ABSTRACT

ADAM HEBERT. "Fleeing Toward Oneself": Cinematic Influence and the Anxiety of Freedom in the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson. (Under the direction of Professor Devin Orgeron).

That the films of Paul Thomas Anderson betray a significant New Hollywood influence, and operate within an elaborate intertextual matrix, is far from in dispute. However, critics of Anderson's work have been content merely to point out or besmirch instances of cinematic *echoes* in his oeuvre, opting not to plumb the depths of textual transfer in their studies of one of America's most prominent latter-day auteurs, and one of its purported postmodern "weathervanes." This essay grapples with the labyrinthine linkages between Anderson's films and those of his cinematic forebears, considers the various connections (or *dis*connections) that each set of texts exhibits, and explicates the curious process through which a later work informs, just as it is informed by, its source text(s).

I argue that Anderson's protracted re-reading of the films of his antecedents is most effectively understood when bent through the prism of *anxiety*, an artistic (and personal) crisis of individuality which mirrors that of many members of the director's *dramatis personae*. I explore *Boogie Nights* (1997) and its pastiche of the hyperkinetic (and hypermasculine) cinema of Martin Scorsese; *There Will Be Blood* (2007) as a "transposition" of Stanley Kubrick's thematics and poetics (by way of Nietzsche); and *The Master* (2012) as a disciplined, yet equally anxious, attempt to detach the New Hollywood yoke. In doing so, I also seek to locate a middle-ground between the structuralist intertextual schemata of Gérard Genette and the poetic, "spiritual" musings

on influence by Harold Bloom, building off of both approaches to elucidate the multidirectional charge of cinematic citation.

This essay thus serves the dual function of presenting an inclusive study of a filmmaker who merits careful critical attention, while offering a meditation on the processes of influence and intertextuality—and the anxieties that confront the artist seeking to navigate such an anfractuous arrangement in a postmodern culture.