

**Qualification essay**  
**ENG2326 – *Fiction and Film***

*Home assignment autumn 2008, October 14<sup>th</sup>.*

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**Assignment 1:** Briefly discuss the main problems and possibilities of film adaptation.

**Assignment 3:** ‘Although literature and film are extremely different media, they are united by narrative’. Discuss this statement, referring to at least two literary texts and adaptations of them.\*

*\*My hand-in paper will actually be a merger of these assignments since I both feel they complete each other, and regard it hard answering one without commenting on the other.*

## **This is your life [and it's ending one minute at a time]**

”Words lead to deeds (...) they prepare the soul, make it ready, and move it to tenderness. There is a clarity and beauty in that thought expressed in just this way. There is also something a little foreign in this sentiment coming to our attention in a time certainly less openly supportive of the important connection between what we say and what we do”.<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Idiosyncrasies and Randomness: Introduction**

Adaptations are older than sin, and appear relative invariably throughout the history of cinema. Its function has nevertheless been more variable during time, and according to Dudley Andrew may the “choices of the mode of adaptation and of prototypes suggest a great deal about the cinema’s sense of its role and aspirations” (Andrew 1999:458). Evaluating the two media – the prototypical text and the filmic adaptation – one tries to find a common denominator. A common field for a fruitful discussion. The narration – the story, or skeleton as Andrews calls it, might be the same. Although “[m]ore difficult is fidelity to the spirit, to the original’s tone, value, imagery, and rhythm” (ibid: 455). Comparing narrativity in fiction and film is an area too big for this paper to rightfully assess. I will no doubt waddle into it, catching my feet wet, and get all sorts of established truths more or less wrong. But I will try to say something generally thoughtful about it. It is too easy only to judge an adaptation by its faults (as well as where it surpasses its source). It’s also important to recognise and take into account the two media’s different solutions to narrative problems, or choices, as it were. Considering “the film themselves as acts of discourse” (ibid: 460).

In this paper I will take a closer look at the films *Short Cuts* (1993) by Robert Altman and *Fight Club* (1999) by David Fincher – a more or less ‘indirect’ and ‘direct’ adaptations<sup>2</sup> – and their literary sources. I will discuss briefly some of the problems and possibilities of film adaptation, focusing on excerpts from the texts these films are based upon and their manifestation on the silver screen. These excerpts are one of the nine novels by Raymond Carver which Altman based his film upon: ‘*They’re Not Your Husband*’ from “Where I’m Calling from” (1988); and chapter 6 of Chuck Palahniuk’s book “*Fight Club*” (1996), which Fincher’s movie gets its title from. The main focus will be on the narrative complications in transforming the material, trying to construct a new meaning where image meets text.

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<sup>1</sup> Carver quoted in Altman and Barhydt 1993:100 (cited in Scofield 1996:392).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Indirect’ as exemplified by *Apocalypse Now* (1979) – F.F. Coppola’s version of Joseph Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” (1902); ‘direct’ by Steve Jacobs’ 2008 adaptation of J.M. Coetzee’s 1999 novel “Disgrace” by the same name.

## 2. “[A] tuba sound is more (...) like a bear than a bird”<sup>3</sup>: Definitions

When I say ‘movie’ or ‘film’, I am thinking of the classical Hollywood narrative. The way I use the phrase in this paper, this ‘movie’ (which arguably, but not completely, both *Short Cuts* and *Fight Club* are a part of) contains and expresses seamless temporal and spatial coherency, consequence, clarity, causality and continuity. This tradition denotes and reveals central information about the narration to its audience; it tries to express or stir emotional quality among its viewers; it creates attractive formal and technical patterns; and it uses symbolism to formulate abstract and conceptual ideas or themes (based on Bordwell et.al. 1985).

Furthermore, David Bordwell is of the mind that, yes, a film has a narration, but no, it has no actual storyteller. A central part of film communication for Bordwell is how the viewer actively reacts to what is screened and constructs the narrative out of the visual information there received (Lothe 1994:38-9). The Hollywood film is thus by way of its own techniques unique for the medium, telling the narrative without a formal teller. Its style is invisible – the way the story is told comes second (though arguably not completely in *Fight Club*) to what is told.<sup>4</sup>

When speaking of ‘narrative’ I rest my definition on Robert Scholes’, by which he asserts, by contrasting the immediate process of narration with those mediated events themselves, that a story “forces the interpreter to make a distinction between his own immediate situation and some other situation which is being presented to him through the medium of narration. (...) it *refers* to events outside of that immediate situation” (Scholes 1985:390-91, italics in original). Summed up, the narration “rest upon the presence of a narrator or narrative medium (...) and the absence of the events narrated” (ibid). Bearing in mind narrativity in film, Edward Branigan rephrases Rudolf Arnheim’s point that it

“rests on our ability to create a three-dimensional world out of a two dimensional wash of light and dark. (...) The spectator, therefore, encounters at least two major frames of reference in film: the space and time of a *screen* as well as (a sample of) the space and time of a *story world*” (Branigan 1996:33, italics in original).

