

THE  
**HYSTERICAL**  
**MALE**

one libido?

The hysterical male, then, as a prelude to the seduction of one libido.

If the image of the hysterical male can be so popular today (Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers*, Fellini's *Casanova*, Verhoeven's *Robocop*), maybe that's because there is no longer a relationship between sex and power.

Canadian Journal of  
**POLITICAL AND SOCIAL  
THEORY**

**Power, fleeing its basis in sexuality generally and male subjectivity specifically, becomes now a *viral* power, a power which speaks only in the previously transgressive feminist language of absence, rupture, plurality and the trace. A post-male power which leaves behind male subjectivity as a hysterical photographic negative of itself, and which disappropriates women of the privileged ontology of the Other.**

**Or is it just the reverse? Not the decoupling of sex and power, but a hyper-infusion of power by a male sex which, speaking now only in the fantasy language of one libido, seeks to hide the privileging of the phallogentric gaze by theorising the disappearance of power into seduction.**

**The psychoanalytics of one libido, therefore, as one last playing-out of old male polyester sex theory, a big zero.**

**Or maybe it's neither. Not one libido theory nor its denial, but the production of neon libidos in the age of sacrificial sex when sexuality, too, is both produced by power as *trompe l'oeil* and then cancelled out. Sacrificial sex, therefore, as a time of the monstrous double, when all the sex differences are simulated *and* exterminated in a spiralling combinatorial of cynical signs.**

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TRUTH AS ETERNAL  
METAPHORICAL DISPLACEMENTS:  
TRACES OF THE MOTHER  
IN DERRIDA'S PATRICIDE

*Lorraine Gauthier*

The trace is not only the disappearance of origin within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow, it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an originary non trace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace. Yet we know that that concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no originary trace.<sup>1</sup>

Derridean deconstruction has been a major force in the shaping of post-structuralist thinking in France. French feminist theorists of the past two decades have not escaped its influence. Indeed, many radical analyses have emerged from their adoption of Derrida's critical reading of western metaphysics. Despite this indebtedness to deconstruction, one feminist theorist has attempted a rereading of western metaphysics which moves beyond deconstruction, and indeed, which raises the question of deconstruction's affiliation with the metaphysics it seeks to subvert. In uncovering the mark left by gender on the dominant intellectual discourses

LORRAINE GAUTHIER

in the West, Luce Irigaray exposes the matricidal basis of western thought.<sup>2</sup>

Following the Nietzschean heritage from which Derrida also draws, Irigaray analyzes the metaphors which have been reified into conceptual Truths by metaphysical thinkers. Idealism posits a strict dichotomy between the dual meanings of the word "sense," between thought and corporeality, between mind and body. Her work aims at analysing the pathos of such a disembodied subjectivity. By taking up Derrida's analysis of the repression of physical sense by intellectual sense in the constitution of metaphor itself, Irigaray seeks to uncover the repressed corporeality which forms the basis of metaphysics' reification of human thought.<sup>3</sup>

In the obliteration of physical senses from the equivocal definition of the word sense she finds the added repressive ideological content of a matricide over which and through which knowledge and truth have been constructed. Trained as a Lacanian psychoanalyst, sensitized to the repression of the maternal which Freud and Lacan theorize as a necessary prerequisite for cultural development, Irigaray turns her critical eye to the relationship between the repression of corporeality and the repression of maternal origin. She argues that the displacement/repression of corporeality, inherent in metaphors, conceals the displacement/repression of the corporeality of our origin, of the physicality of our mother's body. Her work demonstrates how the repression of maternal origin and the confusion between *arche* and *telos*, between woman as source and as object of desire, apparent in Plato's metaphysics, characterizes the entire corpus of Western philosophical thought. It is this hidden repression which lies at the base of western philosophy's reification of thought and its concomitant oppression of women.

Following the psychoanalytic precept that whatever is repressed surfaces in one form or another, often expressing itself as denial, she re-explores the metaphors which have articulated the philosophical representations of what is true and what is false, what is sense and what is non-sense. Under her scrutiny, that which has been declared false, non-sensical, that which has been excluded, is unveiled as unacknowledged variations, as transmutations of Plato's *mater*, one of the terms he uses to depict the matter which mediates the relationship between the physical and the Ideal. Its equivocality as earth, source, and mother is suggestive of what was marginalized by western metaphysics.

Yet if psychoanalysis, as a modern critique of western metaphysics, has made explicit the sexed maternal body as originary site and as original object of desire, Irigaray's extensive critique of Freud's essay, "Femininity," has shown how it merely reinscribes the mother within the metaphysical discourse she threatens to disrupt. It idealizes and neutralizes her as a universalized maternal and it displaces and metaphorizes her originary function as lack. By stamping this lack with the mark of the penis/Phallus as source and object of desire, it rearticulates sexual difference within an age-

## DERRIDA'S DOUBLE DENIAL

old hierarchical discourse of sameness in which metaphor seeks to establish identity by repressing one of its referents. Within this gendered imaginary, the masculine remains a transcendental referent whose scopophilic morphology and matricidal repression rivals that of Plato's.<sup>4</sup>

What about Derrida's deconstruction of Western metaphysics? Has it escaped the metaphysical construction of this denial? Where is maternal corporeality in his texts and what role does it play in the constitution of his metaphors?

Derrida, of course, is not oblivious to the gender question. His work aims at deconstructing Plato's metaphysical notion of Truth as presence inhering in the paternal word. He characterizes Platonic Truth as "the discourse of what *goes back to the Father*," the idealisation and reappropriation of Presence to Himself, speaking to Himself "within the logocentric circle" formulated through the concept of sameness, of similitude.<sup>5</sup> Derrida insists that voice as *logos*, as *phone*, as unitary presence, must relinquish its authority, recognizing that it is but another form of writing, that writing, as he puts it, is its defining metaphor. He decentres *logos* as voice, as *phone*, and dissociates the trace of the *logos* from the literal alphabetical graph to which it had been consigned. He reverses the hierarchical relationship between *logos* and *graphie*, reinvesting *graphie* as arche-trace, as arche writing, as *différance*, the site in which all difference is constituted, including the relationship of *logos* to *graphie*, of presence to absence.

Refuting the metaphysical definition of *logos* as unitary and originary presence, Derrida rejects not only the concept of unity but all concept of presence and of origin. Against Plato's reification of original paternal speech he locates the irreducible complexities of origin in writing, more specifically in metaphor, where it is a question not only of *entre deux signifiants*, the in-between of two signifiers, but of *entre-deux signifiant*, the in-between as signifier.<sup>6</sup> At stake here is the *jeu (de l')entre*, the play of the difference between, the play of in between. Since all language is metaphorical, this functioning of the metaphor as *entre* is, for Derrida, non-representable, non-explicable, except through further metaphor. From his perspective, metaphors can only "be written in the plural."<sup>7</sup> Hence, metaphor is defined as *the* eternal displacement.

In her critique of Plato's metaphysics and of its western heritage, Irigaray draws heavily upon Derridean deconstruction. In two articles entitled "*Le viol de la lettre*," and "*Le sexe fait comme signe*," written in 1969 and 1970 respectively, before what some have called her epistemological break represented by the 1974 publication of *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Irigaray addresses Derrida's work and its psychoanalytic implications directly.<sup>8</sup> She points out that the *phone* is not the unitary entity described by metaphysics. As a set of relationships between sounds it is non-isolatable, neither unitary nor autonomous. Moreover, it is constituted by the blanks, the silences, the absences of sounds which surround it, and these blanks are themselves constructed naturally and culturally by what is physically

possible and linguistically permitted.<sup>9</sup> If *graphie* metaphorically defines *phone*, as Derrida suggests, then their opposition is not multiplicity opposing univocity but the specific expression of multiplicity in *graphie* opposing the denial of multiplicity in *phone*. In maintaining the opposition of *phone* and *graphie* Derrida displaces all of the unrecognized complexities of speech onto writing and, despite the feminization of this graphic site, he continues to ignore woman as origin, the specificity and multiplicity of the maternal voice, the presence of a speaking mother. In Irigaray terms, the boundaries of our comprehension of and apprehension toward origin are once again, as in Plato, circumscribed by a denial of maternity.

In "Plato's Hystera," the final essay of *Speculum*, Irigaray enters into an implicit dialogue with Derrida, taking up exactly where he insists on turning aside. Her deconstructive play with equivocal meanings demonstrates how "*entre* intersects with the question of entering."<sup>10</sup> For Irigaray, Derrida's *jeu (de l')entre* attempts to appropriate the nonappropriable, to repeat the non-repeatable, the *entre en jeu*, the entering into the game of in between.<sup>11</sup> It does so by distancing itself from this entering, by positing interminable interpretations where every displacement would be displaced ad infinitum in a never ending non-referential game with no beginning and no end. Through the concepts of *différance*, *pharmakon*, hymen, and supplement, he argues that the multiplicity of writing denies the very possibility of origin, that metaphors are the irreducible site of the constitution of difference. But it could be argued that the self-referentiality of the Derridean concept of metaphor, like the self-referentiality of the paternal *logos* in Plato, remains caught within its own circularity, unable to grasp its own matrix. For the *entre en jeu* concealed by his concept of metaphor appears through his "chain of *différente* substitutions." Informed by Irigaray's critique, an analysis of these substitutive terms reveals how the etymological relationship among the French words *entre*, *entrer*, and *antre* questions the original status of the trace.

Although Irigaray subscribes to the Derridean suspension of the referent in the 1969 and 1970 articles cited, her critique of the usurpation of metonymy by metaphor developed in another article written at the same time, "La Mécanique des fluides" and her own deconstruction of Plato's "Allegory of the cave," reconsiders that suspension, seeking what lies behind metaphor, speech, and language.<sup>12</sup> But the referent to which she alludes is no longer the same as that found in the original binary opposition of sense and referent. If the deconstructed term escapes what Derrida has described as "the specular nature of philosophical reflection, philosophy being incapable of inscribing (comprehending) what is outside it otherwise than through the appropriating assimilation of a negative image of it," or as Irigaray would suggest, its image as negation, then the deconstructed referent also escapes the repressed denial of philosophy, which is only able to inscribe (comprehend) its desire by assimilating its negative image, its image as *dénégation*, as denial.<sup>13</sup> If, for Derrida, deconstruction

## DERRIDA'S DOUBLE DENIAL

accounts for both absence and its expression as presence, for Irigaray, deconstruction must account for an absent presence and its expression as "irreducible absence." If, as Rodolphe Gasché has expressed it, "deconstruction aims at something that can never become present 'as such' and that without concealing itself can only appear as such," Irigaray aims to show that what can never become present again is not necessarily what never was present.<sup>14</sup> The *entre en jeu*, manifest yet obliterated in the *jeu (de l')entre*, can never be repeated as such, for, as she never tires of repeating, birth is a unique experience. But, in psychoanalytical terms, as irretrievable origin, it nonetheless insinuates itself into the structure of our discourses.

Just as the mother wove her way into Plato's allegory through the terms which were meant to repress her, so she enters, as the *entre en jeu*, as the original entrance, into Derrida's *jeu (de l')entre*. From the point of view of the desire for origin, Derrida's denunciation of origin is but the presence of desire expressing itself as absence; or to follow Derrida's conceptualization, inevitably articulating itself as denial which, in retrospect, constructs the desire by which it itself is constructed. Feminist deconstruction must undo this negative construction to unearth the traces of the desire for origin inherent in the denial of origin. Based on Irigaray's analysis of Plato's allegory, the following reading of certain Derridean texts attempts such a deconstruction.

### Metaphor: The Derridean Critique of Metaphysics as the Discourse of the Father

The traditional philosophical categories, of origin, metaphor, Being, presence, absence, and the void circumscribe and delineate Plato's text and Irigaray's Derridean critique of the allegory. They are also fundamental to Derrida's own critical project. Origin sets the parameters for Plato's exploration of other philosophical concepts, but for Derrida, metaphor exposes the impossibility of defining origin other than through approximation. He counters the usual coupling of metaphor and presence with an emphasis on the relationship between metaphor and the void. For Derrida, as for Irigaray, the hymen plays a central role in the metaphorical approximation of the void through a non-centred circumscription of meaning. Their disparate depictions of the relationship between metaphor and the void, however, and their notions of what is being metaphorically circumscribed differentiate the contours of their respective analyses.

For Derrida what is at stake in the "metaphorization" of origin is not simply a question of the metaphorical nature of all philosophy. Rather, he points out that metaphor is itself a philosophical concept "enveloped in the field that a general "metaphorology" of philosophy would seek to dominate."<sup>15</sup> One must, therefore, go further than a metaphorical analy-

sis of the philosophy of origin, for this alone would leave the philosophical concept of metaphor outside its scope.

As a philosophical concept, Derrida tells us, metaphor has emerged and remains enmeshed within the system of oppositions which has so dominated Western philosophy. It relies on the equivocacy of the word "sense," which suggests the passage and return from sense perception to intelligible comprehension. The signifier, as sense, as meaning, refers to a sensible signified. Whether derived from *physis* or *techné*, from *physis* or *nomos*, which are themselves set in opposition, the signifier ultimately refers to what can be perceived by one of our senses. In Platonic terms, metaphor uses the perceptible to explain the imperceptible, translates sense as sensation into sense as meaning and hence transfers what is physical, what is sensible to the realm of the non-physical, the non-sensible, the meta-physical. For Derrida, "the movement of "metaphorization" is no other than the movement of idealization" and so he concurs with Heidegger in saying that "the metaphorical exists only within the borders of metaphysics."<sup>16</sup>

The problem this poses for the metaphorical analysis of philosophy is the impossibility of finding the source of the oppositions from which metaphor has arisen, of finding the original metaphor, and especially of finding it outside of philosophy. As he states it:

By definition, there is therefore no proper philosophical category to qualify a certain number of tropes which have conditioned the so-called "fundamental," "structuring," "original" philosophical oppositions,....To permit oneself to overlook this *vigil* of philosophy, one would have to posit that the sense aimed at through these figures is an essence rigorously independent of that which transports it, which is an already philosophical thesis, one might even say philosophy's *unique thesis*, the thesis which constitutes the concept of metaphor, the opposition of the proper and the non-proper, of essence and accident, of intuition and discourse, of thought and language, of the intelligible and the sensible.<sup>17</sup>

The problem with the "unique thesis" of philosophy, as Derrida tells us, is that it is silenced by the concept of resemblance, by the imitation of sameness, which is what metaphors and all other tropes are meant to establish. Oppositions are thus, for Derrida, but improperly metaphorized relations. If metaphors were to be well metaphorized, they would not exist. They exist only in so far as they fail to achieve the identity at which they aim.

Metaphors, traditionally understood, are thus caught within the mimetic duplication of sameness. Resemblance has been posited as the condition for the metaphor since Aristotle's *Poetics*. This imitation is always a return to nature, a return suggested within the very sense of the word metaphor, the moving from one sense to the other. Similitude is therefore

## DERRIDA'S DOUBLE DENIAL

the precondition of metaphor, as it is the precondition of Platonic Truth. Metaphors mediate between non-truth and Truth, attempt to return non-truth to Truth. As Derrida concludes, this concept of metaphor carries with it a sense "of a progressive erosion, of a regular semantic loss, of an uninterrupted exhaustion of a primitive sense." Paraphrasing Nietzsche, he claims that metaphor, thus defined, is but "the unveiling of a Truth."<sup>18</sup>

Truth, in Platonic terms, is the omnipresence of Being. Derrida reminds us that the sun, as "the most natural thing, the most universal, the most real, the clearest, the most external referent," the apex of sensible presence, has dominated the entire conception of metaphor, has served not only as the metaphor for Being, for the Truth of Being, but as the metaphor for metaphors. Yet, as he points out, the sun is not always present and what is proper to it, what can be metaphorized, can never be definitely ascertained. At best, the sun can be approached by an imperfect metaphor, which is, of course, as Derrida has claimed, simply a metaphor. And for Derrida, presence is even further undermined by the equivocity of the Greek word *eidos* which suggests a spatial translation in which the metaphor is "at home away from home." This articulates, for him, the paradigm of the traditional conception of the metaphorical process itself: "the idealisation and the reappropriation" of presence to oneself. This paradigm, he argues, encompasses the entire movement of the Idea from Plato through Hegel.<sup>19</sup>

Derrida questions the univocity of such a conception of metaphor and suggests instead that metaphor should be conceived as "a displacement with ruptures, reinscriptions in a heterogeneous system, mutations, separations without origin." From his perspective, it is not merely a semantic displacement of meaning that is at issue but a relationship between syntactic structures in which absence plays a crucial role. The sun's disappearance and reappearance exemplifies the role of absence in metaphors where mimesis represents what does not exist except through representation. Whereas analogies are relationships between pre-determined and pre-existent terms, in metaphors, as Jakobson has argued, one term is missing, is approximated only through the other. For Derrida this pre-determined absence means that metaphors can "always miss the true," and are but a "moment of detour where Truth can always lose itself." Since indeterminate displacement constitutes metaphor, and language is, for Derrida as for Nietzsche, essentially metaphoric, an analysis of this displacement would itself remain caught within it. A meta-metaphoric analysis is impossible.<sup>20</sup>

For Irigaray, metaphors elaborate upon the workings of the copula.<sup>21</sup> Just as the copula which disallows any relationship between subject and attribute still posits itself as their link, so the presupposed *comme* (as if) of metaphor "maintains the distance, underlines it, while attempting to reduce it, to reabsorb it."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, as Irigaray argues, if the functioning of metaphor, as of the copula, cannot be represented through a meta-metaphorical analysis, nor can it be represented through self-referential metaphoricity whose structure its activity is meant to occlude. A close read-

ing of Derrida's own metaphors reveals the self-referential metaphoricity inherent in his proposed chain of substitutions: *différance*, *pharmakon*, hymen, and supplement.

*Différance*: Traces of the Feminine

Countering the metaphysical notion of Presence as Origin, of representation as a return to the same, Derrida addresses the question of the gap between what is presented and what is represented. He articulates this *entre* through an exploration of *mimesis* inherent in metaphor and through the well-known concept of *différance*, the site of the void, where metaphors are constituted and within which metaphors move. As his work points out, the Greek term *diapherein* does not denote deferral as does its latin translation, *differre*, meaning to temporize, (*temporiser*), but also to temporalise (*temporaliser*) and to create space, to become the time of space, the space of time. This deferral has been eclipsed by the more common definition of *différence* as different from, not identical to. Derrida's concept of *différance* is an attempt to articulate the different meanings of the French verb *différer*, which, following the Latin, denotes both deferral and difference. The replacement of the "e" with an "a" indicates that deferral produces difference and is also that in which difference is produced. Deferral as constitutive of *différance* necessarily defines it as displacement but in Derridean terms it is a displacement, which is neither active nor passive, which resists "the fundamental opposition of philosophy: that between the sensible and the intelligible," that which the traditional concept of metaphor structured into its idealization. *Différance*, with an "a" is the present participle of the verb "to defer" but *différence* with an "e," "neutralizes" the activity of the infinitive with the passivity of its effect.<sup>23</sup>

For Derrida, *différance* does not stem from any category of Being. It exceeds all Truth while containing it, opening up the space in which this system of Truth is enacted. In metaphysical terms, *différance* "designates the constitutive, productive and original causality, the process of scission and of division of which differences are the products, the constituted effects." Derrida recognizes the ineptness of such metaphysical language since, in fact, *différance* is "not a cause [and] not an origin." *Différance* defies essence because its site is where chance and necessity are at play in uncontainable, ungraspable indeterminacy, the interminable play of the arbitrary. In fact, *différance* "is" in neither of Being's metaphysical forms, neither Existence nor Identity, neither presence nor absence. If anything, *différance* "is the non-full, non-simple origin, the structured and *différente* origin of differences." As such the word "origin," as that of "Being," does not suit it. In fact no word does, not even *différance*, which, according to Derrida, is "not a name...not a pure nominal unity" but signifies that "which dislocates itself ceaselessly in a chain of *différente* substitutions."<sup>24</sup>

## DERRIDA'S DOUBLE DENIAL

It is in this way that Derrida attempts to theorize what Plato ignored, to which he gave no Ideal Form, which had, therefore, no existence as either Being or Identity, as same or other.<sup>25</sup> We recognize its general location of course, as that of *mater*, matter/mother, in which everything is reproduced, which participates in both Being and Identity, same and other, yet exceeding both. In Platonic terms, *mater*, with its equivocal definitions as mother, as earth, and as source, is not the other of any One since she exists entirely outside the economy of sameness and difference. She is, in fact, the complete other, pure difference, a non-graspable, non-definable, ever-changing difference with no term or set of terms against which to compare her. And she is without origin since only sensible beings have origin. Yet, rather than unveil the mother whose existence is denied in Plato's metaphysical definition of origin, Derrida rejects origin altogether, much as he rejects voice, the *logos*, thus leaving buried what is appropriated by the Platonic paternal projections. Derrida recognizes yet maintains, albeit with a certain "embarrassment," the occlusion of the mother.

To get around the concept of origin, Derrida privileges the Freudian concept of trace, which constitutes both memory and the psyche as difference and as deferral. Nonetheless, if for him traces constitute memory, the psyche, and *différance*, it is not that they are graspable entities or past presences whose mark can be recaptured intact. The present is not established by reactivated, rememorized memories of the past, but by the chance conjuncture of traces of one memory with traces of another, or with a present occurrence whose re-markable feature is in part determined by these conjunctures. The future will never be a simple reconstitution of these, but a series of further chance conjunctures which will, of necessity, rearticulate these with each other and with others not yet incorporated, a process in which every trace is altered. The trace is thus effaced as it surfaces to be remarked, effaced as a trace of what has been itself effaced by it, to be reconstituted as a trace of a trace, *ad infinitum*.<sup>26</sup>

There are no conscious traces, since consciousness is presence to oneself, and Derrida, along with Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, whose particular antecedence he acknowledges, starts with the concept of *différance* to question the very "assured certainty of self" articulated through the notion of consciousness. But neither does this suggest that the unconscious, as site of the formation and deployment of traces, is itself a presence seeking admittance to the realm of conscious presence, as, according to Derrida, Freud metaphysically defined it. Nor is it an absence which is but the metaphysical counterpart of presence. If for Freud the difference between absence and presence is but the detour of the same, defined as "the relationship to an impossible presence — as the irreparable loss of presence," for Derrida, *différance* is, in fact, this absolute other. He argues that if we can think together the same and its other, presence and absence, "it is evident — that we cannot think, together — the same and the absolute other." He therefore eradicates the concepts of presence as sameness but also of

absence as its metaphysical other. For him, the unconscious, *différance*, and its traces exceed both presence and absence, visibility and invisibility. We must learn, Derrida tells us, to conceptualize them outside the contradiction which metaphysics has assigned them.<sup>27</sup> For Irigaray, however, what this answer misses is precisely what metaphysics obfuscated: that the same and the absolute other are impossible to conceive together only in so far as the absolute other is not recognized as the origin which seeks to reinscribe itself as same and forever fails to do so.

In Derridean terms, *différance*, like Plato's matter/mother, is neither presence nor sameness, is neither absence nor the other of the differences constituted by it, but is that in which one and the other constitute themselves. Whereas Plato articulated his notion of origin within the concept of same and other, ignoring this absolute other of matter/mother, Derrida instead relegates origin itself to the realm of the absolute other, reveals thereby what remained hidden in Plato's denial but continues, nonetheless, to ignore the specific role of matter/mother within this realm. In opposition to the masculinized metaphysical presence of Being, Derrida does posit feminized *différance*. Whereas, in Platonic terms, woman is not difference, in relation to sameness, in Derridean terms she is *la différence*. Plato excludes her, Derrida reintegrates her, for in coining a new word, he was not obliged to follow the gender assignation of that which he was attempting to supplement: *la différence*. In fact, as the substantive locution for deferring, *en différencé*, on which he places such emphasis is masculine. Although the "a" of *différance* recognizes the gendered site which was concealed by Platonic difference, the *la* in *la différence* maintains the feminine in the place of the supplement.

### ***Pharmakon*: The Obliteration of Dichotomies and the Continuing Occultation of the Mother**

Further glimpses of this denunciation appear in Derrida's concept of *pharmakon* as writing, as the site of the production of difference, and the functioning of metaphor. For Derrida, the question of origin introduces the problematic of writing. Despite the fact that *différance* is not an origin and metaphors are necessarily plural, Derrida insists, though with qualifying quotation marks, that "the scriptural 'metaphor' thus crops up every time difference and relation are irreducible, every time otherness introduces determination and puts a system into circulation." He suggests that to set up a series of oppositions Plato would have had to posit "one of these oppositions....as the matrix of all possible opposition." What if, he asks, "one got to thinking that something like the *pharmakon* — or writing — far from being governed by these oppositions, opens up their very possibility"?<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere, in his analysis of Mallarmé's "Mimique," he reinforces this point, stating that

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the necessity of that metaphor, which nothing escapes, makes it something other than a particular figure among others. What is produced is an absolute extension of the concepts of writing and reading, of text, of hymen, to the point where nothing of what *is* can lie beyond them.<sup>29</sup>

In exploring this idea Derrida begins with the relationship between *logos* and *graphe*, speech and writing. He argues that for Plato, as for most Western metaphysical philosophers, writing is in excess. It is defined as the supplement of the supplement, the sign of the sign. For them, anamnesis, as reminiscence of Truth, passes through the word. *Logos*, as mnesis, is established by the presence and the law of the Father. Writing, as supplement, as rememoration, as an aid to memory, is thus but hypomnesis. While mnesis repeats Truth, the signified, metaphysical thinkers argue that what is repeated in hypomnesis is the signifier. Writing thus appears as pure mimesis, pure repetition which repeats itself eternally without reference to a Truth as presence. In metaphysical terms, the relationship between two forms of repetition is at stake. One is live repetition, occurring inside, within the soul, as the unveiling of Truth. The other is dead, occurring outside the soul, incapable of unveiling Truth. It can, in fact, contaminate the purity of anamnesis. Derrida suggests that this relationship between mnesis and hypomnesis, between inside and outside, is the containing structure of all oppositions.<sup>30</sup>

He argues that philosophy, however, has been deceived into thinking that it was distinguishing between speech and writing when, in fact, it was merely caught up in the play between two forms of writing. To begin with, it is problematic to establish the legitimacy of the *logos* by the presence of the Father, whose very definition as Father is itself established by the word, the law. As Derrida puts it,

the father is not the generator or procreator in any "real" sense prior to or outside all relation to language....it is precisely *logos* that enables us to perceive and investigate something like paternity. If there were a simple metaphor in the expression "father of logos" the first word, which seemed the more *familiar*, would nevertheless receive more meaning *from* the second, than it would transmit *to* it.<sup>31</sup>

For Derrida, what is more important than this discredit, however, is the fact that "the so-called living discourse should suddenly be described by a "metaphor" borrowed from the order of the very thing one is trying to exclude from it, the order of its simulacrum." He is referring here to Socrates' answer to Phaedrus, regarding the discourse of true knowledge "written in the soul of the learner," to which Phaedrus answers, "you mean the discourse..which is living and animate" — of which we could say in all justice, that "the written discourse [is] only a kind of ghost of it." This

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metaphor, Derrida suggests, is rendered necessary by the structure of Being whose essence is its possibility of being repeated, as nonidentity. Repetition, simulation, hence non-Truth is the very precondition of Truth.<sup>32</sup> Language used to describe this can only imitate this procedure. The *graphe*, as simulation of the *logos*, is its precondition, for

there is no repetition possible without the *graphics of supplementarity*, which supplies, for the lack of a full unity, another unit that comes to relieve it, being enough the same and enough other so that it can replace by addition.<sup>33</sup>

Writing, therefore, is not secondary to speech, it is its necessary supplement, which does not mean its origin.

