

# On Page and Screen: Adaptations of Literature in Recent Film

Session 1: Introduction and Mickey7 / Mickey 17

Welcome!



# Outline for this evening

1. Starting points: books and films
2. Some (light) film theory and literary theory on adaptation
3. Mickey7 / Mickey 17: first reactions
4. Clones and doppelgängers
5. Aliens, insects and otherness





# Starting points: books and films

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## Part 1







Since the first Academy Awards in 1928, there have been 97 best picture winners.

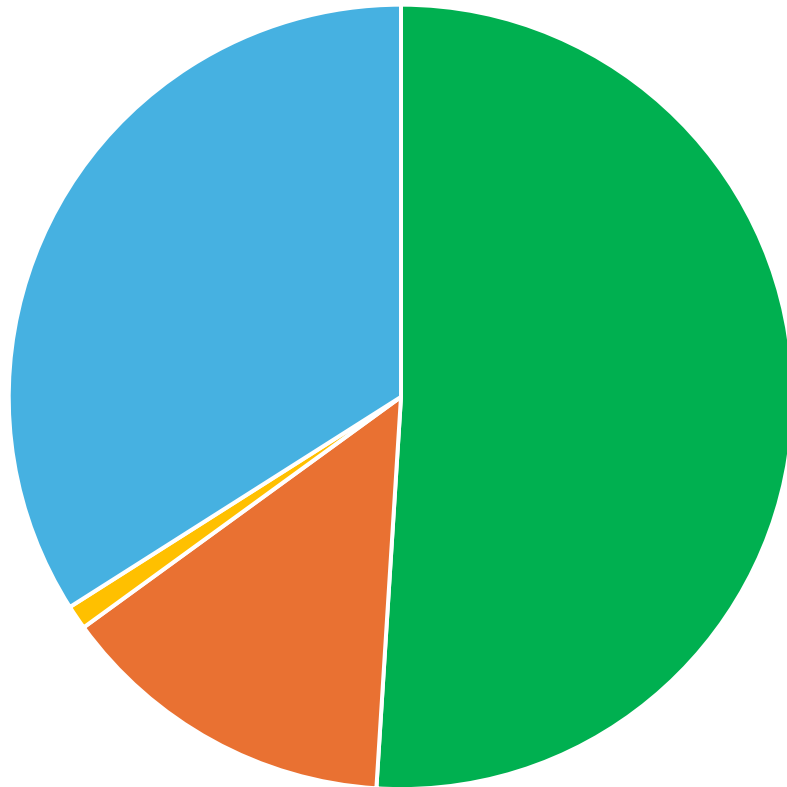
How many do you think were based on books?



All Quiet on the Western Front (1930) **Cimarron (1931)** Grand Hotel (1932) **It Happened One Night (1934)** Mutiny on the Bounty (1935) **Gone With the Wind (1939)** Rebecca (1940) **How Green Was My Valley (1941)** Mrs Miniver (1942) **The Lost Weekend (1945)** The Best Years of Our Lives (1946) **Gentleman's Agreement (1947)** All the King's Men (1949) **All About Eve (1950)** From Here to Eternity (1953) **Around the World in 80 Days (1956)** The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957) **Gigi (1958)** Ben-Hur (1959) **Lawrence of Arabia (1962)** Tom Jones (1963) **The Sound of Music (1965)** In the Heat of the Night (1967) **Oliver! (1968)** Midnight Cowboy (1969) **Patton (1970)** The French Connection (1971) **The Godfather (1972)** The Godfather Part II (1974) **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975)** Kramer vs. Kramer (1979) **Ordinary People (1980)** Terms of Endearment (1983) **Out of Africa (1985)** The Last Emperor (1987) **Dances with Wolves (1990)** The Silence of the Lambs (1991) **Schindler's List (1993)** Forrest Gump (1994) **The English Patient (1996)** A Beautiful Mind (2001) **The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003)** Million Dollar Baby (2004) **No Country for Old Men (2007)** Slumdog Millionaire (2008) **Argo (2012)** 12 Years a Slave (2013) **Nomadland (2020)** Oppenheimer (2023)

# Academy Awards

## Story sources for best picture winners (1928-2023)



■ Books ■ Play ■ Remakes ■ Original Screenplay

Books: 51%

Original screenplay: 34%

Plays: 14%

Remakes: 1%



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## Ways of seeing

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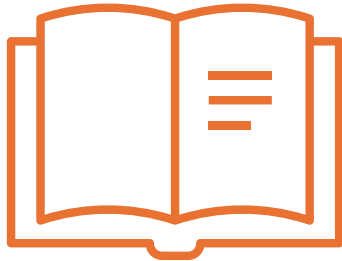
My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you **see**. That – and no more, and it is everything.

**Joseph Conrad (novelist), 1897**

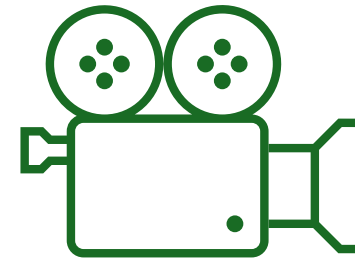
The task I am trying to achieve is above all to make you **see**.

**D.W. Griffith (film director), 1913**

# Ways of seeing



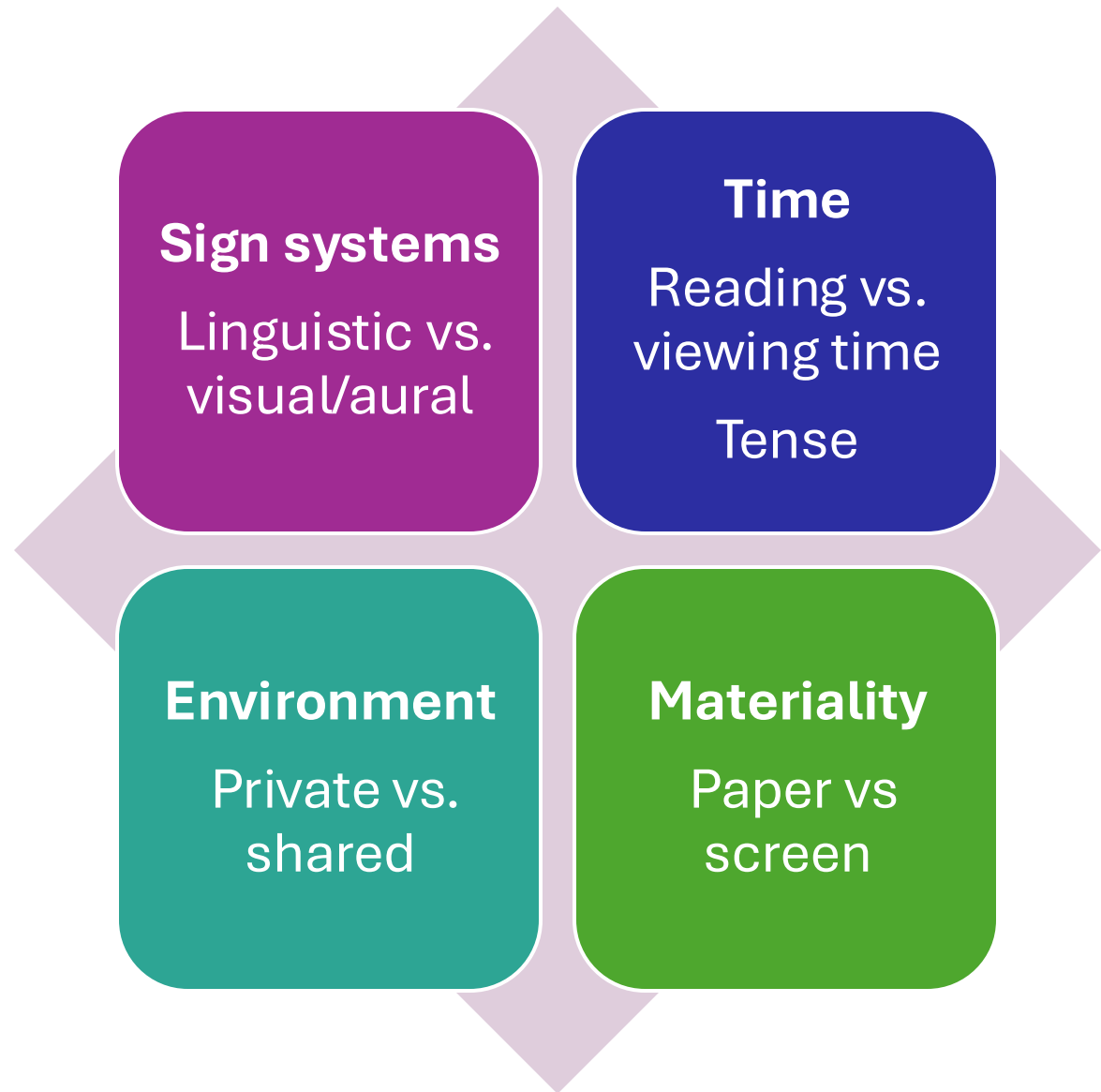
What does it mean to 'see'  
through literature?



