

12

Deliveries of absence: epistolary structures in classical cinema

Clara Rowland

Part I

In a late sequence from François Truffaut's *Stolen Kisses* (1968), Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud) sends a letter by 'pneumatic post'. It is a farewell letter: 'our feelings will die of the same impossibility of Félix de Vandenesse's love for Madame de Mortsau'. We see him writing the letter, discarding an early draft, writing it again and posting the letter at night in a Montmartre street while, in voice-over, we hear its contents read aloud by its author. The camera then follows the letter, in its delivery capsule, through an intricate network of underground tubes, until it is delivered on the other side of town where, at dawn, it is opened by a female hand. We then return to the street where the letter originated. Fabienne Tabard (Delphine Seyrig) has crossed Paris to deliver her reply personally to Doinel, proposing a contract with him, whereby she offers herself to him for a few hours: 'Look at me. You wrote me yesterday and the answer is ... me.'

Everything in this sequence, which I take as my departure point, seems to suggest a mirror pattern: a set of oppositions is established and enacted in the relation between the letter and its reply. The whole episode could be described as the doing and undoing of an epistolary situation. Antoine's love letter seems to encompass, under a sole figure, ideas of writing, literature, distancing and projection: sent at night, conveyed through voice-over, its underground trajectory mapping the city through signposts with the names of the corresponding streets, while the transmission process is handled by anonymous human machinery. Fabienne Tabard's reply is, in every way, the opposite of this: she walks through Paris to join Doinel in his room, talks about her own physicality in doing so and about the city she saw on her way, asserts their uniqueness and denies their identification with Balzac's *The Lily of the Valley*.

'I am not an apparition, I am a woman, which is just the opposite', she says to Antoine, thereby crystallising the conflict at the heart of this episode. In the rejection of the epistolary frame of reference summoned by the earlier

sequence, Fabienne also thereby rejects other forms of substitute, representative presence: indeed, in her personal appearance as simultaneously author of the reply and the unmediated delivery mechanism for it, the immediacy of vision seems to be restored. In fact, through a game of denial and affirmation, the letter and its reply reveal a tension in the idea of presence that inevitably encompasses the medium of representation. In this answer to the letter, the film seems to be affirming something about, in Laura Mulvey's phrasing, 'its uncertain relation to life and death':¹ in other words, through the medium of the letter, film is engaging with its own ontology. Can the cinematic letter bear this sort of representative weight? I believe it can for the letter opens up a divide where ideas of disembodiment and absence necessarily surface. One might think of Kafka's description of the love letter in *Letters to Milena*:

How on earth did anyone get the idea that people could communicate by letter! Of a distant person one can think, and of a person who is near one can catch hold – all else goes beyond human strength. Writing letters, however, means to denude oneself before the ghosts, something for which they greedily wait. Written kisses don't reach their destination, rather they are drunk on the way by the ghosts. It is on this ample nourishment that they multiply so enormously. Humanity senses this and fights against it and in order to eliminate as far as possible the ghostly element between people and create a natural communication, the peace of souls, it has invented the railway, the motorcar, the aeroplane. But it's no longer any good, these are evidently inventions being made at the moment of crashing. The opposing side is so much calmer and stronger; after the postal service it has invented the telegraph, the telephone, the radiograph. The ghosts won't starve, but we will perish.²

Kafka's letter, one of literature's most uncanny depictions of epistolarity, is also a depiction of writing: Kafka describes 'one's own ghost' secretly evolving 'inside the letter one is writing or even in a whole series of letters' and addressing the ghost of the recipient. In the spatial and temporal interval opened up by letters, a phantasmatic dimension is inevitably conjured. From this stems the famous opposition of two 'orders' of inventions: transportation technologies, where touch is possible and bodies are brought together; and then, an army of ghosts equipped with letters, telegraphs or telephones enacting a form of disembodied communication. As Deleuze once noted, photography and cinema would be part of this second order.³ The sequence from *Stolen Kisses* is built upon the same opposition. Truffaut, I suggest, encapsulates in these few minutes some of the uncanny and agonistic tensions at stake.