The next step is for Derrida to show that writing is that in which *différance* traces its infinite metaphorical displacements, that writing and *différance* are coterminous. He concentrates on the fact that the god of writing is also the god of medicine, of *pharmakon* and that he is the one who presents writing to the Father as the remedy for, the aid to anamnesis. The various definitions of *pharmakon*, however, as medicine, as drug, as poison indicate that it can be both beneficial and harmful. Hence it has no proper nature. The dialogue between the god of writing and the Father revolves around this difference, where the god's emphasis on the remedial characteristics of writing is countered by the Father's insistence on the nefarious effects of writing as repetition, as mimesis, which, like metaphor, is good only in so far as it fails. For the Father, writing has no proper essence, no Truth. In fact, it undermines the Truth of essence.<sup>34</sup>

This lack of essence in *pharmakon* and in writing, in writing as *pharmakon*, produces difference, defines it as *différance*. The *pharmakon*, as Derrida tells us, has "no stable essence, no 'proper' characteristics....no ideal identity." It "constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them and makes one side cross over into the other, (soul/body, good/bad, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.)." The *pharmakon*, "without being anything in itself always exceeds them in constituting their bottomless fund. It keeps itself forever in reserve even though it has no fundamental profundity, nor ultimate locality."<sup>35</sup>

In all this, there are once again strong echoes, of Platonic *mater*, matter/mother. As an interesting revelation, what Derrida will underscore in this relationship between speech as paternal *logos* and writing as filial imitation, is the fact that "nothing is said of the mother." If we look for her, he suggests, we might see her "unstable form, drawn upside down in the foliage, at the back of the garden." Following the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus, Derrida has outlined the relationship established by Plato between, on the one hand, true writing as *logos*, as the strong seed giving rise to the products of necessity, sown and reaped by the cultivator, and on the other hand, graphic writing as simulation, as the weak seeds

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which give rise to the ephemeral products of the gardener. The field of the cultivator, of *logos*, is thus opposed to the garden of the writer. Writing is the *pharmakon* and the mother, inverted, is in its depth. Water reinforces this silenced conjuncture, for if oppositions can be brought together and made to pass one into the other, it is due to the fact that "liquid is the element of the *pharmakon*." For Plato also, "water, above all things, is exceptionally necessary for the growth of all garden produce"<sup>36</sup> The repressed symbolic affinity between water and mother thus flows through the discourse of both Plato and Derrida.

Derrida, of course, is not unaware of Plato's displacement of the mother. In "*La pharmacie de Platon*," Derrida points out that

in the *Timaeus*, ... the introduction of the *other*, of *mixture*, the problematic of the *moving* cause and of the *site*, ... the irreducible third genre ... the duality of the paradigms, all this "constrains" us to define as *trace* the origin of the world, that is to say the inscription of the forms, the schemes in the matrix, in the receptacle. In a *matrix* or a *receptacle* which are nowhere and never offered under the form of presence or in the presence of the form, one or the other supposing already the inscription in the mother.<sup>37</sup>

Rather than draw out the implications of Plato's denial, however, Derrida invokes a similar denial of his own, hastening to add that: "here, in any case, the turns which we name with some embarrassment 'Plato's metaphors' are exclusively and irreducibly scriptural." He then goes discusses the reproductive metaphors which imbue Plato's text, underlining the characteristics of this third form, the matter/ mother as invisible, as formless receptacle, as the container through whom all passes, he insists that:

at the moment of ultimate difficulty, when no other pedagogical resource is available, when theoretical discourse cannot find any other way of formulating the order, the world, the *cosmos* of politics, ....[one] turns to the grammatical "metaphor" ... [The] structure is read as a form of writing, in an instance when the intuition of sensible or intelligible presence happens to fail.<sup>38</sup>

Thus at the moment that deconstruction approaches the corporeal mother as referent, when we find her inverted, hidden, missing, we are instructed to retreat to metaphoricity, reading the structure as writing, as *graphe*, as trace without origin. Derrida claims that we must "take the example of the science of grammar and the relationships between the letters to explicate the intertwinements weaving the system of differences." In fact, as he argues, what establishes the patricide of the Sophist is not

only that any *full*, *absolute* presence of what *is* (of the being-present that most truly "is": the good or the sun that can't be looked

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in the face) is impossible; not only that any full intuition of truth, any truth-filled intuition, is impossible; but that the very condition of discourse — *true or false* — is the diacritical principle of the *sumploke* [weaving].<sup>39</sup>

Weaving is an important metaphor in Derrida's texts where such unexplored and unexamined words as *tissue, tisser, texture, texte, textuel*, constitute, through their equivocal connotations as textile and text, the warp on which Derrida's text is woven. And weaving, in the Greek era was done entirely by women. Its goddess was Athena, born of Zeus, thus doing away with the mother altogether, as does Derrida's self-confessed patricide. In the depth of the production of the concepts of *différance* and of *pharmakon*, the maternal is yet again "passed over in silence," discerned by Derrida only as an effect among others, as a phantom, rather than as that in which all effects are formulated, as the garden itself. We will, however, continue to see her weaving herself back into what appears to be the condition of his discourse, most apparently, in "*La double séance*," where the hymen between Plato and Mallarmé suggests another, between Plato and Derrida.

### The Hymen and *le jeu (de l')entre*

In "*La double séance*" Derrida introduces the concept of hymen as that which "illustrates the suspension of differends," in which is inscribed a difference "without any decidable poles, without any independent and irreversible terms...*différance* without presence."<sup>40</sup> In his usual manner, Derrida discusses the equivocacy of the word, an equivocacy in whose play his conceptualization "takes forms." Here, however, as in few other places, an obvious and well known connotation is played down, disempowered in its cursory treatment, a connotation which nonetheless dominates this recharging of the signifier.

Derrida concentrates on the archaic poetic definition of the word hymen as marriage. The consummation of marriage signifies for him "fusion, the identification of two beings, the confusion between two." Between them "there is no longer difference, but identity." This is articulated through desire and its satisfaction, where past, present, and future are redefined in slightly different terms from his more Freudian discussion of the temporal aspect of traces. Here presence is dislocated through the accomplishment of a desire in which the difference between past desire and present accomplishment, between present accomplishment and future desire, between present accomplishment and past memory, is abolished. It is a structure of deferral/referral in which presence is no longer central, in which "non-presence, the gaping void of desire and presence, the fullness of *jouissance* amount to the same."<sup>41</sup>

From this, Derrida draws the conclusion that "there is no more textual difference between the image and the thing, the empty signifier and the full signified, the imitator and the imitated, etc." This does not mean,

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however, that one pole has collapsed into the other, for "in the confusion or consummation of the hymen the heterogeneity of the two places is suppressed" as is the difference between externality and interiority, as is "the independence of unity." At this point he refers to the pupil as the other Greek definition of the word hymen, to indicate that perception has always been linked to presence and that in this form it is no longer central. What is left then, he asks, but the dream, which

being at once perception, remembrance and anticipation (desire) each within the other, is really neither one nor the other ... announces the "fiction," the "*milieu*, pure, of fiction," ... a presence, at once perceived and not-perceived, image and model, hence image without model, neither image nor model, *milieu*.<sup>42</sup>

For Plato, the dream, like matter/mother, participates in both sensible and intelligible, is apprehended by a form of knowledge which is neither reason nor ignorance, but which, like its object, situates itself between, *entre*, in the *milieu* of both. The equivocity of the French word *milieu* is important in this context. It raises not only the confusion and dichotomy "between" two poles, two entities, but the place, site of this confusion and dichotomization. The *milieu* separates and encompasses. Confusion, undecidability, which is the main effect of the equivocity of this word, is the chief characteristic of the hymen, a trait reaffirmed by the word *entre* which, Derrida suggests "carries all the force of the operation."<sup>43</sup> Apart from the term hymen itself, it is perhaps this *entre* which is most suggestive of a trace which is left unexplored.

It is in the confusion between the two definitions of *milieu* as that which envelopes and that which separates, that the question of *entre*, the in-between is raised. *Entre* is itself not univocal. Apart from its different spatial and temporal significations of physically separating things and also creating time gaps between them, *entre* carries other suggestive definitions that are perhaps most clearly revealed by this short statement of Derrida's: "*L'hymen entre dans l'antre*." For the *entre* here, which is to enter and that which signifies in between, can be written with an "a" to indicate "a cave, a natural grotto, deep and obscure." Yet the two *entres*, with the "e" and with the "a", he suggests, are the same. To demonstrate, he draws upon etymology which shows their common origin in *antara*, *antro*. With this confusion we are now fully caught in the logic of the hymen, in the space between, in the space surrounding, in the space encircling, in that which separates but which has no separation.<sup>44</sup> For in Derridean terms, the hymen

merges with what it seems to be derived from: the hymen as protective screen, the jewelry case of virginity, the vaginal partition, the fine and invisible veil, which, in front of the hystera, maintains itself *between* the inside and the outside of the woman, and consequently between desire and fulfillment.<sup>45</sup>

*Entre* and *antre* are intertwined in more ways than their common etymological roots suggest, however. Derrida claims that "the hymen remains suspended between, outside, and inside the '*antre*,'" as was Plato's curtain/hymen/eyelid, the effect of which, however, he misses in suggesting that "one does not leave the mallarméan *antre* as one does the Platonic cave."<sup>46</sup> But is it not a question of exploring this *milieu* rather than of leaving it?

Rejecting the logic of the *logos*, of presence, of the palisades, how do we explore this hymen? The hymen, as the "structure of *entre*," is for Derrida the structure of writing. It is the void which intercepts the equation between the graphic sign and its sense. A text is not made of "signs" and "signifier." It is a composite of hymens, undecidables, voids, gaps, blanks, metaphors, *différences*, traces, and supplements that delineate not only the differences between presences and absences, but perhaps more significantly, between presences and presences, between absences and absences, between the *entres* of the *antres*. The hymen is that which recharges "the signified in the movement when it jumps from one to the other."<sup>47</sup>

As the site of *différance*, the hymen separates difference from its other, the outside from the inside, "making the outside enter the inside and turning over the *antre* or the other onto its surface," much as the Platonic *teik-bion* had done in the allegory.<sup>48</sup> In opposition to the implicit ambiguity of the Platonic hymen, however, the Derridean hymen, as in between, is itself explicitly in between. It is neither one nor the other, but both, "*à la fois*." Folded over on itself, the hymen is its own outside, its own inside.<sup>49</sup> Like the metaphor, it multiplies itself in irreducible plurality. But surely we can go further than this, for the hymen connotes more than this multiplicity. As the veil which bars desire and reproduction, the hymen stands at the conjunction of woman as object of desire and woman as maternal source of desire. The elements of this conjuncture are in fact woven together in Derrida's definition of the hymen as that "which desire dreams of piercing, of tearing in a violence which is (at the same time, or in between) love and murder, a tearing penetration which leaves a virgin womb," a *hystera*.<sup>50</sup>

The *hystera* is introduced by Derrida in an explication which justifies a particular citation of Freud's concerning the difficulty of opposing "the imaginary etymology of a word to the process of its transformation." The example is not insignificant, as Derrida admits, and one could question whether its purpose is solely, as he claims, to show a "certain displacement of language." For did Derrida himself not appeal to etymology in his discussion of the confused interrelatedness of the various definitions of *entre*, this *entre* which supposedly preempts "hymen" as the moving force whose effect is produced syntactically rather than semantically, through structure rather than through meaning? Yet he equates *entre* and *antre* semantically rather than through their syntactic relationship, which, in his text, is equally if not more suggestive.<sup>51</sup>

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Ignoring the important syntactic difference between *entre* as a verb — to enter — and *entre* as a conjunction — as in-between — Derrida loses the full force of his own claim that “*l’hymen entre dans l’ancre*.” Insisting on ascribing to *hystera* the fortuitousness, the arbitrariness of the signifier, he exiles the corporeal mother into the grammatical metaphor, inverting the site, the *ancre*, the place in which all is reproduced, transforming the hymen’s *entre en jeu* into the *jeu (de l’)entre*. What, we might ask, has Derrida’s structure of supplementarity added here, while redoubling, concealing, veiling with a hymen that is both pierced and not pierced, a presence thereby “perceived and not perceived,” *à la fois*?<sup>52</sup>

Derrida claims that “Mallarmé preserves...the differential structure ...of mimesis...even maintains (and maintains himself in) the structure of *phantasma*, as it is defined by Plato, the simulacrum as a copy of a copy,” with this exception, “that there is no longer any model.”<sup>53</sup> Derrida also maintains (himself within) the structure of phantoms, of the simulation of that through which phantoms and simulations are produced, with this exception; that he validate it, give it life, raise it from the depths of the cave, but no more than Plato does he theorize its denial. The model, the Father, is gone, but the mother is still missing. What remains is the unparented play of *différance* within the matrix of her now conspicuous absence.

### The Supplement and the Question of Absence

Absence informs Derrida’s choice of the word supplement as a further articulation of the interminable play of *différance*, of the irreducible structure of substitution. The absence inherent within metaphors remarks itself in the structure of the supplement as the necessity of the void, of the abyss. Like *différance*, *pharmakon*, and hymen, supplement rests on the equivocacy of the word itself and is linked to yet another equivocal French word. Here the word *plus*, in referring both to a nothing and to a something which is added, captures the ability of the supplement to unite within itself the two seemingly opposing gestures of alienation and reappropriation which are constitutive of metaphor. The supplement adds to an already existing plenitude by enriching it, but it also does so by replacing it, by filling the void which marks this plenitude and which this plenitude marks. Each of these functions replaces the other. It is itself, however, neither presence nor absence. It is not a question of reappropriating presence, of unveiling the Truth. “There is no *aletheia*” here, only glimpses, “a wink of a hymen,” an eyelid, which “admit both contradiction and non-contradiction . . . (which) belong to both the conscious and the unconscious.” What is at stake, rather, is a series of “substitutive significations” caught in a “chain of differential reference,” which is not simply a question of *polysémie*, but one of dissemination marked by an endless movement, an endless sowing, with seeds caught in the Nietzschean play of chance and of necessity which no logic can reduce to its own terms. The

supplement describes this structure of substitution in that it represents its inscription and effacement at the same time, like mirrors which establish and denounce presence, which constitute the image by deconstituting presence.<sup>54</sup>

The concept of supplementarity informs Derrida's theory of writing in that the signifier, as in a rebus, "refers, at the same time, and at least, to a thing and its sound." The essence of the signifier, like that of Being, is "the possibility of its own repetition." This is, in fact, the precondition of its acting as signifier, and clearly refutes the notion of the signifier as referring to a singular signified as presence.<sup>55</sup> As Derrida argues and as his own texts show, that to which words refer are caught in the web of the texts in which they are woven. For Derrida, "there is no hors-texte." Their referents are already lost, in fact, never existed as pure external entities. As he states: "the sign, the image, the representation which comes to supplement the absent presence are illusions which mislead." The real "doesn't appear, doesn't add itself to, except by taking its meaning from a trace and an appeal to the supplement." In fact, "what opens sense and language is this writing as disappearance of the natural presence."<sup>56</sup>

The supplement, however, is paradoxically caught between a "structure of necessity," the necessity of the abyss, the void which it supplements, and an "absolute contingency," where chance dictates that the supplement can always fail to appear, like desire or a dream which, of necessity, misses the mark, which may or may not pick up the trace. But if the self-referentiality of the signifier is belied by its repressed affinity with the metaphysical notion of Being, the fortuitous character of the supplement, as well as its conceptualization, is likewise belied by the thread of denied reference that is again woven here.

It is through his discussion of Rousseau's definition of natural presence as "maternal presence" that Derrida opposes the concept of the supplement as void to the metaphysical notion of presence. For Rousseau, the question of the relationship between the void and presence revolves around the mother, since what is at issue in *Émile* is the necessity and impossibility of supplementing "maternal solicitude." Derrida echoes Rousseau's preoccupation with the maternal, admitting that "if premeditating the theme of writing, we have begun by talking about the substitution of mothers, it is, that, as Rousseau himself said: 'more depends on this than you realize.'"<sup>57</sup>

It is no accident that Derrida chooses Rousseau and particular Rousseauian texts in which the mother as absent presence is articulated; that he opens his second chapter of *Of Grammatology* with this quote from Rousseau: "I felt as if I had been guilty of incest"<sup>58</sup>; that the hymen is a "substitutive signifier" for *différance*, *pharmakon*, and supplement, all independently circumscribing and circumventing that which eludes direct expression; that his quote from Freud, which he conspicuously claims to

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be fortuitous, refers precisely to this *hystera* which can only be represented through displacement.

In Plato's metaphysical conceptualization of opposites, the absent maternal presence is repeated in the representation of Being as the original presence. Yet, in Derrida's non-metaphysics of nothingness, of eternal displacement, maternal absence is repeated not through an overt repression but through an infinite "representation of representation" which denies origin altogether. For Irigaray, the fact that maternal origin can never be one "single unique reality" precludes neither its existence nor its acting as referent. The negation of the unique referent, like the negation of voice, of *logos*, remains caught in the matricidal opposition of unities which metaphysics inaugurated. It is not the referent, but rather an impossibility of accurate reference which inscribes the desire for origin in Derrida's text.

It is true that unlike the piercing of the pupil in the sighting of Plato's blinding Truth, Derrida's piercing of the hymen as "the accomplishment of desire" establishes the feminine not only as site but as object of desire. Whereas Plato leaves woman unrepresented, Derrida represents her as radical alterity, as "that which will not be pinned down by Truth."<sup>59</sup> Yet, as Irigaray reminds us in her analysis of "Plato's Hystera," representation does not exhaust repetition. Is Derrida's denial of Plato's concept of origin not a denial of a denial? Is his displacement of the mother, as primary radical other, into the feminine as originary site of *différance* not merely another *dénégation*? For his validation of a metaphorized feminine is not yet the recognition of the mother, of the interconnectedness of woman as source and object of desire, of the maternal/feminine.<sup>60</sup>

The definition of the hymen as that which separates desire from its fulfillment suggests to us the displaced object of its desire, the *hystera*. The metaphysically occulted relationship between woman and origin remains buried, no longer under the weight of presence, but in the midst of absence. Is this perpetuity of repression not rooted in a sexually specific fear and anguish of origin, as suggested by Derrida's paraphrase of Rousseau?

Does the example of fright come by accident? Does not the metaphorical origin of language bring us necessarily back to a situation of menace, of distress, of dereliction, to an archaic solitude, an anguish of dispersion? Absolute fear would therefore be the first encounter with the other as other, as other than I and as other than itself. I can only respond to this menace of the other as other (than I) by transforming it into other (than itself) by altering, in my imagination, my fear or my desire.<sup>61</sup>

Significantly, he goes on to add that "language does not begin with pure anguish, rather, anguish can only signify itself through repetition."<sup>62</sup> This fundamental repetition reveals, in Derrida's "eternal displacement," a metaphorized desire which denies corporeal origin, a displacement of the *entre en jeu* onto the *jeu (de l')entre*, of the *hystera* onto the hymen. The

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repetition of this anguish through language marks the psychoanalytic definition of the symbolic *entre en jeu* as yet another *jeu de l'entre*, as yet one more ritual in the meta-physical burial of the maternal/feminine.

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Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), p. 90; *Of Grammatology*, tr. by G. Chakrovorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 61. For the subsequent texts that have been translated, the page reference will be given in French, followed by the English reference in brackets.
2. Although her emphasis on the repression of the maternal is a key element in Irigaray's critique of western metaphysics and of modernist discourses, it is not the only element. She also argues for the sexual specificity of discourse and sees in the metaphorical structure, so dear to deconstruction and to Lacanian psychoanalysis, an analogy to the classical dichotomy of presence and absence. She explores the psychoanalytical implications of the obsession with the death of origin, with death as origin, which characterizes both the deconstruction of metaphysics and of the traditional concept of subjectivity. In their infatuation with text, metaphor, signifiers, and self-referentiality, these theorists, she suggests, maintain the idealist structure of metaphysics in that the corporeal remains unthought and humanity disembodied. In all of these elements she sees a scopophilic tendency to distance, objectify, contain, and master. She links this to male sexual morphology, to the all too visibly exposed male sexual organ, to the instrumental nature of man's auto-eroticism that is mediated by the hand, a mediation which is rearticulated in their epistemology, constituting knowledge through the triad of subject, object, and instrument. Lacan's redefinition of the "subject" as split, as one who seeks the Other through the other is but a more recent version of this triadic division. To counter this she seeks to develop a discourse of proximity more in tune with metonymy, more reflective of the labial structure of women's sexual morphology.
3. For Derrida's discussion of the relationship between sense and metaphor see page 9.
4. Irigaray's critique of Freud and an Irigarean reading of Lacan is, of course, much more complex than is suggested by this cursory reference. And if psychoanalysis participates in the metaphysics it decries, Irigaray believes that it nonetheless offers some tools with which feminists can move beyond the phallic logic by which it has been restrained.
5. Derrida, *La dissémination*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), p. 56; *Dissemination*, tr. with an introduction and additional notes by Barbara Johnson, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 48.
6. This formulation of Derrida's project appears in Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais neutre*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985), p. 169.
7. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), p. 320; *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. with notes by A. Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 268. The Nietzschean influence is evident here, since for Nietzsche, "interpretation" could only be written in the plural.
8. *Speculum de l'autre femme*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974) translated by Gillian C. Gill as *Speculum of the Other Woman*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985). The articles mentioned are reprinted in Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais neutre*, pp. 149-68 & 169-88. In the introduction to this more recent collection of essays, she underlines the tentative nature of these early explorations where she was still participat-

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ing in the discourses from which she has since progressively disassociated herself. Though she has not since resumed a systematic analysis of Derrida's texts, we glimpse, in this early essay, traces of her developing critique.

9. Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais neutre*, pp. 155-160.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 165 & 168.
12. Irigaray, "La mécanique des fluides," *L'Arc* 58 (1974); the "Allegory of the Cave" is the subject matter of her essay cited above, "Plato's Hystera," *Speculum*, pp. 301-457 (241-364).
13. Derrida, *La dissémination*, p. 39 (33).
14. Rodolphe Gasché, "Deconstruction as Criticism" in *Glyph Textual Studies* 6 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 203.
15. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, p. 261 (219).
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270, ftnt. 19 (226, ftnt.29).
17. *Ibid.*, p.273 (229).
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 282 & 256-67 (237 & 215-16); idem, "La différance," *Théories d'ensembles*, collection Tel Quel (Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 1968), p. 57.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 302 (253).
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 260, 298-99, 318 & 288 (218, 250-51, 266-67 & 241-42). Irigaray would contest this of course. Though metaphor must, of necessity, miss the True in that metaphors displace the original displacement, traces of this second displacement are nevertheless evident and analyzable.
21. As she explains, the metaphysical concept of Being, as existence, denies the relationship of identity between all subjects and attributes except if that relationship passes through itself. Claiming for itself eternal presence, it distorts the presence of the subject as a subject which can be said to be here, now, in this way, manifested in other words, through attribution. Being divides the subject from all predicate, all attribute, whether qualitative or metaphoric, descriptive or representational. We cannot say that something is something. For despite the fact that attributes, by definition what is proper to a thing, attempt to ascribe this property to the subject, they cannot succeed, because only Being is proper and Being cannot be defined except by its own self-reference. Since Being is the only proper subject, attributes are but metaphors, projections, representations, duplications, imitations which are, of course, the metaphysical definitions of identity.
22. Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais neutre*, p. 183.
23. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, p. 285 (289); "La différance," pp. 43-47.
24. Derrida, "La différance," pp. 44, 47, 50, 53-54, 60 & 65. *Pharmakon, supplément*, hy-men form part of this chain of substitution.
25. For Plato, matter has no intelligible Form to which it corresponds and is therefore not a sensible copy. Likewise, it has no recognizable form and hence it does not itself determine form. As the mediating ground between the intelligible and the sensible, it participates in both, though not equally in each, nor in the same manner.

