation of a setting in flux for the characters own identity in flux. Though a place like Iowa has access to most cultural signifiers in media development, it is often delayed in cultural adoption. When Malcolm is in the barn on an Iowa farm or taking pictures in

a forest, he exists in a context outside of time, intentionally leaving open the possibility of time displacement. The audience is left to make the conclusion of whether any particular moment is when he is time traveling or simply in the present timeline.

Adding to the disjointed and ambiguous nature of the narrative arrangement, the editing makes jumps and leaps, reordering time with memory as the organizing factor. Going back to Godard's subversion of classical Hollywood linear editing through jump cuts to re-prioritize narrative meaning, *Photostoria* chooses to prioritize mood and tone over classic narrative clarity. The project intends to provoke a specific experience of time and place through a jumbled and destabilized perspective on the experience of contemporary mediated life. Within scenes, conversations are sometimes intercut between different locations or cut to memories from the past. Whether this experience is effective and not simply confusing is left to the audience. Though much of society lives in a state of flux and uncertainty in relation to cultural identity, it does not mean that they will always make the connection to a narrative in a now normalized linear form like cinema.

A central tension in the film between classic linearity and memory as history is expressed through an alternating editing rhythm. Segments and scenes in the film move back and forth between shorter, lyrical shots in fast progression and longer, stable shots of dialogue. This contrast simulates the experience of being in a transitional phase of cultural identification through virtual and non-virtual spaces. Though the concept of new media is problematic in that it is always new and shifting in culture and therefore identity by relation, the transition of understanding a new media involves old practices in new contexts. Again to demonstrate the state of being in transition, *Photostoria* intercuts silent film style inter-titles with Rita seen

having a conversation over text message. This process demonstrates the state of being in at least two contexts at once for the character and draws the viewer into the same experience. The disruption of the titles for the audience mimics the interruption of the texts for Rita. Going beyond those two contexts, Rita is also entering into virtual spaces through her computer and a television screen on in the background. Rita is able to function under all these contexts to a particular level but eventually she sees the possibility of transcending these virtual spaces and making literal the rupture of time and space through time travel.

A representative moment for the relationship between all three characters comes in the scene where Rita runs into Malcolm in the forest when she has just time traveled. This shared moment between the three as John is later revealed to be watching from afar causes other points in their future and history to be re-contextualized. The network of connection for each character to one another in this moment reveals a fracturing of inter-relationships as their narratives are rearranged. In this scene John and Malcolm see Rita in an altered timeline of their past, although John is unable to recognize her at the time. Because the revelation of these connections is played out of linear order, the viewer must reconstruct a linearity through a network of information. In one sense, the audience can choose to treat this central moment as a narrative puzzle to give shape to linearly historical identity or simply let the images and emotions flow past as an experience of memory. Wittenberg speaks to this dichotomy in the way that viewers interact with cinema in self-aware experience of fractured identity filtered through media. In talking about the audience's experience of viewing a character time traveling to their own past he states that:

I am watching something imaginary-the other in the film is not real-but in another sense both my watching and the film, as well as my reactions, are real, occurring in a hyperspace time context really comprising my act of watching it. This paratextual theater, viewing this screen. In short, "I am myself the place where this really perceived imaginary" is projected. And who then am "I"? The character or actor. (195)

If we can then relate the experience of cinematic spectatorship with the act of being in two contexts simultaneously in a time travel narrative, then we can see the correlating sense of being lost in the feedback loops of identification in a complex culture. Our mediated lives reflect back to us on our screens the drive to form an identity in contextual terms. Because culture moves toward increasing levels of interconnectivity, the multiple screens now employed to contextualize our worlds in virtual and non-virtual forms fracture a singular identity into many.