My hypothesis is that the conflict between the opposing concepts in this example illustrates the functioning of the letter in film. I will look

at how this problem is approached differently in two near-contemporary features: Max Ophüls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) and Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949). Both are structured around epistolary motifs and both signal a clear interest, within classical cinema,⁴ in the circulation of writing. My analysis of both films will examine the conventions of epistolary representation, with its elaborate articulation of voice-over strategies and flashback structures. As has been often recognized, in these two films these conventions are boldly taken to their limits, and I want to suggest that the way in which they engage with their own form can be assessed through the tensions inscribed in the letter as a rhetorical figure. The idea of a separation between voice and body is to them especially relevant – either in the form of a disembodied voice-over, as in *A Letter to Three Wives*, or in the form of a posthumous voice in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. In this, both films seem to enact what I would like to call a cinematic response to the letter, where ideas of writing and cinema are questioned and addressed. In fact, as I shall argue, two opposite responses emerge: denial and subscription.

Part II

As in the story of the spartan – in Plutarch's *Apophthégmata lakoniká* – who plucked a nightingale and, finding very little meat, scorned: 'You are just a voice, and nothing more!' (João Guimarães Rosa, 'Aletria e Hermenêutica').

I begin with *A Letter to Three Wives*. In the famous scene where the letter is delivered, the three women are leaving on a boat for a day-trip. Addie Ross's letter is handed to them as they are about to board the boat. They read it together, Addie's voice-over doubling the words on the page, with its disturbing announcement: 'You see, girls, I ran off with one of your husbands.' Hesitating, they obey the captain and climb the stairs. While the boat prepares for departure, the three of them stand on the deck, casting a long, frustrated look at a public telephone on shore.

Although this letter has been visible to the viewer since the title credits, it is only at this point that its importance as a narrative object is established. It is also at this point that this film reveals itself to be based upon the defining polarities of communication. It does so obliquely: for the letter, through its material deployment and integral reading, is presented as an apparently delimited element within the space of the film. Its effects, however, will be difficult to circumscribe. At the level of plot, the letter sets up a question (to whom is it addressed?) that will remain active until the very end. And through an articulated series of displacements in the film's structuring, the two elements conventionally associated with

letters (voice-over and flashback) will be sundered from what nonetheless remains their source, beginning either before or after the letter. Such a scene establishes the most significant tension at stake here: the tension between the letter *in* the film and the letter as the structuring device *of* the film.⁵ As we shall see, a similar effect will define *Letter from an Unknown Woman* as a ‘double letter’.⁶

It is tempting to see the opposition between letter and telephone in the light of a suggestion made by Tom Gunning: ‘If the telephone had not existed, film would have to invent it’.⁷ As a creation of modernity, the telephone perfectly illustrates cinema’s affinity for technology. In itself, the telephone stands for something eminently cinematic, drawing attention, by contrast, to the specifically literary character of the letter. The scene of the women holding the potent letter and gazing from the deck of their departing boat at the inaccessible phone box clearly states the film’s entrance in what one might call an ‘epistolary mode’: the divide between letter and telephone becomes a divide between deferral and immediacy, setting up the particular temporality that will structure the film until the boat’s return. The three flashbacks that make up the movie take place in this interval, which is transformed by Addie’s letter into a suspended period of waiting and retrospection. Significantly, one of the wives will describe the three women as ‘beginning to behave as in some movie about a women’s prison’. Until their return to shore, *A Letter to Three Wives* is on the side of the letter.

This distinction between modes of communication reinforces the letter’s role in this film as a figure of deferral. However, from a broader perspective, the telephone cannot be entirely isolated from it. If we consider the part radio will play during the second flashback, where the marriage of Rita (Ann Sothern) is threatened both by her work for the radio *and* by Addie Ross, we may begin to see how the family of ghostly forms of communication interacts in the film. What letters, radio and the telephone appear to have in common in *A Letter to Three Wives* is a connection to the idea of a disembodied voice. Proust admirably described the telephone as an instance of separation between voice and body in his character’s first phone call in *The Guermantes’ Way*:

Suddenly I heard that voice which I mistakenly thought I knew so well; for always until then, every time that my grandmother had talked to me, I had been accustomed to follow what she said on the open score of her face, in which the eyes figured so largely; but her voice itself I was hearing this afternoon for the first time. And because that voice appeared to me to have altered in its proportions from the moment that it was a whole, and reached me thus alone and without the accompaniment of her face and features, I discovered for the first time how sweet that voice was . . . It was sweet, but also how sad it was . . .; ‘Granny!’ I cried to her, ‘Granny!’

and I longed to kiss her, but I had beside me only the voice, a phantom as impalpable as the one that would perhaps come back to visit me when my grandmother was dead.⁸

The telephone functions here as a marker of the same polarity that, according to Janet Altman, is constitutive of every letter: bridge/barrier.⁹ The threat of separation is always implicit in its connective function. The possibility of death is discovered and anticipated through the encounter with nothing but a voice. This effect is, as in Kafka, reliant on the mediation of absence, on the fact that bodies are beyond reach. Separated from the face and its readability, this voice becomes the voice of the dead. Michel Chion has read this passage as an example of *acousmatic voice*,¹⁰ connecting its uncanny effect to the cinematic device of *voice-over*. As Mary Ann Doane has stressed, the separation of the voice from its source through *voice-off* or *voice-over* effects entails, in the classical film, the risk of 'exposing the material heterogeneity' of the medium; a risk that is often covered up by the integration of this voice within the dramatic framework, and by its anchoring to a visible body.¹¹ Provocatively, in *A Letter to Three Wives*, this 'integration' is denied. Addie's voice-over, initially identified as the source of the film, will never be linked to an image. Her voice seems to be hovering over and around the space of a film that, at the same time, seems to revolve around her absence.

In the two examples proposed, the unsettling of the body-voice relation is dependent upon a third element: the inscription of writing. If letters are typically represented through voice-over strategies, we may ask what is at stake when epistolary structures prevent the reintegration of voice and image. These films associate letter writing with a denial of the image in very different ways. Perhaps in these cases the problematic anchoring of the voice depends more on the presence of writing than on the absence (or posthumous impossibility) of a body; or perhaps the uncanny effect of these voices stems from the fact that their source is an absence bodied forth in the form of a letter.

Part III

Of such a letter, death himself might well have been the post-boy (Melville, *Moby Dick*).

Recognition may be said to be the subject of Stefan Zweig's 1922 novella 'Letter from an unknown woman' from which the Ophüls film was adapted. It becomes a leitmotiv throughout the woman's confession. For her, to be visible is to be recognised as an 'enduring picture' through the intelligibility of memory. It has often been remarked that the fundamental difference between the Ophüls/Koch screenplay and the literary text

it adapts is the man's inability to remember. Žižek, for example, briefly summarizes this view:

What is especially interesting here is the difference between the film and Zweig's story, a difference that confirms the superiority of the film (and thus refutes the commonplace about the Hollywood 'vulgarization' of literary masterpieces). In the story, the pianist receives the letter, reads it, and remembers the woman only in a few hazy flashes – she simply didn't mean anything to him.¹²

Robin Wood, listing the major differences in the adaptation, also notes this distinction: 'Stefan [Louis Jourdan], even at the end, never manages to remember Lisa [Joan Fontaine], and her letter has no discernible effect on his life'.¹³ Yet, the idea of a 'discernible effect' is the problematic focus of the novella's last paragraphs: if the writer is unable to form a discrete image of the woman in his mind, the text ends, nonetheless, with an immaterial perception of 'death and (...) of deathless love'. Avrom Fleishman was right in suggesting that 'by having the protagonist go out to die, the film's finale acts out the story's metaphysical rhetoric of a transaction with the dead'.¹⁴ The novella's complex interplay of remembrance and recognition is essential to an understanding of the film's remediation of its source.