What does it mean to 'see'  
through film?



How do films and books mediate stories differently from one another?  
– a few starting points





# Some (light) film theory and literary theory on adaptation

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## Part 2



# Story and plot

'Story' is simply the basic succession of events, the raw material which confronts the artist. Plot represents the distinctive way in which the story is made strange, creatively deformed and defamiliarized.

**Terence Hawkes (literary critic)**

Novel and film can share the same story, the same 'raw materials,' but are distinguished by means of different plot strategies which alter sequence, highlight different emphases, which – in a word – defamiliarize the story.

**Brian McFarlane (film critic)**

# George Wagner's 3 types of adaptation

## Transposition

‘in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference’

**Being true to the book**

## Commentary

‘where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect ... when there has been a different intention on the part of the film-maker, rather than infidelity or downright violation’

**Passing comment on the book**

## Analogy

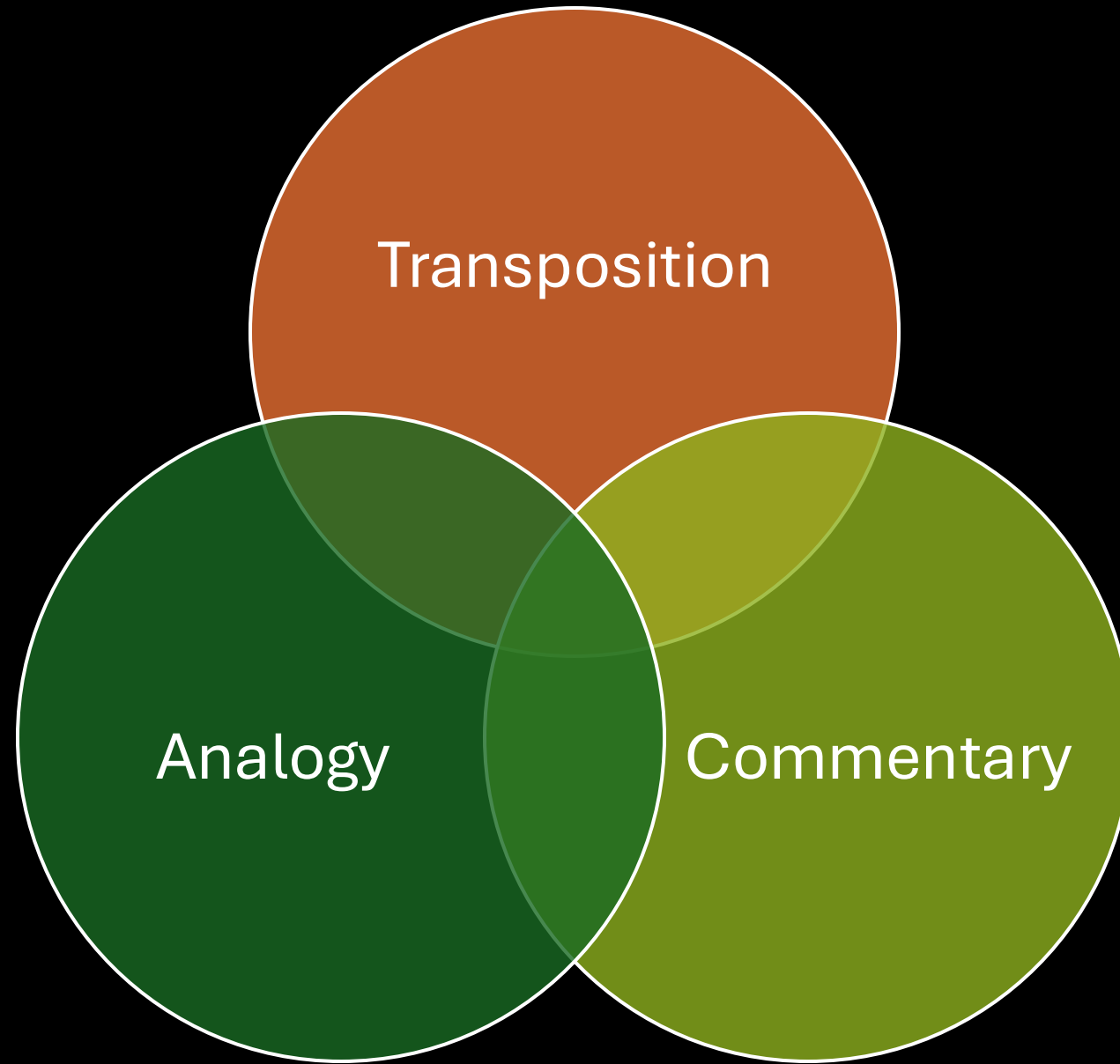
‘which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art’

