Contemporary Surfiction: Wideman, Kaufman, and Maddin

Patrick Keller

University of California, Irvine
E-mail: pkeller@uci.edu

Abstract

The term "Surfiction" is usually associated with the writings of a small group of Vietnam War-era writers, including Raymond Federman, Ron Sukenick, Steve Katz, Clarence Major, and Gilbert Sorrentino, but it is actually applicable to a wider variety of pseudo-autobiographical short stories, novels, and even films. This article suggests three definitive criteria for considering a work surfictional — the centrality of the author's own experiences, ambiguity of autobiographical fact and fabrication, and eventual cancellation of dramatized scenes — and explores these features in John Edgar Wideman's tribute story "Surfiction" and the contemporary films *Adaptation.* by Charlie Kaufman and *Brand Upon The Brain!* by Guy Maddin.

Keywords: *surfiction, autobiography, film, self-conscious fiction*

While answering a question about the extent to which his *Taipei* (2013) is autobiographical, Tao Lin pointed out that "even if I'm just telling you a story about one of my friends, I would not want you to believe, like, "this is the truth, I need to base all my actions on this" [...] hopefully [we] both know [ ] that I'm telling a story."[1] Lin's novel, however, does not take steps to encourage the reader to grapple with the realization Lin alludes to in the interview; the events of *Taipei* are a close enough match to Lin's public biography that many readers probably assume it is mostly true, and at the same time, the artistic shaping that may have gone into the refining of experience into fiction is not particularly legible in the published novel. Lin is not alone in this respect; most novels do not highlight the relationship between their fictional elements and the aspects of reality that may have inspired them. Moreover, *Taipei* does not appear to aim to be particularly avant-garde; in 2011, Lin wrote: "I currently feel most interested in reading/writing novels that aren't improvements on or innovations of other novels. I want to view each potential novel as already definitively and unavoidably unique, improvable only in comparison to itself and then only from its creator's singular perspective."[2] Those interested in narratives that seek to openly incorporate the question of their own veracity, however, would do well to look to the under-discussed

---

[1] Tao Lin, *The Wandering Wolf*, episode 48, interview with Yoni Wolf, March 27, 2014, accessed April 11, 2014, http://whywithaquestionmark.com/post/80902363842/this-weeks-episode-of-the-wandering-wolf-features.

[2] Tao Lin, "Does The Novel Have A Future? The Answer Is In This Essay!," *The New York Observer,* April 19, 2011, accessed April 11, 2014, http://observer.com/2011/04/does-the-novel-have-a-future-the-answer-is-in-this-essay/.

experimental narrative mode called "surfiction".

The term "surfiction" is usually associated with a handful of experimental writers (Raymond Federman, Ron Sukenick, Steve Katz, Gilbert Sorrentino, Clarence Major) from the Vietnam War era, many of whose first novels were published during what Ted Pelton calls the "major U.S. Publishers' brief foray into experimental fictions in the late 1960s",[3] including Sukenick's *Up* and *The Death of the Novel and other stories* from Dial Press; Katz's *The Exagggerations* [sic] *of Peter Prince* from Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, *Creamy and Delicious* by Random House, and *Saw* from Knopf; and Sorrentino's *Imaginative Qualities of Actual Things* from Pantheon. Not long after the first surfictional texts were published, the publishing industry experienced a dramatic shift brought on by faltering prices on the stock market related to the exorbitant cost of the Vietnam war,[4] and these major publishers turned away from publishing and promoting texts that were at odds with the increased focus on "satisfying preexisting notions of what constitutes saleable product".[5] In response, Sukenick and Katz, along with Peter Spielberg and other frustrated refugees of large publishers including Jonathan Baumbach and Mark Mirsky, forming in 1974 a not-for-profit publish cooperative so that innovative fiction would be released, promoted, and kept in print[6]; the Fiction Collective would go on to publish works from all of the Surfictionists (except Sorrentino, who was wary of being grouped with others), as well as many other authors with entirely different approaches.

Though these authors came to know each other, Surfiction was not a "school" of narrative poetics.   Each author discovered Surfiction's pseudo-autobiographical methods for themselves — as Steve Katz put it, "I don't think the ideas were 'in the air' […]; rather, all of us found ourselves at the same stoplights in different cities at the same time. When the lights changed, we all crossed the streets."[7] — and only later came together as a group, largely through the efforts of sympathetic critics such as Jerome Klinkowitz and Joe David Bellamy. Federman, who first publicized the term "surfiction" in an essay in *Partisan Review* in 1973, was the only one of these writers to publicly identify with it — Sukenick only self-identified with the phrase in occasional correspondence, and Katz, Major, and Sorrentino never openly identified with the phrase at all. Even Federman eventually declared that his "Surfiction" manifesto really only applied to his own first two novels.[8] Nonetheless, even though the term does not yet have wide recognition outside the discourse on self-reflexive fiction, it does have more critical capital than any newer coinage would, having been cited by both detractors (Hutcheon) and supporters (Cornis-Pope, Schneiderman). What it does not have yet is a fixed definition that allows us to acknowledge that this type of writing emerged most prominently from a particular moment of cultural friction, but need not be limited to it.

When coining the term "surfiction", Federman did not intend to establish a

---

[3] Ted Pelton, "How, and How Not, to Be a Published Novelist," in *Federman's Fictions,* ed. Jeffrey R. Di Leo (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), 41.

[4] Jerome Klinkowitz, *Keeping Literary Company* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 252.

[5] Pelton, "How, and How Not, to Be a Published Novelist," 41.

[6] Jeffrey DeShell, R.M. Berry, Lance Olsen, and Matthew Kirkpatrick, "The Fiction Collective Story." n. d., accessed April 15, 2011, http://fc2.org/about_us.aspx.

[7] Steve Katz, interview by Larry McCaffery (October 31, 1977), in *Anything Can Happen,* ed. Larry McCaffery (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 227.