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26. Derrida, "La différance," pp. 59-60 & 63. He is also indebted to Freud for the concept of detour.
27. Ibid., pp. 56, 59 & 63-64.
28. Derrida, *La dissémination*, pp. 189 & 117-18 (163 & 103); "La différance," p. 44.
29. Derrida, *La dissémination*, p. 252 (223).
30. Ibid., pp. 124-26 (109-11).
31. Ibid., p. 91 (80).
32. Ibid., p. 172 (148-49). We see here the Derridean basis of Irigaray's analysis of the impossibility of Being positing its Existence outside the attributes which metaphorize it into Identity.
33. Ibid., pp. 194-95 (168).
34. Ibid., pp. 108-13 (95-100).
35. Ibid., pp. 144-146 (125-28).
36. Ibid., pp. 164, 173-5 (143, 150-52).
37. Ibid., p. 184 (159-60). I have here retained my own translation rather than use Barbara Johnson's for I prefer to translate "l'introduction de l'autre et du mélange" as "the introduction of the *other* and of *mixture*" rather than as "the introduction of the *different* and the *blend*." Also, Barbara Johnson has omitted part of the original text in her translation. The original reads: "tout cela 'contraint' (49a) à définir comme *trace* l'origine du monde, c'est-à-dire [l'inscription des formes, des schémas, dans la *matrice*, dans] le *réceptacle*." Omitting what I have placed in square brackets she has translated this as reading "all these things 'require' (49a) that we define the origin of the world as a *trace*, that is to say, a receptacle."
38. Ibid., p. 187 (162). Since Socrates was not in Derrida's original text as Barbara Johnson's translation suggests, I have translated *on* as "one."
39. Ibid., pp. 191-92 (166).
40. Ibid., p. 238 & 39 (210). I have retained Derrida's original word *différance* rather than translate it as "difference" as has Barbara Johnson.
41. Ibid., p. 237 (209). Again, I have preferred to keep Derrida's term *jouissance* rather than translate it as "enjoyment" as has Barbara Johnson.
42. Ibid., p. 239 (211). Here again, I present my own translation. *Autre* is not plural in the original text although Johnson translates it as such. Also medium has a connotation in English of substance and of the mid-point. Derrida's notion of site is lost in this translation.
43. Ibid., pp. 249-50 (220).
44. Ibid., p. 240 (212). "The hymen enters into the *antre*."
45. Ibid., p. 241 (212-13). Whose desire and fulfillment we might ask?
46. Ibid., p. 244 (216). (my translation) In "Plato's Hystera" Irigaray argues that the wall in the cave represents the placenta of birth, that through which we must pass to see the light of day. This wall, *teikhion*, behind which the stage managers hold up the statues

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whose shadows deceive the prisoners, is that through which the prisoners must pass on their way towards the fire, the true cause of the shadows, and out of the cave towards the sun.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 285 & 294 (253 & 261).
48. The erection of a wall in Plato's cave confuses the stark opposition which it is meant to implement between the cave and its passageway, between the protagonists and the spectators. The stage managers organize their show behind the wall which separates them from the prisoners. But this wall reverses the relative position of front and back walls. The prisoners watch the spectacle on the back wall, in front of them, but from the front wall, behind them, the stage managers watch the prisoners watching the spectacle. It also confuses the scenario in that the prisoners become part of the spectacle, while those who are an integral part of the allegory, the stage managers, occupy a relatively external position. Just as we cannot clearly demarcate what, in matter/mother, is attributable to the intelligible and to the sensible, so we are unable to ascertain, here, whether the activity in the passageway is part of the cave, outside the cave, both, or neither.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 259 (229). The concept of the *pli*, for Derrida, is related to the fact that the hymen is a fold of mucous membrane.
50. We see yet again, as in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," the piercing of the hymen/pupil to arrive at that which lies beyond. In the allegory, the analogy of Truth and the sun is articulated through the piercing of the pupil by the brightness of the physical sun so that the light of metaphysical Truth may reach the soul. And in Greek, *kopn*, means both pupil and virgin, pupil and the hymen by which virginity is defined.
51. Derrida, *La dissémination*, p. 208 (182).
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 239 & 250 (212, 211 & 221). I have translated *traversé* as "pierced".
53. *Ibid.*, p. 234 (206).
54. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, pp. 208, 228, 233 & 442 (145, 159, 163 & 314); *La dissémination*, pp. 293 & 250 (261 & 221). *Aletheia* is the Greek word which scholars have translated as Truth but which Heidegger suggests means disclosure.
55. But in its structural affinity to Being, the signifier's referent is arguably the Being whose unitary presence it is meant to replace. See above pp. 19.
56. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, pp. 137-39, 221, 227-28 (90-91, 154, 158-59).
57. *Ibid.*, p. 210 (146).
58. *Ibid.*, p. 145 (95).
59. Jacques Derrida & C. V. McDonald, "Choréographie," *Diacritics* Vol. 12, no. 2 (Summer, 1986):66.
60. It is interesting to note that Derrida acknowledges the feminine while disparaging the maternal, while Lacan acknowledges the maternal while disparaging the feminine. Of course, Lacan's acknowledgement of the maternal is qualified since immediately upon recognizing her as the primordial Other in the realm of the Real he exiles her to the role of the other in the realm of the Imaginary, fusing both realms and with it both of the maternal roles into a pre-human and pre-symbolic sphere. Likewise, Derrida's recognition of the feminine is curtailed by his insistence on the role of the supplement to which it is relegated. We are reminded here of the way in which Lacan theorizes the

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impossible jouissance of the woman as the supplement to the elusive maternal *object a*. Of interest also is the fact that in the supposed hymenal structure of Derrida's thought the feminine and the maternal are dissected as they are in Lacan's formulation. The hymen retains Derrida on the surface much as Plato's allegory failed to delve the depth behind the various screens/mirrors through which he demonstrated the illusive nature of knowledge. The hystera remains virgin territory.

61. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, pp. 392-93 (277).

62. *Ibid.*, p. 394 (278).

## “HOW'D YOU LIKE TO DISAPPEAR?”\* THEORIZING THE SUBJECT IN FILM

*Frank Burke*

Jameson contends that the individual self has been annihilated by postmodernism since it is no longer a centred subject, yet this presupposes that subjectivity is impossible without a rigorous homogeneity of all ideological messages within a given context. But in the face of competitive interpellation the subject is seldom answering one uniform 'call,' but rather being hailed by multiple, competing messages all issued simultaneously. The 'disappearing self' criticism has become commonplace, but it fails to take into account the centring power of individual discourses, or the power of individuals to make choices regarding those discourses. While a unitary culture may have disappeared, unitary discourses constructing very specific subjects have only intensified. The category of the subject remains highly viable in large part because it has never been so hotly contested. (James Collins<sup>1</sup>)

### Preface

Film has always had a major stake in what Collins terms “the category of the subject.” Mainstream cinema forms the most recent and perhaps the most insistent chapter in the dominant text of the “hero” in Western thought. This has been both cause and effect of the common assumption that film has a unique capacity to “individuate” — to affirm what is unique and special about the human image (note, for example, the emphasis on

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\*Capt. Edelson to Steve Burns early on in *Cruising*

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the “face” from Béla Belázs to Bergman). Yet, despite the panic privileging of the hero in current Hollywood cinema, the subject is as hotly contested in film as it is everywhere else. The essays that follow provide compelling evidence.

They also range far beyond the issue of the subject (hence defeating any simplistic attempt to introduce them). But they got me thinking about the subject in film — particularly in relation to identity and difference. And they have led me to explore how subject/identity/difference are reflected both in critical approaches to movies and in movies themselves.

I.

In an introduction to his recent anthology *Deconstruction in Context*, Mark C. Taylor summarizes the historical development of the modern subject in terms of identity/difference:

In the wake of Descartes’s meditations, modern philosophy becomes a *philosophy of the subject*. The locus of certainty and truth, subjectivity is the first principle from which everything arises and to which all must be reduced or returned.... As God created the world through the Logos, so man creates a “world” through conscious and unconscious projection. In different terms, the modern subject defines itself by its *constructive* activity. Like God, this sovereign subject relates only to what it constructs and is, therefore, unaffected by anything other than itself. What seems to be a relationship to otherness — be that other God, nature, objects, or subjects — always turns out to be an aspect of mediate self-relation that is necessary for complete self-consciousness. The absolute knowledge made possible by the phenomenological reduction of difference to identity in subjectivity’s full knowledge of itself realizes Western philosophy’s dream of enjoying a total presence that is undisturbed by absence or lack.<sup>2</sup>

The apotheosis of Western “identity thinking” (to borrow Adorno’s term) is Hegel’s System, and Taylor’s anthology traces the reaction of post-Hegelian thinkers to the System — culminating with Deconstruction and Derrida:

Deconstruction is, among other things, a critical rereading of all Western philosophy in which Derrida tries to dismantle (the) tradition, *as if* from within, by tracing philosophy’s other.... Like Heidegger, Derrida [maintains] that philosophy does not, indeed *cannot*, think difference.... Along with writers like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Bataille, and Blanchot, Derrida tries to think the unthinkable by thinking difference *as* difference, and other *as* other. This differ-

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ence, irreducible to identity — this other, irreducible to same, is an alterity that “exceeds the alternative of presence and absence.”<sup>3</sup>

The movement charted by Taylor from the modern to the postmodern, the philosophical to the postphilosophical, establishes a continuum which characterizes notions of the subject in film criticism and films themselves — and which is very much in evidence in the essays that follow. On one end, we have the traditional sense of subjectivity (the hero) as the foundation of all that matters. (This position is repeatedly under attack by the authors below.) On the other end, we have the play of difference and radical alterity of which the subject is merely a part. (Here, no Hegelian *Aufhebung* can reduce the other to the self, difference to identity, the world to the will and constructive activity of the hero.) We also have a middle ground which gives rise to what I see as the prevailing story of fiction film: the subject/hero, adrift and de-centered in a world of difference, commits himself/herself to the elimination of otherness, to creating and/or identifying with structures, myths, and codes that come to be identical with the self. (The films of Peckinpah, most genre films — western, detective, gangster — and, in fact, most American films past and present tell this kind of story.)

In a sense, there is little to choose between the first and the third options. Whether the subject's world begins or becomes self-identical, it exists principally in the realm of the Imaginary, of mirroring and imploding identity/other relationships.<sup>4</sup> This “story of the Imaginary” could also be termed the story of “colonization,” in which the subject appropriates everything non-identical to himself. (I specify gender advisedly, since the subject — or self-centered story is inevitably male.)

There is a flip side to the story of colonization, in which the subject becomes appropriated to some hegemonic social and institutional “other” (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Hair* and a spate of recent war movies such as *Full Metal Jacket* and *Gardens of Stone*). This might seem to subvert the traditional role of the subject. Yet, to a large extent it merely substitutes the subject with the Subject (manmade, man-centered Society). And to the extent that institutional colonization is presented as deplorable, it recuperates the centrality of the small “s” subject through tragedy. (Romantic hubris is replaced by equally romantic angst.) Most important, the system of collapsing identity-other relationships remains in place; genuine alterity and difference are excluded.

Historically, the colonization story has been the basis for prolonged debate over the worth of individual films. The question has been whether stories of appropriation are self-reflexive or merely ideologically determined. Does the film/filmmaker know what he/she/it is doing (hence are we being given a well-conceived lesson on social mores), or are we just confronted with another unconscious reproduction of dominant culture? This, of course (like the issue of self-reflexivity), is largely a matter of intentionality, yet again centering the “subject” — now as auteur rather than hero.

## II.

In recent years, death-of-the-author theorizations have caused radical reformulation of the auteur theory.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, structuralist and poststructuralist critical strategies have helped shift the focus away from the (male) protagonist(s).<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, in much current criticism, the subject-hero still remains the source of meaning for individual films, reflecting the larger assumption that the subject is the origin and locus of meaning in society. (This is virtually *always* the case in journalistic film reviewing, but I am talking here of academic discourse.)

The essays that follow provide useful examples, almost always in a highly critical light. For instance, Snyder has trouble accepting a Jungian interpretation of *Cruising* by Nancy Hayles and Kathryn Rindskopf which sees Stuart (the killer) as the "shadow" side of Burns (the cop). In the context of this interpretation, "The tragedy of Pacino's [Burns's] quest is not that he fails to engage the shadow, but that in our society he cannot integrate it within himself to become a whole person."<sup>7</sup> At least two assumptions underlie this reading of the film: 1) everything "out there," if properly seen, is merely a reflection of the subject (the entire Jungian apparatus of shadows, personae, animuses, animas, etc. is designed to "operationalize" this assumption); 2) the ideal is for everything "out there" to be properly consumed by the subject so that he/she can become "whole." Here we have a psychology of the subject which is more than equal to Taylor's modern philosophy of the subject. The extent to which otherness is collapsed into the subject-as-source is even implied in the authors' use of Pacino's (the actor's) name rather than Burns's (the character's). Just as society is merely a reflection/shadow of Burns, the latter, we may assume, is merely the reflection/shadow of Pacino.

Snyder's dissatisfaction with the Jungian collapse of the other into the subject is matched by Testa's displeasure with certain Freudian/structuralist strategies employed by Robin Wood.<sup>8</sup> Wood, as Testa explains, establishes a set of binary oppositions for the horror genre, one of which is the "Monstrous/Normal." The "monstrous" is repressed "natural desire" and "a mirror of the repressed aspects of the self." The goal, as for the Jungians, is some sort of recognition and reconciliation. The linkage of Freudian criticism with structuralism ends up recuperating the transcendental subject which structuralism was instrumental in dismantling. The binary oppositions of structuralism, which serve among other things to construct subjectivity, become subsumed *within* subjectivity — i.e., within a larger, all encompassing self-other dichotomy. One might argue that this kind of mirroring does injustice to Freud as well as structuralism, since the former fissured the Cartesian subject beyond the possibility of reconciliation and simple mirroring. (Hence the centrality of Freud for Lacan, who fissured the subject further, and also cracked the mirror [stage].)

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Though Testa's point of disagreement with Wood does not emerge from precisely the same issues discussed here, his general disapproval is based on Wood's tendency to reduce the "other" to the "same" — Cronenberg's work to Wood's cine-structuralist categories. In contrast to Wood (and other genre critics), Testa takes as a point of departure the excess and instability of Cronenberg's work — the remainder that lies outside simple identification and generic appropriation.

### III.

The films discussed in the following essays reflect the same tension between preserving the foundational subject and "thinking otherwise" that exists in current film criticism. The films of Cronenberg, it would seem, are highly paradoxical in their embodiment of this tension. While his work thematizes the dissolution of mind/body (subject/object) relations, and delights in a kind of Bataillesque excess, the structure of his films often remains subject-centered. (Intriguingly, Cronenberg cites Descartes — whose *cogito ergo sum* marked modern philosophy's embrace of the subject — as a "gloss" on his vision.)<sup>9</sup> To illustrate my point, I will focus on five recent films: *Scanners*, *The Brood*, *Videodrome*, *The Fly*, and *Dead Ringers*. (I omit *The Dead Zone*, which would normally be grouped with these films chronologically, not only because it is an adaptation of a Stephen King novel but also because Cronenberg did not script the film.)

*Videodrome* offers the most complex example, and Testa helps highlight the complexity. On the one hand, *Videodrome* is rooted in the tradition of the "*Kammerspielfilm*," in which the inner state of the hero dominates the story. On the other hand, the film works on a principle of reversal, whereby Max-the-subject (producer) is revealed to be Max-the-object (product/victim of seduction). Max's subjectivity turns out to be an illusion, a point reinforced (as Testa notes) by the fact that, as pornographer, Max does not make films, he merely collects and purveys them. He is thus constructed by what he sees, not by his own actions and intelligence.

Moreover, *Videodrome* sets up then destroys a psychology of the subject, at least as far as Max is concerned. As Max begins to become infatuated (personally rather than merely professionally) by the videodrome signal, we assume that its S & M imagery is merely a reflection of his own repressed and perverse inclinations. However, once we discover that it is the signal itself rather than the imagery that attracts, the notion of self-other mirroring is demolished. (In fact, in focusing on signal rather than image, Cronenberg marks the difference between movies and television, between projection and transmission.) Finally, there is the sustained dissolution of all body/mind, subject/object, Max/world distinctions as hallucination, implantation, "rewriting," and simulation erase identifiable boundaries.

Yet while *Videodrome* thoroughly undermines Max's subject position, it reconstitutes it elsewhere. On the one hand there is the corporate sub-

ject, Spectacular Optical, which has all the attributes of the rational Cartesian subject writ large: agency, intentionality, self-determination, originality, and, especially, the ability to reduce the other to the self. Spectacular Optical is, clearly, the Panopticon reconstituted (as is the tv, whose role becomes reversed in *Videodrome* from seen to omnipotent seer). Cronenberg could not have given us a more "Identical" representation of the institutional Self which turns *Videodrome* at least in part into what I have described earlier as a flip-side colonization story.

On the other hand there is Brian O'Blivion — the subject as guru: the "last man" in a world of corporate takeover. (The fact that his presence is posthumous merely underscores Cronenberg's insistence on reconstituting the subject after it has seemingly been killed off.) The struggle between O'Blivion and Spectacular Optical makes Max's disappearing subjecthood the battleground for other, colonizing, subjects. Even if we read the end as Max's devolution beyond O'Blivion and Spectacular Optical into pure self-destructive hallucination — even if we see (with Testa) that his subjectivity is entirely reversed, becoming the tv reality that was originally "objective"<sup>10</sup> — we have yet one more instance of subjectivity disappearing only to reappear somewhere else. (Moreover, the entire final sequence, as Max's reversed hallucinations, becomes entirely subject-centered.)

The dominance of the subject is more conventional and less complex in Cronenberg's earlier films *The Brood* and *Scanners*. In the former, everything begins with the individual. Not only is Dr. Hal Raglan the originator of the Somafree Institute of Psychoplasmics, but far more important, his therapy — getting patients to externalize their anger physically — locates all change in the psyche of subjects ("I'm angry therefore I am"). The film becomes populated with projections/offspring/replications of self, which destroy all otherness. In *Scanners* (whose title refers to people capable of exerting mental control over minds and matter), we again have an ordinary male, Dr. Paul Ruth, who not only invented the drug which makes scanning possible, but who is the father of both the protagonist Cameron Vale and the antagonist Darryl Revok. (Ruth's subject-hood is made blatantly transcendental when Revok refers to him pointedly as "Our Father" in a discussion which includes reference to other religious notions such as incarnation.) Again, agency and change emerge from the minds of subjects ("I scan, therefore I am"). We also have the emergence of corporate selves (Consec and Biocarbon Amalgamate), anticipating *Videodrome*, but the film grounds itself far more in the individual than in the corporate subject, culminating with a good old American-style "scan-out" between Vale and Revok. As in many of Cronenberg's other films, the subject position may shift (Vale seems to be incarnated in Revok's image at film's end), but this is much more a reconfiguration than a deconstruction of subjectivity.

*The Fly*, Cronenberg's penultimate film (as of this writing), centres the subject even more completely than *The Brood* or *Scanners*. Seth Brundle is a self-sufficient loner. He may have corporate sponsorship, but this is

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clearly the result of his genius. His metamorphosis is almost entirely the result of his own actions: he invents the teleportation process, assembles the mechanism, then is foolish enough to fall in love, get jealous, get drunk, and undergo teleportation without sufficient precaution. There are, of course, a few things which qualify his autonomy. He admits to contracting out a lot of the equipment manufacture, the fly is aleatory, and the computer takes over and becomes a gene splicer when faced with two different organisms in the pod. The most promising of these in terms of decentering Brundle is the fly itself. Given the fact that it names the film, the fly could suggest that the aleatory is, in fact, the real hero and that, for all his seeming dominance, Brundle ends up displaced.

However, virtually everything in the film works to confirm identity and eliminate difference in a way that ensures the domination of the subject. For instance, the goal of teleportation is to reproduce identity — to make the identical reappear in another place. And, the confirmation of success for Brundle is his own reproduction. Paternity, which is so important in a film such as *Scanners*, becomes male self-birthing.

Moreover, even though the fly (otherness, difference) becomes implicated in (Brundle's) identity, otherness is consistently treated as negative. Even the computer tries to splice difference (the fly and the human) into one. Then "Brundlefly" — initially a relatively delightful mixture of identities — gradually sloughs off Brundle and becomes fly. This becoming other, in turn, is seen as the source of horror within the movie.

The result, of course, is the destruction of the fly by the last vestige of Brundle's identity/humanity. He emerges from the telepod 99% insect but manages to use one of his appendages to direct a shotgun (held by his former lover Ronnie) to his head — begging, in effect, to be blown away. She reluctantly obliges, and the film's title becomes ironic. As visible and as seemingly dominant as the fly has become by the end, the film's conclusion is brought about by purely human action. Brundle, refusing to become other, affirms his human subjecthood — and his central agency within the film — right to the finish.

One way to "de-subjectify" *The Fly* is to take it all for laughs — as a comic postmodern commentary on "the fall of a great man" and a satire on the male subject with his urge for self-transformation and religious transcendence. Certainly the story is absurd, and there are moments in the film when Cronenberg clearly acknowledges the ridiculousness of both his hero and his tale. However, the ending, though conceptually hilarious, is not emotionally so. It comes across as horrible and, most of all, "tragic." More specifically, it comes across as the tragedy of the lost subject, of lost identity, of lost humanity. As such, it makes *The Fly* by far the most melodramatically humanist of Cronenberg films examined here — a real retreat from the complexities and (at least surface) postmodernity of *Videodrome*. On the other hand, the absurdity of the tragedy, and in fact of the entire film, marks *The Fly* as impossible humanism. It opens a gap between come-

dy and bathos, concept and feeling, that cannot be closed. Perhaps in spite of itself, *The Fly* ends up asserting a difference, "changing the subject." In this light, the title would prove more than just ironic.

*Dead Ringers*, Cronenberg's most recent film, though much different from *The Fly* in subject matter, is quite similar in its method of centering the subject and eliminating difference.<sup>11</sup> As with its predecessor, *Dead Ringers* clearly emphasizes the agency and choice of the unified subject — somewhat paradoxical given the fact that subjectivity is split between twins. The whole gruesome medical career(s) of Elliot/Beverly Mantle can be attributed to a childhood incident in which they are snottily rejected by a young girl in their attempts at sexual exploration. In response, they become gynecologic misogynists — and what could be seen as a crucial tautology from a decentered, ideological point of view (gynecologic control of women's bodies *is* a form of patriarchal misogyny) is reduced to the mere personal idiosyncrasy of two warped but brilliant, coherent, and initially self-determining heroes. The insistence on grounding events within the twinned psyche of Elliot and Beverly repeatedly blunts anything resembling an institutional analysis of the medical profession and makes the film claustrophobic in its rendering of an almost exclusively "inside" world.<sup>12</sup>

Having securely grounded the action within subjectivity, *Dead Ringers* then works, *Fly*-like, to collapse the multiple into the one, the other into a single subject. This occurs most blatantly when the potentially differentiating aspects of split identity are sacrificed to the principle of *identicality* — present in the fact that the Mantle brothers are identical twins, in the use of one actor (Jeremy Irons) to play both men, and in the loss of all seeming difference between the twins by film's end. (The collapsing of brothers into one recalls the incarnation of Cameron Vale within Darryl Revok's body at the end of *Scanners*, as well as Revok's sardonic comment just prior to the final confrontation: "After all, brothers should be close, don't you think?")

The loss of difference is underscored metaphorically near the film's end by Elliot's and Beverly's identification of themselves as Siamese twins (brothers not merely similar but joined as one). Their sameness becomes both metaphorical and actual through their union in death.

Throughout the film the relationship between Elliot and Bev is threatened by anything nonidentical. Professionally, Elliot's differing career development creates tension. Personally, Claire (and, by extension, woman as anything other than scientific or sexual object) is a source of danger. The most obvious response to the threat of Claire(Woman)-as-other is elimination. She and more peripheral women are gone by the end of the movie. Less obvious but more important is the appropriation of women — a process which becomes "identical" to the elimination of difference between Elliot and Beverly.<sup>13</sup> The appropriation of women is implicit, as I have suggested, in the Mantle brothers' profession: as gynecologists they

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have taken over woman's body, woman's reproductivity. (Claire implies her loss of proprietorship when she has to ask one of the twins early on: "Tell me about my uterus.") The paternity of *Scanners*, become self-birthing in *The Fly*, now becomes usurpation of maternity. Claire, who is incapable of bearing children, must come to the Mantles for her fertility — first professionally, then sexually. (Within the sterile male economy of the film, she never does acquire the capacity to reproduce.) More subtly, men take on the role of women. Beverly or "Bev" is established early on as the feminine partner of the twins — not only by name but by being the stay-at-home as well as the more sensitive, more vulnerable, and, of course, weaker twin. Then Elliot becomes "Ellie," as *he* becomes vulnerable and weak — victimized by Beverly's own victimization. At the end, there is a "female" coup as Beverly emasculates Ellie. Each now occupies a gynecologist's chair — the former site of women — and women are no longer necessary, even as surgical instruments. In the film's final gynecological procedure, birthing has been replaced by a symbolic separation of Siamese twins — an act which does not differentiate as new life ("separation can be a terrifying thing," one of the twins attests), but collapses into shared death.

One might be tempted to read some of the above as not only profoundly but self-reflexively insightful into the ways of patriarchy and the oppression of women. However, we must recall the film's thoroughgoing avoidance of institutional and ideological analysis. Moreover, the film appears to offer no validation of women, no sense that there is something *wrong* in all that is going on. After all, the little bitch at the beginning starts all the trouble, and Claire is a nymphomaniac druggie, too horny to distinguish between two different lovers. (All that "redeems" her is her desire to become a real woman by bearing children.)<sup>14</sup> The Mantles may be slimeballs, but they so completely control the show that there is no position within the film from which any critique can be launched. Added to that is the essentialist insistence that women (in addition to being bitchy, horny, addictive, and obsessed with motherhood) are emotional, vulnerable, and weak. Finally, there is the same retreat at the end of *Dead Ringers* that we witnessed at the end of *The Fly* — into pathos that suddenly renders the offensive main male character(s) pitiable and tragic. There is, in short, nothing I can see to indicate that the film is any less pathologically misogynist than the world it depicts.

As we move from Cronenberg to Joyce Wieland, the subject can be theorized in a substantially different way. Armatage approaches Wieland and the issue of the subject in terms of feminist theory. In particular, she focuses on Teresa de Lauretis's revision of the notion that "the personal is political" — not to romanticize the individual in political terms (à la "engagement," "commitment") but rather to emphasize the fact that the construction of the subject in relation to language/discourse is inherently political. In the case of women, the subject is constructed outside of or against language, in "silence," and in a problematic relationship to

(dominant) discourse. Armatage's feminist emphasis on the "social subject" is radically different from the male obsession, in the other films/filmmakers under discussion, with the transcendental subject. In fact the feminist revision of subjectivity offers a release from the absolute identification of the subject with male issues of autonomy, power, and appropriation.

The subject as a construction in/against language offers an interesting point of access to *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (1968), Wieland's remarkable "allegory" of gerbils escaping their U.S. prisoners, crossing the border into Canada, and triggering a U.S. invasion. The film offers two contrasting levels of discourse which, in the context of Armatage's discussion, can be hypothesized as feminine versus masculine. The feminine is the domestic (and reflects Wieland's commitment, discussed at some length by Armatage, to insert the uniquely feminine into cultural discourse). It consists of the kitchen table, family pets (gerbils, cats), gardens, the natural environment, and perhaps most important, the nonverbal immediacy of both the film's action and the film(ed) world. Superimposed in the form of subtitles and intertitles is the realm of language (the Symbolic, the Name of the Father), which concocts a comically absurd narrative or allegory out of the domestic realm. Gerbils become rats, cats become jailers, arbitrary borders (U.S./Canada) are erected. Language also gives the film a title which has nothing to do with the images and action. On the level of allegory, the film may be "about" oppressors and oppressed, but far more important, it reveals oppression to be the very condition of its own existence as *narrativized* rather than free-flowing imagery.