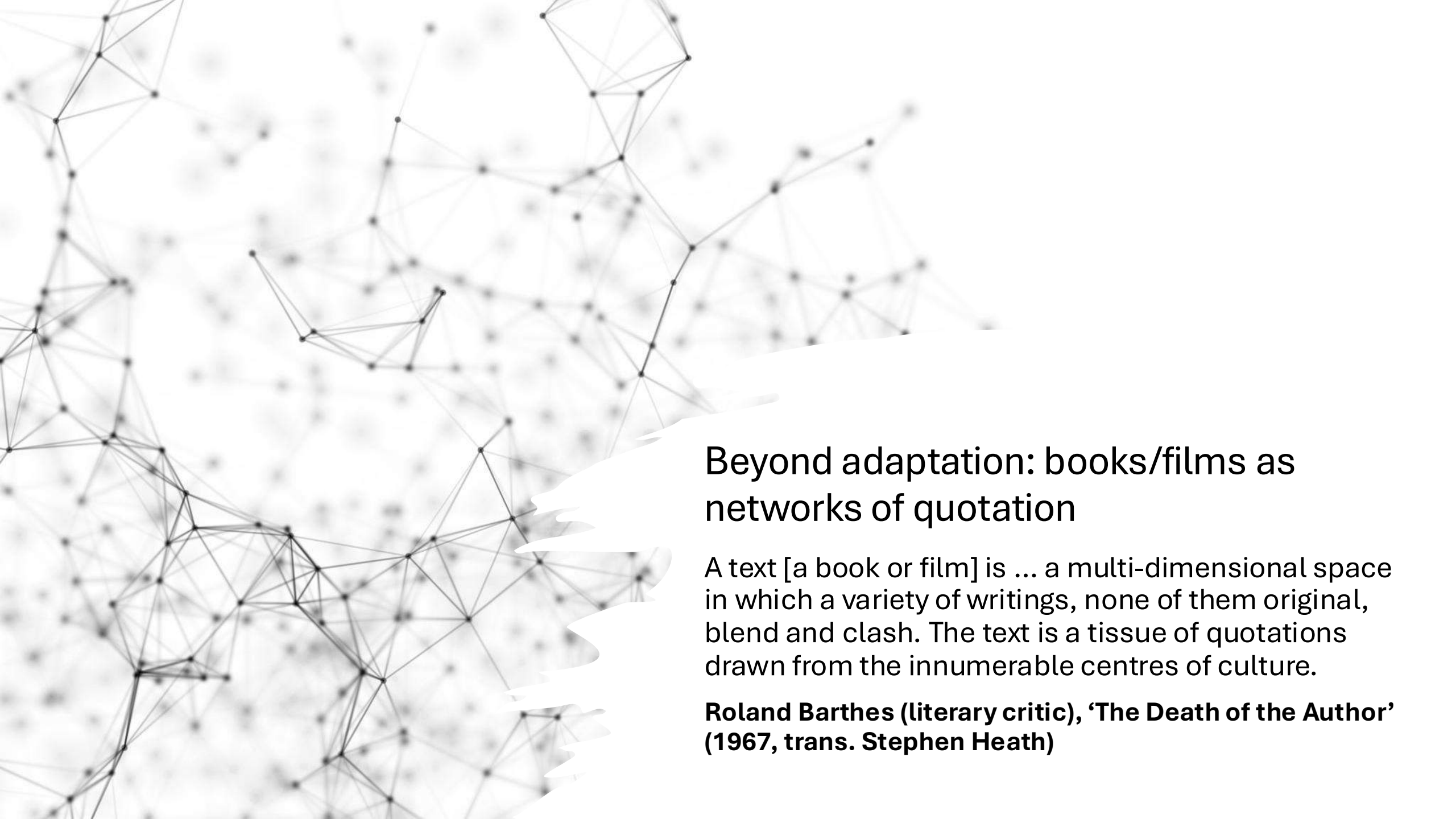
**Using the book as inspiration for something else**

Source: George Wagner, *The Novel and Film* (1975)

See also: Dudley Andrew, ‘The Well-Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory’ (1980); Deborah Cartmell, *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (2012)







## Beyond adaptation: books/films as networks of quotation

A text [a book or film] is ... a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.

**Roland Barthes (literary critic), 'The Death of the Author' (1967, trans. Stephen Heath)**



# Mickey7 / Mickey 17: First impressions

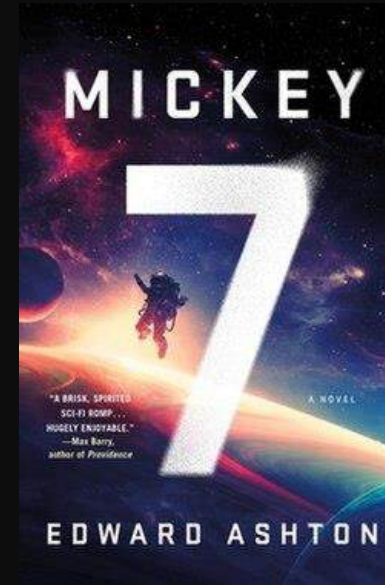
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Part 3

# What did you think of this week's book and film?

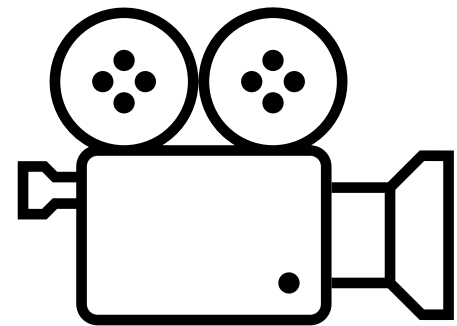
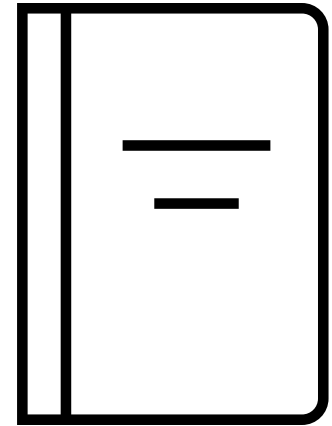
- What interested you about the book and/or film?
- What did the film do differently to the book?
- What is gained in the translation from book to film and what is lost?
- What, for you, were the main issues in the book/film?
- What do you think of the artistic choices made by Edward Ashton and Bong Joon Ho?
- Were there any moments in book or film that struck you as particularly interesting?





## A few of the differences between book and film

- Planet Midgard in the book reverts to being Earth in the film – larger history of Earth diaspora removed in film
- Mickey
  - His interest in history – and the history of planetary colonisation – doesn't feature in the film
  - In the film he acquires a traumatic childhood incident (the red button incident)
  - Is the relationship with his clone more hostile in the film?
- Marshall is fleshed out for broader satirical intent in the film; his wife, Ylfa, doesn't feature in the book
  - Book: not a 'villain from a vid drama' (p. 271)
- Alan Manikova: populates a planet with himself in book; is a serial killer in film
- Mickey's friendships: Berto (book) vs Timo (film)
- Ending: broader changes in Niflheim society in the film





# Clones and doppelgängers

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Part 4

# Edgar Allan Poe 'William Wilson' (1839)



Illustration by Arthur Rackham (1935)

His cue, which was to perfect **an imitation of myself**, lay both in words and in actions; and most admirably did he play his part. My dress it was an easy matter to copy; my gait and general manner, were, without difficulty, appropriated; in spite of his constitutional defect, even my voice did not escape him. My louder tones were, of course, unattempted, but then the key, it was identical; *and his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own.*

How greatly **this most exquisite portraiture harassed me** ... I will not now venture to describe. I had but one consolation – in the fact that **the imitation, apparently, was noticed by myself alone** ... .

**A large mirror, (so at first it appeared to me in my confusion),** now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced, with a feeble and tottering gait, to meet me.

**Thus it appeared, I say, but was not. It was my antagonist** -- it was Wilson, who then stood before me ... . He said --

*'You have conquered, and I yield. Yet **henceforward art thou also dead** – dead to the world and its hopes. **In me didst thou exist** – and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.'*



## Clones as alien/non-human

Invasion of the Body Snatchers  
(Don Siegel, 1956)

Townpeople have been replaced  
by alien clones. Here, the aliens  
(clones of their former neighbours)  
explain the benefits of becoming  
clones to Miles and Becky

See also: the 1978 remake



# Clones and split personalities

- Star Trek
- 'The Enemy Within' (1966)
- Episode trailer
- Captain Kirk is split into two by a transporter malfunction



# Clones and split personalities

- Star Trek
- 'The Enemy Within' (1966)
- Mr Spock analyses Captain Kirk(s!)