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew 1999:456.

<sup>4</sup> Debatably, Seymour Chatman notices, one should still regard the movie as the narrative source, consequently giving it the status of a material storyteller. A message can’t be received if it isn’t sent. Chatman also proposes that, if that is the case, Bordwell’s viewer is not so much constructing as she is reconstructing the narrative (Lothe 1994:40).

### 3. "Even the Mona Lisa is falling apart"<sup>5</sup>: The Plots and Adaptations

Some of the themes in Raymond Carver and Chuck Palahniuk, though they're a generation and half apart, are the same: the fragility of the modern American society and the voices and stories of humans living inside it. Both authors share a common minimalism in their language. A way of telling a story with the least amount of words and descriptions. That doesn't mean their texts are not verbally rich. They are. Though as well-made literature, Scholes contend, they need only understanding. The films, on the other hand, requires interpretation (Scholes 1985:399), and before I begin discerning the literary texts, looking at what's left, what's kept and what's added, I will first briefly retrace the plots of the two different adaptations: The one a regular based upon, but enlarged, shortened, scrambled and used to other purposes; the other a more or less 'filmatized' book: the novel as a movie.

*Short Cuts* is Altman's character appreciative 'tribute beyond' to Carver, making a mosaic of nine stories and one poem by Carver's desolate Midwestern literature.<sup>6</sup> Altman went to some length stressing the relationship between the film and the stories, resulting in a book published the same year as the movie premiered, itself containing all the stories and poem in one edition. The movie depicts the "dense materiality of the American big city", says Martin Scofield, ruined by insects and earthquakes, where everybody's life is a tragedy. Though it focuses more on the small, individual, weird lives of the characters than the stories they came out of, "there is a sense of pressure, of turmoil, of many lives and energies pursuing their own paths and then intersecting, or colliding, bumping off each other." And the "different characters and situations are brought together by a single all-enveloping crisis" (Schofield 1996:388). This device of inter-connected plotlines is later borrowed, among others, by Paul Thomas Anderson in his *Magnolia* (1999) and by Paul Haggis in the 2004 film *Crash* – both movies unmistakably alike *Short Cuts* in their portrayal of suburban L.A. The 'Obers' from '*They're Not Your Husband*' (named the 'Piggots' in the movie) are both up- and down-played by Tom Waits and Lily Tomlin, in their trailer park and at the diner Johnnie's Broiler. Earl's character is transformed from a Midwest salesman to a downtown limo driver. The intrigue of Doreen's diet is lost on the audience – almost cut in its entirety out of the story.

*Fight Club* is, according to its author Chuck Palahniuk, an apostolic fiction – "where a surviving apostle tells the story of his hero. There are two men (...). And one man, the hero, is

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<sup>5</sup> Palahniuk 2006:49

<sup>6</sup> The stories are: '*Neighbors*', '*They're Not Your Husband*', '*Vitamins*', '*Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*', '*So Much Water Close to Home*', '*A Small, Good Thing*', '*Jerry and Molly and Sam*', '*Collectors*', '*Tell the Women We're Going*'. The poem is '*Lemonade*'. The story of Tess and Zoe Trainer, the jazz singer and cello player, was invented by Altman himself.

shot to death” (Palahniuk 2006:216). What he left out, though, and what we see in Fincher’s movie – which stays more or less accurate to the novel – is that our guy (Edward Norton) and his hero (Brad Pitt) start a club, a place where people could ask each other to a fight; also, there’s something about a damsel (Helena Bonham-Carter) making more distress than a ‘triangular’ drama would necessitate; and an army of fascistic urban guerrilla fighters (dubbed ‘space monkeys’) wreaking havoc on capitalist society’s popular institutions. Not to forget (spoilers ahoy): The deceased, looked-up upon hero, Tyler Durden, is actually part of the nameless speaker’s (‘Jack’ in the movie) split personality.