Both of my central case study films, in fact, inherit the epistolary motif from their source texts. *A Letter to Three Wives* was adapted from John Klempner's novella 'A Letter to Five Wives' that had been published in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in 1945. Everything in the film reinforces the epistolary situation created by Klempner, beginning with the film's central idea, Addie Ross's invisibility (claimed by some to have been the suggestion of producer Sol Siegel).¹⁵ But Ophüls' film is adapted from a text that is itself built upon a doubled structure: the Zweig novella places the long, uninterrupted letter-text inside a very brief narrative frame that explicitly questions the effects of reading. This, I believe, cannot be separated from the issue of recognition. The novella is staging writing through writing, while at the same time placing a writer in the position of the reader: this series of doublings is of crucial importance in considering the relations between writing and film. In the novella, the very first thing we are told about R., the novelist, is that he is reminded of his own birthday by glancing at a newspaper's date. We could see this as a premonition of the way the letter will entail a revelation of mortality. But we could also think of this man as being described through Theuth's warning: 'Trust in writing will make them remember things by relying on marks made by others, exterior to them'.¹⁶ In any case, the question this novella asks is one concerning the powers and pitfalls of writing. And, on a broader scale, the same is true of the films themselves.

This is the major issue at the end of the Zweig 'Letter from an unknown woman' novella, when the narrative frame describes the writer's reaction to having read the anonymous letter:

The letter fell from his nerveless hands. He thought long and deeply. Yes, he had vague memories of a neighbour's child, of a girl, of a woman in a dancing hall – all was dim and confused, like a flickering and shapeless view of a stone in the bed of a swiftly running stream. Shadows chased one another across his mind, but would not fuse into a picture. There were stirrings of memory in the realm of feeling, and still he could not remember. It seemed to him that he must have dreamt all these figures, must have dreamt often and vividly – and yet they had been the phantoms of a dream. His eyes wandered to the blue vase on the writing table. It was empty. For years it had not been empty on his birthday. He shuddered, feeling as if an invisible door had been suddenly opened, a door through which a chill breeze from another world was blowing into his sheltered room. An intimation of death came to him, and an intimation of deathless love. Something welled up within him, and the thought of the dead woman stirred in his mind, bodiless and passionate, like the sound of distant music.¹⁷

The novelist is unable to remember her. His inability to see is described as an inability to form an intelligible image from scattered flashes (beginning, middle and end: the child, the girl, the woman), shaping them into a consistent visual whole. The tension between the fleeting impression of her body in time and the endurance of memory, as described in the letter, returns here in the opposition between the running stream and the shapeless stone: her image is to him unattainable. However, after restating his blindness, the text depicts an act of perception: the man's eyes wander to his writing desk, where he perceives the absence of the white flowers. Invested by her narrative with a metonymic dimension (these were *her* flowers), the emptiness of the vase depletes the trope and becomes an image of death: the writer thinks of the invisible woman (die *Unsichtbare*, in the German text) as a void, her existence paradoxically acknowledged by its negation (dematerialized: in bodiless thought, like a distant sound). Only in a blank figuration can this recognition of death, brought by a posthumous letter, take place. We are not far here from Zweig's description, in another novella, 'The Invisible Collection', of the blind collector in unknowing contemplation of the blank sheets that have been substituted for his treasured prints:

I shuddered as the unsuspecting enthusiast extolled the blank sheet of paper; my flesh crept when he placed a fingernail on the exact spot where the alleged imprints had been made by long-dead collectors. It was as

ghostly as if the disembodied spirits of the men he named had risen from the tomb.¹⁸

It is this same problem that is brought to Ophüls' film by Zweig's 'Letter from an unknown woman', both in terms of the rendering of the letter and of the film's relation to its source. If the perception of a void is the effect of this posthumous reading, can the film put forth what the text itself denies? And how do we relate the voice-over to the articulation between images and writing? These are central questions to Ophüls' work, which, according to Marie Claire-Ropars, 'claims, at the same time, reference to Literature and the self-sufficiency of film'.¹⁹ *Letter from an Unknown Woman* clearly enacts this conflict by foregrounding the letter's materiality through scenes where it is being written and read, counterbalanced, in a complex use of flashback convention, by images in which Lisa's narrative is visually rendered. By doing so, the unknown woman is given not only a name, but also a face. And if the story is *about* recognition, it is also clear that what is impossible in Zweig's text – the reader's remembrance of the nameless writer – becomes possible in the film, where the protagonist can finally act in answer to the letter. Stefan is held back by the letter and prompted by its reading to sacrifice himself in the final duel.