## Clones and the Uncanny

The Stepford Wives  
(Bryan Forbes, 1975)

Joanna discovers she is to be replaced by a facsimile of herself



## Clones and the Uncanny

The Stepford Wives  
(Bryan Forbes, 1975)

Clones of Stepford women  
shop in the supermarket



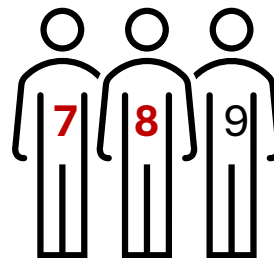
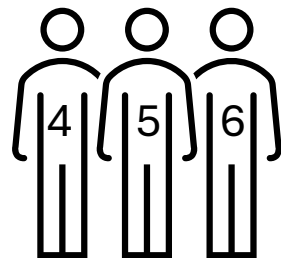
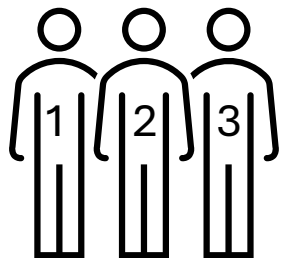
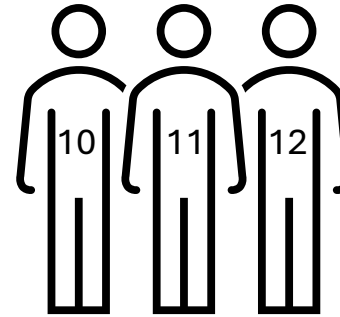
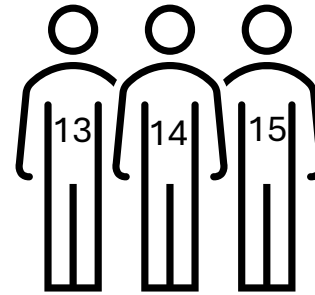
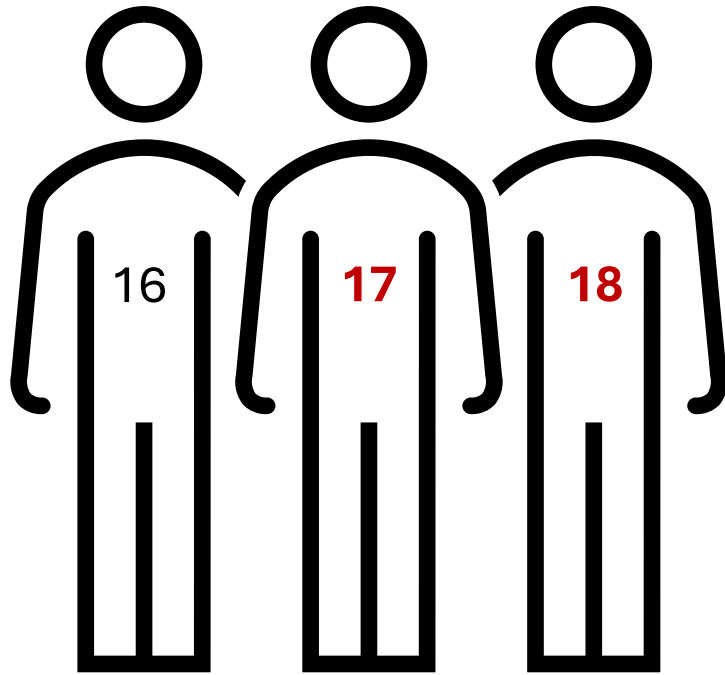
## Clones and loss of selfhood



Moon

(Duncan Jones, 2009)

Having met someone who looks like him on a moonbase (on which he thought he worked alone), Sam asks GERTY, an artificial intelligence, whether he's a clone.



How does Mickey7/Mickey 17 treat the idea of cloning?

- Does it address similar issues to the previous examples?
- Does it bring anything new to it?
- What is the relation between Mickey7 and Mickey8 (in the book)? Is it the same as that between Mickey 17 and Mickey 18 (in the film)?

Mickey 17  
and Mickey  
18 discover  
one another



## Discovering the clone (book)

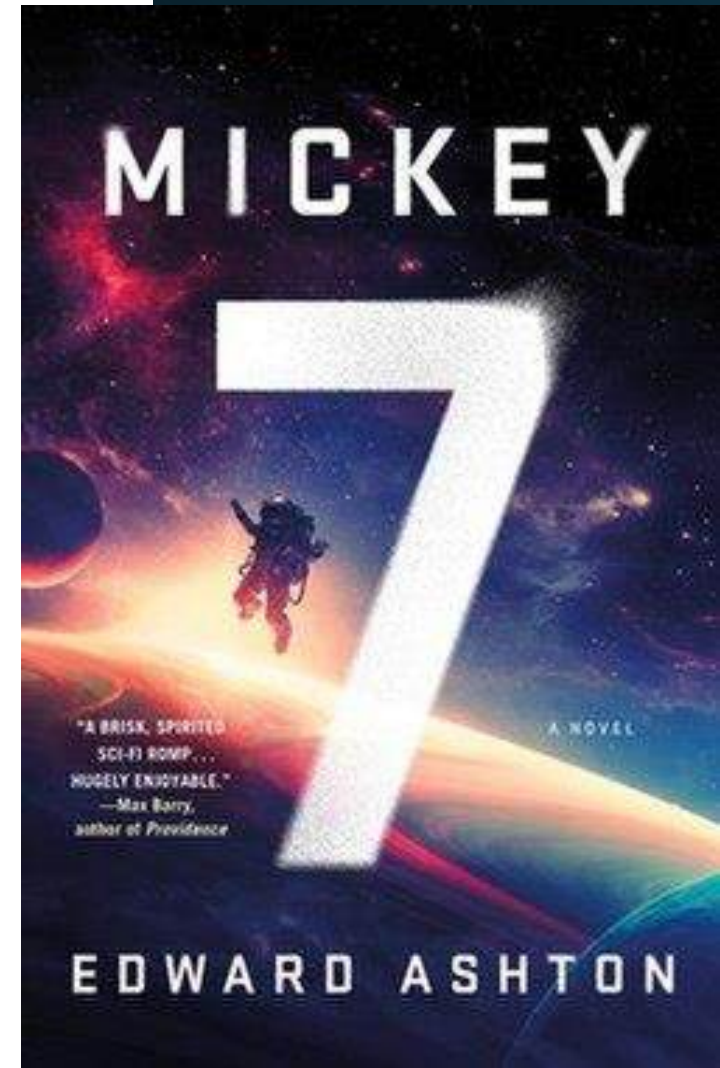
I first realize we may have an issue when I try to key my door. It's already unlocked. I push it open, heart pounding out a staccato rhythm in my chest. There's someone in my bed, with my blanket pulled up to his chin. His hair is plastered to his forehead, and his face is streaked with what looks like dried snot. I take two steps forward, and swing the door closed behind me. His eyes pop open at the sound of the latch closing.

‘Hey,’ I say.