The challenges of adaptation is finding a structure for a film in terms of cause and effect and building momentum. Exploring the characters deeper and further in dialogue and behaviour. Keywords include visualization; supplying of physical details or the translating of verbal signs into images; aesthetic interpretation; not to mention the power of conceptualization. “The cinematic world invites – even requires – conceptualization”, according to Scholes. And his argument that “[t]he images presented to us, their arrangement and juxtapositioning, are narrational blueprints for a fiction that must be constructed by the viewer’s narrativity”, mirrors that of Bordwell’s above (Scholes 1985:401). Certainly all of these levels make the adaptation one more step distant to its source: the language of the manuscript – a text based on the primary source, but simplified to fit or be possible inside the language or semiotics of cinema; the performance of the actor; the deeds of the characters on screen and not the least the process of photography – the choices of perspective/position, visual styles and lighting (i.e. mise-en-scène), and montage. How possible, then, is this source fidelity that I mentioned in the introduction? “Generally film is found to work from perception toward signification.” Literary fiction, on the other hand, “works oppositely (...), elaborating a world out of a story” (Andrew 1999:456). By borrowing, intersecting and transforming its sources, the adaptation becomes something, which in the case of *Short Cuts* we recognise, and *Fight Club* we know (as long as we’ve read the literary texts first). It is worth acknowledging that on some level, an adaptation is always about loss of the imagined as well as the material visualization of written fiction. In *Fight Club*, the way we perceive the nameless speaker is forever changed when we see him on the screen for the first time. In *Short Cuts*, maybe we had pictured some different character than a Tom Waits’y character playing Earl Ober/Piggot. The story is the same, but seems changed by the characters’ way of telling it: Differences in tone of voice, gestures, hand/eye movement, and body language. Expectations are always hard to overcome.

#### 4. Duelling Doppelgangers Dismantle Dystopia<sup>7</sup>: Analysing “Fight Club”, chapter 6.

“Fight Club” started out as a short story, which eventually made its way into the final book as chapter 6 (Palahniuk 2006:215). It is therefore comparable to the one short story by Carver, considering its same length and form. The chapter starts out with our nameless speaker, a ‘recall campaign coordinator’ describing a situation in his office interior, where, during his ‘demo to Microsoft’ stitches from the inside of his mouth has come loose and he has to start swallowing blood, revealing to us that “[y]ou can swallow about a pint of blood before you’re sick” (ibid: 48). The violence upon his face attracts attention from the other conference room delegates, and our guy starts reminiscing about the other day and the fight club he attended, while telling us “[t]he first rule about fight club is that you don’t talk about fight club. (...) The second rule about fight club is that you do not talk about fight club” (ibid). Talking directly to us, he tells us that the people he meet on the street, the waiter, the copy centre kid, they are all bruised like him. They are all people he’s met at fight club. But because of the rules – because they are not the same in the real world and in fight club, they cannot tell each other they had a great fight. They’re simply not the same persons: “[T]he third rule of fight club, when someone says stop or goes limp (...) the fight is over (...). Only two guys to a fight. One fight at a time. They fight without shirts or shoes. The fights go on as long as they have to. Those are the other rules of fight club” (ibid: 49), those and the eight rule that you have to fight on your first night out.

Our guy, he goes on to describes that everything in the real world gets its volume turned down after a night of fight club. The club he and Tyler created. It’s their solution to our guy’s societal conformity. “Perhaps self-improvement isn’t the answer (...). Perhaps self-destruction is the answer” (ibid).<sup>8</sup> Fight club, we are told, is the in the basement of a bar after it’s shut down on Saturday nights. Our guy and Tyler, they never really knew their dads. They are, like the rest of the men you see at fight club, “a generation of men raised by women” (ibid: 50). Through his ramblings – almost like free associative- or indirect speech – our guy finally comes to the part in the story where he gets pounded so hard, he need stitches, and Tyler takes him to the hospital: “Sometimes, *Tyler speaks for me*” (ibid: 52, my italics). We are then being dragged longer back, right until the moment Tyler and our guy met and first talked about fight club. The very first voluntarily fist fight taking place: “I want you to hit me as hard as you can”

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<sup>7</sup> Borrowed from Rick Tremble’s “Motion Picture Purgatory” (Vol.1) title to his 1999 review of *Fight Club*. Fab Press, London. 2004:50.

<sup>8</sup> Which is given a slightly more provocative ring in the movie by making Tyler say it, in his Tyler-way: “Self-improvement is masturbation. Now self-destruction... [on the other hand]” (transcribed from *Fight Club*, ca 00:43:28).