Dean and Rushkoff have little in the way of concrete answers to the cautions of a cultural identity stuck in a liminal state of meaning representation, except simply being aware of the system of remediation as we interact in a postmodern culture. Playing a part in this awareness is allowing our media to speak back to our current condition in order to illuminate conditions of affect. As the character of Malcolm shows, a complete sense of displacement can lead to disconnection and paralyzation. Simple answers and explanations devalue a complex history and progression. Just as new media is always understood in terms of what came before, we cannot view cultural identity in a vacuum but be willing to view history in alternative forms. Cinema can use a history of techniques and language in new contexts, inspired by memory and affect, to demonstrate cultural shifts. In shared narratives and collective intelligence the effects are

difficult to surmise in the present but the act of interaction brings meaning to the process. The immediacy of posting a photo to Instagram in the moment somehow adds value to the present experience in a shared culture at the same time that it takes us out of the moment.

Nostalgia and affect are tied into one another in a postmodern experience of cultural and personal history because of their emphasis on intangible emotion. These two traits exhibit in us a longing for what cannot fully be grasped, yet we are drawn to the seeking of it anyway (Cook, 2, 161). *Photostoria* is steeped in nostalgia and affect as it is meant to be an experience that cannot be fully comprehended as a puzzle reconstructed in linear ordering. The film represents the unattainable feeling that the past evokes as we struggle with finding meaning in our present experiences. This feeling holds a particular power in a period of transition as individuals in culture come to terms with new media possibilities.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the relationship of the characters in *Photostoria* enlightens the ways that media and identity collide in various forms. In the process of deciding the details of the mysterious nature of Malcolm's time displacement, I discovered my own view of time and space structuring as a reflection of what I believed about Malcolm. In order for the narrative to work, every time Malcolm goes away and time travels in an attempt to return to his original time (1940's), he ends up returning to a continuation of a present timeline in 2013. In other words, when he returns from time traveling to the past, but not his time, normal linear time has passed in his absence. This mix of forward progression in a constant present and jumps to the past cause him to be in and out of chronological time, canceling his ability to function in a standard

definition of linear time. He always loses time, whether it is the time missed from where he started before inadvertently time traveling or while he is gone in the contemporary present. The paradox of such an existence for Malcolm is a hyper-awareness of time and space because it dictates his identity in not being able to live in a time that fits his perception of himself. The film highlights an equivalent self-awareness with the spectator experience.

Rita also reflects the self-awareness with her inability to be who she is in a particular time and space as she feels stuck in a mid-sized, Midwestern town. I wanted to portray characters who had outsized cultural identities for the cultural context in which they lived. This means Rita and John cannot find meaningful expression in their work in the town they grew up in and now live. The difference is that Rita finds a way to transcend the limitations of her historically linear framing, escaping into an unknown time. The catch is that we discover in her moment of time travel in meeting Malcolm in their past, that a loop is created. Malcolm already feels caught in this loop, becoming obsessed with seeing a pattern in his time travels in order to escape. In the end, the movement through the transition of new media history brings out those that resist and seek escape, those that transcend new and old, and those that simply ride the wave of change. Media and identity in culture have always spilled into one another, but digital media is allowing cinema to interact in a new network of narrative possibility. Additionally, both concepts of consumer and producer are spilling into one another, dissolving concrete delineations of identity within cultural groups on and offline.

As Wittenberg argues, time travel narratives are prime points of study for dealing with questions of storytelling as a concept, and by extension the narrative interpretation of self in the linearity of story (2). *Photostoria* piles on layers of self-referential storytelling elements to the

level of breaking down the character's and viewer's ability to comprehend the defining story.

The three characters either write or tell stories in order to make sense of their world, history, and memories. Myself and others write stories for the script and website to make sense of our own history and memories. The viewer and readers of the project formulate narrative approximations of the story in a complex interaction and interpretive process, hinging on cultural nostalgia and affectual response. This network of personal and cultural association both mimics and attributes to the cultural understanding of our current times. In this cyclical process, a reflection on our own identity through the lens of culture and memory becomes an important function of our media interaction, if not a complete one.

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