The film, then, is about itself as a signifying practice, about the manipulative, artificial nature of narrative, and about the forced subsumption of feminine visual/domestic discourse within male verbal/militarist discourse. (The content of the allegory — oppression, rebellion, invasion, mixed in with contentious leftist ideological statements — is clearly male-aggressive.) In the largest sense, it can be seen as a film about the construction and appropriation of female subjectivity. The fact that *Rat Life* was attacked as allegory and as a trivialization of political issues (the Vietnam war) seems somewhat ironic. Wieland's use of allegory does not trivialize politics, it politicizes narrative, discourse, and art. Moreover, it suggests that the fundamental battle zone of imperialism is not Southeast Asia in the 1960s (or Central America in the 80s), but rather the process of subject and discourse formation in male society.

Because the subject is a site of discourse for Wieland, the free Cartesian/romantic ego is nowhere to be seen in *Rat Life*. The personal-as — political maxim is, indeed, revised, and subjectivity forfeits the kind of discrete identity and autonomy that characterized Cronenberg's heroes and progenitors.

When we move from *Rat Life* to William Friedkin's *Cruising*, we are not only back in the realm of the male, macho individual, we are thrust into a film in which (self)identity is an obsession. (Snyder will address much

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of the following from a different perspective.) Consider the following bits of dialogue, all from a five-minute stretch early in the film:

"Capt. Edelstein?" "Edelson." "Ah, sorry."

"There are more guys out there impersonating cops than there are actual cops."

"Well, frankly, the victims appear to be the same physical type. Which is to say they all look like you."

"These [hotel] killings have a similar m.o. But we've also been finding parts of bodies floating in the river. We don't know a damn thing about these torso victims. We don't even know who the hell they are yet. But it's my hunch that they were done by the same two guys who did these two killings up here."

In each of these instances, difference is in some way denied, identity affirmed and/or imposed. The last two statements are actually comical in their blind insistence. To say that victims "appear to be the same physical type" as someone is not at all to say they all look like that person. And to conclude that the torso murders (about which Edelson admits to knowing nothing) are performed by the same person who kills people and leaves them whole in hotel rooms is pure wishful thinking.

Keeping things (self)identical, especially for Edelson, is also a way of keeping things separate: cops and killers, good guys and bad, and ultimately self and other. This separateness works not to preserve or affirm the other, but to "identify" it in order to neutralize its threat through appropriation, elimination, or submission. Edelson, the cops, and dominant culture appropriate and eliminate: by jailing, ghettoizing, killing. The gays submit — becoming the other through dress and violent behavior.

This latter is, of course, a form of self-other mirroring, as subjects, insecure in their own identity, reaffirm it by seeing themselves in everyone else. Sartorial doubling is the most pervasive form, Steve Burns's (the cop's) strange fascination with Stuart (the presumed killer) is another crucial example. The subject, even more so than in Cronenberg, seeks always to be the origin of relatedness; "what seems to be a relationship to otherness . . . always turns out to be an aspect of mediate self-relation" (Taylor above).

Although identity and the subject are more obviously and more obsessively privileged in *Cruising* than in any of the other films we have discussed, *Cruising* is also the film most given to the play of difference that makes simple identification impossible. We never discover for sure who *any* of the murderers are, they remain plural despite Edelson's attempts to make them one, Burns may actually be a murderer himself, and attempts to provide a simple Jungian mirror-reading of characterization inevitably fail.

In fact, by film's end, subjects are part of a never-ending process of dispersal — the culmination of a film long proliferation of murdered and dis-

membered subjects. Moreover, dispersal is accompanied by completely illogical re-materialization. Everyone and everything show up everywhere. The subject-position of the killer(s) even surfaces (perhaps) in Steve Burns, as he lives next to the viciously murdered Ted Bailey.

The complexity of subject dispersal/rematerialization becomes clear in the third-from-final sequence, when we see from the rear an unidentifiable figure, in cop/gay uniform, walking toward a leather bar. Is it Burns (it is the "same physical type")? If so, since his undercover masquerade as a gay is over, does this mean he has *become* gay? Or has he become the killer, now out cruising? Is it a killer who is *not* Burns? Is it a cop? Is it a cop who is gay who is a killer (which brings us back to Burns!)? All we can really assert is that it is an image, walking and dressed like a human, which may or may not be possessed of any of a number of possible subjects.

This recalls the prevailing condition of another Friedkin film, *The Exorcist*, where Regan is the place of possession, the locus of indeterminable subject positions which, though collapsed by society into one (a Demon), is in fact the "demon" of Difference. *The Exorcist*, in turn, helps gloss the eerie moment in the penultimate scene of *Cruising* when Nancy, Burns's lover, begins to don the cop/gay heavy-leather gear that Burns has cast off. She, like Regan, like the mysterious figure seen from the back, like Burns, becomes the possible site of anything. Her identity is not her own, and she is unprotected even by gender or sexuality from the play of decentered subjectivity that has issued from an all male world.

The deconstruction of the subject is completed in this penultimate scene, partly through Nancy but principally through Burns. After a period of estrangement caused by his undercover work, Burns has returned to Nancy's apartment and announced "I'm back." The implicit assertion that he has regained his former identity (i.e., "I am back") is quickly and thoroughly undercut. As Nancy plays dress-up in the other room (stealing Steve's recent — and only remaining — identity), Burns is busy shaving and cleaning up. As he looks in the mirror, he clearly fails to find the reassuring image of a former self. (This scene evokes an earlier scene of Burns looking in the mirror, applying makeup for his undercover work, and echoing Edelson's prophetic question: "How'd you like to disappear?") Instead of a vibrant former self there is an utterly blank look — a face without *personality*, a dead subject.<sup>15</sup> His gaze then shifts so that it is looking directly at us. Not only is subject-ivity destroyed but so is all concomitant mirroring — through the absence of the mirror reflection. We do not see it (a clever and necessary detail on Friedkin's part). Burns *can't* see it (there can be no self-image for a dead subject). And, it ends up being replaced by us, who are as invisible to Burns as his own mirror image.

If, in the spirit of Cronenbergian humanism, we were placing our stake in the subject, this would be a sad case of identity loss. But the movie does not impel us to see it that way. In fact, in place of the subject, it opens

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up new possibilities which have interesting ramifications for our own positioning within a cinematic/specular system. When Burns looks out at an image that will not/cannot look back, three interrelated things occur: the object of the gaze is eliminated; the subject-object, self-other circuit is broken; and the gaze ceases to be appropriative. Instead of looking at, we have looking out. This even tends to obtain when we reinstate the object of the gaze — as we must do in the case of Burns, onscreen, looking at us. His “looked-at” is also an “out-look.” In this context, the gaze becomes not merely the confirmation of subjectivity through the appropriation of the other, not fixation in the mirror and the Imaginary, but a means of self-dispersal. Friedkin, in short, has opened his film and the specular onto the realm of Dis/Appearance.

He concludes his film accordingly, with the tantalizing image of a tugboat, apparently towing something that never makes it onscreen. Not only does the “tuggee” never make it, but the boat enters screen left, crosses through the picture, and exits screen right, leaving only a rope connecting something unseen to something unseen.<sup>16</sup> The rope becomes the consummate expression of Dis/Appearance: the presence of absence and the absence of presence. It also becomes the consummate celebration not of identity but of difference or the “spaces between” identity. (It is a temporal as well as a spatial celebration, affirming the difference of the “now” from the just-seen and the about-to-come-into-sight.) The fade to black moments before the (presumed) appearance of the tuggee eliminates the object of the gaze and frustrates narrative expectation and narrative closure, short-circuiting our spectatorial mechanisms of identification.

All this, in turn, defeats and reverses the insistence throughout the film on appropriation and (imposed) unity. Had the object attached to the tug been dragged on screen, it would have been triply appropriated: by the tug, by the movie, by us. Instead, “replaced” by a line that escapes on both sides of the screen, it bespeaks only dissemination. Similarly, the film frame, instead of remaining the place of appropriation, becomes the place of dispersal. Instead of suturing objects together (what the police seek to do with the torso victims) it serves as the border where dismemberment and excess occur.

*Cruising*, I would conclude, takes its title seriously — far more seriously than do its protagonists. For them, the verb is transitive, oriented toward direct objects and consequently toward places of rest (sexual partners, criminal offenders, gratification, law and order, the other-as-undiscovered-self). In the full context of the film, however, cruising is the *in-transit*-ive and intransigent play of difference which operates within, between, and beyond the categories characters attempt to set up. It erases the margins and exceeds the bounds — inviting us to Dis/Appear into a space where thinking difference as difference, other as other, becomes possible.

## IV.

The issue of the subject is very much caught up in the issue of reference and signification. The death of the subject in semiotics and structuralism has resulted directly from the replacement of reference with signification. The subject, forfeiting its transcendental character as someone standing outside signification, becomes constructed entirely in and through the play of signs (signifier and signified). More precisely, it becomes constructed through "shifters" ("I," "you,") which create subject positions, not subjects.<sup>17</sup>

The films discussed above illustrate this quite clearly. The more realistic and referential they seek to be, the more subject-centered they remain. The more open they are to the play of signification, the less stable their subjects become.

Cronenberg's films again are paradoxical. As science fiction and horror, they could readily tend toward the nonrealistic and nonreferential and — especially as horror — toward the figurative and symbolic. Moreover, as mixed genre films, they might foreground their own status as signifying practices, playing with and against the practices (genres) they are citing. Testa's essay suggests that useful critical work can be done along these lines, and recent postmodern interest in Cronenberg emerges from the promise they seem to hold for such work. However, I am not sure they can deliver on their promise, because they constantly seek to anchor themselves in the real — partly by *literalizing* the signifiatory aspects of their story (Testa discusses literalization in *Videodrome*), partly by (overly) humanizing their characters. We end up *identifying* with characters as real, and we end up identifying with futuristic or horrific situations as virtually real. (A probable or possible real can be just as reference-able as a "real" real.) *The Fly* is a case in point. Brundle's transformation becomes so literal, so believable, that the metaphorical dimension tends to be lost.

(Of the Cronenberg films I have discussed, *Videodrome* seems to me the most inclined toward signification rather than reference, largely because of its focus on the mediascape of television.<sup>18</sup> Caught in the simulacrum, at least one subject, Max Renn, gets deconstructed. Moreover, its literalizations — such as Max actually turning into a videorecorder — are so fantastic, that when they collapse the metaphoric into the actual, the latter does not absorb the former, it becomes it. The real is effectively turned into pure signification.)

Linked to the privileging of reference over signification in Cronenberg's work is the agency of a subject who exists outside or prior to signification. This is the paternal "Signifier" in a pre-linguistic, pre-semiotic sense: not someone caught up in the sign play of signifier-signified, but one who "signifies" or "creates meaning" by setting the play in motion. (The paternal Signifier can be an individual or a corporate subject.) Spectacular Optical is a case in point. Though Max Renn and even Brian O'Blivion get

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caught in the videodrome signalscape, Spectacular Optical stands outside, initiating and — at least for a time — controlling it. Seth Brundle begins outside, activating the teleportation process. His tragedy lies in forfeiting distance, becoming part of the process, and getting rewritten by his computer. In *Scanners* Paul Ruth originates the action, in *Dead Ringers* the Mantle brothers. It is Brundle, Ruth, Elliot, and Bev whom we can hold accountable for the horror within their films.

Standing outside signification, the paternal Signifiers are free to be referents, and to ensure the status of reference within their films. In so doing, they incarnate the traditional giver of meaning in Judaeo-Christian tradition, the absolute origin and transcendental referent: God (“Our Father,” as Revok calls Ruth). Within the romantic tradition, they incarnate the Artist/Auteur, who stands prior to and sets in play the signification of his (gender intentional) artwork. (Cronenberg has suggested a link between his scientific Signifiers and himself-as-artist: “I feel a lot of empathy for doctors and scientists. In fact I often feel that they are my persona [sic] in the film.”)<sup>19</sup>

We have already noted the absence of the traditional subject — and suggested the emphasis on signification — in Wieland’s *Rat Life and Diet in North America*. The latter goes hand in hand with the film’s thoroughgoing subversion of reference. The title is “wrong,” the identification of gerbils as “rats” is “wrong,” in fact the entire allegorical structure is “wrong.” There are no referents to which the words “truly” refer us. The erasure of reference works two ways. Not only do words lie as they try to direct us “beyond themselves,” the images we watch (potential referents in the “realistic” medium of film) lose their grounding in any real world by their absurd placement within allegory. Moreover, allegory as Wieland uses it, instead of performing its classic function of directing us to some extratextual reality, simply points out the absurdity of its own signifying excesses.<sup>20</sup> This undermining of a stable extratextual reality (in particular the Vietnam conflict, to which the film might ostensibly refer) was precisely what annoyed the politically committed.

Ultimately, *Rat Life* exemplifies the way in which signification emerges from the play of signifiers, not from the transparent reality of referents (or from fixed signifieds). It does so ironically — to illustrate the imposition of one kind of discourse on another. And, in fact, it may do so somewhat nostalgically, for (returning to the terms we set up in my earlier analysis of the film), the discourse of the oppressed (the feminine), clearly lies closer to reference than does the discourse of the oppressor (masculine).

The problem of the assumed (extratextual) referent got Friedkin in trouble, much as it did Wieland. In the case of the former, the film was boycotted by gays who felt that it presented a distorted view of the gay community. However, even Edelson, with his penchant for misrecognition, makes clear that the heavy-leather scene is *not* mainstream gay — obviating any real need for Friedkin’s disclaimer at the film’s beginning. More

important, the breadth and complexity of the film's vision have impelled gay critics to address it as something more and other than gay bashing.<sup>21</sup>

What Snyder suggests and my reading supports is that *Cruising* is no more about "real" people than about signification itself: about people "identifying" themselves within a system of meanings which fails to hold because the play of signification is far more important than the meanings it generates. It is about figures who from the outset, with their uniforms and colored handkerchiefs, are signifiers of signification rather than referents. These figures, culminating with the mystery image we see from the back, are two-dimensional, all surface, all (as Snyder will later demonstrate) semiotic. And the principal figure (Steve Burns), merely shifts subject positions within cultural subsystems of signification and ends up proving the radical impossibility of being a "real man."

Burns's "Dis/Appearance" — as well that of the murderer(s), the tugboat, the tuggee, and most everything else in the film — makes *Cruising* both an act of and an escape from signification. However, *Cruising* manages to escape from signification through signification — which is far different from a Cronenbergian escape to some pre-existing, originary, real. Friedkin's "escape" is, in fact, the articulation of *différance*, the Derridean "nonoriginal origin"<sup>22</sup> of signification, identity, and individual differences:

It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called "present" element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present.<sup>23</sup>

*Cruising's* concluding image of the "disseminating," "differentiating" rope is, it might be argued, the "trace of *différance*" found within signification once the rigid identities and "subject-ions" of society have been dismembered.

Having pushed my discussion entirely beyond the realm of reference, let me conclude with a brief retreat. Or, more specifically, let me acknowledge the obvious fact that, for all one wishes to talk of (pure) signification, there is a strong and powerful "content" with which we "identify" in a film such as *Cruising*. Its imagery of violence, brutality, and domination do reflect aspects of our society and our lives. It has, in short, a referential dimension — and one which is extremely grim. I would not argue that we should ignore this dimension — or foreclose discussion, for instance, of the film's relation to the gay community. I would, however, argue that equal play be given to its discursive dimension — to the way it opens up spaces and possibilities that "exceed" its social and psycho-

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logical content and thus qualify the grimness of its reference. I would, in fact, argue that the film should be read "excessively" in two directions: as reference exceeding the limits of signification and as signification exceeding the bounds of reference. This kind of reading raises the interesting possibility that in postmodernism movies, while emancipatory strategies are denied in the realm of the social, they reemerge on the level of signification itself. Equally important, "excessive" reading keeps a film like *Cruising* free from premature dismissal as Hollywood mainstream cinema, enabling us to match its narrative suggestiveness with our own critical methodology of Dis/Appearance.

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### Notes

1. "Postmodernism and Cultural Practice," *Screen* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1987), 24.
2. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1986, p. 3.
3. *Deconstruction in Context*, pp. 32-33. Taylor covers much of the same ground in his study of modern philosophy and post-philosophy: *Altarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
4. The predominance of the "Imaginary story" may seem inevitable given the specular nature of the film medium. As readers familiar with film theory will know, film and the Imaginary have been fruitfully linked for well over a decade. See, for instance, Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Alfred Guzzetti, et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); Charles F. Altman, "Psychoanalysis and Film: The Imaginary Discourse," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 2, no.3 (Summer 1977): 260-264 (rpt. in Bill Nichols, ed. *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, Vol. II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).  
The link has been especially useful to feminist theory, beginning with Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure in the Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18 (rpt. in Nichols).
5. See for example John Caughie, ed. *Theories of Authorship: A Reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).
6. For useful access to important structuralist and poststructuralist writings on film, see *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vols. I & II, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976 and 1985); *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).
7. Nancy Hayles and Kathryn Rindskopf, "The Shadow of Violence," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 8, no. 2: 2-8.
8. Testa focuses on Wood's contributions to *The American Nightmare*, ed. Andrew Britton and Richard Lippe (Toronto: The Festival of Festivals, 1979) and *The Shape of Rage*, ed. Piers Handling (Toronto: General Publishing, 1983). An updated and revised version of Wood's *American Nightmare* perceptions appears in his *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 70-94.
9. I am indebted to Doug Kellner for this point.

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10. This reversal is confirmed by the fact that when Nikki shows Max how to become the video word made flesh — by presenting a tv image of him blowing his brains out — the tv spews forth all sorts of intestines, whereas when Max himself performs the “transformative” suicide, the screen just goes blank. In other words, it’s the tv image of Max that undergoes an organic or “real” death, whereas the “real” Max merely undergoes a video death.
11. If there are any inaccuracies, omissions, or misplaced emphases in my discussion of *Dead Ringers*, I must blame the fact that I was only able to see the film once, as it screened briefly in Kingston, in the middle of term. I hope its release on videotape will not shame me into instant retractions.
12. In a review of *Dead Ringers* which is otherwise quite disturbing, Andrew Dowler makes some accurate observations that underscore the claustrophobic subject-centeredness of the film: “There are virtually no exteriors .... There are virtually no characters but the Mantles.... The absence of other characters leads to a lack of definition in the film’s social setting — the world of medicine... Without something ... to locate the Mantles with, or against, other doctors, the gynecological background loses much of its potential to enrich the drama. We see the casual drug use, the dehumanization of the patient, the monstrous ego, the authoritarian attitude and the hypocritical cant surrounding it all. But we see it all as Mantle brothers’ behaviour, and they’re weird from the go ...” (*Cinema Canada*, 157 (November 1988): 23).
13. Like the twins, Claire herself is caught in a system of replication, which just reinstates sameness and eliminates difference. She is a “trifurcate,” possessing three cervical openings rather than one. When told she can adopt a baby she says: “It wouldn’t be the same. It wouldn’t be part of my body.” She admits to being a nymphomaniac (i.e., to sexual repetition with a minimum of difference). And, of course, most important, she can’t tell the twins apart until a friend informs her that Beverly has an identical brother.
14. Unlike many feminist reviewers who have seen Claire as “blamed” within the film for the decline and fall of the brothers, I see her as their victim from her opening moment — with legs spread in a gynecological posture of extreme vulnerability. (If the film blames any female, it is the adolescent who refuses to indulge the Mantles’ sexual curiosity.) I would have found it infinitely preferable if some grown woman *could* have been blamed, could have been viewed as possessing enough power to originate something, anything — *especially* the downfall of the twins and their sick male world.
15. There is a temptation, given our hero-centered movie conditioning to read expression such as “bewilderment” or “loss” into Burns’s face. But close examination reveals that his face is thoroughly expressionless.
16. The screen goes to black the moment the tugboat exits, leaving only rope. It is conceivable that on a full 35mm print, a tiny portion of the boat might remain, but even without the “purity” of the videotape version, the effect would be the same.
17. The recent frequency of both angels and identical twins in films reflects, I would suggest, a tendency to replace realistic individuals or subjects with signifying positions. Angels, after all, can hardly be taken as referential, and twins confound simple referentiality and signification by making identical signifiers point in at least two different directions. However, this tendency ends up frustrated. In Wim Wenders *Sky Over Berlin/Wings of Desire*, Peter Greenaway’s *A Zed and Two Noughts*, and Cronenberg’s *Dead Ringers* angels or twins begin as potentially free-floating signifiers, only to get grounded increasingly in a world of reference and sameness.
18. Even here, Cronenberg can be found guilty of “conservatism,” as William C. Wees pointed out in “Through the Rearview Mirror Into Twenty Minutes Into the Future: McLuhan,

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*Videodrome*, and *Max Headroom*," a paper delivered at the 1988 annual meeting of the Film Studies Association of Canada.

19. "David Cronenberg," Article and Interview by Paul M. Sammon, *Cinéfantastique*, 10, no. 4 (Spring 1981): 22.
20. The "classic" understanding of allegory has been strongly contested of late, particularly by postmodern theorists. Briefly, allegory is no longer seen as "vertical" — i.e., pointing outside the text. It is seen, instead, as exploiting and drawing attention to the polysemy of words, the multiple possibilities for signification *within* a given text. Words do not refer to something else; rather they mean exactly what they say because they say so much. (It might be interesting to work Wieland's film through on these very terms — though as my interpretation of *Rat Life* suggests, I feel something other is at stake.) For recent discussion of the allegorical, see Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (Spring 1980) 67-86; and "The Allegorical Impulse (Part 2)," *October* 13 (Summer 1980): 59-80. Rpt. in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York, Boston: The New Museum of Contemporary Art/David R. Godine, 1984), pp. 203-235. See also Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).
21. Robin Wood approaches the film seriously, relatively sympathetically, and with insight in his *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*.
22. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 7.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

## ROBOCOP: THE RECUPERATION OF THE SUBJECT

*Steve Best*

*We now live in the detritus of high-technology*<sup>1</sup>

Since cultural texts are deeply rooted in the ideological and social conditions of their time, it is no surprise that in the last decade or so Hollywood has been preoccupied with the postmodern themes of simulation, reproduction, doubling, and cloning. Films such as *The Stepford Wives*, *Boys From Brazil*, *Blade Runner*, and *The Terminator* have focused on the technological simulation/reproduction of the human body. Frequently, these films are part of a dystopian genre which symbolically encodes our deepest fears and anxieties about the present and the future. A key aspect of this fear concerns the erasure of human identity under advanced technological conditions.

This theme is dramatically evident in *Robocop*, the sleeper hit of summer 1987. *Robocop* tells the story of a Detroit police officer (Murphy) killed in action and resurrected as a cyborg super-cop programmed to restore law and order. His former memory returns, however, and he sets out to track down his killers. While *Robocop* provides the standard Hollywood fare of violence, humor, and sentimentality, it is also an acerbic attack on corporate capitalism and the mass media, as well as a dark meditation on the detritus of modernity and the fate of the subject in a post-industrial world. But, as a complex and contradictory text, *Robocop* is unable to push its thematics into the radical context they require and it succumbs to conservative and metaphysical positions.

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### Postmodernity in Toxic USA

*It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine.*

REM

In a general sense, postmodernism is what Fredric Jameson has termed an "inverted milleniarism": a burnt-out era lacking any sense of future, filled with a sense that it's all over with, that everything's been done (and done badly), that nothing lies ahead but degeneration or repetition of the same. Decline, disappearance, detritus — these are the passwords to the postmodern scene. If, as Marx has written, a social order continues to expand until it exhausts its possibilities, then the explosive growth of the whole Western order seems to be decelerating, imploding, and approaching an entropic breakdown. In postmodernity, late-bourgeois society confronts its own rationalist and technicist myths (truth, reason, freedom, totality, and representation) just as early bourgeois society confronted the naturalist and religious myths of feudalism.

As a new, complex, and rapidly changing social era, postmodernity poses a strong challenge to all political ideologies, left and right, to rethink their basic assumptions. Any ideology which is not completely impervious to the changes brought on by our transition to a late-capitalist society of signification becomes compelled to adapt to new conditions and struggle for hegemony on a social terrain which is shifting and destabilized, and for that reason open.

In this vein, *Robocop* is a meditation on the exhaustion of modernity. The wreckage of industrial modernity is visible everywhere in *Robocop*, not only in the graveyards of the steel mills — toxic dumps pushed aside to the margins of the urban metropolis, but in the anarchy of crime-ravaged "Old Detroit," and in the technified and mediated spaces of everyday life. Modernity stands as an empty husk which capitalism leaves behind as it exuviates into the new postmodern space, and *Robocop* attempts to negotiate this territory.

Thus, *Robocop* is perfectly "postmodern" — a panic film suffused with a sense of crisis precipitated by our rapid entrance into the brave new world of simulation, media, and high-technology. Stylistically, *Robocop* could also be identified as postmodern in its pastiche nature which implodes and combines numerous film genres (romance, sci-fi, detective, horror, revenge, the western, etc.). As a postmodern text, it betrays a scavaging amongst the debris of modernist styles, severed from the ideology of self-identity and subject/author, and recombined by the *bricoleur*. One could thus see *Robocop* as a recycled, updated, postmodern version of *High Noon*, *Frankenstein*, or, more recently, *Blade Runner*, itself a pastiche.<sup>2</sup>

But there are many ways in which *Robocop* is not a postmodern film and, ultimately, postmodernism is itself simply one more code or style constituting its complex pastiche. Although *Robocop* is a panic depiction of

a moribund modernity, it eschews other key apocalyptic postmodern themes — the end of political economy and the end of the social.

Capitalism is no missing referent in *Robocop*, rather it is foregrounded as the determining force behind labor conflicts, crime and corruption, social distress, cutthroat individualism, and the impoverishment of subjective life. "We will meet each new challenge with the same aggressive attitude," says Dick Jones, the malevolent vice-president of Omni-Consumer Products, and this perfectly expresses the present philosophy of capital as it moves beyond the cul-de-sacs of the old, used-up avenues of accumulation, and appropriates the new opportunities of the post-modern world.