(ibid). Here the pace of the story is slowed down, and we get a blow by blow through the next couple of lines. The fighting is, in short, found relieving and refreshing, and our guy feels he can cope with everything. The next days, the fight gathers more followers from the bar, and our guy asks Tyler whom he was fighting. Tyler answers, his father: “Maybe we didn’t need a father to complete ourselves” (ibid: 54).<sup>9</sup> The club grows bigger, almost uncontrollably, and our guy see more persons with broken noses and jaws wired shut among his peers in the office. It’s the end of the chapter, and we’re back at the ‘demo’, our guy comparing his bloody self to perfect teeth and clear skin Walter from Microsoft (a perfect and clear waste in his opinion). Contemplating maybe Walter’s thinking about “the ozone or the Earth’s desperate need to stop cruel product testing on animals, but probably he’s not” (ibid: 55).

Since the director David Fincher adapts and translates the story contained in this chapter (and the rest of the book) without too much trumpet playing, it is easy commenting on both the literary or filmic story arc and still getting the gist of the other. Big parts of the events and plot developments of the movie seem condensed or compressed into this one chapter. The nameless storyteller’s thoughts and descriptions in the chapter (and the novel as a whole) are evenly distributed in the dialogue by Fincher between Tyler and Jack in the movie, which seems to fuel the whole thought of the convoluted doppelganger plot more. For Jill Nelmes, the nameless speaker demonstrate domesticated masculinity, “passive, alienated and without ambition” – Tyler, on the other hand, “exemplifies and embodies masculinity that refuses the seductions of consumerism” (Nelmes 2006:273). She also points out that “the belief that pain through suffering is somehow redemptive or a transformative experience is a nostalgia for the past rituals of primitive societies” (ibid: 274) – in a way making “Fight Club” the antonym of William Golding’s 1954 novel “Lord of the Flies”, though the director Fincher is making Palahniuk’s text conscious of this:

“The film links self-abuse with regaining power over the body and one’s life. Jack argues in voiceover that fight club gives him power and the people who had power over him have less and less because of his new state of mind. This is undercut however when he says ‘by this point I could wiggle most of the teeth in my jaw’, and we are made aware he is actually destroying his body” (ibid: 275).

In writing this novel, Palahniuk points out that he searched for a kind of narrative device where he could “just – cut, cut, cut. To jump. From scene to scene”, instead of ‘walking’ the characters from one scene to other, “[w]ithout losing the reader. To show every

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<sup>9</sup> One is inclined here to see the father figure as symbol for patriarchy and civilization as we know it. Tyler’s fight, then, is aimed towards the structure of society, and this reading is strengthened by his behaviour and events occurring later in the novel.

aspect of a story, but only the kernel of each aspect. The core moment. Then another core moment. Then, another. (...) A kind of glue or mortar that would hold together a mosaic of different moments and details” (Palahniuk 2006:213). What he did was he created the rules of the club: “The fighting wasn’t the important part of the story.<sup>10</sup> What I needed were the rules (...) to cram together a lot of details and moments (...) and NOT lose the reader” (ibid). What is interesting is that this kind of narrative device – much alike a Greek chorus, becomes a transitional tool perfect for making a movie. The problem of the novel’s proleptic and analeptic narrative – as really emphasized in this chapter, is solved by the film’s more (but not completely) chronological shuffling of the material. It’s worth noting that the use of non-fiction forms in the film is evident, so as to solve the problem of having Jack speaking through voice-over all the times. The director takes use of furniture catalogues, security cameras, and television news to tell the story. “Fight Club”, thus, fits into a post-classical tradition where “It is increasingly common for the audience to be presented with highly complex ideas about identity and time. This produces real challenges in determining, for example, the reliability of the narrative information with which we are provided”. Films or texts of this kind makes for “much more uncertain forms of identification, alignment and allegiance to key characters” (Phillips 2006:113). Nevertheless, it doesn’t help down play the shock near the end of the novel, when it’s unveiled that Jack and Tyler is the same guy: “[T]he second you fall asleep, I take over, and you become Tyler Durden” (Palahniuk 2006:167). This is frequently hinted at throughout the novel – as in chapter 6: “[W]e understand in retrospect that he is a deeply disturbed character” (Nelmes 2006:274), a theme current for almost all of Palahniuk’s biography: The mother of the sex addict and con artist in “Choke” (2001); the lone cult member in “Survivor” (1999); and the group of self-mutilating, kidnapped would-be authors in “Haunted” (2005). Also, society’s pressure for self-improvement is seen again with the disfigured model in his novel “Invisible Monster” (1999), and he uses the advent of rules in describing the sociology of an association or club in the recent “Rant” (2007).<sup>11</sup>