One should not, however, jump to the conclusion that the film responds to the denial of the image in Zweig's story through its flashbacks. In fact, those images are clearly framed by writing. V.F. Perkins has called attention to the fact that the film has a palindromic pattern: the beginning and the end are marked by a series of symmetrical repetitions, such as Stefan's gesture in covering up his eyes, first employed immediately before washing his face, and subsequently echoed, though now in despair, immediately after reading the letter. 'The effect is to lend weight to the containment of Lisa's story within Stefan's, and so to balance our sense of Lisa's letter as the frame within which the events of the past are accessed.'²⁰

I would like to take this idea further, by focusing on how the doubling between writing and voice-over is introduced. The letter is delivered to Stefan by his mute butler as he enters his apartment and gives instructions for his departure. He moves around his chambers, throws the letter on his writing desk, takes it to the bathroom where he washes his eyes. At that moment, he is attracted to the letter by its first sentence, which arrests his movements and brings him to the text: 'by the moment you read this letter I may be dead'. We read this sentence through a close-up, *before* it is repeated by the voice-over as Stefan sits down to his reading. From that moment on, the flashback is triggered. The voice comes into play as a deferred doubling of writing. There are only two shots in the film where Lisa's text is *readable* on the screen, in close-ups in which writing figures as both a verbal *and* visual inscription: the beginning of the manuscript was the first. We return to an image of writing, and to the clear repetition of text and voice, only

at the end of the flashback. Lisa's final uttered words (*If only...*), interrupted by death as she writes them,²¹ are the *raccord* to a voiceless shot of the same words on that last page, now in Stefan's desk, handwritten by Lisa and sealed by the partially typewritten announcement of her death by the sister-in-charge (significantly, these words have no voice-over). The structure is indeed palindromic, in Perkins's terms, or perhaps we should call it chiasmic: the uttered words follow or precede the writing, and delimit the complex perspective of the flashback in which Lisa is depicted. The letter functions as the mediator between the two spaces. The impossible co-presence of Lisa and Stefan – writing and reading separated by death, the condition for the letter's delivery – is enacted *through the letter* in its deferred doubling of sound (and as the voice ceases, images get blurred). This, I think, sheds some light upon the issue of invisibility raised by Zweig's text. For if the body of the woman has been constantly shown to us throughout the flashback, and her name has been literally shouted at our ears, what Stefan actually sees is *writing*. The ironic construction of the film seems to enact his blindness through our ability to see, while the status of the voice-over, as the transitional element between writing and the images, is brought into question. In this complex temporality, Lisa's death is revealed at the end of the letter (and of its reading) as having already occurred, being the condition to its delivery. Her voice is reread as the writing that survives her body: anchored to the letter, it has become a posthumous voice.

Part IV

Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? (Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener*)

To understand this better, I propose a return to the celebrated voice-over in *A Letter to Three Wives*. Initially presented as an omniscient narrator, Addie is then revealed to be part of the fictional world she describes and is finally deprived of her apparent control: her letter turns out to be undone by events she couldn't predict. 'A man can change his mind', reads the script: the husband she has run off with returns home. This movement, which is at the heart of the film's comic reversal, should draw our attention to the temporal status of her presumed knowledge.

The film opens with a fixed shot of a train leaving a station by the river. A woman's voice is heard: 'To begin with, all the incidents and characters in this story might be fictitious, and any resemblance to you, or me, might be purely coincidental.' Two things strike me as important here: the first is the way in which the film plays with the conventional written disclaimer. If this begins to establish the paradoxical construction of Addie's movements in and out of the fictional world she supposedly depicts, it also reveals a trope important to the film as a whole: Addie's voice doubles writing, or stands

for writing. And not just her writing: towards the end, Addie's voice will be heard over a text that is clearly not hers. Moreover, the initial sequence can be seen, retrospectively, as the moment when the letter is shipped, when we learn that Addie sold her car and left town; and we also learn that Porter (Paul Douglas) was actually seen at the station that morning. The beginning of the movie presents what we will discover to be two opposing movements: the train leaves with Addie while the letter is sent to the wives – Addie's departure is the condition for its delivery. From this stems the particular temporality of Addie's knowledge: her voice knows, one could say, what the letter knows; the letter functions in her absence and her action is confined to its consequences. The intermittent return of her voice can be more or less directly traced to the letter's effects and implications. And the script's provocative insistence upon her body's invisibility is a form of negative affirmation: the voice is anchored to the presence of her absence, in the form of her letter.