Thus, in *Robocop* we witness not the demise of capitalism (Baudrillard), but its intensification (Mandel): the universalization of market relations, the transmutation of capital as abstract circulation of information and images, and the colonization of new economic spaces — urban gentrification, privatization of prisons and hospitals, automation of the workplace, mass media, and, that "final frontier," outer space. Crime, drugs, gambling, and prostitution also become important avenues of capital accumulation as the distinctions between civilian, business, and military, legal and illegal, order and disorder, implode in the movement of capital which is always already violent, immoral, and anarchic, and is itself an implosive logic, prior to and independent of the implosive effects of mass media.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, we should see that *Robocop* depicts not some strict, unqualified, and vaguely formulated "end of the social" and its correlative thesis of "dead power" (Baudrillard) — abstract, semiotic, and disembodied — but rather the crisis of the social, the social under siege by capital and criminal forces, and their traumatic impact on individuals such as Murphy and his family. To the extent that individuals, while resisting the forces of atomization and alienation, still share an intersubjective world held together by lines of communication, empathy, and shared projects and needs, the "end of the social" is a theoretical mystification which erases complex material realities.<sup>4</sup> Here the graphic depiction of violence in *Robocop* has a contradictory function: to serve as spectacle and so foreclose critical reflection (and so contribute to the decline of the social), and to remind us of the real, all-too-real, underbelly of a signifying society, the grim, everyday presence of violence, pain, death, and urban blight, the postmodern city as the crisis-ridden site of chronic social war, class struggle, and dehumanization.<sup>5</sup>

As a contradictory, disunified text, *Robocop* simultaneously advances a liberal critique of an immoral capitalism in need of rational control, a conservative recuperation of the social and the subject (legal and moral unities rooted in the traditional family governed by discipline, male authority, and the work ethic), and problematizes the postmodern claim that social, political, and economic reality have disappeared in the black hole of radical semiurgy by vividly representing and critiquing the material forces and

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ideologies which reduce the natural and social world to raw material for an interplanetary, panoptic capitalism.

### Technology and Reification

*Belief in the omnipotence of technology is the specific form of bourgeois ideology in late capitalism.*<sup>6</sup>

While *Robocop* offers a vigorous critique of capitalism as an inhuman, ruthless, and corrupt society (as represented in the figures of Jones, Morton, and Boddicker), its critique is also directed against technology. In the paranoid, technophobic world of *Robocop*, technology is out of control. Throughout the film we see the human world trying to master nature but ultimately failing. Thus, the numerous failures of ED-209, the power failure at the SDI space station and its subsequent misfires, the return of Robocop's memory and former identity despite computerized programming — all signal the film's critique of technological reification as a flawless cybernetic control over the human lifeworld, albeit one already integrated with technology.

"They'll fix you," Robocop mordantly tells a wounded Lewis, his tough female partner, "They fixed everything." But it is clear at this point that "they" — the technocrats — cannot fix everything and *Robocop* satirically debunks technocratic ideology. Specifically, *Robocop* presents a timely and powerful message: the failed robot technology serves as a metaphor for and warning against the policies and attitudes behind SDI, the assumption that a "fail-safe" nuclear "protection" device can be created for the scientific management of world conflicts. *Robocop* suggests that if robots cannot be controlled, neither can more complex systems such as SDI, despite the assurance we receive daily from Reagan and his minions in the White House and universities.

Most generally, *Robocop* voices a warning against "technicism,"<sup>7</sup> that ideology which sees technology as the solution to all problems and seeks an unqualified technical mastery of the world where massive system breakdown is "only a glitch" (Jones) requiring minor adjustment.<sup>8</sup> The postmodern world is the victory of what Canadian theorist George Grant, following Nietzsche, has termed the "will to will," willing purely for its own sake, that is, for the sake of technology, a nihilistic absorption of human morals and values to the unlimited, autonomous movement of technology, the (tragic) completion of Enlightenment logic in the maximization and technification of the means of domination.<sup>9</sup> Where technology has always constituted an important aspect of human existence, in the postmodern world it delimits the horizon of our existence and so informs our most basic attitudes and experience, marginalizing all other languages, recasting all values in a means/ends scheme of maximal efficiency, seeing all problems — be they the "disorders" of the body or the social — as resolvable through technology.

Ultimately, the goal of technicism is to replace natural and social life with technology and to create a totally artificial and processed environment to be controlled through the technologies of domination. Although prone to exaggeration, Baudrillard has provocatively described the increasing technologico-semiotic mediation of this contemporary experience and our gradual entrance into and immersion in a hermetic universe of signs, consumption, technique, cybernetic codes and models. His narrative of simulation helps us to understand the growing eclipse of the human lifeworld, and his distinction between the automaton and the robot provides a conceptual space in which to locate the historical specificity of the technologies depicted in *Robocop*.

In Baudrillard's scheme, the automaton belongs to the first stage of simulation, the "counterfeit era" or "classical period" of simulation which begins in the Renaissance and ends in the "industrial era." This is the first period after the symbolic era of feudal society when signs were non-arbitrary and referred to persons in distinct social obligations. With the bourgeois revolution, signs became "democratic" and arbitrary, referring only to their own "disenchanted signifieds,"<sup>10</sup> now simulating an obligation and referent to the real world.

The arbitrary sign is the beginning of semiological hegemony, the triumph of signs over reality. Within this world, the first stage of simulation and semiotic domination, the "automoton" emerges, which Baudrillard sharply distinguishes from the "robot." The automaton belongs entirely to the order of analogy and resemblance. It is bound up with the metaphysics of being and appearance. The distinction between the human and the machine is still maintained, as is the distinction between truth and falsehood, being and appearance.

The robot, however, belongs to the next stage of simulation, the industrial era and its infinite multiplication of identical objects within the series. This is an advanced stage in the hegemony of technique (at the service of (re)production). It liquidates the metaphysics of being and appearance — much too other-worldly — and brings everything into the strictly technical logic of production ruled by exchange value. Unlike the automaton, the robot is not the analogy of "man," but his equivalent. Both are serialized simulacra.

If the automaton belongs to the first order of simulation, and the robot to the second order, then the cyborg must belong to the third stage of simulation, the era of "hyperreality" where images, signs, and codes engulf objective reality. *Robocop* is the product of this postmodern era of cybernetics, media, and simulation. On a Baudrillardian scheme, *Robocop* is neither the analogy of "man," nor his equivalent, but a computer generated video being that surpasses man, a prosthetic being of a prosthetic age, where signs are "realler-than-real" and stand in for the world they erase. The scientific/medical replacement of human parts, in addition to being

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a graphic representation of a technological reality, is a metaphor for the replacement of nature, representation, reality, and society in a technologically processed, automated, semiurgic consumer world which proliferates signs and simulacra from multiple reproductive models. "Everything is obliterated only to begin again,"<sup>11</sup> resurrected within technique and hyperreal semiurgy. The sudden rebirth of Murphy as Robocop speaks equally of the mutation of our age as the age of mutation.

### Postmodern Bodies

*It is our plight to be processed through the technological simulacrum; to participate intensively and integrally in a 'technostructure' which is nothing but a vast simulation and 'amplification' of the bodily senses.*<sup>12</sup>

Robocop is the perfect metaphor of our postmodern condition and postmodern bodies, symbolizing a new, "emergent" (Williams) form of subjectivity which is increasingly technologically mediated. He represents, first, what Jameson has termed the "waning of affect."<sup>13</sup> This does not mean the literal death of emotions for Jameson, but the reduction of the expressive energies of modernism (such as angst) to a flat, monotonous, solipsistic and lifeless plane, a robotization of the life-world. In one sense, Jameson is describing a mechanization of emotions, their implosion into a closed machine-like cycle, an affective decline such as where Robocop's blank stares *from* the video screen parallel our dull gaze *into* it. But, in another sense, Jameson is describing the explosion of emotions in a diffuse and discontinuous schizoid world, an internal violence such as Robocop comes to know when jolted by memories of his former self, his lifeworld reduced to staccato bursts of conflicting "intensities" ("I can feel them, but I can't remember them") where meaning is transcoded as processed information.

More literally Robocop represents not the waning of affect, but the technification of the human body. He is the fantasy expression of our new "technobodies" (Kroker), "half-metal, half-flesh" (Grant), a completely "new man" who is daily "x-rayed by television" (McLuhan), a video being whose very body is transformed into some sort of "operational screen" irradiated within the informational circuits of ecstatic communication (Baudrillard), quantified, rationalized, fragmented, and commodified (Adorno and Horkheimer).

Drawing from McLuhan, Arthur Kroker has described the technological dialectic of postmodernity.<sup>14</sup> First, we find the full and final exteriorization of our senses in technology — the "technological extensions" (McLuhan) of human experience. If the wheel was an extension of the human foot, then informational technologies are an extension of our central nervous system (as Samuel Morse was the first to write) and the computer is an extension of our brain. Modern electronic technologies bring about a

final exteriorization of the senses, and "complete the cycle of mechanization of the human sensorium."<sup>15</sup>

But since, on McLuhan's conception, the (technological) environment is not a passive container, but a dynamic shaping process which "works us over completely," altering not only our social relations, but our very "ratio of senses," the technological sensorium produced as a simulation of the human body returns to encompass the body in a pervasive, but invisible merger of technology and biology, in the loss of a substantial distance between the body and its technological extensions, in the integration of the body into Sony Walkman's, IBM computers screens, and the semi-otic surfeit of consumer capital.<sup>16</sup>

It is this merger and the fact that it has gone unnoticed, that motivated McLuhan's theorizing and his attempt to shock us into a heightened awareness of the transformative work of technology and media. One could also say this is a potential effect of *Robocop* which dramatizes the fact that we're approaching a closed system that adapts us to its workings. "[T]he new media ... are nature."<sup>17</sup>

As a technified, schizoid subject, *Robocop* symbolizes the disintegration of the bourgeois humanist ego, its ruination in the postmodern scene of toxic poisoning, technological deprivation, surveillance, and body invasion. In a brilliant visual scene, we witness the resurrection of Murphy as *Robocop* from a series of interior point-of-view shots. We assume the visual field of an objectified looker which implodes Sartre's distinction between the objectifying subject and the objectified object of the gaze. We witness the dawn of a new subject, an ontogenic mutation which recapitulates the phylogenetic transformation of subjects in techno-capitalism.

But there is still a higher level of literalization in *Robocop*: technobodies are becoming a literal possibility as genetic engineering moves closer to the simulation/reproduction of life. As we move into the twenty-first century, science not only has been able to substitute technology for biology (artificial hearts, etc.), but seems capable of simulating life itself through technological creation (genetic splicing) — a giant leap beyond McLuhan's technological extension of the body. Is the brave new world of full technological simulation only a matter of time? What is certain is that the scientization of capital and the capitalization of science brush ethical questions aside, or that a new "ethics" has emerged based on technological imperatives. The humanist language of valuation doesn't cease in postmodernity: its displaced referent becomes technique and simulates a relation to a specific subject world long ago surpassed.

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### Utopic/Dystopic Projections

*He doesn't have a name. He has a program — he's a product.*

Morton

Thus, *Robocop* conveys an intense awareness of our new “postmodern condition.” It articulates the fear of a completely alienated, rationalized, mechanical world where human beings and their body parts are technologically processed, where emotions are lacking, where the ego is in ruins, where personal identity is absent, and where simulation approaches perfection. The fear in *Robocop* is two-fold: that human beings will be *replaced* by machines (automation), and that human beings are *becoming* machines (alienation), spiritually and emotionally lifeless rationalists, technologically processed and simulated beings.

Both developments augur the end of the lifeworld in its implosion with cybernetic systems. This grisly fusion is vividly portrayed in the homecoming scene. As Robocop walks through the door of his former existence, he confronts not the living warmth of his family, but the cold technological pretense of an automated salesman to guide him through the designer environment. The images and sounds of his past life, already technologically processed, merge with the pre-recorded video salespitch. Bereft and metaphysically estranged, the lonely cyborg smashes his fist through the television screen in an act of rebellion against the reified object world of which he is inalterably a part.

Importantly, *Robocop* not only dramatizes the dehumanization of untrammelled technological development, it resists the postmodern fatalism of someone like Baudrillard who concludes that the Subject has lost its battle with the Object and so should surrender and embrace “fatal strategies.” While *Robocop* depicts a cyberblitzed, post-catastrophic, hyperreal, technified world, it also suggests that technology *cannot achieve its goal* of a perfectly enclosed, self-referential entombment, that simulation strategies do not necessarily succeed, and that the human subject is not so easily erased. Robocop's struggle to understand what has happened to him and who he is, his identification with his former human self irrevocably entrapped within a steel body, his rebellion against bureaucracy and his corporate creators, and the forging of his own will against a technological determination, constitute this film's undeniably utopian moments. *Robocop* dramatizes the resilience of a subject, albeit a cyborg, amidst the most incredibly reified and subjugating conditions, and allegorizes its attempts to find meaning and value within a corrupt and decadent postmodern world. The film preserves a moment of struggle and refusal that is now threatened with extinction. Thus, the *dystopic* projection of a hyper-alienated future coincides with a *utopic* hope for spiritual survival, salvation, and redemption. This key theme, however, is given a reactionary coding as the film conforms to its own — or that of Hollywood's — “directive

four." Thus, where Robocop could not arrest any top executive of OCP, *Robocop* cannot deconstruct the law of genre, the ideology of traditional narrative, and the metaphysics of the bourgeois subject.

### Post-mortem/Post-modern Identity

*Yes, I'm a cop.*

Robocop

*First identity had to be constructed, ultimately it will have to be overcome. That which is identical with itself is without happiness.*<sup>18</sup>

Where subjectivities are increasingly in peril, technified within conditions of cybernetic control, narcotized by consumerist pathology, pathologically destabilized within the material and psychic economy of incessant innovation with nihilism as its by-product, a renewed search for radical subjectivity becomes a necessary precondition for an emancipatory politics. Thus, as George Grant saw, any movement that seeks to transcend the present technological horizon must begin with a reformation of human identity.<sup>19</sup> But this project, at once philosophical and political, must proceed in a way that avoids a return to (1) the humanist conception of the subject as a unified and rational ego, a pre-given essence positioned outside of determining social and historical forces (the epistemological basis for domination of the social and natural world); (2) the Romantic conception of an authentic, natural subjectivity defined in opposition to technology (a reactionary naiveté which fails to grasp the emancipatory aspects of technology); while also avoiding (3) the post-structuralist celebration of a schizophrenically decentered self (which perfectly coheres with the ideology of fashion in late-capitalism).<sup>20</sup>

And here is a key point where *Robocop* must be understood not as a postmodern, or even critical, text, but rather as a conservative, technophobic narrative governed by traditional narrative codes of closure and redemption.<sup>21</sup> For Robocop gradually *overcomes* the alienation of his technological processing and *resynthesizes* his fragmented memories into a complete *recuperation* of his identity — that outrageous final moment when Robocop reclaims his former name/self. In a Hegelian *Aufhebung*, Robocop identifies his object being with his subject being, Robocop with Murphy. Not as the same Murphy, of course, but as a higher expression of his former self, a "concrete" identity achieved through the movement of alienation (in this case, not the "self-alienation" of a Subject, but as caused by an external attack on the subject by capitalism and technology). In a sense, there never was a rupture in the transformation of Murphy to Robocop for Murphy became the moral gunslinger he always wanted to be (as evident by his identification with the TV cop T.J. Laser). To

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paraphrase Camus, we must conclude this cyborg is happy — a postmodern self at one with its technification, alienation, and commodification in the electronic sensorium/marketplace.

Thus, while *Robocop* shows postmodernism as a site of intense struggle where the subject must battle against the forces of dehumanization and reification, it also suggests that the subject will survive its integration into cybernetic technology without resisting/appropriating it at a political and collective level. *Robocop* is exemplary of the conservative project to save the disintegrating bourgeois subject — under assault by the very forces which conservatives valorize — and resurrect it as a moral/legal entity, and as a traditional male subject — macho, individualist, heterosexual, conservative. Beneath this hero-redeemer's steel plating lies the old bourgeois ego, safe within the inner truth of natural law.

But *Robocop* deconstructs itself. As typical of mainstream crisis and dystopian genres, *Robocop* concludes with the figure of a wasted wreckage — not the capsized boat of *The Poseidon Adventure*, nor the smouldering high-rise of *The Towering Inferno*, but the battered and damaged body of a cyborg already constructed from the ruined fragments of a human being — which foregrounds the very issues and implications the film, once it has raised them, tries to evade through narrative closure.<sup>22</sup> As a panic film and narrative which dramatizes the de-authorization of the modernist subject, *Robocop* tells us as much about postmodern capitalism and subjectivity as it does about U.S. mythology and bourgeois metaphysics in the current stage of capitalist crisis and decline.

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### Notes

1. Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984), p. 30. Sections of this paper are much indebted to Kroker's book.
2. See Fredric Jameson: "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and the voices of styles in the imaginary museum." "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Washington: Bay Press, 1986), p. 115. Jameson has not considered whether pastiche itself could be some sort of "stylistic invention," nor whether, just as the subject has always been "dead," stylistic invention too has, and so there might be nothing radically new about postmodern "writing." One might also use *Robocop* against Jameson's claim that parody is extinct and incompatible with pastiche. For Jameson, both are "the imitation of a peculiar or unique style," but pastiche "is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without that satirical impulse, without laughter" (p. 114). If one reads

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*Robocop* as a dystopia played just "for kicks," as does Pauline Kael (*The New Yorker*, 8/10/87), then Jameson's point is well-taken. But I see no basis for this claim. *Robocop*'s satire of corporate capitalism, mass media, technicism, and the ideology of progress (such as is evident in the name of the futuristic car "6000 SUX," and the ironic OCP billboards, "Delta City: The Future has a Silver Lining") is too sustained and is tied to serious issues such as a critique of SDI. Any firm rejection of "postmodern" satire as a contradiction in terms is premised on an (elitist and nostalgic?) identification of genuine satire with high modernism. While *Robocop* may not have the artistry of a Jonathan Swift, it remains a strong and effective satire.

3. On the subject of capitalism and illegality, Mandel observes: "Whereas the average capitalist in the nineteenth century respected the law as a matter of course, in the interests of the orderly peace and quiet and his own business, the average capitalist of the twentieth century lives more and more on the margin of the law, if not in actual contravention of it." *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975), pp. 511-512.
4. Thus, the reactionary moment of Baudrillard is to project onto the victims of aggression a psychology which seeks nothing beyond the will to a passive consumption of spectacles. See *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).
5. The postmodern thesis of "catastrophe" can be said to "completely ignore the central hallmark of late capitalism — the *crisis of capitalist relations of production* unleashed by the development of all the contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production." Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, p. 521.
6. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, p. 501.
7. Technicism is "an urgent belief in the historical inevitability of the fully realized technological society," the ideological linkage of technology and freedom. Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 247.
8. For a vivid analysis of this ideology and how it was applied in the Vietnam war, see James William Gibson, *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986). I have reviewed this book in *Socialist Review*, 1988/2.
9. See Kroker, *The Canadian Mind*, pp 20-51.
10. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 85.
11. *Ibid.* p. 22.
12. Kroker, *The Canadian Mind*, p. 57.
13. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late-Capitalism, *New Left Review*, #146, p. 64.
14. See *Technology and The Canadian Mind* and *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Volume XI, Number 1-2: 1987.
15. McLuhan quoted in Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, p. 75.
16. "Environments are not passive wrappings, but active processes which work us over completely, massaging the ratio of the senses and imposing their silent assumptions. But environments are invisible. Their ground-rules, pervasive structure, and overall pattern elude easy perception." Marshal McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Bantam, 1967), p.68.
17. McLuhan quoted in Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, p.56.

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18. Theodor Adorno, quoted in Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 27.
19. See Arthur Kroker's discussion of Grant in *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, pp.20-51. Similarly, Jameson observes that postmodernism necessitates "the reinvention of possibilities of cognition and perception that allow social phenomena once again to become transparent, as moments of the struggle between classes," "Afterword" in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso Books, 1977), p. 212.
20. For a sustained attempt to rethink the nature of the subject, see Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), and Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
21. Where someone like Jameson would look immediately to the utopian moment of redemption and narrative closure as a genuine longing for the resolution of all the warring conflicts, divisions, and contradictions created by capitalism, as well as the liberation of Desire from Necessity (and such themes may well constitute part of the contradictory, polysemic content of a text), one must remain skeptical that such themes, however complexly encoded, will be *decoded* in a progressive rather than conservative way, since cultural consumers are so strongly conditioned to decode and identify with conservative themes.
22. "All such metaphoric meaning schemes can be deconstructed, simply because it is the nature of [the] anxiety [of crisis films] both to turn away from the source of anxiety and to inadvertently point to its source." Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 68.

## PANIC PORNOGRAPHY: VIDEODROME FROM PRODUCTION TO SEDUCTION

*Bart Testa*

### Introduction: Structure and Seriality

Infamous for their gruesome and spectacular imagery, David Cronenberg's horror/science fiction films impose themselves as underdeveloped yet suggestive excursions through the utterly blasted aesthetic of contemporary narrative film. Since the late 1960s, and the radically diminished confidence in the modernist "art film", the narrative film aesthetic has fragmented badly but has done so in complicated ways. Some ambitious manifestations of the involuted decrescendo of cinema's narrativity are to be found among so-called genre movies, particularly in the minor genres.<sup>1</sup>

But just what do Cronenberg's films manifest, apart from a notorious iconographic excess so sensationally instanced by the extruded "birth sacs" of *The Brood* (1979), the "exploding heads" of *Scanners* (1980), or the metamorphosis of man into insect in *The Fly* (1986)? This is a question that covertly preoccupies the film critics assembled by Piers Handling in *The Shape of Rage: The Films of David Cronenberg*, an anthology of essays unified mainly by the seriousness with which the writers approach the filmmaker.<sup>2</sup> However, this collection of essays is problematic because these critics do not acknowledge the extremity of the director's work nor his shattering of film's narrative aesthetic. Instead, they examine Cronenberg as an imaginative innovator within the horror genre and, for the most part, they seek to decipher the director's variations within the structural tensions and formal usages assumed to characterize the horror genre as a whole.<sup>3</sup> This type of analysis tends to ignore the difficulties of the twin

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methodological assumptions subtending film-genre study in general. First, there is the assumption that horror films share a solidity, often described as a quasi-mythic structure; and second, there is the presupposition that a director works comfortably inside and through that stable structure. The broad problems with these assumptions are twofold not only because modern film genres are unstable but also because Cronenberg, like most strong contemporary genre directors, is a baroque parodist (the most famous figure is Brian De Palma with his *Dressed to Kill*) who foregrounds instability in many ways. For example, Cronenberg blends horror and science-fiction, he deploys excessive imagery calculated to overwhelm narrative linearity, and, more radically, he actively refuses to become a "competent" narrative filmmaker. Instead he has devised a serial style of construction that is, at best, a parody of conventional narrative style.

Because of their assumptions, the *Shape of Rage* critics are able to concern themselves with investigating the director's "innovations" and his usages within horror. They interpret the genre as a set of stereotyped symbols around which Cronenberg is seen to weave his own "personal" improvisations. The mode of interpretation that results, which might be termed symbolic-structural, yields a familiar range of psychoanalytic ideas (in this case, softened by the critics themselves into a Neo-Freudian and/or humanist thematics).

This approach toward Cronenberg's films may be exemplified in its most sophisticated form by examining Robin Wood's critical account of horror films and his attack on Cronenberg.<sup>4</sup> Proceeding in cine-structuralist manner, Wood establishes a set of binary oppositions shaping the horror film: the genre's root antinomy are the Normal/Culture and the Monstrous/Nature dyads where the Monstrous is the Natural taking the distorted form of the "return of the repressed", and the Normal/Cultural is repressive ideology extruded by "bourgeois patriarchal capitalism."<sup>5</sup> The Monstrous, then, is a revenge against repression. However, it is to be interpreted — beneath its grotesque distortion under the regime of repression — as natural desire which, at a deeper level of the film-text, is accepted, even embraced (or rejected and repressed again) as the hidden self which suffers sacrificial renunciation at the overt level of the drama. Evaluating directors in the horror genre, Wood divides them into two groups, progressives and reactionaries, not according to whether their films achieve textual depth — for depth is provided autonomously by the symbols at play in the genre itself — but according to how filmmakers mediate his Monstrous/Normal opposition in order to articulate an acceptance or rejection of the monster as denied desire and as a mirror of the repressed aspects of the self.<sup>6</sup> On these grounds, Wood argues that Cronenberg exemplifies reaction in the genre because his monsters cannot be recuperated at any level. His films actively affirm and repeat the repressive work of Culture against Nature even while depicting the normal world as enervated and deadening. Cronenberg's films, then, are the "achievement of total negation" and Wood

traces the basic meaning of his films to the director's "neuroticism" about "aggressive female sexuality".<sup>7</sup> When discussing *Videodrome* (1982) in his contribution to *The Shape of Rage*, Wood adds heterosexual male anxiety about natural bi-sexuality to the filmmaker's neuroses.

Wood's influential account of the horror film, and his attack on Cronenberg, share the two methodological assumptions mentioned above. Wood assumes that horror films possess a stable system of stereotyped metaphors (his Normal and Monstrous categories) whose root signifieds are to be situated within the Nature/Culture opposition. He also assumes that a stable system of narrativization, usually called "the classical Hollywood style", operates through a stereotyped narrativity (how the monster emerges as a figure of the "return of the repressed") that can always be shown to mediate the Normal/Monstrous opposition toward a "reconciliation" (Wood's ideologically progressive conclusion) or "demonization" (the reactionary conclusion). These binarized alternate narrative conclusions arise, in Wood's treatment, from the style of an individual director — or "auteur" — and are to be read out of the films by the critic's discernment of his personal vision, or by an overdetermination operating within the studio system.

The present paper takes a different starting point. It does not offer reasons why these assumptions are false but tries to suggest how one might proceed without them.<sup>8</sup> It is my position that contemporary genre films are neither successful narrative mediations of oppositions in the sense that structuralist film criticism proposes nor do they deploy a successfully stereotyped symbolism. These critical constructs are of limited and dubious applicability, methodologically because largely confined to a broadly literary style of interpretation resembling "archetypal criticism", and historically because they are of particularly limited relevance when considering contemporary Hollywood horror films. In any case, Cronenberg, a Canadian director, has worked at quite a distance from Hollywood's horror genre aside from his adaptation of the American horror-novelist Stephen King's *The Dead Zone* (1983).

This paper does not propose a different construct of the genre but, by drawing on the post-structuralist film-semiotic work of Raymond Bellour<sup>9</sup> and Stephen Heath,<sup>10</sup> which takes "narrativization" itself as a problem, I will attempt a circumscribed account of a single "scene" from Cronenberg's *Videodrome*. At the same time, the paper seeks to discern something of the internal stereotypicality that Cronenberg works into the film. When placed under scrutiny, Cronenberg's films, and *Videodrome* especially, deploy a quite monotonous repetition of scenes which tend to be isomorphic (or at least homologous) with each other in terms of their syntagmatic relations (the ordering of shots), and their centering of the internal narrator (here the hero, Max Renn) within a tightly controlled and repetitious "suturing" (point-of-view system). The reason to select this single scene is that it marks a dramatic reversal in the signification of eroticized power positions within the film.