[8] Raymond Federman. "The Word-Being Talks: An Interview with Ray Federman," by Mark Amerika, *Journal of Experimental Fiction* 23 (2002): 418.

blueprint for others to follow meticulously, and thus his definition of it as "that kind of fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction [;] [...] challenges the tradition that governs it; [...] [and] reveals man's irrationality rather than man's rationality"[9] is too broad to capture the specific mixture of fiction and autobiography that is the unifying element among the first-wave Surfictionists. (Moreover, it does not effectively distinguish their approach from that of the more widely-discussed strain of self-reflexive fiction that has come to be known as "metafiction", after author / theorist William Gass's coinage in *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (1970) and critic Robert Scholes's subsequent adoption of the term in an article for the Iowa Review, though it did not reach critical saturation until the early 1980s.[10] The Surfictionists were keen to distance themselves from John Barth and Thomas Pynchon, whom the Surfiction-sympathetic critic Jerome Klinkowitz called "regressive parodists, who [...] have confused the course of American fiction [...] incorporat[ing] contemporary subject matter but approach[ing] it in essentially traditional ways."[11] A better definition comes from Federman's subtitle to his first book-length surfiction *Double or Nothing* (1971): "a real fictitious discourse." This phrase instantly gets to the heart of the difference between a surfiction and a traditional representational narrative that functions as "a fictitious real discourse" where the author presents an internally consistent model of reality that, though fabricated, does not strain the reader's suspension of disbelief. Still, this definition is not restrictive enough to identify surfictions as doing something markedly different from narratives that prioritize consistent character, plot, and scene.

Following surfictional practice and informed by the commitments indicated by the essays and correspondence of these authors, I propose the following three[12] features that mark a narrative as a surfiction: first, that the author's own experiences (which often includes that of formatting autobiography for communication) are overtly the primary subject; second, that the boundary between autobiographical fact and invented fiction is deliberately blurred; and third, that the *act* of narration is emphasized by cancelling or declaring conditional any dramatized action. While existing surfictions differ in the degree to which they utilize these three features, this definition differentiates them from ostensibly similar texts, including the short fiction of Robert Coover in *Pricksongs and Descants* (which feature integrated process and self-cancellation but lack the pseudo-autobiographical dimensions), Robbe-Grillet's "objectivist" *nouveaux romans* (which attempt to cancel the reality of what they describe by the accumulation of self-contradicting details and the resistance to suggesting psychological depth but lack the pseudo-autobiographical and improvisatory aspects), the New Journalism of Norman Mailer and James Kunen (which feature texts that are self-reflexive but aspire to qualified objectivity rather than self-cancellation), and Fellini's film *8 ½* (which builds from the director's experience but hides it behind a fictionalized protagonist and does not overtly share the director's actual creative process). Also, while there is nothing to

---

9 Raymond Federman, "Surfiction — Four Propositions in Form of an Introduction," in *Surfiction*: *Fiction Now and Tomorrow,* ed. Raymond Federman. 2nd ed. (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1981), 7.

10 For example, the term is not acknowledged or used in *Practical Magic*, Robert Alter's groundbreaking study of the lineage of self-reflexive fiction published in 1975.

11 Jerome Klinkowitz, *Literary Disruptions,* 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), ix.

12 At one time, I strongly considered making "an overt invocation of the reader" a fourth required feature of a surfiction, given that many of the first-generation surfictions have this characteristic. Eventually, I decided against requiring it because it is difficult to quantify what constitutes direct engagement with a reader, given that to a certain extent all textual elements are presented for their benefit.

preclude the possibility that surfictions written before the Vietnam-War era could be identified, the combination of these three features also clarifies the difference of surfictions from their acknowledged precursors, such as Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (which banters with its reader and captures the unpredictable and dynamic trajectory of its author's mental experience but features a fictional first-person narrator who believes in the reality of the fictional world he describes), Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (which blurs the lines between self-reflexive autobiography and fiction, but leaves its fictional world intact), and Beckett's *The Unnamable* (which grapples with the concept of narration without a story and cancels what fragments it offers of a fictional world, but engages with the contemporary world in only the most abstract way and whose eponymous narrator is not identified with the author himself).

These criteria are diagnostic rather than proscriptive; the fact that surfiction arises from narrativizing cognitive processes rather than a plot determined from the outset makes each surfiction fundamentally experimental and idiosyncratic. Though the first surfictions were written, surfiction should not be understood as a format of written work (such as a novel, a short story, or a novella), but rather a *mode* of narration (alongside "fiction" and "non-fiction"). It is true that many of the early surfictions draw attention to their printed nature through unconventional uses of the physical space of the page (such as Federman's snaking, multidirectional sentences in *Double or Nothing* or Katz's parallel columns that develop three unrelated anecdotes across several pages in *The Exagggerations* [sic] *of Peter Prince*), but this speaks more to an interest in incorporating the materiality of the medium into the product because it is part of the authorial experience of creation. For example, Sukenick sometimes did his dictation by tape-recorder, and some of his texts, such as "Roast Beef: A Slice of Life" in *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories*, incorporate this fact. Thus, the diagnosis of surfictions need not be limited to only print; any medium that allows cognitive processes to be recorded legibly can be surfictional.

Indeed, this paper will discuss two prominent contemporary examples of surfictions that happen to be films, albeit films that pay particular attention to the processes of composition and memory. *Adaptation.* (2003) is a film written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze about Charlie Kaufman attempting to write an adapted screenplay that eventually becomes autobiographical. Similarly, *Brand upon the Brain! A Remembrance in 12 Chapters* (2006), written and directed by Guy Maddin, is about Guy Maddin attempting to remember his childhood; the result is a film that plays with the conventions of silent film but to unconventional ends. Despite focusing on the men who wrote their screenplays, the autobiographical nature of these films is ambiguous, and the only certainty ultimately left to viewers is that the process of creating these films was a process of the screenwriters "thinking through" their own experiences, if not representing them in a straightforward manner.

John Edgar Wideman also demonstrates the value of cognition-through-surfiction in his short story "Surfiction" (1985), which will be discussed in this paper alongside Kaufman and Maddin's films to provide a more canonically surfictional point of comparison. Wideman started his career as a novelist around the same time as the first-wave Surfictionists, but he apparently did not encounter their work until he was invited to participate in a panel at the University of Colorado at Boulder (where Sukenick, Katz, and Major were teaching), at which point he decided to try out their method by documenting his own engagement with a story by Charles Chesnutt. Wideman's comment that "without authors whose last names begin with B, surfiction might not

exist. B for Beckett, Barth, Burroughs, Barthes, Borges, Brautigan, Barthelme"[13] is more conjecture than genealogical fact, but he nonetheless deftly intuits the definitive concerns of the Surfictionists from their work and concisely distills them in his story. Wideman's text allows him to tackle Chesnutt's story and the issue of how racial dynamics are encoded into literature) in a way unavailable to either traditional literary scholarship, a re-staging of Chesnutt's story, or an autobiographical essay.[14]