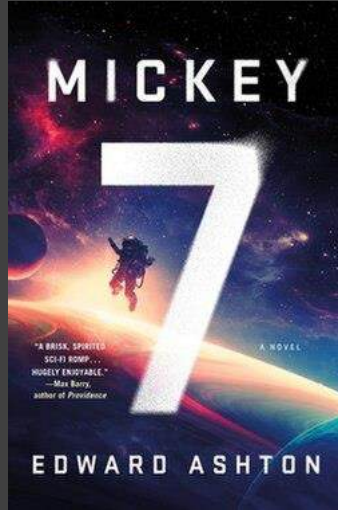
He sits half up and puts a hand to his face. ‘What the ...’ He looks at me, and his eyes go wide.

‘Crap,’ he says. ‘I’m Mickey8, aren’t I?’

**p. 27**



# Playing rock-paper-scissors to go in the cyclor



‘Look,’ I say, ‘Are we doing this?’  
‘I guess so,’ he says.  
‘He raises his left hand. I  
raise my right. We clench our  
fists and say the words together.  
‘One ...’  
‘Two ...’  
‘Three ...’  
‘Shoot’

I’m planning to go with Rock,  
right up until we shoot. But then I  
remember that he’s me. He’s  
probably thinking the same  
thing. So it’s Paper, right? But  
what if he’s thinking that too? He  
could be figuring I’ll go with  
Paper and shooting Scissors. So  
that brings me back to Rock,  
which is good because by the  
time I work my way through all of  
that it’s too late and my fist is  
still clenched

I look down.

His hand is held our flat.

‘Sorry, brother,’ he says.

**p. 51**

I don’t get shoved into the cyclor  
at this time. The disassembler  
field doesn’t get me.

I’m explaining this now because  
you looked nervous.

I’m on my hands and knees,  
looking down at the hole. Swear  
to God, I’m gonna do it. I lower my  
face down, right next to the  
interface. I can feel the field  
pulling at my, a tingle along my  
cheeks and across the bridge of  
my nose as it strokes my skin, and  
I’m trying to figure out a way to do  
this that will be something less  
than agonizing, when I feel a hand  
on my shoulder.

...

‘No,’ Eight says. He pulls me back  
onto my heels and offers me a  
hand up. ‘This isn’t right. I can’t  
just stand here and watch you do  
this.’

**p. 60**



# Robert Pattinson, Bong Joon Ho and Dan Glass (Visual Effects Supervisor) on Mickeys 17 and 18


‘Creating Characters for Mickey  
17’ (Warner Bros promotional  
material)



Design and production staff (plus Naomie Ackie –  
Nasha) on Mickey and technology

‘Creating the Visuals of Mickey  
17’ (Warner Bros promotional  
material)





## Playing with identity: Mickey7 becomes Mickey8 on the messaging system

I've just bounced back a read receipt when a second window opens next to the first, partially covering Nasha's face with text.

**<Mickey8>**: You're seeing the summons from Command too, right?

**<Mickey8>**: Yeah, I see it.

**<Mickey8>**: Ugh. We're both Mickey8 now, huh?

**<Mickey8>**: Looks like it.

**<Mickey8>**: Great. This is gonna be confusing.

**pp. 73-74**

# By being an 'expendable,' Mickey is disturbing to some of the colonists

soulless monster  
(p. 84, p. 206)

abomination  
(p. 84, p. 259)

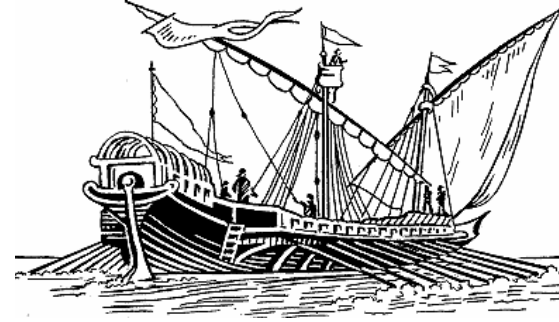
spooky  
(p. 128)

zombie  
(p. 156)

ghost  
[desired by 'ghost-  
chasers']  
(p. 156)

[Multiples likened to:]  
child stealers; human  
head collectors (p.  
226)

# The Ship of Theseus

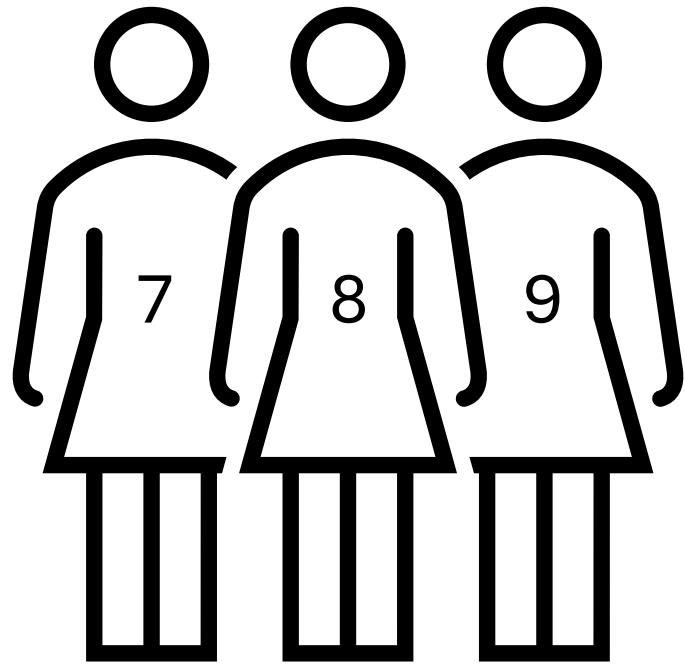


The book makes extensive reference to a philosophical puzzle, the Ship of Theseus.

- What does this add to our understanding of Mickey's predicament?
- Do the book or the film nudge us toward a particular solution to the puzzle?







## Seven and Eight discuss whether Nine will be them

I sigh, sit up, and turn to face him. ‘You’re not me, Eight. Isn’t that obvious?’

‘What’s your point?’

‘My point is that all that stuff Jemma crammed into our head back on Himmel Station – all the bits about immortality, anyway – that was all bullshit. This is it. The past six weeks are the only life I get, and the last few days are the only life you get. We’re fucking mayflies, and when Marshall shoves us down the corpse hole, that’s it for us. I don’t care if he pulls Nine out of the tank or not, because even if he does, *Nine won’t be me*. He’ll just be some other guy who sleeps in my bed and eats my rations and gets his hands all over my stuff.’

Eight shakes his head. ‘No. I don’t buy it. Remember that Ship of Theseus thing? Remember Kant? If he thinks he’s me, and everyone around him thinks he’s me, and there’s no way to prove he’s not me, then *he’s me*.’