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I take as a starting point the notion that *Videodrome* is a parody, something the film itself at times insists upon by lapses into broad comedy and satire. The loose idea of parody helps illuminate some features of *Videodrome*. For example, even a casual viewing of the film raises the question: why is it that *Videodrome* is so unsuccessful in achieving narrative resolution, but instead concludes in a terminal TV/film loop, the ideal image of irresolution? It is not the director's incompetence, nor a failure of the film's structure. Rather, it is because Cronenberg acknowledges the blasted aesthetic of narrative cinema *en passant* and then passes it by. The iconographic excess is so extreme that the drama of the film is reduced to a phantasmagoric seriality of obsessed returns to pornographic spectacle and, later, to spectacular murders, so that it can never restore itself to the familiar linearity, cause-and-effect chains and homogeneity that are indispensable to narrative work in its conventional configuration. More importantly, *Videodrome* is a serious, even earnest parody of Jean Baudrillard's theoretical nightmare, using precisely one of the blunt figures of post-modern simulated erotics Baudrillard proposes: programmatic literalization of the human body.<sup>11</sup>

This paper's critical activity will be a reading back of the film's excessive iconography, its placement and treatment within a serial film construction, into theory. This activity proceeds on three hypotheses: first, that theoretical ideas, quite aside from the intentions or knowledge of the director, engender a stereotypicality — here a programmatic — literalization that is thematized here as “writing the body”; second, that this engendering of the film's “programme” is set in motion and carried through the seriality of repetitions that determines the film's construction as a gross exaggeration of narrativization at the level of the shot sequence; and, third, that the drama of interpretation the film performs on itself works across the play of familiar but less conscious fascinations, with scopic pleasure and pornographic images especially, and that the film interprets them, through tropes and reversals, as the film interprets itself.

At first, *Videodrome* shares with the viewer pornographic imagery and a pornographic “look” that it later dissolves in a parodically violent reversal. Dependent on serialized scenes, on isomorphic camera set-ups and arrangements of shots, this reversal is encoded as transformation under the the signs of a literalized iconography of the body, and particularly, the body of Max, the hero. This encoding of reversal as transformation swings on two iconographic tropes: the hero's power becomes a wound that makes Max the site of a “writing the body” and, further, this reversal literalizes the shift from what Michel Foucault terms panopticism<sup>12</sup> with its bifurcated spaces of the look and the spectacle, to its spatially collapsed successor, Baudrillard's “contactual obscenity”.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, *Videodrome* is a serious parody of that theoretical space which is Baudrillard's nightmare space of the videated body.

The Story So Far

Max Renn (played by James Woods), the hero of *Videodrome*, is the pornographer. He runs CIVIC-TV, a television station that, as another character puts it, "offers viewers everything from soft-core pornography to hard-core violence." It is a token of the film's sophistication that it denies the pornographer is some sort of artist who makes things. Owning the means to gather and purvey, Max is more purely the pornographer than someone who takes pictures of people caressing (or abusing) each other or who loops the moans of actresses for a living. Fitted out as the exacting consumer, the capitalized collector, and especially as the discerning eye of videoporn, Max at first seems to hold pride of place, the place of pure "production": his potent gaze enjoys a conjuring mastery over erotic spectacle. At his command, porn images appear, they are gathered, distributed, according to what Max sees and wants.

By encoding Max's look as a mastery, *Videodrome* exaggerates conventions of many films that position the protagonist in and by the "narrativization of space".<sup>14</sup> The exaggeration is that here this potency (Max as owner) and its production of eroticism (Max as discerning eye) are brought together not as one point in a network of looks but as the exclusive center of the gaze that makes fantasy into spectacle. As the fiction of *Videodrome* develops, Max's position is flipped over, reversed and, in that reversal, Max's mastery is transformed in a viciously imaged victimhood. Max panics at the same place, the center of the gaze, once the center of his mastery, where the pornographer's position might always be reversed and where he might always panic.

Max embodies the pornographic imaginary and he acts out that imaginary often early in the film when he quite literally conjures images by his command, inspecting them and dismissing them from view. And Max always, it seems, dismisses the imagery he calls up because he is the master pornographer, the man who is secretly certain that he has the ur-text of the pornographic in his mind as he rummages about for its manifestation in photographic spectacle in a film or video image. Of course, he firmly believes his spectacle will never be found. This belief is the *felix culpa* that grounds his power: it ensures the distance that opens between every spectacle and his disappointed gaze, and that divided space depends on his never finding the realization of his ur-text, which is always inside him. Marked by that distance, pornographic production — the mastery of erotic spectacle under his gaze — bores the pornographer. His boredom in turn — the token of his power in ownership — protects his production, as discernment, collection and banishment. These three moments — power-in-mastery/ pleasure-of-his-gaze/and boredom-in-ownership — always proceed on to the production of the next erotic tableau which, again, will not be that spectacle.

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These three moments are repeatedly played out in the early passages of *Videodrome*. In the third scene, for example, Max conjures up a porn tape with the words, "Let me see the last one"; an excerpt from a soft-core Japanese porn tape appears on the screen (the fourth sequence) and, in the fifth sequence, Max dismisses it as "soft, too soft" and presciently calls for "something that will break through, something tough." The reversal and Max's panic begin when the pornographer finds his spectacle, the S&M Videodrome show, or worse, it finds him. In Videodrome it "breaks through" all right — Videodrome closes the distance, reverses the system of the gaze, and rewrites Max as if that "something tough" were the original of every pornographer's imaginary and rightfully part of his flesh; in fact, Videodrome cuts itself into some important parts of Max's flesh: the eye and the hand, making them sites of polluting inscription. In *Videodrome*, what fleetingly seems like blissful conjunction of the pornographer's ur-text and the Videodrome TV show's savage S&M spectacle flips over to reverse the erotics of *Videodrome*, bringing them under the signs of pollution, contamination, incision, inscription — and Max's production turns over into his seduction.

### The Space of the Theoretical Nightmare

In *Videodrome* this reversal programmatically follows Jean Baudrillard's dyad of media "obscenities" corresponding to the second — and third-order simulations. In what could be correctly read as a treatment for the film, Baudrillard writes,

The hot, sexual obscenity of former times is succeeded by the cold and communicational, contactual and motivational obscenity of today. The former clearly implied a type of promiscuity ... objects piled up and accumulated in a private universe.... Unlike this organic, visceral, carnal promiscuity, the promiscuity that reigns over the communication networks is one of superficial saturation, of an incessant solicitation, of an extermination of interstitial and protective spaces.<sup>15</sup>

*Videodrome* is a film that literalizes the concepts it brings into play, and there is a particular configuration of shots that marks off the space in the film where the pornographer's "production" flips over to become his "seduction", where Baudrillard's "extermination of protective spaces" is articulated in a literalism: Max's body opens up with a large pulsating slit. An incision is inscribed on Max's flesh, a flesh he believed he held at a distance, that was a protected space in which he stood in mastery over spectacle. This is the distance the pornographer ensures himself he enjoys as the owner of the erotic spectacle delineated in cinema from the place of panoptic power and scopic pleasure. That distance closes in, a "contactual" obscenity filling the gap, and Max literally opens up.

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That event is configured in a 19-shot sequence to be found in the middle of the film; here *Videodrome*, a television signal that Max has been "monitoring" and seeking to purchase, rewrites Max, rewrites the text of his body. Simply put, the pornographer panics when it is revealed that his own eroticism (his pornographic ur-text) is and always was a simulation he never owned. It was never inside him, never a "depth", never the pornographer's imaginary. Rather it has made him and has inscribed him as its text cutting directly on the surface of his flesh. Ownership and production were only Max's fantasy, as they are always the pornographer's fantasy. There is and never was any such pornographic ur-text, but only a nostalgia for the owned imaginary original of a private universe that never was. Instead, Max has been "contacted" and has fallen under the contaminations and inscriptions that have rewritten him, remade him as technology's body, the issue of the obscene paternity, the simulation model. Precisely as pornographer, now under the seduction earlier misrecognized as his production, Max opens himself to the signal while seeking the pornographic spectacle he believes to be his own production. Instead of opening out before him under his gaze as it seemed to do, Max himself opens up and is cut a new eye, the slit in his belly.

In *Videodrome*, the iconography of Max's body descends into the gruesome nightmare of the destiny of the body described by Michel Foucault's essay on Nietzsche and amplified in his *The History of Sexuality*:

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of substantial unity), and a volume in disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history and the process of history's destruction of the body.<sup>16</sup>

### The Place of the Reversal

To begin, however, one speaks of a place, Max's first place in the erotics of *Videodrome*. At the level of the sequence, in what is, in terms of the standard cine-semiotic account of syntagmatic arrangements, a classically made film, *Videodrome* sets up that place as, first of all, a reverse angle point-of-view shot. The 19-shot sequence to be studied comes after an extended series of almost identical sequences, starting with the very first of the film. These sequences form the principal syntagmatic series of the film, a point-of-view/object-of-the-gaze dyad construction in which Max communes in his apartment with his TV set. Minor variations include a visit to his television station's video lab (sequence six) and a session with his partners in the station's board room (sequence four). Quite monotonously, this series of almost isomorphic sequences has positioned Max as the internal watcher, the center of the filmic space. In the only other series, those involving Max's encounters with other characters, and the brief tran-

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sitional passages where Max moves from scene to scene, the hero also assumes a like centering position. But it is this primary series, which includes the pornographic spectacles of the first half of the film, where the emphasis on Max's gaze is obsessively emphatic and controlling.

In this 19-shot sequence, like most of its predecessors, the first shot begins with a backward zoom and proceeds to a series of alternating shot-reverse shots, seven of which are evenly distributed reverse-angle shots of Max looking. The segment closes with a rightward pan following Max as he moves to answer a phone call. Over the course of this passage, starting at shot 8, Max "becomes the monster" of the film.

In a naive sense, Max is alone in his apartment and is watching a videotape of the murdered media prophet Professor Brian O'Blivion — loaned to him by the professor's daughter, Bianca. During the backward zoom from the TV image, O'Blivion starts to explain what Videodrome, supposed by Max to be only a sinister and fascinating S&M TV show, really is. This zoom figure has been used so often before that it already announces Max will occupy the space of the implied reverse angle — and that this first shot is already from his point-of-view. The shot-reverse-shot series which ensues shows Max in medium shots and close-ups silently watching O'Blivion on the TV. The banality of this shot construction, which represents the most ordinary solution to the question of how to convey the scripted scene of a conversation, is listlessly articulated to render quite exactly the bored fascination of watching a videotape on TV. This banality also underscores the contrasting aggression of the soundtrack, which consists of O'Blivion's deliberately overwritten speech. Then, at shot 8, the segment spirals out into gruesome spectacle of the opened slit and this ordinary sequence becomes an extraordinary parody of the conventional horror film scene in which the main character "becomes the monster".

O'Blivion is explaining that he was Videodrome's inventor and first victim. Massive doses of Videodrome have given him a brain tumour he believes is really a new organ of perception, a new eye. The professor is addressing Max as his "son", a man made by the father's invention — a ray of light, a code, a signal — since Max has been absorbing massive doses of Videodrome "under" the S&M TV show. He will become what O'Blivion became; Max, too, will develop a new eye. A character thinly disguising Marshall McLuhan, O'Blivion is transparently a parodic personality. Nonetheless, throughout *Videodrome*, McLuhan's texts are always paraphrased cogently and even earnestly, although with dark irony. Max has been videated by the ray which has no direct connection to the S&M imagery — "the signal can come in under a test pattern, anything." So, Videodrome is, first of all, a medium that is its own message indifferent to content, including pornographic spectacle. This paraphrase of the famous media prophet's slogan, "the medium is the message", is collated in O'Blivion's speech with McLuhan's theory of the extended and transformed sensorium as the result of electronic media. However, whereas

many interpreters of this theory, and sometimes McLuhan himself, have been inclined to see this transformed sensorium as a beneficent "exteriorization of the senses" and the media as "extensions of man", in *Videodrome*, McLuhan's theory is articulated under the signs of contamination, incision and violation of flesh. Max is not just videated, he is totally worked over, contaminated, incised and inscribed by the Videodrome signal. He is, in Foucault's formulation, "traced by language and dissolved by ideas" and Foucault's "destruction of the body" is literalized as a wound in Max's flesh. In fact, in Cronenberg's blunt, parodic unfolding of the image of the slit during the second half of the film divided by this segment, Max becomes a videotape machine that acts out Baudrillard's "contactual and motivational obscenity". Max is to be not just saturated and contaminated but injected with a simulation model that is to remake him according to a political scenario.

Indeed, as the professor talks on over the shot-reverse-shot alternations, the silent Max is being solicited by his technological father; O'Blivion's discourse is a science-fiction patriarchal aetiology. The professor tells the tale of the birth of a race, the men of the "new flesh", of which the professor himself is father and Max his son. In the sixth shot, a stately zoom-in that makes O'Blivion's face fill the film screen, the professor concludes "the only reality is our perception — surely, Max, you can see that, can't you?" The video image of O'Blivion splatters out. In the next shot, Max, in close-up, looks down, and Max does see since the succeeding shot is clearly from his point-of-view; he sees a close-up of a large, pulsating slit that has opened up vertically in his chest. The pornographer's panic has assumed a spectacular visibility which, by the rules of the horror genre, makes Max the monster; and, by the rules of *Videodrome's* systematics of space and sound, flips over the erotic power positions of the film.

### System and Excess

As a formal unit, the segment is calculatedly dull, but it is not just a container for this gruesome spectacle of the slit. Although it is obvious that the excess of the image is factored into the dullness of the sequence to ensure the shock of reversal, this is really a superficial effect, and so obvious that it tips the scene over into parody. More important is the way that dullness is calculated on the conventionality of the scene's construction. There are two inextricable aspects of this formal conventionality relevant to understanding how *Videodrome* renders Baudrillard's theoretical nightmare: the first is the system of spatial organization, called "system of the suture" and centered on the gaze; the second is the systematic imbalance of image and sound (and specifically, language, which assumes the mastery Max seemed to enjoy in the first half of the film).

The institutional codes of narrative cinema, especially at the level of the composition of successive shots, have as their basic purpose setting up

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a continuity system that unifies the fragmentary single shots. Stephen Heath describes this purpose as the “narrativization” of screen space, and he writes,

Classical continuity ... is an order of pregnancy of space in frame; one of the narrative acts of film is the creation of space but what gives the moving space its coherence in time...is here ‘the narrative itself’, and above all as it crystallizes round character and point of view.<sup>17</sup>

Film semiotics have excavated that “narrativized space” and examined its center — the point-of-view crystallization — as a critical site of textual production. Developing the critical heuristic called “the system of suture”, semioticians have argued: 1) that screen space coheres through a network of feints and fusions that are anything but literal; 2) that they are instead complexly figural of anxieties and desires and, therefore, that this cohering function is not a neutral process but a determined activity; and (3) that the site of production of the “system of suture” is as well and concomitantly the site of the erotics of cinema involving pleasure, desire, difference and, at least potentially, excess.

Most narrative films mobilize the gaze through a network of looks and in varying degrees dissipate that erotics and smooth over the narrativizing activity. This is, in essence, what the cinematic decorum often associated with “classical narrative style” consists of. Exceptions, like the often discussed films of Josef von Sternberg and Alfred Hitchcock, concentrate and exacerbate the erotics of the “suture system” in the direction of difference and/or excess. *Videodrome* belongs among these exceptions, and in a highly exaggerated manner, for Cronenberg narrows the network of gazes to a very tightly closed circuit of power/pleasure. Max’s point-of-view is not just crystallized as the centering position of screen space, his gaze is totalized as the solitary site of spatial production, and not just for one or two sequences, as occurs in Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. Max seems literally to own all screen space, and to conjure up the pornographic spectacles out of that space because cuts from his point-of-view overwhelmingly determine what the camera’s reverse angles show (early in the film these are persistently pornographic sub-sequences) and because the camera so insistently returns to Max’s look from the reverse angle afterwards. Cinematically, this is what makes Max so purely the pornographer and how the film obsessively serializes the expository facts of Max’s ownership, his discernment and his boredom into Max’s empowered production of images. And, when this tightly coiled system of looks and gazes is reversed, the effect is extraordinarily powerful, an effect thrust into extraordinary and parodic excess of the image of Max’s slit torso.

*Videodrome* is firmly rooted in the tradition of the *Kammerspielfilm*, the single-character drama in which the inner state of the protagonist controls the dynamics of composition and the mood of the piece as a whole.

The character's state becomes the whole enunciation of the work. From the very beginning, *Videodrome* extends to Max's point-of-view this sort of extreme enunciatory potency. Even when scenes do not begin with Max, the camera's trackings, zooms, dollies and pans obediently return to him; all the film's movements through space and time are obsessively centered on his screen presence. More particularly, his empowered gaze operates as the specifically pornographic gaze: the lengthening glimpses at the savage S&M TV show are for Max alone, at least until he meets Nicki Brand. Marking an extension but no change in the film's enunciatory system, Nicki watches and delights in *Videodrome* with Max, declares "I was made for this show" and then, becoming his lover, performs her sexual masochism with and for Max. This erotic encounter triggers his first hallucination: the theatricalized image of their lovemaking on the *Videodrome* set, the bliss of the ur-text fantasy and the production of spectacle made one.

Max's pornographic look, not unlike Freud's Baby Max, operates in what seems to be his playpen of power and desire. It is his apartment, his TV station, his videoplayer, his screen and finally his fantasy which Nicki embodies that constitute the enclosed, virtually solipsistic spaces of the film's first half. The images that interest Max he picks up and drops, unwinds and rewinds like so many erotic yo-yos. The whole scopic system of the film converges as a monotonous seriality to constitute this exaggeration of Max's position in *Videodrome*. Then, after the sequence in which Max "becomes the monster", the elastic alternation in the later part of *Videodrome* is re-configured and Max's position is reversed: he is now the toy at the end of the elastic wire.

Max is pulled into *Videodrome*, that other playpen, the hyper-simulation of Max's "new flesh" — and what the film soon amplifies in the clanking comic book phrase — "the video word made flesh". But, of course, there never was any other playpen but always only the game of Max's seduction in which Max's body is always rewritten (as "new flesh") to a scenario (the "video word") produced elsewhere in the no-place of the *Videodrome* simulation model. It always and already produces technology's body, which was always the pornographer's real — or rather his hyper-real — body. At the juncture when Max has a glimmer, when his new eye — the slit in his chest — opens to his point-of-view, as his father O'Blivion promised seconds before, *Videodrome's* eroticism — which as Max says himself "ain't exactly sex" — flips over. The slit opens as a new eye — and it is again the slit eye that so provoked Jacques Lacan to see it as the site of inscription when it was opened in the notorious first sequence of the Dali — Bunuel *Un chien andalou* — that marks the effacement of Max's own body. The incision signals that it is Max who is now the site of a writing of another "ur-text".

In terms of sequence, narrative space and system of point-of-view, then, Max has not simply become the monster, his slit means he has become the obscene spectacle he, as the holder of the pornographic gaze, had stood

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outside of. Indeed, Cronenberg makes him a humiliating spectacle at that, for in shot 9 he sticks a pistol into the new cavity and his hand is drawn in after it. A grisly slapstick attempt to remove the pistol ends up with him able only to withdraw his hand.

### From Production to Seduction

Baudrillard's opposition between production and seduction is critical here in understanding that in *Videodrome* the reversal that occurs is not just between owners of the look or gaze. It is not just that Max's position in the film is flipped over and that someone else is on top and he has become the film's eroticized bottom. Rewriting Foucault's theory of the production of the sexual through multiple discourses and "panopticism", (precisely the mastering look from within the protected spaces of a private universe), Baudrillard describes production's imperative: "let everything be said, gathered, indexed and registered: this is how sex appears in pornography...with its immediate production of sexual acts in a frenzied activation of pleasure."<sup>18</sup> Posing seduction as a stage beyond panopticism's productive activity, Baudrillard adds: "seduction withdraws something from the visible order" and calls it back to an origin it never had, while it flows without depths through the technological manufacture of simulation models, scenarios, simulacra without originals.<sup>19</sup> Max's pornographic gaze is, then, a fantasy of production that centers, conjures, activates. Now become the spectacle, Max opens up and is drawn inward (his hand and gun) toward seduction, and everything is reversed. Not just the installation of a second panoptic system (that would make *Videodrome* merely a paranoid film), the reversal extinguishes the very system of Baudrillard's "protected spaces".

But, having spoken of inscription, of Max being re-written, we must now shift over to the second aspect of this 19-shot sequence, to the systematic imbalance of image and sound/language. This aspect Cronenberg not only exaggerates but complicates in *Videodrome*, although this is an aspect of the film that is perhaps less successfully realized than others. In most narrative films, the soundtrack supports the image. Moreover, sound and language simultaneously defer to the image-track by constantly insisting that they have as their point of origin someone or something inside the image, even if it is not immediately visible. It could be "off-screen", but always potentially brought "on-screen" to confirm that sound and/or language's origin lies within the image-track. One of the key film-sound conventions of narrative cinema, then, is a systematic balance of sounds across shots to maintain the "coherence of vision", in Heath's phrase,<sup>20</sup> which is what this system of sound-image relations protects.

Max is silent in this 19-shot sequence, which on one side is bordered by O'Blivion's speech and on the other by the phone call, which will turn out to be corporate executive Barry Convex's first command to Max —

to have a talk. The next scene is that talk, in which Convex, too, tells Max what Videodrome really is and what it has made of Max. The scene concludes with Max's last hallucination: Nicki and Max "performing" on Videodrome, this time followed by the flagellation murder of a secondary character. It is the first murder, indeed a site where pornographic spectacle crosses over to spectacular killing, in a series of murders that will mirror the pornographic spectacles of the first half of the film.

At the segmental level, Cronenberg replicates in *Videodrome* the favored narrative design of his later films (excepting *The Dead Zone*): set piece spectacular scenes alternating with sequences in which secondary characters (here O'Blivion and Convex, and usually, like them, paternal figures) tell the hero-monster the origins of his monstrosity, which is always the secret history of his body as a technological product. In *Videodrome*, and in its successor, *The Fly*, this design gains an unusual density and obsessiveness that are linked directly to the "writing of the body". In the 19-shot sequence discussed here Cronenberg literalizes that linkage: O'Blivion speaks and what he says does actually transform the body. This empowered speaking — which is a writing — redoubles the seduction Max undergoes in the second half of the film. But the place of that speaking does not have an actual source, an origin, because the empowered speaking comes from the TV — in *Videodrome* a no-place, the simulation model from which the literally dead, like O'Blivion, address the living, namely Max, in their place. In the reversal, Max's power over the video-porn spectacle becomes the video-speech's power over Max, and the conjuring work of his gaze is returned to its proper no-place, the TV image. Moreover, the inscriptive work of sound/language is empowered, as speech, from that same no-place over the course of the second half of the film.

The aural aspect of the reversal is crucial to interpreting the film and, particularly the Videodrome's gruesome iconography of the body. O'Blivion, for example, tells Max that Videodrome's signal engenders a new organ of perception, a new eye, and Max's belly promptly opens to be that new eye. At first, this might suggest only the flipping over of erotic positions from Max on top to the "father" whose instrument unmans the son. This suggests that *Videodrome* can be mapped on to an Oedipal structure: when Max's gun and hand slip into his slit and he struggles to pull them out, he succeeds only in removing his hand, and so experiences a sort of emasculation by the father. The imagery and the humiliation suggests that the reversed erotics of *Videodrome* have made Max a monstrous castrato-hermaphrodite. His monstrosity, his humiliation and especially his panic are reactive signs that his bi-sexuality and its trauma have been unconcealed. For Robin Wood, this is everyone's repressed true nature, and its escape into view — indeed, into grotesque spectacle — signifies Cronenberg's neurotic fears of bi-sexuality.

This is initially a persuasive symbolic reading of the imagery. However, *Videodrome* is a film that uses not only imagery, but a tremendous, even

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redundant, supplement of language. It is critical that this 19-shot sequence is bordered on both sides with explanatory speeches. In the second half of the film, these speeches are multiplied. In every instance, the speeches effect the production of the horror spectacle, which is always now Max's own body. The image of the slit is not a hidden depth, the repressed bisexual self, that has emerged into view. It is a stereotype worked up internally by the film itself, and it has heaved itself into view as a body written and re-made as "the new flesh". This internal stereotyping is the point of Cronenberg's insistent scripting and of the massive supplement of explanatory-empowered language to the point of self-parody.

Moreover, the phone call from Barry Convex is not just a transitional closing shot but resolves the question that two earlier shots (16 and 18), taken from Max's left side, had raised: just whose position are they taken from? In a film so insistent on the gaze and on such positionings, this question has weight. When the phone rings, the pan in shot 19 reveals the angle to have been "the phone's". Or rather, it is Convex, who has "seen" through this medium of speech.

But who exactly holds that point-of-view at the end of that sequence is no more interesting and no more critical in Cronenberg's register of sound, language and image than mystic McLuhanism or corporate science fiction fascism. What matters is that both O'Blivion and Convex are "fathers of the eye": O'Blivion inscribes Max under his image with his aetiological speech; Convex encodes Max under the S&M TV show. Convex also encodes Max with a "flesh-cassette" and "flesh-gun": instruments of "writing." In a scene following his phone call, Convex thrusts a flesh-like videocassette into Max's slit and says "Open up to me, Max. I've got something I want to play for you." Max's slit is torn open, turning Max literally into a videotape player: the instrument for writing the science fiction of a corporate dystopian revolution. Crawling into a stairwell, Max then removes the gun from the slit, and it extends metal styli that penetrate Max's hand and arm, growing Max his "flesh gun".

Both O'Blivion and Convex incise Max's body as a slit eye with the paternal phallus of language itself: their speech, which serves as a tremendous supplement to the image — so much so that it is out of balance with the images and creates an excess of language that collides with the iconographic excess. When coupled with Max's silence, the fathers' speeches act as signs — no less than the reversal of the film's suture system — of his opening to them. The paternal speech-that-makes-spectacle is the video word that makes (rewrites) Max's flesh. The eye and the hand as sites of polluting inscription, are further signs along the chain of internal stereotypes that wind through *Videodrome*: like the slit that cuts a new eye in his torso, the gun whose styli penetrate Max's body is a displacement of the pen that inscribes the hand, that rewrites it exactly as the "flesh-gun". In the reversal of *Videodrome's* erotics, Max's body becomes a scene of writing for a scenario written elsewhere. He becomes the spectacle of incised flesh,

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the effacement of the text of his own body, which is rewritten from that elsewhere of the fathers. And, by being rewritten, Max is withdrawn from the "visibility" that had been the fantasy arena of his power, pleasure and ownership and has become literally the written image of "contactual obscenity".