Centrality of Authorial Experience

In his seminal work on autobiography, Philippe Lejeune suggests that autobiographical works frequently do not mention the author's name because the author "assumes that he is more or less known to the reader."[15] Lejeune's point is relevant here because the identification of the first-person perspective in a surfiction with the actual author (rather than a narrating character) is sometimes a matter of simply not providing a proxy narrator with pseudonym (such as Philip Roth's Nathan Zuckerman or James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus) and backstory that would constitute, in Lejeune's terms, an "obvious practice of nonidentity"[16] between protagonist and author. Indeed, even though Wideman does not include his own proper name in the text, he also does not provide enough details to give readers reason to suspect that the first-person pronoun is meant to refer to anyone besides the author of record. Similarly, the first-person perspective is not fleshed-out enough to imply that the text is meant as a vivisection of the narrator's persona, as is the case with first-person novels featuring "unreliable narrators." The only information Wideman attaches to the first-person perspective is that which matches his own publicly available biography as a professor, essentially following Lejeune's advice to "[act] as if he were the author, in such a way that the reader has no doubt that the 'I' refers to the name shown on the cover."[17]

Wideman's narration does not foreground himself as narrator to establish a "frame tale" with which to enclose a fictional world (as does Kurt Vonnegut in his metafictional novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*), but rather, his writing is ostensibly a response to — and extension of — his own experiences of being invited to the panel and of rereading his own notes to Charles Chesnutt's *Deep Sleeper*. The text opens with Wideman reproducing the notes he had written, first as abstracted comments on the narrative voice employed by Chesnutt, then as a running marginal commentary answering a column from *Deep Sleeper*. In the spaces between these recreations, Wideman meditates on his critical approach and its debt to Roland Barthes and postmodern fiction, mentioning that he keeps a journal and swearing that his descriptions of it are being double-checked against the actual object as he proceeds. He then returns to the passage from Chesnutt, offering this time a qualitative narratological analysis rather than his previous elaboration of social context.

Abruptly, Wideman switches to a transcript of an argument between unidentified intimates about a journal read in violation of trust. The dynamic quality of the

---

[13]   John Edgar Wideman, "Surfiction," in *Fever* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 68.

[14]   Wideman must have found the surfictional technique particularly fruitful, since he employs it again in his most recent novel *Fannon* (2008), though without mentioning the Surfictionists.

[15]   Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography,* trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 18.

[16]   Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, 15.

[17]   Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, 14.

interchange is captured on the page in interlocking columns of text, echoing the self-interrogation in Federman's *Double or Nothing* and the formatting in certain sections of Sukenick's *The Endless Short Story*. The text then shifts to an outline of the main events of a story about a married couple who are both students of a professor with Wideman's credentials and come to conflict over the unauthorized reading of the husband's diary by the wife and her affair with the professor. Before this story can be developed, Wideman denounces it as a fiction and abruptly ends the text, mirroring the Surfictionists' structuring of their texts around the dynamics of the creative act rather than plot-based closure.

By contrast with Wideman's confident disregard for making the connection of his narration with his real world self, Charlie Kaufman's film *Adaptation.* connects the author of the script with the on-screen protagonist through insecurity. The film begins with a nearly minute-and-a-half meandering voice-over that contains ruminations such as "Do I have an original idea in my head, my bald head? Maybe if I were happier, my hair wouldn't be falling out."[18] and

> I need to turn my life around — what do I need to do? I need to fall in love. I need to have a girlfriend. I need to read more, improve myself. What if I learned Russian or something? Or took up an instrument. I could speak Chinese. I would be the screenwriter who speaks Chinese. And plays the oboe.[19]

Meanwhile, the screen is black except for the credits, no more than two at a time, in relatively small white text that seems to be trying to stay out of the way of the voice-over. Among the credits is, of course, Kaufman's screenwriting credit (which he shares with "Donald Kaufman", an invented twin brother who will later be central to the film's surfictional unmasking), though in 2002 with only two produced screenplays to his credit, Kaufman's name might not have been particularly recognizable to all audience members, despite the critical success of *Being John Malkovich* (1999), for which his screenplay had been nominated for an academy award.

The first visual scene of *Adaptation.* begins, as viewers are informed by a caption, between takes of filming Kaufman's previous film, *Being John Malkovich*; the film stock is grainy, and the zooms are abrupt in a simulation of a behind-the-scenes documentary featurette. The real life actor John Malkovich is given an identifying caption, as are a couple of the members of the film's production team, including a man pacing behind set pieces identified as "Charlie Kaufman / screenwriter" — except the man is actually the actor Nicolas Cage with carefully thinned hair and a bewildered demeanor. After Kaufman / Cage (referred henceforth in this article as "Charlie" to differentiate him from the real Charlie Kaufman and his on-screen twin brother) leaves the soundstage by request, the film switches to a normative film stock and the internal monologue from the credits returns and remains a dominant element until the film's absurdly frenetic second half.

The plot of *Adaptation.* proceeds with Charlie attempting to write an adapted screenplay based on *The Orchid Thief,* Susan Orlean's plotless non-fiction book about orchids and a man obsessed by them, but eventually it becomes clear that the screenplay he is producing is the one for *Adaptation.* itself. After struggling with the task for most of the first half of the movie, Charlie's thoughts about Darwin spur him to a frenzied

---

18   *Adaptation.*, directed by Spike Jonze (2002; Burbank, CA: Colombia Pictures, 2010), DVD.
19 *Adaptation.*

dictation to his tape recorder of an unconventional approach: "Start right before life begins on the planet. All is . . . lifeless. And then, like, life begins . . . with organisms. [...] From there we go to bigger things, jellyfish! And then that fish that got legs and crawled out on the land."[20] Charlie's un-self-conscious, ecstatic reiteration of evolution all the way up to Susan Orlean writing at her desk is humorous, but it also happens to mirror one of the first scenes of the movie viewers have already watched, one where Charlie, wandering away from the *Malkovich* set, wonders, "I've been this planet 40 years, and I'm no closer to understanding a single thing. Why am I here? How did I get here?", only to have the screen immediately cut to a scene of the early molten earth (captioned "Hollywood, CA / Four Billion And Forty Years Earlier") that rapidly progresses in time-lapse to stock footage of a human child being born.[21]

Similarly, after Charlie despairingly rejects his evolutionary approach and an attempt to centre his screenplay on Susan Orlean, he excitedly dictates another idea: "We open on Charlie Kaufman — fat, old, bald, repulsive — sitting in a Hollywood restaurant. [...] Fat, bald Kaufman paces furious in his bedroom. He speaks into his hand-held tape recorder, and he says, "Charlie Kaufman — fat, old, bald, repulsive — sits in a Hollywood restaurant.""[22] The scene he describes (twice) has also already taken place early in *Adaptation.*, directly between the chronological burlesque and a scene where Susan Orlean indeed sits writing at her desk. By this point, even viewers who missed Kaufman's credit during the opening cannot help but be aware that this is not just a movie about writing a movie, but a movie about writing *this* movie.