# Aliens, insects and otherness

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Part 5

# Similarity and difference

- Mickey's story explores being human by thinking about minute differences between Mickey7 and Mickey8 but ...
- ... the book/film also explores being human by confronting the colonists of Niflheim with the alienness of the creepers



# Insects and humans in SF literature

## Octavia Butler, 'Bloodchild' (1984)

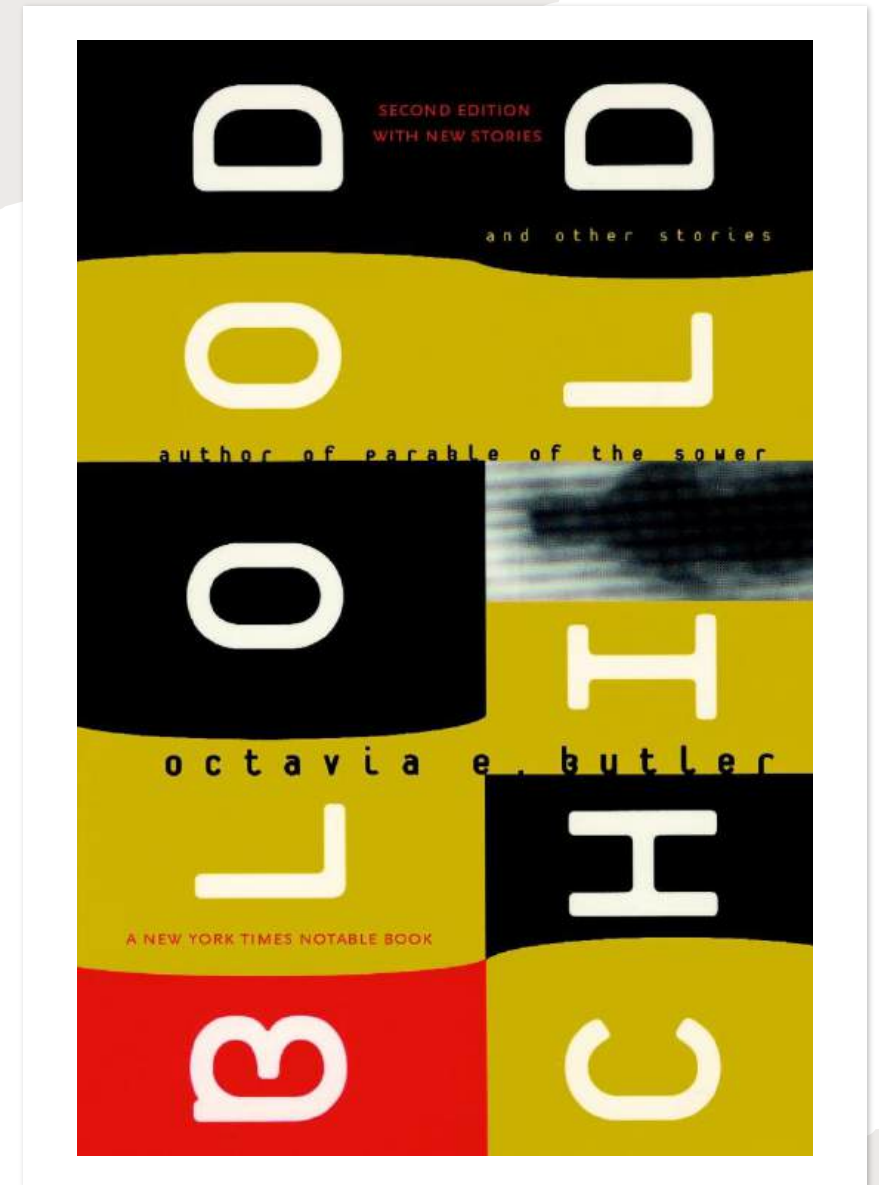
T'Gatoi whipped her three meters of body off her couch, toward the door, and out at full speed. She had bones – ribs, a long spine, a skull, four sets of limbs per segment. But when she moved that way, twisting, hurling herself, she seemed not only boneless, but aquatic – something swimming through the air as though it were water. I loved watching her move.

...

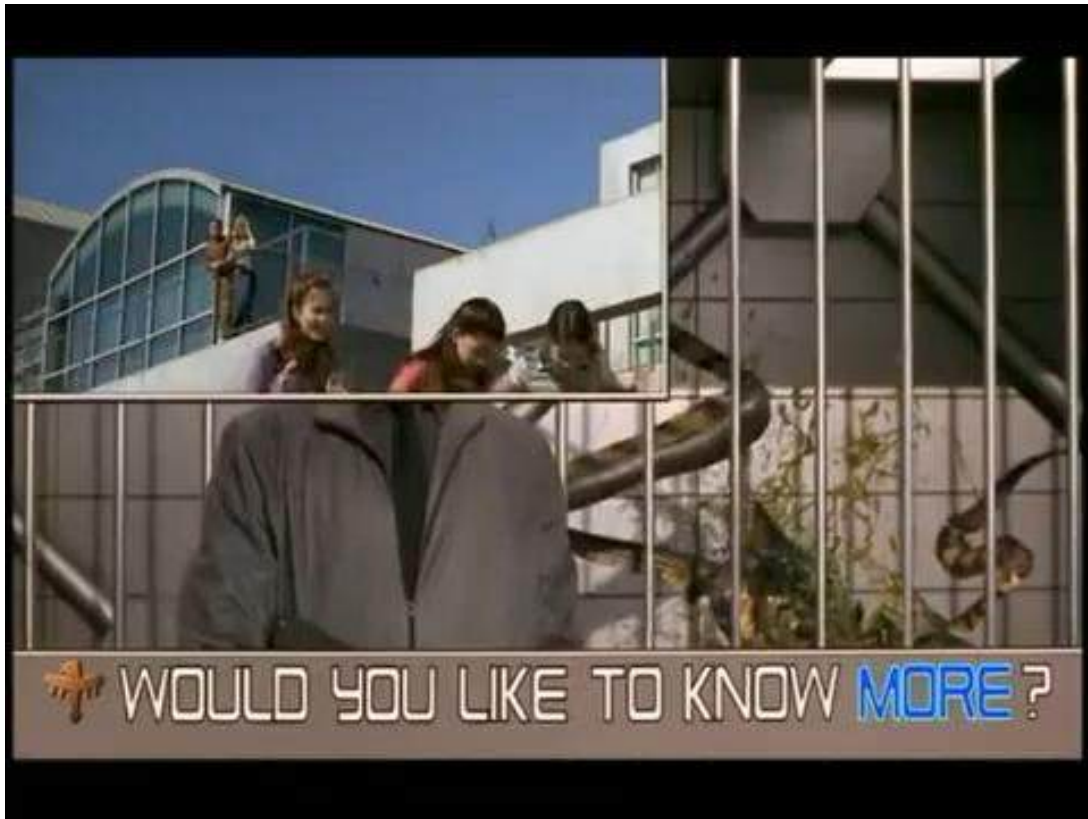
T'Gatoi glanced at me, then placed a claw against Lomas's abdomen, slightly to the right of the middle, just below the left rib – tiny, seemingly random pulsations moving his brown flesh, creating a concavity here, a convexity there, over and over until I could see the rhythm of it and knew where the next pulse would be.

...

And she opened him. ... She found the first grub. It was fat and deep red with blood – both inside and out. It had already eaten its own egg case but apparently had not yet begun to eat its host.