However, even this is not yet exactly all Max's seduction — to become a sort of reversal-production, to become Max the product rather than master of production. The fathers' punishing gift to Max is to ritualize panic as murder, excess of power and further spectacle — and so the shootings in the second half of the film that answer the pornographic passages of the first half. But that is not all, for it is not just the fathers' words that transform; Nicki calls to him as a mother as well. And it is Nicki's role to articulate the no-place from which empowered speech emanates.

When she first appears on Videodrome (having disappeared temporarily from the drama to "audition for that show", as she says), she strangles O'Blivion in mid-speech and calls out "come to me, come to Nicki, Max". Her lips protrude from the sexually aroused TV like a tumescent breast and Max plunges his face into the screen-breast-face. Later, in concert with Nicki, Bianca "changes the programme" by removing Convex's flesh-tape and renames Max "the video word made flesh"; and finally, Nicki offers him extermination/resurrection, soliciting him to the no-place of origin, Videodrome itself, where the difference between TV signal and the flesh collapses into the "communicational". This is the seductive call that is, for Baudrillard, always the call to return to origins that never were — here back to the source( the TV itself) that made Max what he has become.

*Videodrome* concludes with a last trope, a last literalized turning, a TV/cinema loop in which Max hails himself as "the new flesh" and shoots himself in the head with the flesh gun. The loop arcs out over the figure of the hysteron proteron to diagram a no-beginning no-end. Max's suicide and its video-simulation loop over and under each other and neither can be the original. Nicki seduces Max to this final end of extermination and resurrection in what is also *Videodrome's* last parodic gesture, a black parody of McLuhan's theory of angelistic circulation of the body in the electronic media: the disincorporation of the nervous system through electronic media that curves back to engender "cosmic man", the simulation become the noogenesis of the body itself. The pseudo-incarnational rhetoric, the use of openly magico-religious speech to seduce Max this one last time, suggests nothing so much as an impossible collision of Baudrillard and Teilhard de Chardin. This TV/cinema loop is the absurdist lighting flash of a dead divinization.

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### Notes

1. Two critics who attempt to develop this widely assumed but rarely investigated notion are Robert Phillip Kolker in his study of modern American directors, *A Cinema of Loneliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) and Robert B. Ray, in his study of the ideological shifts in American films, *A Certain Tendency in the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), especially pp. 247 ff.
2. Piers Handling, ed. *The Shape of Rage: The Films of David Cronenberg* (Toronto: General Publishing, 1983).
3. See especially William Beard, "The Visceral Mind," in Handling, pp. 2 — 10.
4. Wood has written often on horror films over the last decade. His most important texts are gathered in Andrew Britton, Richard Lippe, et al, *The American Nightmare* (Toronto: The Festival of Festivals, 1979), especially pp. 7-32; and in his own *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 70-162 and 189-201. His first criticism of Cronenberg appears in *Nightmare*, 23-26; his second, expanded attack is "David Cronenberg: A Dissenting View", in Handling, pp. 115-135.
5. *Nightmare*, pp. 14-16.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 7 and "Dissenting", p. 130.
8. For a sustained criticism of current methods in film genre criticism, see Stephen Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980). Also see Thomas Schatz, "The Structural Influence: New Directions in Film Genre Study", in Barry Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 91-101.
9. See Raymond Bellour, *L'analyse du film* (Paris: Editions de l'Albatros, 1979); *Camera Obscura*, Nos. 3-4 (1979) affords a very good introduction to Bellour's analytical procedures and critical themes.
10. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).
11. Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (New York: Semiotext[e], 1988), pp. 30-32.
12. Michel Foucault, "Panopticism", in his *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979). Also see, Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault* (New York: Semiotext[e], 1987), especially 20-23.
13. Baudrillard sets up this spatial typology in "The Ecstasy of Communication", in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 126-133.
14. Heath, "Narrative Space," *Questions of Cinema*, 45-46.
15. Baudrillard, "Ecstasy of Communication", 131.
16. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald Blouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 148
17. Heath, "Narrative Space", 44.
18. Baudrillard, "Ecstasy of Communication", 132. Also see *Forget Foucault*, 21-23.
19. Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, 21. See also "Seduction, or, the Superficial Abyss, in *Ecstasy of Communication*, 57-75.

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20. See Heath, "Film Performance", *Questions of Cinema*, 119-121: "To disturb the achieved relations of sound and image in the apparatus is to disturb the performance, to break the whole coherence of vision."

## LOVE LETTERS TO THE MOTHER: THE WORK OF CHANTAL AKERMAN

*Brenda Longfellow*

### I

When I speak of the relation to the mother, I mean that in our patriarchal culture the daughter is absolutely unable to control her relation to her mother....there is no possibility whatsoever, within the current logic of sociocultural operations, for a daughter to situate herself with respect to her mother: because, strictly speaking, they make neither one nor two, neither has a name, meaning, sex of her own, neither can be "identified" with respect to the other.

Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*.<sup>1</sup>

Reconstituer l'image de la mère, la voix de la mère, la présence de la mère. Lui donner un lieu fictif: terre promise. Mais loin d'Israël. A Manhattan par exemple, et pourquoi pas?

Eric de Kuyper.

Introduction to the published script of *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*.<sup>2</sup>

If there is a recurring phantasmatic core to the work of Chantal Akerman, it lies in the desire to reconstitute the image of the mother, the voice of the mother. By phantasmatic I am employing Kaja Silverman's definition as "a cluster of fantasies" or "erotic tableaux or combinatoires"<sup>3</sup> which mark a certain symptomatic continuity of authorial inscription. While not all of Akerman's work bears traces of this symptomatic quality, the four films I am most concerned with — *Je tu il elle* (1974), *Jeanne Diel-*

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*man*, *23 Quai de Commerce*, *1080 Bruxelles* (1975), *News From Home* (1976), and *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978) — are intimately related as phantasmatic variations on a theme.

No other cinematographic work, I believe, is so singular in its evocation of the relation between daughter and mother and in its tracing of an explicitly homosexual economy of narrative and spectatorship ordered by and through this relation. Desire in these films circulates around the maternal body, around the variable presence and absence of the mother, around the enduring gaze of the daughter at the mother.

In their persistent articulation of the primacy of the mother/daughter relation, Akerman's films share common terrain with much recent feminist theoretical writing on female subjectivity. The political urgency of both projects bears on the possibility of articulating a different economy of desire and subjectivity as symbolic resistance to the law of the Father and the interminability of phallic mediation. Both theorize an account of female subjectivity explicitly opposed to the classical Freudian version of a normalizing oedipalization which results in the obliteration of the daughter's relation to the mother and the reversal of love for the mother into hatred and *ressentiment* as the daughter enters the world of language and desire.

Before developing a more explicit textual analysis of Akerman's films, I want to take an extended theoretical detour through certain textual fragments of Irigaray, not in the interests of establishing a metatheoretical discourse which the films will be induced to reflect, but as a kind of companion text, a work which is equally focused on the mother/daughter relation and which, in its peregrinations through this territory, reveals certain symptomatic and endemic theoretical pitfalls.

II

To start with, I would insist that the journey back to the mother, as imaginary as it might be, is neither direct nor invulnerable to psychic overdetermination. Is it imaginatively possible, we might first ask, to reconstitute that relation without the usual phobias, phantasms and idealizations which attend our relation to that space/place/memory/figure we represent as the mother?

In "Stabat Mater", Julia Kristeva observes that "we live in a civilization where the consecrated (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood".<sup>4</sup> One of the central objects of feminism, both theoretical and practical (the struggle for reproductive rights, for example), has been to disassociate these two terms, to reserve a space for female desire in society exclusive of maternity. It is a task taken up by Irigaray in her massive deconstruction of western metaphysics and by Kristeva in "Stabat Mater", both of whom endeavour to expose the "consecrated" representation as fraud, as a phantasmatic projection of a phallogocentric imaginary. As Kristeva writes:

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this motherhood is the *fantasy* that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory; what is more, it involves less an idealized archaic mother than the idealization of the relationship that binds us to her, one that cannot be localized — an idealization of primary narcissism.<sup>5</sup>

It seems, however, that there is something indestructible about that idealization, something which returns, with the force of the repressed, to haunt even the most theoretical of daughters (theory, as we know, providing no defence against the return of the repressed). And in that return, the theoretical investigation of the mother/daughter relation occurs, less as a writing from the place or perspective of the mother, than as a continually renewed repetition of our narcissistic relation to her. In this, Irigaray's work seems particularly symptomatic.<sup>6</sup>

In *Speculum*, Irigaray argues that the psychic damage inflicted on the female subject under patriarchy is rooted in the fact that women are denied any representational means, any access to the "minting of signifiers" which would allow them to repeat, re-produce and re-present their relation to origins. Under the current symbolic economy, it is only the male subject, possessor of a penis "or better still — the phallus", "**Emblem of man's appropriative relation to the origin**"<sup>7</sup>, who is provided with the representational wherewithal to effect an imaginary return to the originary place of the mother. In the absence of any symbolic equivalent "to make up for, substitute for, or defer this final break in physical contact with her mother", the female subject can never "lay claim to seeing or knowing what is to be seen and known of that place of origin; she will not represent "her" relation to "her" origin; she will never go back inside the mother; she will never give the mother a drink of sperm from her penis..."<sup>8</sup> The therapeutic and political task of feminism would thus involve the obligation to "trouver, retrouver, inventer, découvrir, les paroles qui disent le rapport à la fois le plus archaïque et le plus actuel au corps de la mère, à notre corps, les phrases qui traduisent le lien entre son corps, le nôtre, celui de nos filles"<sup>9</sup>

In Irigaray, the resolution of this task is most frequently represented as an imaginary regression where mother and daughter are bound in a corporeal fusion which dissolves all difference and where homosexuality is constituted by the mirroring and similitude of these two bodies. While it is difficult to deny the visionary potential inherent in Irigaray's tracing of female subjectivity in the imaginary — metaphoric and theoretical — regression to the pre-oedipal "corps à corps" with the mother, the theoretical problem remains that the relation to origin is consistently displaced to a utopic territory of nonmediated identity and desire, before language and differentiation, before, in some instances, birth itself. The mother, in this encounter with origins, remains, to all intents and purposes, silent, a matter of blood, womb, placenta, milk, less a subject than body matter consistently associated with "intra-uterine life" or even the placenta, "cette

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première maison qui nous entoure et dont nous transportons partout le halo".<sup>10</sup> The daughter's desire for the mother is subsequently represented, not as the result of loss or separation, but as anaclitic, in direct continuity (if not collapse) with the female infant's love/dependency on the mother as physiological support, as womb and breast.

Irigaray's harmonious portrait of the mother/daughter relation, however, is not without its breaks or contradictions, its violent repudiation and nightmarish other, its nightmarish mother — who returns in the essay "Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre". Composed as a paranoid treatise written/spoken by the infantile daughter to her mother, the essay begins with this reproach: "Avec ton lait, ma mère, j'ai bu la glace. Et me voilà maintenant avec ce gel à l'intérieur".<sup>11</sup>

Here the maternal phantasm is not the loving, erotically cathected, mother of Irigaray's other writings but the persecutory mother, the mother who provides not warmth, but cold, not fluid, but the cruel glacial stolidity of ice. The "corps à corps" with her is experienced as a suffocating annihilation, an oppressive violation of the daughter, who is held "prisoner", too close to the body, too stuffed full of food to flee. Here what the daughter desires is not fullness, but emptiness, an experience of hunger that might alone provide a boundary between the two, a space for a relation that would not be interminably bound to the exchange of food. A space, also, of resistance against the oral mother who has no other desire but to maintain the daughter within her own phantasm as corporeal extension, to fill the daughter with her milk, her honey and the detested meat.

N'y aura-t-il jamais d'autre amour entre nous que ce comblement de trous? Fermer-refermer indéfiniment tout ce qui pourrait avoir lieu entre nous, est-ce ton seul désir? Nous réduire à consommer-être consommées, ton unique besoin?<sup>12</sup>

But it is not only the daughter who incorporates the mother. In this exchange, everything is reversible, reflexive. The mother also incorporates the daughter, inhabits her through the implantation of her images, her phantasies, her melancholic emptiness. This mother, in fact, is nothing without the daughter — has no image of herself, no self knowledge. By a strange reversal of terms, it is she who is dependent on the daughter, the daughter who guarantees the mother life through the mere fact of her existence, her provision of a mirror in which the mother can postpone the recognition of her nothingness, her absence, her non-identity. "Et si je pars", the daughter claims:

tu ne te retrouves plus. N'étais-je le dépôt cautionnant ta disparition? Le tenant lieu de ton absence? La garde de ton inexistence? Celle qui t'assurait de pouvoir toujours te rejoindre. De te tenir, à toute heure, entres tes bras. De te maintenir en vie. De te nourrir indéfiniment pour tenter de subsister?<sup>13</sup>

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The piece ends with the daughter's plea for a relation to the mother without the mutually annihilating effects of a too obsessive proximity, for a relation that could incorporate a measure of distance, allowing the daughter to look at the mother, to touch her, to know her body, experience her volume. If desire is to remain between them, then a definitive separateness is called for in which the mother and daughter could remain two, in exchange, neither "béante ni suturée". Neither polarized by an irreducible opposition nor sutured into an imaginary oneness. But "Entr'ouvertes, sans déchirure".<sup>14</sup>

I am at a loss to situate this very odd and bewildering essay which arrives without markers, without a "meta-language" that could contextualize, balance even, this public denunciation of the mother. The conceit of the piece, of course, is that it speaks of or from the unconscious, from the depths of the paranoid-schizoid attitude toward the mother. According to Melanie Klein, the characteristic of this stage is that the child is incapable of containing or reconciling its ambivalent feelings toward the mother. Oscillating between the extremes of hatred and passionate love, she projects her ambivalence onto the mother who is split into "good" mother and "bad" mother, a split, it seems, which is reproduced across the body of Irigaray's writing.

What would it mean to recognize that ambivalence, to acknowledge that the difference projected into an opposition is a difference internal to the subject herself? Given that Irigaray has been foremost in the theoretical effort to deconstruct the binarism of sexual difference, why is she so reluctant to deconstruct the binarisms inherent in her relation to the mother? Jane Gallop reads Irigaray's narcissistic monologue in "Et L'une ne bouge pas sans L'autre" as the daughter's phallicization of the mother, this being to whom the demand is made but who offers no response. "In Lacanian terms", writes Gallop, "the silent interlocutor, the second person who never assumes the first person pronoun, is the subject presumed to know, the object of transference, the phallic mother, in command of the mysterious processes of life, death, meaning and identity".<sup>15</sup> For me, though, the question and the demand in the text seem more rhetorical than imperative, and the mother less phallic, less a spectre of a full and terrifying plentitude, than a site of absence, emptiness and non-identity. Pathetic really: a clinging, wimpy mother who can only ascertain her existence and desire through the daughter. The problem then lies not, as Gallop suggests, with the refusal on the part of the daughter to recognize the identity she shares and exchanges with the mother, but with her refusal to acknowledge the mother as anything else but a figure within her own infantile phantasm. Perhaps, the path toward a healthy reconciliation of opposites would begin here in the recognition of ambivalence, not only on the part of the daughter, but on the part of the mother: that her desire, like the daughter's, is dual and contradictory; that she (a daughter herself) might have conflictual feelings about maternity; that her desire, contrary to the nar-

cissistic fantasy, may not be trained exclusively on the child; that the daughter may not be everything to the mother.

To what extent then, we might ask ourselves, is this question of the daughter's ambivalence and the mother's desire repressed within feminist investigations of the mother/daughter relation? If the mother is condemned, as Freud would have it, for repressing the daughter's sexuality, what of the converse, of our inability to recognize the mother as desiring and sexual subject<sup>16</sup> in a manner that does not reconstitute her as idealized and romantic projection? This projection seems to haunt our cinematic representations of the mother. In *The Gold Diggers*, for example, the mother appears only as a recurring phantasmatic trace, her desire for the father and/or for gold experienced as a kind of betrayal. Or still more in Michelle Citron's *Daughter-Rite*, the mother is conspicuously absent, figured ironically as the derisory object of the daughters' investigation of her affects, present only as in the cinematographic memory of the Super 8 footage. And yet with this latter, I can think of no other film (perhaps, only *Jeanne Dielman*) which so evocatively succeeds in representing the actual, the experiential, contradictoriness of our relation to our mothers: the obsessive curiosity tinged with obstinate indifference; the disdain for her values and morality coupled with the frightening reappearance of these values in our own lives; and underwriting all, the recurring, indestructible memory of our desire for her, as evoked by the Super 8 footage.

In order to bring up the question of sexuality, in order to bring the sexual into play, we are confronted with the necessity of moving from the closed economy of duality, of the two, of the mother/daughter trapped within an endless refractory dialectic in which, as Irigaray suggests, the life of the one can only be affirmed through the murder of the other. To move beyond two, a third is called for. An other, a third term capable of introducing the necessary distance required to sustain and mediate the recognition of desire.

The formulation of this third remains a continuing problem for feminist theory. Kaja Silverman in *The Acoustic Mirror* proposes that this third would be language itself; that the effect and operation of castration has to be deliteralized, taken at its most existential level as the separation of meaning from being, a split which is simultaneous to the separation of mother and child. This originary "cut" would precede and be distinguished from all rigid assignation of sexual difference as both sexes are equally traumatized and marked by the lack which the entry into language inaugurates. Silverman argues, moreover, that object choice and identification, as constituting instances of sexual difference, are only made possible through the mediation of this originary division.

Re-emphasizing Freud's hesitant (and often elided) assertion in "The Ego and the Id" that the positive Oedipus complex (heterosexual object choice and same sex identification) is "by no means its commonest form"<sup>17</sup>, Silverman insists that it is the negative oedipus complex which constitutes

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the primary strata of female subjectivity. For the daughter, this negative traversal of the oedipus complex is represented by the cathexis of the mother as erotic object, a choice which may co-exist or supersede the girl's positive Oedipus complex. The daughter's desire for the mother is, thus, not dependent on the primal nurturing and physiological support which the mother provides but is, necessarily, contingent on the daughter's separation from the mother, on her turning "après le coup" to the mother as object of desire.

While the implications and usefulness of the negative oedipus complex as a paradigm (and of desire rather than love as the constitutive basis of the mother/daughter relation) remains to be worked out, Silverman's theoretical move does have the important advantage of resurrecting difference in the theorization of female desire and subjectivity.

### III

I would argue that the theoretical contribution of Akerman's films lies equally in their singular attentiveness to the ambivalence and difference that structures the mother/daughter relationship, a difference which informs both the diegesis and the structural articulation of her films. I would go so far as to say that it is precisely the particular structural articulation of her films which functions as the third term, triangulating the mother and daughter relation and framing the films both as a mode of reparation and as evidence of an irreparable divide. Like Irigaray, Akerman's work gives expression to the desire of the daughter for the mother, but it is a desire that originates, and most emphatically so, from the side of the symbolic, from the side of the daughter's insurmountable difference from the mother, a difference that is at once spatial, generational, political and sexual.

"Maman", whispers the filmmaker in *Toute Une Nuit* over an image of an older dark-haired woman, Akerman's mother, who stands by a suburban house in the waning heat of a summer evening, smoking a cigarette. There is a painful repetition of loss here in the difference between these two spaces of daughter and mother, between the offscreen voice of the daughter and the maternal image, between the subject behind the camera and the object, ephemeral as a phantasm before it. Before the steadfast gaze of the camera, the mother is uneasy, embarrassed, perhaps, before the fathomless demand of the daughter, this "immoderate demand", as Freud puts it (always too little milk, never enough love)<sup>18</sup>. And it is precisely the mother's impassiveness, her seeming inability to hear the daughter's call, which produces the incredible nostalgia of the sequence, recalling our narcissistic desire for fusion while denying that possibility. The denial is inevitable. It is structurally conveyed through the irrevocable difference of those two spaces of the off-screen voice and the onscreen image and by the mediation of the cinematic apparatus itself.

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On the other side of that "immoderate demand" of the daughter, however, lies the equally insistent and relentless demand of the mother, a demand observed through the textual and linguistic folds of *News From Home*. On the soundtrack, Chantal reads letters from her mother, letters full of impassioned pleas for the daughter: "My dear little girl, write to me. I think of you all the time. I love you". Here the mother's voice is mediated through the daughter not with a collapse of distinctions, but with a certain intermingling of subject positions, the "I" and the "you", which observe no fixed address of identity. "Mother" and "daughter" are always and only effects of a continuous exchange, of a writing/speaking through and with the other. Addressee and addressor unknown, nowhere. At least nowhere in the image. Letters are sent and circulated back in a perpetual reciprocal fold: Chantal's through the mother, the mother's through Chantal. "I only learn of you from what the letters tell us. I live for your letters. That's all that matters: a letter from you, Chantal. Everyone asks of you". "Last week I received three letters, this week, only one. Please write". "I live to the rhythm of your letters. We only ask you don't forget to write. Your loving mother".

Set against the melodious refrain of the news from home — the domestic details, the family's health, the onset of menopause, the engagements and birthday parties, the arrangements for sending Chantal bits of money, her sandals and summer clothes — is the daughter's detached and protracted gaze at the subways, traffic and streets of New York. Marked by their extended duration and by the absence of camera movement, these scenes are marked by an impersonality that contrasts radically with the fervoured tone of the mother's letters. Not, however, with the daughter's delivery which, like her gaze, remains observant without direct emotional implication. She is a little like Dora before the Sistine Madonna, impassive in her contemplation of maternal desire. A matter not of indifference, perhaps, but of the "correct distance", "neither too close nor too far"<sup>19</sup>, the space required for the daughter to live and to create. To oblige the maternal desire with the intensity it demands would mean the obliteration of both possibilities, a tipping of the balance into an imaginary fusion in which neither, to paraphrase Irigaray, could move without the other.

In this film, however, something does keep moving — the camera and with it the gaze of the daughter over the discontinuous spaces of the city, an ocean removed from the mother. Beyond the image track, a structural distance from the mother is articulated through the fluctuating use of ambient sound. Apart from the voice over, the only other sound which punctuates the silence of the barren New York landscape is post-dubbed traffic noises. While the absence and presence of this traffic ambience marks out a formal rhythm and serves to emphasize the inhumanity of the city, its varying levels function (and humourously so) as active defences against the immoderateness of the maternal demand. As the mother's letters attain new (and to many viewers, uncannily familiar) heights of emotional

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blackmail ("I'm beginning to get depressed but as long as you're happy that's the main thing"), the level of traffic ambience is exaggerated to the point of drowning out the reading of the mother's letters, as if the suppression and muffling of the mother's voice were necessary to the continued sanity of the daughter.

This good humoured resistance continues throughout the film, as in the sequence which begins with the mother admonishing the daughter not to go out at night ("it's dangerous") and is followed — almost as a deliberate provocation — with shots of New York streets in the dead of night and early morning. However, a certain sense of reconciliation is suggested by the end of the film. There, for the first time, the camera begins to move in an extended travelling shot through the streets of New York. This shot is followed by one of equal duration in which the camera, stationed at the stern of a ferry, observes the departure from the harbour and the New York skyline as it diminishes into the horizon. Contrasted to the austere and stationary gaze which preceded it, this sudden and unexpected movement suggests a kind of liberation from the oppositional nature of the mother/daughter relation in which the daughter, refusing to acquiesce to the maternal demand, nonetheless, had remained passive and immobile before it. In that last movement toward the other shore, a new possibility is suggested in terms we have yet to conceive.

*Jeanne Dielman* is Akerman's most sustained and powerful meditation on the mother. "I didn't escape from my mother...", Akerman noted in an interview, " ... this is a love film to my mother. It gives recognition to that kind of woman, it gives her "a place in the sun".<sup>20</sup> On one level, *Jeanne Dielman* functions as an act of reparation, a repairing of the distance between daughter and mother, a "love-film" which provides for a sublimated return to the corps à corps with the mother. Equally, it is an act of political reparation, in its loving attentiveness to the domestic world of the mother, in its precise documentation and cinematic validation of the gestures which constitute her experiential space.

The mother figured in *Jeanne Dielman* before the protracted (225 min.) gaze of the daughter is not the mother of primary narcissism, but the historic mother, the mother as she is inserted into the circumscribed space of the domestic, of the economy of reproduction, of the production of oedipus. The film as is well known documents three days in the life of a Belgium petit-bourgeois housewife, the temporal passage marked through the repetition of the daily tasks of domestic routine which the camera records in "real" time, from commencement to completion: the washing of dishes, the preparation of wiener schnitzel, the kneading of a meat loaf. Women's work, the work that is never done, that work, which in our current social order remains unpaid, invisible, at the lower end of the hierarchy of values.

Of all Akerman's films this one is the most "documentary" in its observation of the conceit of real time and real space, in its phenomenological

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investigation of the repeated gestures which fill the space of the domestic.

For my cinema...the most suitable word is phenomenological: it is always a succession of events, of little actions which are described in a precise manner. And what interests me is just this relation to the immediate look, with how you look at these little actions going on. And it is also a relation to strangeness.<sup>21</sup>

(Emphasis mine.)

In *Jeanne Dielman* this loving gaze of the daughter is also overcoded as a search for knowledge of the mother, an epistemophilic gaze which makes of the film something of a primal scene. It is a primal scene, however, which resists the habitual voyeurism of the psychoanalytic scene where the child stumbles upon its parents engaged in coitus, or the habitual voyeurism of classical cinema which overdetermines the look as one of penetration and appropriation. "The camera was not voyeuristic in the commercial way", Akerman notes, "because you always knew where I was. You know, it wasn't shot through the keyhole"<sup>22</sup>.

The spectator enters this film "not through the keyhole"; as Akerman insists, but in "a relation to strangeness". This strangeness at once recalls Brechtian aesthetic politics, the "making strange", as Brecht puts it, of a materialist practice of art which operates to break down the processes of imaginary involvement, the habitual norms of perception and identification, in order to produce a knowledge about social relations. In *Jeanne Dielman* this strangeness works against the collapsing of difference to maintain a distance in which the spectatorial position is shaped as one of detached observation. It is precisely this quality of formalism — the absence of the reverse shot, the prolonged duration of each sequence, the editing structure which remains as predictable as Jeanne's activities — that denies the viewing subject the possibility of control and possession.

This strangeness of the film, however, bears not only on the observational distance between the spectator and the image but on the nature of Dielman's gestures themselves which, to this viewer at least, seem pathological. In this very silent film, the body language of the housewife speaks the most profound alienation, an anal retentive obsession with order, cleanliness and routine shading into "housewife's psychosis". Her world is structured by an economy of saving, of penny-pinching which involves the refusal of excess, of expenditures of money or of libido without return. Within this economy, her relation to her body is completely de-eroticized. The body, for Jeanne, is simply one utilitarian instrument among many, to be scrubbed, deodorized, sanitized with the same rigorous sense of duty and self-denial as the bathtub, the breakfast dishes. For Jeanne, her prostitution occurs at the same level as her other duties, an activity with no more or less significance than the peeling of potatoes or the washing up of dishes.