Guy Maddin's *Brand upon the Brain!* does not foreground its own creation in quite so explicit and recursive a way as *Adaptation.*, but it does thematize a mental revisiting of autobiographical incidents. The first spoken words in the movie are the screenwriter's name,[23] accompanied by a shot of a man (actually the actor Erik Steffan Maahs, henceforth referred to in this paper by the name given him by the movie's silent-movie-style intertitles: "Old Guy") asleep in a small boat. The movie's voice-over "explicator" — who provides the only voices in the movie (besides rare sung vocals) — sets up the movie's frame story at this point: Old Guy has been summoned to his childhood home to re-paint his family's old lighthouse so his mother can see it once more before she dies.[24] Old Guy arrives and begins the task, allowing the movie to follow his memories back to a time when he was twelve years old and his parents operated an orphanage out of the lighthouse; only in the last of the film's twelve overtly numbered sections does Old Guy become the focus again as he is haunted by the physical presence of his now-blind mother (identified only as "Mother") and a mental phantom of his childhood love-object Wendy Hale.

The lack of publicly available information about the lives of both screenwriters actually proves to be a boon to their projects. When asked in an interview about Cage's relative lack of physical resemblance to himself, Kaufman replied, "I wanted to write a character that was insecure and who had specific insecurities. Since no one knows who I am, I took the liberty of making them up and not being the specific ones that I suffer

---

[20] *Adaptation.*

[21] *Adaptation.*

[22] *Adaptation.*

[23] *Brand Upon The Brain!*, directed by Guy Maddin (2006; New York: The Criterion Collection, 2008), DVD.

[24] *Brand Upon The Brain!*

from."[25] Viewers do not know that the insecurities belong to Charlie rather than the real Kaufman, but the repetition of them in the voice-over meshes with Cage's performance to create a consistent, pitiable caricature. Maddin also takes liberty with his cinematic self-presentation; he did, in fact, work for a time as a house painter, though he did not grow up in a lighthouse.[26] The film does feature a number of elements that would strain the credulity of even the most biographically uninformed viewer (as discussed in the next section), but in interviews Maddin impishly maintains that the movie is "97% autobiographically true [...] it's emotionally and melodramatically true. Psychologically true. Poetically true."[27] Moreover, Maddin describes the film's focus on memory to be in keeping with his own experience:

> As a child, I always had a feeling that everything would happen again. Somehow I always felt that my emotional responses to things were inadequate to them. […] I started to wonder if that second time would just be I'd die [...] but then I realized that the second time was actually being delivered to myself personally when I'm making these movies, and I'm finally beginning to understand what it was that I went through.[28]

Kaufman similarly avers, "I was terrified [at the idea of turning in the script to the studio] [...] I wanted to quit. I did not want to finish this. I couldn't face it. [...] [my character] Charlie Kaufman's story of taking the job and becoming frustrated and deciding to put himself in the screenplay is true."[29] Thus, the autobiographical revisitation is not just an overly clever conceit or precious put-on, but a natural outgrowth of self-reflection.

Ambiguity of Fact and Fiction

The final section of Wideman's text (where he describes having an affair with his married student) captures the second key feature of a surfiction: that the balance between autobiography and invention is perpetually and deliberately blurred. The first-wave Surfictionists believed that correlation to external reality was an impossible and undesirable standard to place on language, much less fiction, and although they used their own experience as a starting point, they presented their texts as fiction rather than journalism or memoir because the true autobiographical element was a record of the imagination at work rather than a faithful re-creation of previous experiences. Their point was not to show off what they had done nor release the tension of what they wished they could do — to paraphrase Sukenick, the libidinal escapades frequently described in the Surfictionists' texts were less long-held personal fantasies and more the fancies of the imagination in the moment of composition. At the same time, a surfiction refuses to relinquish the possibility that any of the textual flights of fancy may be based in reality, clinging to the appearance of candid disclosure to cultivate the interest of the reader. Accordingly, Wideman suggests that "[t]he canny reader will not trouble

---

[25]Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman, interview by Rebecca Murray and Fred Topel, *About.com Entertainment > Hollywood Movies,* n. d., accessed April 11, 2014, http://movies.about.com/library/weekly/aaadaptationintb.htm.
[26]Guy Maddin, interview by Andy Battaglia, *A.V. Club,* May 17, 2007, accessed April 11, 2014, http://www.avclub.com/article/guy-maddin-14103.
[27]*97% True*, produced by Kate Elmore (New York: The Criterion Collection, 2008), DVD.
[28]*97% True*.
[29]Kaufman, interview with Murray and Topel.

him/herself trying to splice the tape [of the transcribed argument over the journal] to what came before or after" but also that "the canny reader would also be suspicious of the straightforward, absolute denial of relevance dismissing the tape."[30]

This bandying with the reader points to a frequent aspect of surfictions, one that Wideman introduces early on in his text with the reflection that his beginning is "already a rather unstable mix of genres and disciplines and literary allusion. […] readers fall away as if each word is a well-aimed bullet."[31] The degree to which an individual surfiction invokes its reader directly varies, from the unaddressed inclusion of details of Katz's writing process in "Female Skin" to the concretized proxies of readers that attempt to invade Federman's *Take It Or Leave It* to uncover the plot without the narrator's obfuscations — but archival drafts[32] show that even the most seemingly haphazard surfictions underwent grooming to tailor the reader's experience of them. This packaging of experience for readerly consumption fits well with Sukenick's evaluation, thirty years into his career, that a surfiction was an "ongoing persuasive discourse"[33] by which a reader is enticed to "share [an author's] attention structure"[34] rather than accept a definite world-view. Still, the Surfictionists' attitude toward the reader is often ambivalent since their desire for a more direct connection with the reader (a connection that does not require the suspension of disbelief commonly assumed by traditional mimesis) was potentially at odds with their commitment to presenting experience without compromises with the demands of the existing marketplace for fiction.