## Enemy insects? – Starship Troopers (Paul Verhoeven, 1997)

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Scene 1: propaganda film encourages children to pitch into the war against the bugs

Scene 2: the starship troopers capture an enemy bug



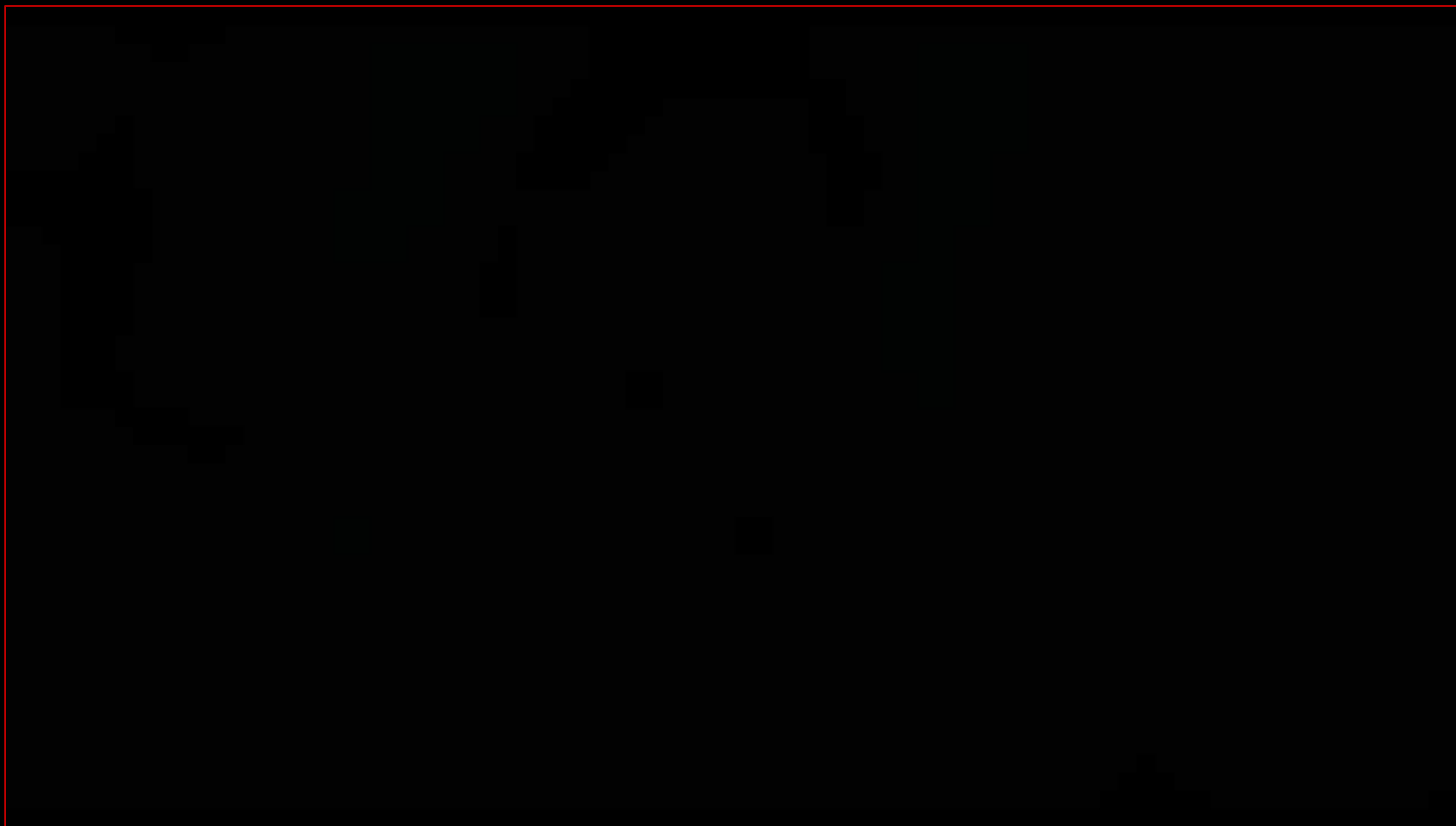


## The 'creepers' in Mickey7 / Mickey 17

- How do Edward Ashton and Bong Joon Ho's represent the creepers?
- How is the encounter between human and alien important in the book/film?
- Are there differences in the representation between book and film?

Mickey encounters the creepers

Mickey 17



## Marshall and Nasha discuss the creepers

**[Marshall:]** My God, Agent Berge. You used to be a five-time Marshall Cup champion, Agent of the Month, and now, now you're sweating over these alien insects!? How far you've fallen! What are you gonna do when they tear a hole in this ship and tear off your ass? These grotesque shit-gibbons ...

**[Nasha:]** Grotesque or not, they are the native inhabitants of this planet and we have proof that they saved one of us. They didn't eat him or attack him.'

**[Nasha:]** You call them aliens. We're the aliens dumb ass. They were here before us. ... They were just living their lives.



# Mickey's memory of the spider (book)

I suddenly remember being nine years old in my grandmother's country house back on Midgard. It was a sunny spring morning, and I'd caught a spider in my bedroom. I scooped him up in my cupped hands and trapped him, ran down the stairs and out the front door with his sharp little feet scrambling around and around my palms. I crouched down in the front garden, put my hands near the ground, and opened my fingers. As he scuttled away, I felt like a benevolent god.

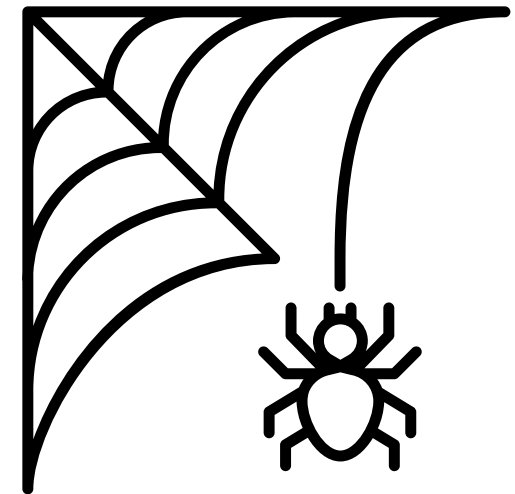
Through the hole in the wall, I can see the snow-dusted bulge of our main dome, no more than a couple of kilometers away. I'm the spider. I'm the spider, and that thing in the tunnel just set me down in the garden.

**p. 24**

I think back to that spider I set loose in my mother's [sic] garden all those years ago. If it had come back into the house, would I have saved it again, or would I have just crushed it and been done with it?

And what if I'd found a nest of spiders out there, hundreds of them, and realized they'd come to colonize the garden?

**p. 287**



You might have the impression at this point that every colony that's ever been attempted has failed miserably. That's not remotely true, obviously. ... Take Bergen's World, for example.

...

[There] they sterilized the smaller continent. Burned it down damn near to the bedrock.

It's a beautiful place now. Practically a paradise, from everything I've read.

So, yeah, it's not true that every time we make landfall on a new planet we wind up dying.