It is possible, then, to see the plot's final reversal as the film's undoing of this ghostly presence, much like in Truffaut's example. This letter began its circuit by stating the problem of identifying its addressee (which wife?). The wives then pass from the recognition of themselves as candidates for that position (all three are addressed) to the reassurance of the security of their marriage (none is addressed). The three flashbacks make clear that Addie is a shadow in each of these women's relationships; yet it is also through the doubt instilled by the letter that the film becomes, once the boat returns to shore, a kind of remarriage comedy, in Cavell's terms,²² in which the threat to marriage and 'the ordinary' is overcome through a reassessment of an open past. The necessary condition to the confirmation of marriage is presence: 'being there' is the answer given by two of the husbands to the women's fears.²³ With this movement, the letter becomes, at one and the same time, unanswerable (Addie has left no address) and undeliverable: it has become a dead letter. Addie can thus be 'the dear departed', or the invisible 'body under the table'²⁴ only until her absence is relevant. With the plot's final clarification, her disembodied voice takes leave with the famous shot of the glass breaking on the empty table. This radical figuration of an aural void is elided – with the film it signs – in the restoration of presence.

Part V

Nobody could fight his way through here even with a message from a dead man. But you sit at your window when evening falls and dream it to yourself. (Kafka, 'An Imperial Message')

We can now return to the ending of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and to the problem of its voice-over. As we have seen, the voices that double these belated letters are affected by the constitutive absence of their authors.

In the end, as the letter is emptied of meaning, Addie's voice takes leave. But in Ophüls' film, Stefan remembers Lisa. Finishing the interrupted letter, he looks away from the page, only to see the seven repeated shots that cause him such horror; the 'spell of his blindness', as Zweig has put it, seems to be broken. But those images are now contaminated by the consciousness of death. Between their first appearance, invisible to Stefan and framed by the written words, and their return, filtered through her death and shared by him, the film enacts a visual quotation that begins to suggest, through repetition, the overlapping between words and images, letter and memory. But just as the letter is still incomplete, this recognition is nothing but partial. For the seven shots Stefan recalls are all related to two of Lisa's three forms: the woman and the girl. What is missing is the image of the child, impossible for him, yet, to recall, since their first encounter is the beginning of Lisa's story (her second birthday, as she says), and can be perceived as such only through the 'retrospective revelation of the law of the whole' of her narrative.²⁵ For Stefan, to remember it is to recognize the story as *his* story, to recognize himself in it, and to identify that moment as the beginning of a narrative that has now achieved closure. It is here, I think, that the question of this film's response to the letter, and to the ending of Zweig's novella, is most clearly articulated: the condition for this sighting, for the retrieval of the original encounter, is death.

The decision to fight the duel inserts Lisa's letter into what we may call a deadly correspondence, a transactional exchange in which suicide may prove the impossible answer to a posthumous letter. It depends upon the revelation of the name by John, bearer of the letter, figure of the film and inscribed witness to their common past:²⁶ the letter reaches closure only when the possibility of a reply arises, that is, when it becomes part of a chain of address, giving Lisa her own name.²⁷ If Lisa uttered Stefan's name just before she died, as we are told by the sister-in-charge, Stefan can at this point double the mute writing of her name in his own voice. It is now that the film's rigorous structure of demarcations between seeing, hearing, writing and reading may be set aside. The letter breaks out of its frame in an open display of contaminations that fully enact a coincidence (a correspondence) between letter and film: now the film *is* the letter. In this, invisibility is reversed: image and sound, now, in a mode of absence, are on the side of the letter. Lisa's voice is heard, outside the flashback, over the image of the vase filled with her roses, and the child's spectral image, by the door, leads him to death. The beginning of their story has become the end.