### **5. Life’s Little Ironies<sup>12</sup>: Analysing ‘They’re not you husband’**

As already mentioned, little less than the people of Carver’s short story is intact in Altman’s *Short Cuts*. In the movie, the characters of Lily Tomlin and Tom Waits seems more like

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<sup>10</sup> This sort of undermines the importance of violence upon the society and self-destruction, which the book is said to represent. But I think Palahniuk here is merely contrasting the argument that in the writing process, the rules were the major narrative pilar, not the matter of fighting.

<sup>11</sup> These books will not be listed in the sources section.

<sup>12</sup> Borrowed from Scofield who borrows its from “one of Hardy’s volume of tales and sketches” (1996:391).



vehicles for the greater narration, and their roles appear simply to add to a bigger category of archetypal stock characters from the sociology of a 1990s Los Angeles. By combining the short stories with each others and having characters appear in different stories, it makes them, in Proppean terms, having alternative functions – an example being that Doreen in *'They're Not Your Husband'* is the driver hitting Scotty, or Casey as it were, in *'A Small, Good Thing'*, thereby transforming completely how she sees herself in the movie and how we as the audience experience her role (Rowe and Wells 2006:83).

In the short story, we are presented with a particularly rich text. Though its narrative is pretty straight forward, the language is to a great degree significant. One evening, middle-aged Earl Ober, a salesman in between jobs, father of two and heavy on the drinking, comes to say hello to his wife Doreen, in the diner where she serves tables. Taking up a seat at the counter, he overhears two suits discussing his wife's sexual attraction when she bends over to scoop up some chocolate sundae: "Look at the ass on that" (Carver 1993:20). Earl is half-offended, half-stimulated by overhearing the suits' coarsely talk. And the one man continues: "[S]ome jokers like their quim fat" (ibid). Not wanting to be a 'joker', Earl, as the salesman he is, decides to try and 'sell' Doreen on the idea of a losing weight: "I think you better give a diet some thought. I mean it. I'm serious". Doreen is obviously not keen on the idea, but talked into it and eventually 'sold' on it: "I'll try. For a few days I'll give it a try. You've convinced me" (ibid: 22-23). When his wife agrees about dieting Earl concludes that he is a 'closer'. Just a letter away from 'loser'. Clearly, Earl's values come second to what sympathies the narrator tries to imply. It seems the point about the diet is impulsive and not thought through, because only after some small hick-up, Doreen drops nine-and-a-half pounds in four weeks, becoming pale, tired and depressed in the process. This pleases her shallow husband, who measures here with the bought-for-savings bath weight he got for the occasion. As suggested in their names, Earl Ober is scrambled for 'real bore', and Doreen's name scrambled is 'redone'. Though the real 'joke' is on the bore. Visiting the diner a particular unsobering night, Earl causes attention when he tries to point out Doreen's skinny buttocks to a stranger: "Don't you think that's something special? (...) I'm asking. Does it look good or not? Tell me" (ibid: 26-27). The commotion gains the attention of the other customers and Doreen's colleague who asks who this character, this 'joker' is. And Doreen answers, with a kind of resignation one might add: "He's a salesman. He's my husband" (ibid).

Something might be lost in the anagrams and word plays of the short story in its portrayal in the movie, and that is perhaps why Altman changes the surname of the characters from Ober to Piggot. That might be a word play for 'Bigot'. Earl blames Doreen for being fat