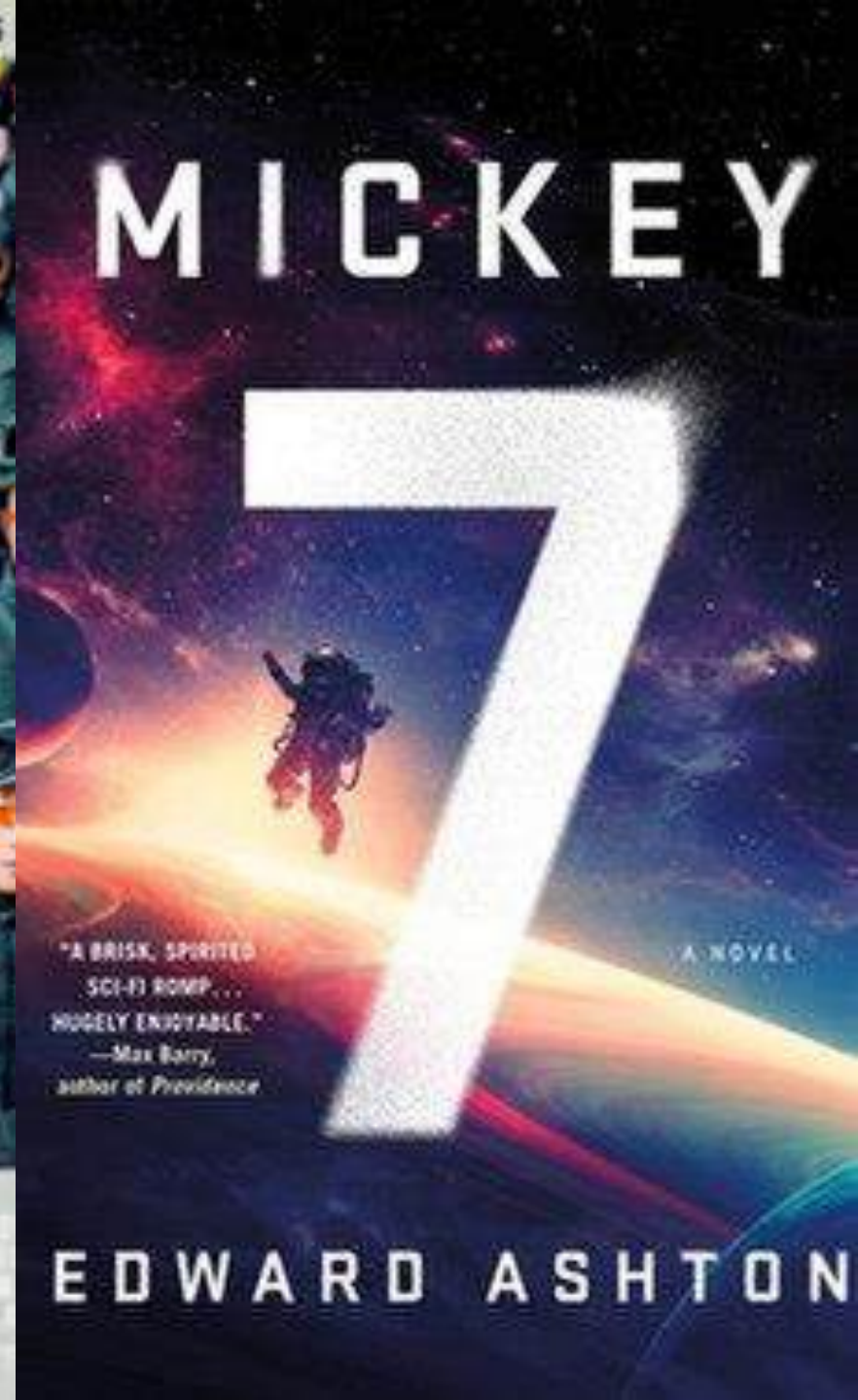
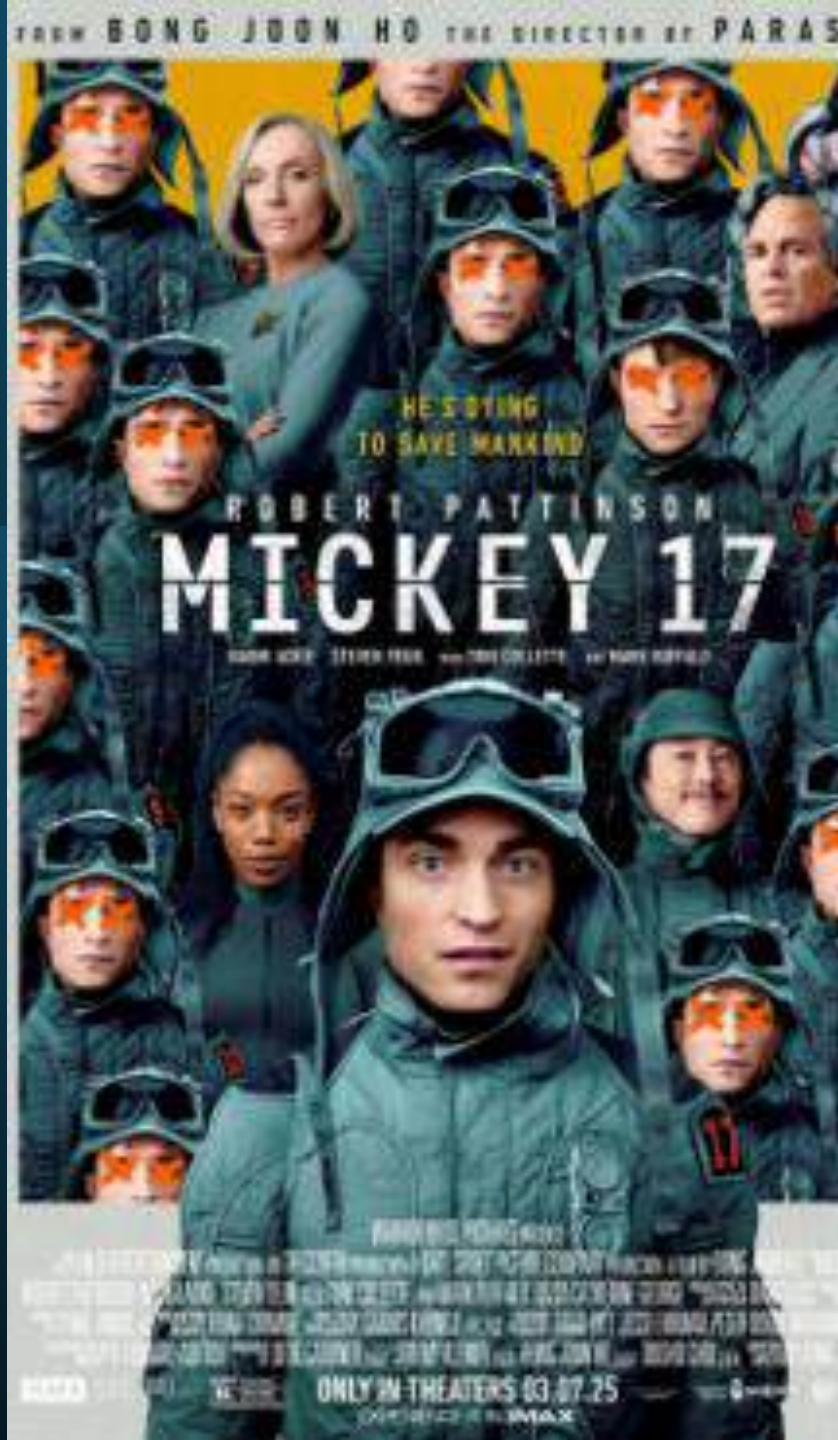
I mean, *somebody* almost always does.

It's just not necessarily us.





# Conclusions





# Next week: a different kind of cloning!

After watching a few scenes of this mirror world, I decided that Rona is a better version of me than I am: she's giving a more convincing performance, her emotions more authentic, motivations more clearly defined, experiences more deeply felt. I was never as committed to the role.

**Amy Liptrot, 'My Real Life as an Alcoholic, Played Out on the Big Screen' (*Guardian*, Sept 2024)**