The elements of *Brand upon the Brain!* that are most addressed to his audience are ones that are borrowed from cinematic history and delight in underscoring the artificiality of Maddin's work. The film's form is essentially that of a silent movie, but featuring an additional archaic element that Maddin learned about by reading surrealist director Luis Bunuel's autobiography: an "explicator" who would "stand on the stage while the stage while the [silent] film is being projected and [...] explain things that might not be apparent to everybody" and "explain people through the new [cinematic] vocabulary of "cutting.""[35] In *Brand upon the Brain!*, the role of the explicator (fulfilled by a number of different celebrities across the film's initial run as a travelling live spectacle that included live musicians and sound-effects performers) is not only to explain things such as "[Guy's] Mother used suicide threats as her primary teaching aid; she kept orphans and offspring alike in line with colorful bluffs"[36] while the actress grimaces and gesticulates on screen, but also to articulate Guy's thoughts, such as when he is invited by teen detective Chance Hale (actually Guy's love-interest Wendy in drag) to help him investigate a mystery: "Oh, Chance! Chance! Hero and role model! Chance all to myself!"[37] The movie's more conventional silent-movie-style intertitles often work as a parallel but complementary explanatory stream beside the explicator's dialogue; in the previous example, as the explicator moans about Guy's infatuation with

---

[30] Wideman, "Surfiction," 66.
[31] Wideman, "Surfiction," 60.
[32] I have done research in the Harry Ransom Center's archives of the papers of Sukenick, Katz, and their sympathetic critic Jerome Klinkowitz; the collection includes multiple stages of drafts, as well as journals and correspondence.
[33] Sukenick, "Introduction: It's Only Make-Believe," *Narralogues* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 1.
[34] Sukenick, "Narralogue on Everything," *Narralogues,* 70.
[35] *97% True.*
[36] *Brand upon the Brain!*
[37] *Brand upon the Brain!*

Chance, it is the intertitles that provide the relevant plot information that would otherwise go unremarked: "Famous Chance enlists awestruck Guy as an assistant."[38] Unlike the original silent context, Maddin's intertitles often flash only briefly on screen, providing snippets of information from the irreverent ("Good for dippin'"[39] when Young Guy discovers butter that his mother has thrown on the wall) to the poetic ("The island always seems on the verge of telling Guy something […] [;] If only he can make sense of what it is trying to say."[40]). They also articulate the specific vocal exchanges of the characters that are not spoken audibly. The visuals, explication voice-over, and intertitles form three parallel streams of information that overlap but require each other to create the tenuous whole.

Maddin's highly artificial formal elements are not his only way to problematize the autobiographical story he presents; the plot itself includes a number of surreal and implausible elements (some of which turn out to be the most literally true). The idea of lighthouse that is also an orphanage is whimsical, though not impossible, but within the first ten minutes, Maddin introduces the "aerophone", an oversized steampunk cell-phone of sorts designed by Young Guy's father and carried by Young Guy and his sister ("Sis") so that Mother can keep track of them; besides the fact that Maddin's childhood predated the period of widespread cell use, the intertitles relate that the "aerophone" has a surreal caveat: "The signal is strongest when the feelings are running high, when the communicants are deeply in love, but also during outbursts of extreme fury. In other instances, the signal is either weak or non-existent."[41] Mother also surveils her children from a rotating enclosed throne with a telescope that also seems to direct the lighthouse's searchlight.

The surreality of the plot becomes more sinister when harp-playing Wendy Hale arrives on a mission to discover why orphans adopted from the Maddins' lighthouse all have a suspicious puncture wound to the back of their heads. Wendy and Chance's profession — travelling twin teenage detectives whose adventures are apparently chronicled in the *Lightbulb Kids* series of books — is itself a reminder that the plot is closer to children's literature than a child's direct experience. When Wendy assumes Chance's identity (so that she can pose as a lighthouse inspector to Guy's parents and a lover to Guy's sister), she adds an additional dreamlike layer, insisting on wearing a tuxedo, top hat, white gloves, and a domino mask on her attempt to infiltrate Father's lab with Guy's help. Halfway through the movie, before Chance's investigation reaches fruition, the audience is exposed to Father's nightly "Harvest of the Nectar" from the orphans (though the grotesque mechanism of extracting fluid from the brainstem — a serrated signet ring with the family crest — is not revealed for several more minutes) and its purpose: the stolen fluids reverse Mother's aging (literally swapping out actresses that play her).[42] The intertitles explain that Mother seeks to regress to a childhood state "before the ripeness of womanhood", even to the extent of (as the explicator explains) "set[ting] aside a cradle in her room for when the day of infancy finally returns."[43] Mother's secret plan is constantly thwarted because, as Chance witnesses first-hand after gaining access to her lighthouse throne room with a grappling

---

38   *Brand upon the Brain!*
39   *Brand upon the Brain!*
40   *Brand upon the Brain!*
41   *Brand upon the Brain!*
42   *Brand upon the Brain!*
43   *Brand upon the Brain!*

hook, "Rage ages one! Rage ages all!"[44] Still, the "nectar" is powerful enough that after Father is killed by entranced, knife-wielding Sis who is finally resisting being harvested, his body can be exhumed and reanimated using heart-to-heart jumper cables powered by a "nectarite jolt"[45] to Mother. Eventually, the now even more zombie-like Father is packed away in Wendy's harp case and taken on the little boat with Mother as she is exiled for a cannibalistic rampage brought on by nectar addiction.

It is Father's (first) funeral that underscores the uncertain relationship between reality and fantasy in the movie. Because his funeral takes place on the beach at high tide, Father's coffin will not settle into the earth on its own — the weight of a half dozen of the orphans he has harvested is required to sink it. This surreal scene is richly symbolic but, as it turns out, it is one of the most literally realistic scenes in the movie; according to Maddin, his own real life mother's father died during

> flood season out on the farm. […] All 6 of his children had to stand on his coffin to sink it in the flood water while they clawed mucky, soggy wet earth onto themselves and onto the coffin, and sort of hot-stepping it out from beneath their own burials […] in this rather macabre and fairy-tale-seeming funeral.[46]

The film itself does not underscore that this moment is anchored in (transposed) reality, but the point of surfiction is not to settle the audience into a sense of certainty, it is rather to keep them engaged with ambiguity.