and eating too much: “«Slob», Earl said. «*Go ahead, eat! Go on!*»” (ibid: 24, italics in original), while he – and this is portrayed good and much in both the text and the film – obviously has a problem with drinking. Though at the same time, in the movie-version, they drunkenly reconcile during the earthquake – the ‘big one’ – simply undercutting the balance of the intrigue. In *Short Cuts* the whole of the diet drama is mentioned only in a quick sentence, where Doreen (in the movie *not* sold on the idea) tells her grown up daughter (who incidentally is the trespassing wife in ‘*Neighbors*’ and the wife of Bill in ‘*Tell the Women We’re Going*’): “I hit a eight year old kid. (...) I came home, I told Earl our whole life could change. Earl tells me to go on a diet. It’s all he could think of to say”.<sup>13</sup> Altman is, as already mentioned, more preoccupied by Earl’s and Doreen’s personalities than their actions. The plot(s), in spite of the film’s three-hour length, seems rushed. There’s a problem gathering what the film wants to say, because before you can get your bearings – won’t you know it – we’ve jumped forward or back again into a different plot line, or the movie is ending. Almost none of the different narratives remain in full. They seem to be happening chronological, but everything is at a faster pace, tuned up, and at the same time parallel to each other (though we know that can’t be possible). There is almost no time to mediate. “We’ve taken liberties with Carver’s work” Altman says in the introduction. Liberties of which without “the film could go on forever” (Altman in Carver 1993:7). Martin Scofield mirrors some of Altman’s apology, that “a film has its own kind of vision, and a director should be free to mold his material in whatever way he thinks” (Scofield 1996:387). Altman concludes that “[i]n the end, the film is there and the stories are there and one hopes there is a fruitful interaction” (Altman in Carver 1993:10), but this interaction might be hampered by what Scofield feels is a near-confusion in the film, the same point I’ve just stressed. He sees Carver’s work as more real opposed to the artistry of Altman: “[A] serious aesthetic treatment of human sexuality or vulnerability or suffering can never be separated from our moral reaction to these things in real life”, and “the problems start when we ask ourselves what kind of sensation we are being made to feel, and what kind of perspective we are being given” (Scofield 1996:390). By this, Scofield is problematising the narrative devices of chance and providence in Carver’s work divergent with Altman’s film,

“[*Short Cuts*] need for a common denouement, the easy gesture toward a common fate, the *deus ex machina* of an impersonal Nature overriding “petty” human affairs (...). But Carver’s stories imply a world where human tragedy, however private, is greater than earthquakes, even when earthquakes are the cause of tragedy” (ibid: 395).

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<sup>13</sup> Transcribed from *Short Cuts*, ca 01:21:45.

## 6. “criticism begins when narrativity ceases”<sup>14</sup>: Concluding points

Adaptations change from time to time. But one cannot simply change what one sees by just seeing it, like reading a book. The adapted is there. It is more final than the text, because, let's face it, you're not half as much imagining the images any more than you are taken on a visual journey through the story world. Robert Scholes asserts: “Literature, beginning in language, must exert extraordinary pains to achieve some impressions of the real. (...) [Film] must achieve some level of reflection, or conceptualization, in order to reach its optimum condition as narrative”. If this is achieved, then film, for Scholes, “is the closest to actuality, to undifferentiated thoughtless experience” (Scholes 1985:403). Here, he reflects the opinion of one of movie history's most famed theorists, André Bazin, and his argument about directors who believe in reality in contrast to those who believe in the picture – in other words: Matter over style. Bazin also declares that film's number one priority is: “[T]he preservation of life by a representation of life (...) by a mechanical reproduction in the making which man plays no part” (Bazin 1997, 1967:10,12). In the case of the narratives I've just analysed, I'm inclined to disagree. In *Fight Club*, the more self-reflexive visually visceral of the two, the reality of Palahniuk's novel springs to gritty life in a way almost surpassing its original. It adapts and overcomes. In *Short Cuts*, by contrast, though it is supposed to show the unmediated images of these people's lives, the feeling of the reality in the source is lost. Altman has butchered the text, picked out the bits fitting his bill the best. ‘Short’ ‘cuts’, indeed. The result, looking particularly at the silver screen treatment of ‘*They're Not Your Husband*’, is poor (if not delightful to see the comedy that is musician Tom Waits playing a character much alike his own in Jim Jarmusch' 1986 movie *Down By Law*). But that might just be my own elitist opinion. On a different note, *Short Cuts* is still an exhilarating and emotionally strong flick to watch, and a consequential source of narrative inspiration for some of the best movies of the twentieth century.

In the end, it probably would have been easier to gaze at two examples of literary prose and their adaptations that were more alike.<sup>15</sup> But that is beside the point. What is interesting by comparing what in both cases are movie adaptations of a short literary text, is to look at how different the directors use their sources. They are, after all, both united by the same drive for a filmic narrative. A way to tell its story by the uniqueness of its medium. And as such, they both succeed.

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<sup>14</sup> Scholes 1985:349.

<sup>15</sup> Case in point here that *Fight Club* is far more riddled with (albeit minimalistic) special effects than *Short Cuts*; also that the time disparity between the writing of the texts and their adaptations differs markedly.

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