In an earlier sequence of the film, Lisa and Stefan are walking through the Prater. They talk of wax statues. Lisa wonders whether they'll ever make one of Stefan. 'If they do, will you pay your penny, to come in and see me?' he asks. 'Only if you'll come alive', is Lisa's reply. Between this exchange and its reversal in the end (death as a condition to vision), the film imparts its beautiful uncanny ambivalence, of which the letter is a figure.

Notes

1. L. Mulvey, *Death 24 x a second* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 18: 'To see the star on the screen in the retrospectives that follow his or her death is also to see the cinema's uncertain relation to life and death. Just as the cinema animates its still frames, so it brings back to life, in perfect fossil form, anyone it has ever recorded.'
2. F. Kafka, *Letters to Milena* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), p. 223.
3. G. Deleuze, *Cinema 1. L'Image-mouvement* (Paris: Minuit), p. 142.
4. The presence of epistolary structures in Hollywood cinema is strongly indebted to Howard Koch's writing. Besides *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, he wrote the script of two other major 'letter films': *The Letter* (dir. William Wyler, 1940) and *The Thirteenth Letter* (dir. Otto Preminger, 1951).
5. M. Vernet, suggests a doubling in the fact that the letter's circuit (written in the absence of the recipients and received in the absence of the writer) imitates the functioning of the cinematic device. *Figures de l'absence* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1988), p. 114.
6. S. Cavell, *Contesting Tears. The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 108.
7. T. Gunning, 'Fritz Lang Calling: The Telephone and the Circuits of Modernity', in J. Fullerton and J. Olsson (eds.) *Allegories of Communication: Intermedial Concerns from Cinema to the Digital* (Rome: John Libbey, 2004), pp. 19–37, (24).
8. M. Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 3 (London: Everyman, 2001), pp. 419–21.
9. J. Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), p. 186.
10. M. Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 32; and *Film: A Sound Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 466. Chion has described the acousmatic voice as a voice whose source is impossible to identify. Its power, he argues, is usually undone through the materialization of the source as a discrete body.
11. M.A. Doane, 'The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 33–50 (35). For a recent detailed analysis of female voice-over in the frame of feminist theory, see B. Sjogren, *Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).
12. S. Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).
13. R. Wood, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 203.
14. A. Fleishman, *Narrated Films: Storytelling Situations in Cinema History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 150.
15. P. Mériageau, *Mankiewicz* (Paris: Denoël, 1993), p. 99.
16. Plato, *Phaedrus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 70.
17. S. Zweig, 'Letter from an Unknown Woman', reprinted in *Selected Stories* (London: Pushkin Press, 2009), pp. 119–120.
18. Zweig (2009), p. 149.
19. M-C. Ropars, 'L'Oubli du Texte', *Cinémas* 4 (1), (Fall 1993), 11–22 (14).
20. V.F. Perkins, 'Same Tune Again! Repetition and Framing in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*', *CineAction* 52 (2000), 40–8 (46).
21. Ropars describes the image of Lisa writing as the sole moment where the suppressed 'graphic gesture' takes over the film, establishing a 'declared *faux raccord*'

between reading and writing as the point of tension between text and film. Ropars (2000), 15.

22. Cavell (1996), p. 108.
23. Porter and Deborah (Jeanne Crain): 'Brad didn't run away with Addie. I did.' 'But how? You're here!' 'A man can change his mind, can't he?'
24. Rita and Deborah: 'There's a fine relaxed atmosphere at this table. It's as if there were a body under it.' 'What was it that you called Addie down at the peer? The dear departed? Maybe that's who's under the table. Only it's Brad.'
25. J. Hillis Miller, *Ariadne's Thread. Story Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 18.
26. For the association between the butler and the director, see Cavell (1996), p. 109; for his description as bearer of the script see Perkins (2000), p. 45.
27. As Branka Arsić suggests: 'The unaddressed do not have a name, however they may be called.' 'Afterword: On Leaving no Address', in P. Kamuf, *Book of Addresses* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 286.