Adaptation. maintains this (to paraphrase Sukenick) "suspension of the suspension of disbelief" partially through its audience's assumed previous experience with Hollywood movies. Audiences are conditioned to accept big-name actors playing historically important characters in biopics, but because *Adaptation.* is a movie about Hollywood, there can be a shot where Nicolas Cage as Charlie gives a guileless and unreturned wave to actor John Cussack who is portraying himself about to film a scene for *Being John Malkovich*.[47] In the same scene, the actress Maggie Gyllenhaal (who had recently made a splash in *Donnie Darko* and *Secretary*) appears as Caroline, a make-up artist working on the set of the movie, further co-mingling actors playing actors and actors playing non-actors.

Cage's status as a recognizable actor is doubly emphasized by the fact that he plays not only Charlie but his (fictitious) twin brother Donald as well. Both characters have the same artificially thinning hair and generally doughy physique, only Cage portrays Donald as being blithely comfortable in the body that Charlie finds shameful. The artificiality of Donald's presence in the film is highlighted in a discussion between the brothers about the logistical difficulties of the serial killer movie that Donald is attempting to write where the psychopath, kidnap victim, and detective turn out to merely be different personalities of the same individual. Charlie asks, "how could you have someone held prisoner in a basement and working in a police station at the same time?", to which Donald answers, "Trick photography",[48] an unintentional nod to the well-known camera techniques that allow Jonze to create the numerous on-screen interaction between the "brothers".

Even though the film's finale is over-the-top in ways that end up with Donald

---

[44] *Brand upon the Brain!*
[45] *Brand upon the Brain!*
[46] *97% True.*
[47] *Adaptation.*
[48] *Adaptation.*

being fatally injured (which will be discussed at greater length in the next section), the movie maintains that Donald is based on a real person all the way through the very end, when the credits are followed by a sententious quotation from Donald's screenplay and a dedication to the "loving memory of Donald Kaufman".[49] The DVD release of *Adaptation.* even includes a page on Donald in the "Filmographies" section, waggishly suggesting that his serial killer movie was released in 2004.

At the same time, the movie has all along played with the possibility that Donald has been a figment of Charlie's anxiety. Donald's first introduction is an off-screen voice calling out to Charlie as he enters his house, but the movie has previously established the trope of Cage's off-screen voice to represent Charlie's internal monologue. Later, the movie enacts a series of threatening pronouncements from Donald that are quickly disarmed; on the *Malkovich* set, Donald asks Charlie for "a cool way to kill people", waiting until after a long sip from his drink before clarifying, "Don't worry — for my script!"[50] Later, as Charlie crumples up a list of "commandments" from a screenwriting seminar that Donald had placed over Charlie's desk, the camera pans to show standing backlit in the doorway Donald, who ominously says, "You shouldn't have done that", waiting through Charlie's stunned response shot to add, ". . . because it's extremely helpful!"[51] The same backlit framing of Donald is used a few minutes later when he interrupts Charlie's transcription of a particularly embarrassing part of his dictation about himself to announce that his serial killer script — the antithesis of everything Charlie values in a movie — is complete.[52]

The movie never sustains this idea that Donald is a physical threat to Charlie, but as Charlie becomes increasingly desperate and stops discounting Donald's advice, there is the possibility that Donald is a summoned figment who can do the things that Charlie feels too strangled by doubt to do (as with Brian DePalma's multiple-personality thriller *Raising Cain* (1992) or David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999)). When Charlie feels too nervous to meet Susan Orlean in person, Donald goes in his place.[53] Later, when the brothers are going to spy upon Orlean and her lover, Donald tells Charlie to stay in the car while he investigates, but Charlie, wrestling down his insecurity, offers to go instead, saying, "It should be me, right? I mean, it's my . . ."[54]

Of course, to believe that Donald is an externalization of carefree confidence that Charlie now possess and therefore no longer needs by the end of the movie would require contortions of logic similar to those required by Donald's screenplay — namely, Charlie would have had to have hallucinated Caroline in her many scenes with Donald — but the movie *has* established a precedent that not all of its visual images can be trusted. In three different scenes, Charlie is shown being intimate with women (the waitress, his studio liaison, and Orlean) only to have hard cuts to him alone in his darkened bedroom.   Combined with Charlie's voice-over, these scenes provide a poignant account of Charlie's incessant feelings of anxiety and inadequacy, but they also threaten the veracity of the otherwise realistically acted scenes of Orlean researching her book three years before Charlie will attempt to adapt it, suggesting that rather than reliable visualizations of Orlean's non-fiction book, they may be Charlie's

---

[49]   *Adaptation.*

[50]   *Adaptation.*

[51]   *Adaptation.*

[52]   *Adaptation.*

[53]   *Adaptation.*

[54]   *Adaptation.*

subjective imagination of these events.

Cancellation of the Fictional

The last definitive element of a surfiction is a focus on the act of narration achieved by a subordination of the dramatized events and characters that it describes (or, as the Surfictionists would prefer to put it, "creates") by signalling these aspects as conditional from the outset or rescinding their "reality" after the fact. Wideman's story employs both of these strategies, introducing the skeletally dramatized story of the married students as "the main narrative […] [i]n embryo",[55] something that may develop but has not yet, and concluding it with the self-cancellation and self-reflexive analysis, "The plot breaks down. It was supposed to break down. The characters disintegrate. Whoever claimed they were whole in the first place?"[56] Also, like many surfictions, Wideman's story is narrated in the present tense, as befits the notion that narration is a record of an act of creation rather than a recreation of something that pre-exists it (though this is not actually a required characteristic of a surfiction, as seen in past-tense surfictions such as Sukenick's *Long Talking Bad Condition Blues* or Katz's *The Exagggerations* [sic] *of Peter Prince*).

Brand upon the Brain! is far more subtle than most surfictions when it comes to self-cancellation; to a certain extent, Maddin's fragmented, jumpy cutting between incredibly brief shots makes all parts of the movie seem already contingent and provisional. Maddin describes this as a "scrolling" effect, primarily because it is an outgrowth of the idiosyncrasies of the interface of the computer editing software he used on the film and its antecedent *Cowards Bend the Knee*.[57] While trying to scroll to a specific moment in his raw footage, Maddin found that the difficulty in finding the perfect position, neither too far beyond nor before, created an uncanny aesthetic:

> I really liked the way this process of speeding up and slowing down and then stopping seemed to fetishize, seem to skittishly move ahead and backwards and forwards, and it reminded me of the way I remember my favorite erotic or just favorite wistful memories [...] I will rush ahead, perhaps too fast, skipping over too much and maybe go right to the great moment too soon to really enjoy it properly, [...] so I would go back and approach it a little more slowly, but even then, find I hadn't quite got the right speed of approach yet, and so I would go at it again.[58]

This aesthetic is used throughout the film, and combined with the already piecemeal and telegraphic communication of the explicator and intertitles, it mirrors the tentativeness and jitteriness of a sketching hand. This provisionality of memory is overtly thematized early on in the movie as Young Guy idly explores the island, rehearsing non-specific memories that predate the scope of the movie; the intertitles read, "Find the right combination / from this the poem springs."[59] The definitive combination may never be reached; at the end of the movie, as Guy has finished the requested second coat of paint, he begins a third, the intertitles reading, "Permanent Wet Paint".

Adaptation., too, has an inherently circular nature, but unlike *Brand upon the*

---

[55]   Wideman, "Surfiction," 66.
[56]   Wideman, "Surfiction," 69.
[57]   *97% True.*
[58]   *97% True.*
[59]   *Brand upon the Brain!*

Brain!, it finds a resolution that nonetheless collapses in on itself. The two halves of *Adaptation.* work by contrasting two types of present-tense experience for the audience; this contrast is what lays the groundwork to debunk the fictionalized reality it has painstakingly constructed. The first half of the movie is structured around Charlie's attempt to gain a foothold on the formidable task of writing a film that will be faithful to an obstinately plotless book. Though the movie frequently lurches back in time to Orlean, Darwin, and the molten earth, even these tangents are part of a present-tense sense of mentally exploring a topic, with all the dead-ends that real exploration entails. The movie lacks an overarching structure of the sort that Charlie early on repudiates anyway in his rant to the movie studio executive that gives him his assignment:

> I'd want to let the movie exist rather than be artificially plot-driven. […] I just don't want to ruin it by making it a Hollywood thing, like . . . an orchid heist movie or something. Or . . . changing the orchids into poppies and turning it into a movie about drug running. […] I don't want to cram in sex or guns or car chases, you know, or characters . . . you know, learning profound life lessons or growing or coming to like each other or overcoming obstacles to succeed in the end. I mean, the book isn't like that, and life isn't like that — it just isn't.[60]

Charlie's flailing attempt to find an elusive approach that is not formulaic or still-born is as Sisyphean as Orlean's thwarted desire to see for herself the rare ghost orchid that has obsessed Laroche, the quixotic man at the centre of her non-fiction book, but having effectively mirrored his subject's experiences in his own life does not get him any closer to a screenplay that will satisfy the demands of his client.

The second half of the movie shifts abruptly to a more conventional type of immediacy as Charlie's desperate quest to connect with his material moves from figurative to literal. Instead of scenes of Charlie attempting to write, Charlie is shown attempting to act; he flies to New York to meet Susan Orlean (eventually sending Donald in his place) and allows himself to be convinced by his brother to follow Orlean back to Florida. At this point, the movie becomes all the things that Charlie refused to write: Orlean and Laroche have a steamy secret romance that is fuelled by a drug extracted from the ghost orchid, and when Charlie is caught eavesdropping on them, a gun-wielding chase through the Fakahatchee swamps ensues, during which Donald imparts to Charlie the speciously profound life lesson that "You are what you love, not what loves you."[61] The watershed moment of the movie is marked by the first voice-over from Orlean that is definitively not taken from *The Orchid Thief*: "What I came to understand is that change is not a choice. [...] It happens, and you are different. Maybe the only distinction between the plant and me is that afterward I lied about my change. I lied in my book."[62] The scene that accompanies this voice-over is the major way that Orlean and Laroche's changed relationship is presented in the movie, and it meshes perfectly with Charlie's later confirmation of the "facts" that can only be the brothers' speculation. The dialogue and acting in this screen is noticeably less sophisticated (Laroche, attempting to recapture Orlean's interest: "Boy, my porn site's going to be big . . . Look, there's something I didn't tell you that I want to tell you about the ghost [orchid] . . ."), recalling an earlier fast-forwarded scene of Laroche that Charlie was drafting via panicked voice-over: "We open with Laroche, he's funny. He says, "I love to mutate plants. Mutation is fun." [...] Ok, he says, "I was mutated as a baby, that's why

---

60 *Adaptation.*
61 *Adaptation.*
62 *Adaptation.*

I'm so smart.""[63] During the eventual chase scene, Laroche (who in the first half of the movie was portrayed as canny beyond his level of apparent sophistication) becomes simpering, and Orlean (who was inquisitive but melancholy) becomes petulant and impulsive.

Beyond the disintegration of the psychological complexity of its characters, *Adaptation.* carries out its winking self-cancellation through incongruous repetition. After Laroche is abruptly assaulted by an unexpected alligator attack, Orlean cries out to Charlie, "Oh, God! You fat piece of shit! He's dead, you loser! You've ruined my life, you fat fuck!",[64] which echoes the specific terms of her earlier description of the fleeing Charlie to Laroche ("Yeah. Fat. That's all I could tell."[65]) and Charlie's own mantra-like self-descriptions from the opening monologue onward. Orlean's tin-eared grief in this scene does not quite match the gravity of the moment, just as Charlie's attempt minutes earlier to get the dying Donald to sing along with him to the '60s pop-song "Happy Together" is a straight-faced travesty. The shoehorned inclusion of a pop-song was actually an element that Donald earlier excitedly described to Charlie as a feature of his serial-killer script, and in a previous scene, Donald randomly tried to get Charlie to join him in singing this particular song in the middle of one of their conversations about stalking Orlean. In case any viewers have not realized that the movie has "succeeded" in finding closure by failing its scriptwriter's principles, the final shot of the movie is a time-lapse shot of a flower surrounded by traffic as the professional version of "So Happy Together" plays; the upbeat song fits with Charlie's improbable sense of hope at the end (having quickly gotten over Donald's death and succeeded at revealing his feelings to his long-suffering love-interest Ameilia), but the true purpose of the shot is to point the viewer back to the earlier incongruity.

Final Thoughts: Surfiction Now and Tomorrow

At first glance, it seems odd that the current bastion of English-language surfiction would be film. After all, movies have considerably higher costs than writing novels, and movie studios may be loath to make a shaky investment on an audience's ability to forgive a script for proceeding by tangent rather than simplistic overarching design. In actuality, both *Adaptation.* and *Brand upon the Brain!* had particular opportunities that allowed them to take a risk on surfiction; *Adaptation.* followed the surprise success of *Being John Malkovich* and was able to cast big-name stars because of it, and *Brand upon the Brain!* was produced by a not-for-profit film company that approached Maddin and gave him full control over the project as long as he worked with a cast and crew from the Seattle area.[66]

At the same time, it could be asked why millennial American pop culture is not actually *more* surfictional, given the way the entertainment landscape has shifted towards increased self-documentation by celebrities via social media and 'reality TV' shows. Hip-hop, a musical genre overtly concerned with authenticity, has reached new commercial heights by embracing the fact that the lives of its most successful artists are closer to opulence than street violence. Even some blatantly scripted sitcoms such as

---

[63] *Adaptation.*

[64] *Adaptation.*

[65] *Adaptation.*

[66] Maddin, interview by John Battaglia.

The Office and *Parks & Recreation* have embraced the appearance of documentary form previously reserved as a novelty of Christopher Guest's mockumentaries. Pushing the envelope of stand-up comedian Jerry Seinfeld's hit TV show about a stand-up comedian (and nothing), the sitcoms *30Rock* and *Louie* star Tina Fey and Louis C.K., respectively, playing versions of their own real-life roles in the entertainment industry. Still, even though astute viewers of *Louie*'s end credits may notice that his daughters on the show are played by unrelated actresses, the show does not make an effort to reveal to its viewers the degree to which it is fabricated.[67] Part of the reason why these shows continue to conceal their construction may be that the self-cancellation present in surfiction to balance the self-mythologization is at odds with a society where building a brand identity is no longer just for corporations.

For now, new surfictions are still more likely to come from the less monetized parts of society. The Surfictionists were born a couple of generations before the Punk movement would valorize the ethos of 'do it yourself' in the late 1970s, but this was essentially the spirit that brought each of these writers to this technique and convinced them that thought process could be as worth sharing as thought product. The amateur fanzines that Punk fans created were an inspiration for the 'zine' explosion of the 1990s, which in turn set the template for the first online blogs. Millennial social media sites have taken blogging mainstream, and now there are more open-access platforms than ever for any interested person (with a computer or a smart-phone) to craft and play with their own self presentation. Hopefully, establishing a greater awareness of a surfiction as a definable phenomenon will reduce the number of individuals who have to build the idea from scratch — as Charlie Kaufman did — and reduce the likelihood of pseudo-autobiography being dismissed as solipsistic or merely derivative of *Adaptation.*

References

1.   *"97% True." Brand upon the Brain!* Directed by Guy Maddin. 2008. New York: The Criterion Collection, 2008. DVD.

2.   *Adaptation.* Directed by Spike Jonze. 2002. Burbank, CA: Colombia Pictures, 2010. DVD.

3.   Alter, Robert. *Practical Magic.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

4.   *Brand upon the Brain! A Remembrance in 12 Chapters.* Directed by Guy Maddin. 2006. New York: The Criterion Collection, 2008. DVD.

5.   DeShell, Jeffrey, R.M. Berry, Lance Olsen, and Matthew Kirkpatrick. "The Fiction Collective Story." *FC2.org*, n. d. Accessed April 15, 2011. http://fc2.org/about_us.aspx.

6.   Federman, Raymond. "Surfiction — Four Propositions in Form of an Introduction." In *Surfiction*: *Fiction Now and Tomorrow*, edited by Raymond Federman. 2nd ed., 5-15. Chicago: Swallow Press, 1981.

7.   Federman, Raymond. "The Word-Being Talks: An Interview with Ray Federman." By Mark Amerika. *Journal of Experimental Fiction* 23 (2002): 416-422.

---

[67] Surprisingly, given hip-hop's focus on authenticity, a few rappers — such as Eminem, Kanye West, and Tyler the Creator — have recently released songs that reflect critically on the performer's own fabricated sense of self.

8.   Katz, Steve. Interview by McCaffery. In *Anything Can Happen*, edited by Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery, 219-234. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983.

9.   Kaufman, Charlie. Interview by Rebecca Murray and Fred Topel (along with Spike Jonze). *About.com Entertainment > Hollywood Movies,* n. d. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://movies.about.com/library/weekly/aaadaptationintb.htm.

10. Klinkowitz, Jerome. *Literary Disruptions.* 2ⁿᵈ ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.

11. Klinkowitz, Jerome. *Keeping Literary Company*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998.

12. Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Translated by Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

13. Lin, Tao. "Does The Novel Have A Future? The Answer Is In This Essay!" *The New York Observer,* April 19, 2011. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://observer.com/2011/04/does-the-novel-have-a-future-the-answer-is-in-this-essay.

14. Lin, Tao. *The Wandering Wolf*, *episode 48*. Podcast audio, interview with Yoni Wolf. Posted March 27, 2014. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://whywithaquestionmark.com/post/80902363842/this-weeks-episode-of-the-wandering-wolf-features.

15. Maddin, Guy. Interview by Andy Battaglia, *A.V. Club.* Posted May 17, 2007. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://www.avclub.com/article/guy-maddin-14103.

16. Pelton, Ted. "How, and How Not, to Be a Published Novelist." In *Federman's Fictions*, edited by Jeffrey R. Di Leo, 39-50. Albany: SUNY Press, 2011.

17. Sukenick, Ronald. *Narralogues.* Albany: SUNY Press, 2000.

18. Wideman, John Edgar. "Surfiction." In *Fever,* 59-69. New York: Penguin, 1989.

Autoficţiune contemporană: Wideman, Kaufman şi Maddin

Termenul de „autoficţiune" e de obicei asociat unui grup mic de scriitori care au publicat în timpul Războiului din Vietnam, grup din care fac parte Raymond Federman, Ron Sukenick, Steve Katz, Clarence Major şi Gilbert Sorrentino; totuşi, termenul se poate aplica mai multor nuvele pseudoautobiografice, unor romane şi chiar unor filme. Articolul de faţă sugerează existenţa a trei criterii definitorii conform cărora un text se integrează în categoria autoficţiunii: centralitatea experienţelor proprii ale autorului, ambiguitatea dintre datele autobiografice reale şi cele inventate şi anularea scenelor de natură dramatică. Voi explora aceste trăsături în povestirea „Surfiction" de John Edgar Wideman şi în filmele contemporane *Adaptation*., în regia lui Charlie Kaufman, şi *Brand Upon The Brain!*, regizat de Guy Maddin.