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Only the endlessly repeated routine, the obsessive protraction of her domestic tasks, saves Jeanne from confronting that which these things are most designed to prevent: a confrontation with the emptiness of her life. "Not to have pleasure"; Akerman says, "is her only protection". Within such a rigidly defensive order, such a confrontation could only be responded to with annihilation or through a radical restructuring of the relations to the self, to objects and to others.

If the film is a love letter to the mother, it is also a film about the daughter's remove from what the mother represents and denies. About a love that returns across the territory of the daughter's experience, education and politicization to regard the mother at a distance, with a healthy measure of ambivalence. In the previous section, I argued that without the intervention of a third term this ambivalence traps the female subject in an eternal oscillation between the extremes of love and hatred. In *Jeanne Dielman* what intervenes in the space between the daughter and the cinematographic return to the mother is feminism, a collectively engendered understanding of the mother's significance, of her place within a symbolic and political economy which denies her worth and the possibility of desire. The intervention of this third political term structures the film as double, split as Janet Bergstrom has observed:

between character and director, two discourses, two modes of the feminine: the feminine manquée, acculturated under patriarchy, and the feminist who is actively looking at the objective conditions of her oppression — her place in the family. It is the absence of the reverse shot which guarantees the separateness of the logics.<sup>23</sup>

It is this third, her feminism, which prevents Akerman from repeating the daughter's symptomatic repression of the mother's desire in the interests of her own.

In *Jeanne Dielman*, the issue of the mother's desire is raised through its absence, through the investigation of the symptoms of its repression and hysterical conversion into memory lapses, accidents, slippages which increasingly invade the ordered routine of Jeanne's life. Seemingly set in place by a condensation of events — the son's oedipal interrogations and the sister's suggestion of a remarriage — the intensifying force of desire marks the second movement of the film.

The return of the repressed is first evidenced when Jeanne mysteriously prolongs her engagement with a male customer. This lapse sets in motion a chain of effects in which the potatoes boil dry, dinner is late, Jeanne neglects to button her housecoat and increasingly begins to lose the security of her bearings. Given the previously established rigidity of Jeanne's domestic routine, these lapses begin to assume the proportions of the grotesque. On a formal level, this hysteria emerges with the exaggeration of the sound effects: the whirl of the coffee grinder, the thump of the brush hitting the shoes, the kettle boiling, the sound of a spoon hitting the side

of the pot, the clatter of dishes. Within the pervasive silence of the domestic landscape, these noises stand out as eruptions of excess within the textual body. This excess receives its penultimate expression in the murder which concludes the film.

What are we to make of this so very impassionate murder, this gesture which annihilates order, which finalizes the system of exchange? And what of the shot which precedes the murder: that groping and movement of Jeanne under the man. How do we read her contorted expression: one of pleasure or of pain, orgasmic or disgusted? In a random survey of women friends who had seen the film, the readings seem to divide, interestingly enough, according to the sexual preference of the spectator. For the lesbian spectator, Jeanne's response represents a flash of consciousness and a frightening recognition of her own alienation, her own status as sexual object. For the heterosexual female spectator, the movement of the head and arm connote sexual pleasure, an eruption of the disordering possibility of desire against which Jeanne reacts with a gesture of violent negation.

In this difference of interpretation, I arrive at a certain impasse. To side with the former would mean denying the unconscious, the pressure of repressed desire which, as I had argued, was responsible for the gradual dissolution of order. On the other hand, to exclude the possibility that any element of consciousness attended her gesture, would be to repress the significance of who her victim was (a customer, a john) and deny the murder its negatory potential. The difference in interpretation seems, finally, to revolve around the question of what is being negated — her desire or the Law — a question of what the man represents for the spectator: an erotic substitute for the absent husband or the "Nom du Père" incarnate. A univocal interpretation appears impossible. Is she a hysteric or a feminist revolutionary? Perhaps the only answer is both, and simultaneously so.

Within the range of domestic gestures the film has documented, the murder stands as the one singular act of unbridled affirmation, of violent refusal. While the murder implicates Dielman too in a symbolic death, as she waits in silent resignation for the son to return, the sirens to roar, the forces of law and order to descend, the final image of this woman sustains the memory of her refusal and something else: a rage and a passion which might just permit the journey of the mother to the side of feminism.

While I have spent some time arguing for the necessity of a third term in thinking through the dialectic of the mother/daughter relation and of posing feminism, language or symbolic mediation as possibilities, I have yet to elaborate the relation between this dialectic and the economy of homosexuality. It has long been an insight of feminism that lesbianism, the love of women, is profoundly connected to the archaic mother/daughter relation. This connection is often read in moving poetic celebrations of lesbianism as a direct analogue, a repetition of the daughter's love for the body of the mother.<sup>24</sup> While certainly not denying the role that this phan-

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tasm continues to play in the sexual experience of both homosexual and heterosexual couples, I think we have to recognize the extent to which this notion of repetition as replication is based on the narcissistic phantasm of the mother, the mother with no frustration, no ambivalence, no breaks. Perhaps a way out of this theoretical impasse is to investigate the way in which the emergence of desire marks that repetition with serious implications of difference. It is a point that is theorized by Irigaray in a frequently neglected passage of *Speculum*.

Freud's observations on the phallic phase of infantile sexuality provide her point of departure. In "On Femininity", Freud writes that of the many perverse and variable desires represented within this stage one is "most clearly" expressed — that is, the desire "to get the mother with child and the corresponding wish to bear her child"<sup>25</sup>. Now for Freud, this incestuous offspring, conceived within the usual penis/baby exchange system, is unquestionably regarded as male. But, writes Irigaray:

One might advance the hypothesis that the child who is desired in the relationship with the mother must be a girl if the little girl herself is in any degree valued for her femaleness. The wish for that girl child conceived with the mother would signify for the little girl a desire to repeat and represent her own birth and the separation of her "body" from the mother's. Engendering a girl's body, bringing a third woman's body into play, would allow her to identify both herself and her mother as sexuate women's bodies. As two women, defining each other as both like and unlike, thanks to a third "body" that both by common consent wish to be "female"....

In other words, this fantasy of the woman-daughter conceived between mother and daughter would mean that the little girl, and her mother also, perhaps, want to be able to represent themselves as women's bodies that are both desired and desiring — though not necessarily "phallic".<sup>26</sup>

The introduction of the third woman, then, re-negotiates the terms of the mother/daughter relation, provides both with a necessary mediating detour to the other which allows for the affirmation of self and other as sexual and desiring. Most importantly, however, this third (and we could follow Irigaray in suggesting that she is not only the phantasized baby but simply, another woman, another female body) at once opens the mother/daughter relation to the social and, most emphatically, to the political, erotic and unconscious relations of feminism. "I love you", writes Irigaray, "who are neither mother (forgive me, mother, I prefer a woman) nor sister. Neither daughter nor son".<sup>27</sup>

The third woman is the focus of the narrative trajectories of *Je tu il elle* and *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, the final destination of the metonymic movement of desire that has circulated around the mother/daughter relation in

this corpus of Akerman's films. Of all Akerman's films, these two are the most similar in narrative structure. *Les Rendez-vous*, in some ways is a palimpsest rewriting of the black and white starkness of *Je tu il elle* in which the third woman is figured only as a textual trace, a possibility which remains on the other side of representation.

*Je tu il elle* is divided into three sections, each corresponding to specific shifters: the "je", "il" and "elle". The "tu" remains unassigned, addressed, perhaps, to the space of the spectator. The first sequence features a character (played by Akerman herself) who endeavours to occupy the oppressively barren space of a ground floor apartment, a space (with perhaps a too Kleinian emphasis) which is reminiscent of the mother's body, where objects (an old mattress, a table) are moved around in an obsessive desire to control the dissolution of identity, the marking of boundaries. She is a little hysteric, trapped in a closed economy where "things circulate without inscrip[tion]"<sup>28</sup> around a psychic core of emptiness which she endeavours to fill through the repeated ingestion of sugar and through a violently excessive outpouring of writing.

This writing, however, functions less as an act of communication than as a transitional object, a tactile object. Multiplying kinetically, the pages of a letter are spread all over the floor, tacked up on the walls, scratched out, erased, written over, crumpled and filled endlessly with the volume of that emptiness. It is a letter without any obvious destination or end until, suddenly, the cycle stops. "I've been here twenty-eight days", the character observes in voice over. "It stopped snowing, it melted and I got up".

The second section of the film involves the character's encounter with a disillusioned truck driver who has picked her up hitchhiking. Throughout the long night, punctuated only by brief stops in a bar and restaurant, he recounts his life story of an early marriage, sexual frustration and alienation. The character listens silently, though not unsympathetically, and obliges him with a hand job.

The final section has the character arrive in the middle of the night at the apartment of her former female lover, a woman who only reluctantly obliges the character's monosyllabic demands for food and drink. While admonishing the character that she can only spend one night, she, however, does allow herself to be seduced and the final sequence of the film features an extraordinary and powerful scene of their rough and tumble love-making. While "graphic" — the images feature their nude bodies and a gesture of cunnilingus — the scene resolutely resists voyeurism both by the distance of the camera which frames their bodies in long shot and by the gentle awkwardness of their body movements. Their love-making is a representation not of imaginary fusion, but of playful and ironic defiance.

The narrative structure of *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* also involves the peregrinations of an existential heroine, Anna, who is touring Europe with her new film. Like the character in *Je tu il elle*, Anna is stricken with a pro-

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found melancholia, a sense of loss and emptiness which is only ever possibly relieved through the recovery of the maternal in the other woman.

*Les Rendez-vous* opens with Anna's arrival at a hotel. The receptionist hands her a telephone message. It is from her mother. "How did she know I was here?"; inquires Anna. Retiring to her room, she moves toward the telephone and informs the operator she wants to place a long distance call to Italy. As in so many of the efforts at communication in Akerman's films, the destination of this call is unclear. A call received, a call returned. Is it to the mother?

Throughout the film, Anna engages in repeated and aborted endeavours to call Italy, calls that never go through, connections that are never made. While she journeys in the opposite direction, her desire and longing lean towards this other land, this land of the other, Italy. The name itself, as Freud pointed out, represents an anagram of sexual promise. ("I recalled", he writes, "the meaning which references to Italy seem to have had in the dreams of a woman patient who had never visited that lovely country: 'gen Italien [to Italy]' — 'Genitalien [genitals]'"<sup>29</sup>.) For Anna, the return to Italy is postponed indefinitely as she moves away, recovering the other, in absentia, only at the end of the film.

Throughout the endless train trips and stopovers, Anna's melancholia is manifested by her impassiveness and growing sense of disquietude in the face of others. Silent herself, Anna becomes a catalyst for the discursive explosions of these others: an abandoned single father, an older Belgian friend of her mother's, a man on a train, her leftist Parisian lover — all of whom deliver monologues offering a contemporary psychological landscape of recession, political withdrawal, romantic disillusionment. Anna, however, by her silence and by her profession as a wanderer, represents a profound threat to these individuals. Voluntarily exiled from the community, from home, family and dependency, her freedom provokes their bitter self reflections. As her estrangement intensifies, she can no longer engage in sexual intimacy with men. While reluctantly allowing herself to be seduced by the single father, she abruptly terminates their love-making because of her overwhelming fatigue with the dispassionate routine of it all.

At the conclusion of the film and the end of her adventures with the others, Anna arrives in Brussels, the long since eclipsed home of the filmmaker. She meets her mother and they decide to take a hotel room for the night, a special treat. On entering the room, Anna insists that she must phone Italy. "What", her mother responds, "in the middle of the night? ... Tell me". Finally it is Anna's turn to speak. With the camera held stationary immediately over the bed in which the two women lie, staring at the ceiling, Anna tells her mother of meeting an Italian woman who came to see her film and of talking with her until the cafes closed:

Then she accompanied me to my room. We were tired. We lay down on the bed and continued to talk. By chance, we touched. Then

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we just started kissing, I don't know how that happened. I felt a sort of disgust, I was going to be sick, it was too much. I no longer know, but we continued to kiss and then everything was so simple, I let myself be carried away. It was good .... I never imagined it would be like that between women. Not at all. We didn't separate all night. And you know, bizarrely, I thought of you.

The story ends, the light is extinguished, and Anna, nude, curls up next to her mother's body.

Within the metonymic movement of desire in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* the homosexual economy is structured by a repetition in which the love of another woman replays, with a difference, the love and atavistic relation to the mother. A doubled repetition in which the presence of the one recalls the other: the mother remembered in the lovemaking scene with the Italian woman, the encounter with the Italian related to the mother. The circle moves without a break or violent renunciation, the one offered to the other as the most precious of gifts. Each scene, the narrated one and the one onscreen, replayed as a trace of the other: two women in a hotel bed who touch each other, with a difference. That difference is sexuality, a difference which insinuates itself between these two scenes and which insists that the one is never an immediate or direct analogue of the other. Here the love of the other is not modeled on an infantile phantasy of fusion, of the obliteration of difference, but assumes the distance required for the realization of desire.

In the next-to-last sequence, Anna returns to Paris where she is greeted by her lover whose intense despair and sudden fever terminate their sexual encounter. After providing him with medication, she arrives at her apartment, her final refuge with its barren fridge and resounding emptiness. She turns on the answering machine which echoes with a chorus of meetings missed and promised and with the announcement of a new tour with the film that would once again commit her to a life of wandering. Finally she hears the voice she has been waiting for, the voice of the woman who asks first in Italian and then in English: "Anna, dove sietta? ... Anna where are you?"

It is a question which bears a full existential resonance concerning Anna's positioning within a heterosexual or a homosexual economy of desire. Equally, however, it is an utterance which does not demand a resolution but which articulates desire precisely as a question. A question posed by this third, neither mother nor daughter, whose linguistic otherness vehiculates difference and situates the other as radically ex-centric to the mother-tongue. Alone and offscreen, this voice (the voice of Akerman herself) registers a possibility, on the edge of representation, of a lesbian sexual economy in which two remain, as Irigaray put it, "entr'ouvertes, sans déchirure".<sup>30</sup>

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### Notes

1. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) p. 143.
2. Eric de Kuyper, "Par Elle(s)", *Les Rendez-Vous D'Anna* (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1978), p. 14.
3. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 216.
4. Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater", *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 161.
5. *Ibid*, p. 161.
6. I would strongly argue that Kristeva herself is certainly not exempt from a certain return of the repressed. As Kaja Silverman has so brilliantly argued in *The Acoustic Mirror, The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), Kristeva's elaboration of the maternal may be read as a repetition of the narcissistic phantasm of the mother, the phantasm that Kristeva herself warns against: "the full totally englobing mother with no frustration, no separation, with no break producing symbolism, with no castration, in other words" ("Women's Time", *The Kristeva Reader*, op. cit. p.205). Silverman argues that Kristeva's work is subject to a curious reversal in which it is the mother who is situated in the interior of the chora, the semiotic or the enceinte and attributed with the infant's undeveloped hold on language and the symbolic. While disavowing the possibility that the mother could accede to the position of speaking subject (and here Kristeva is close to Lacan), and while situating herself, through her own inimitable rationalized discourse, on the side of the Law and the symbolic, Kristeva maintains her own (repressed, according to Silverman) cathexis of the mother precisely through the repetition of the maternal phantasm.
7. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.42.
8. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, op.cit., p.42.
9. Luce Irigaray, *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère* (Montreal: les Éditions de la pleine lune, 1981), p.28.
10. Irigaray, *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère*, p. 22.
11. Luce Irigaray, *Et L'une ne bouge pas sans L'autre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979), p.7.
12. *Ibid*, p. 11.
13. *Ibid*, p. 16.
14. *Ibid*, p. 21.
15. Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis/The Daughter's Seduction*, ed. Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), p. 115.
16. On this issue of the mother as desiring subject, perhaps it is only Kristeva (and Mary Kelly in a different context) who presumes to speak from the place of the mother as subject. Certainly, she is unique in her exploration of the divisive nature of the mother's desire, of the mother/artist; mother/theoretician, of the mother divided, balancing the rational with the irrational, the semiotic with the Law, the creation of children with creation of texts. This is to say nothing, however, concerning the contradictions in her work which are too vast and difficult to approach within my limited time and space.
17. Freud, "The Ego and the Id", *The Standard Edition*, vol. 19, p.24.

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18. Freud, "Femininity", *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, vol.2, trans. James Strachey (New York: Penguin, 1983), p.155.
19. Catherine Clement, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.76-78.
20. Chantal Akerman, quoted in "Reflections on Jeanne Dielman", *Marsba Kinder, Film Quarterly*, 30, no.4, Summer 1977, p.2.
21. Chantal Akerman, "Entretien", *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 278, July 1977, p. 41.
22. *Ibid*, p. 119.
23. Janet Bergstrom, "Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles by Chantal Akerman", *Camera Obscura*, no. 2, Fall 1977, p.17.
24. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: Bantam, 1976) p. 234.
25. Freud, "Femininity", *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: Penguin, Pelican Freud Library, vol.2, 1983), p.153.
26. Irigaray, *Speculum*, op.cit., p.36.
27. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, op.cit., p. 209.
28. Catherine Clement, "Sorceress and Hysteric", *The Newly Born Woman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 37.
29. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Penguin Books, Pelican Freud Library, vol.4), p.328.
30. Irigaray, *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*, op.cit. p. 21.

## JOYCE WIELAND, FEMINIST DOCUMENTARY, AND THE BODY OF THE WORK

*Kay Armatage*

In Canada, Joyce Wieland is widely known as a feminist visionary who conjoined women's traditional domestic crafts (quilts, embroideries, knitting, and even cake-decorating) with nationalist propaganda in the first major exhibition of a living Canadian woman artist in Ottawa's National Gallery ("True Patriot Love", 1971). More recently she has become known as a painter of large figurative canvases, honoured by the first major retrospective of a living Canadian woman at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Spring, 1987). Internationally, she is known as an experimental filmmaker historically situated in the New York Structural film movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

In the spring of 1987, I completed a documentary film, *Artist on Fire: The Work of Joyce Wieland* (titled after a 1983 Wieland self-portrait in oil on canvas)<sup>1</sup> which addresses Wieland's work in all media: pencil drawings, pastels, water colours, cloth works, sculptures, earth works, assemblages, oil paintings, works in plastic, and films in 8mm., 16mm., and 35mm. Her thirty-year career as an innovative and always changing artist is surveyed not chronologically or biographically, but as a constellation of formal variations on Wieland's principal concerns: nationalist, environmentalist and feminist politics; visionary spirituality; feminine sexuality and subjectivity; and the continually transformative interrogation of modes of representation.

This article addresses some of the theoretical concerns and formal strategies of that documentary, emphasizing the work which remains my principal interest, Wieland's experimental and narrative films. First, a few

remarks on the origins of the documentary and on the history of Wieland's film work. In 1983 I was teaching a course on avant-garde cinema which included the short films of Wieland from the late 60s and early 70s. In preparing for that class I found very little critical work on her films. She was mentioned whenever the topic of structural cinema was addressed (in P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-1978*<sup>2</sup> and elsewhere) but she usually appeared only in a list of the seminal filmmakers of that movement, along with Michael Snow, Ernie Gehr, Hollis Frampton and Paul Sharits. Only one major article had been published on Wieland's film work, placing her firmly within the modernist parameters of structural or material cinema and suggesting the element of the feminine in Wieland's work (Lauren Rabinowitz's "The Development of Feminist Strategies in the Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland", which introduced the now well known "domestic altar thesis").<sup>3</sup>

In presenting Wieland's films to the class I was struck forcibly by the fact that those early films — *Hand-Tinting*, *Solidarity*, *Rat Life and Diet in North America*, *Pierre Vallières*, *Sailboat*, and *Water Sark* — were remarkably resistant to any narrow classification, and could not be contained in a cinematic moment that seemed from the perspective of the 1980s to belong largely to the past. Those films spoke, through their variety of formal strategies and subject matter, to concerns being articulated in the most current film theory. The richness of Wieland's work for contemporary audiences is now being tapped by Kass Banning, who uses semiotics, structuralism and psychoanalytic theory to argue that certain of Wieland's films are marked by a transgressive excess which identifies the site of the feminine in art.<sup>4</sup> And in a previous article, I attempted to demonstrate that *Water Sark*, a film made in 1964, could be usefully analyzed as an anticipation of many of the issues now discussed under the rubric of *l'écriture féminine*.<sup>5</sup> In this work I see not a schematic overlaying of au courant critical theory onto cultural work from the past, but the valid task of contemporary criticism, exploring the still-pulsing lifeblood of art which reaches well beyond any supposed historical grave.

As of 1983, however, I think I can say that for Wieland, her work in film was consigned to the past. She had suffered a series of profound disappointments. After the critical successes of her early films in the structural mode (*Water Sark*, *Hand-Tinting*, *Sailboat*, 1933, *Dripping Water*) she had been "lambasted" (as she put it) for daring to combine experimental techniques with comic narrative in *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (1968), an allegory about draft resisters (played by pet gerbils) who escape from the United States to take up organic gardening in Canada. The film is now seen as combining Wieland's characteristic humour, politics, domestic setting and the innovative strategies of the "tabletop films" (made single-handedly on her kitchen table) with textual engagement in the form of subtitles and intertitles. (The use of subtitles and intertitles alternates between the informational and the abstract.) But at the time, the film was

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received by the formal purists (as Wieland recounts) as a departure from the concerns of material cinema in its use of allegorical narrative. And it was viewed by the politically concerned as a trivialization of resistance to the Vietnam war.

Wieland returned to abstraction in *Reason Over Passion* (1969), a feature-length avant-garde film which brackets a section of treated and rephotographed footage of Pierre Eliot Trudeau at the 1968 Liberal convention with a series of hand-held tracking shots of the Canadian landscape from coast to coast, punctuated throughout by electronic beeps on the soundtrack and overlaid with multiple anagrams of the words 'reason over passion' (Trudeau's famous phrase) as superimposed subtitles. *Reason Over Passion*, now considered a classic of Canadian experimental cinema, was also disappointingly received. Wieland recalls that the New York avant-garde establishment more or less advised her to return to short pieces rather than to attempt to compete with the major figures of the structural film movement who were by then producing feature-length avant-garde works.<sup>6</sup> And when the principal critic and promoter of the avant-garde in New York, Jonas Mekas, founded the Anthology Film Archives as a repository for "monuments of cinematic art", Wieland's work was not invited into the collection.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps her greatest disappointment, however, had been the reception of *The Far Shore* (1975-76). Only the third woman filmmaker in English Canada to produce a dramatic feature film (after Nell Shipman's *Back to God's Country* in 1919 and Sylvia Spring's *Madeleine Is ...* in 1969), Wieland embarked on a large-budget period production in 35mm. to realize her dream of combining a story of Canadian art with nationalist and environmentalist politics. Based loosely on the tragedy of Tom Thomson, the quintessential painter of the Canadian landscape who had mysteriously disappeared in the northern wilderness at the peak of his career, *The Far Shore* situates itself in the historical period of the 1920s. Although the film is not silent, it employs melodramatic techniques of characterization and narrative common to D.W. Griffith and Jean Vigo, centering on a tale of aesthetic aspiration, cross-cultural conflict, and forbidden and doomed love. Rabinowitz analyzes the film as an exploration of parodic reversals of genre elements.<sup>8</sup> Thus a revisionary history could situate *The Far Shore* as a prophetic instance of the concern with the semiosis of genre which has come to mark filmmakers as diverse as Chantal Akerman (in her musical *The Golden Eighties* 1985), Rainer Werner Fassbinder (in his many reworkings of Sirkian melodrama), Kathleen Bigelow (*The Loveless*, 1982 and *Near Dark* 1987), Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen (*The Bad Sister*, 1984) Wim Wenders (*Hammert*), Bette Gordon (*Variety*), Lawrence Kasdan (*Body Heat*), and Neil Jordan (*Mona Lisa*). *The Far Shore* was however again rejected by the avant-garde community for its commitment to sentiment, genre and narrative, and it failed miserably at the box office in Canada as it was laughed off the screen by the very audience Wieland hoped to reach.

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Although she had produced a body of sixteen films in a stunning variety of modes, this series of disappointments resulted in Wieland's turning away from film work in any format. Fortunately, the turn was not permanent. In the winter of 1983 I renewed contact with Wieland, writing her a note expressing my excitement over the contemporary vitality of her films, and offering to help in any way with a return to that work. Wieland needed little more than encouragement and money to prompt a new interest in the medium which had been as intimate and personal for her as pencil and paper. The results have appeared over the last four years: the final 'publication' of works which had languished in a metaphorical drawer for 20 years, *Patriotism II*, and *Peggy's Blue Skylight*, and the post-production to completion of works that had been shot earlier but never edited, *Birds at Sunrise*, and *A and B in Ontario*. She now has in progress *Wendy and Joyce*, again from 'archival' footage. Happy ending.

The winter of 1983 marked the beginning of my interest in making a documentary about Wieland, a film which would not only indicate the wealth of her film production, but would place the films in the context of her work in all other media as well.

There were a number of issues that had to be considered in the planning of the film. In terms of documentary treatment of the subject, it was plain to me from the outset that I would deal exclusively with Wieland's cultural production, leaving biographical elements aside, despite Wieland's clear interest not only in her own subjectivity but in her personal and family history as well. In terms of feminist theory, this was a somewhat controversial decision. For Lauren Rabinowitz, among others, the placing of women artists as social subjects in relation to dominant discourses necessitates a consideration of personal biography, for a constant in the history of women artists is their marginalization from and oppression within those discourses.<sup>9</sup> Thus for example the corpus of work from many women artists is smaller, more intermittent and more materially inhibited in its production than that of their male counterparts, for women artists partake of the general poverty of women which limits their access to materials and the market, as well as to the famous room of their own or separate studio. They are affected as well by the traditional social and domestic obligations of women towards children and family which limit not only the time they may spend on cultural production but often the scope and nature of the subjects they tend to deal with and, as a corollary, the degree of seriousness with which their work may be critically received. They are also affected by the general discrimination against women in important collections (for Wieland, the Anthology Film Archives decision is a case in point) leading to their invisibility in cultural history. Thus for Rabinowitz, personal biography has tangible material ramifications for women artists, and such information is crucial to the accurate representation of a new cultural knowledge which includes women as active subjects.

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My decision that the documentary should deal only with Wieland's work and leave aside biographical details was taken not to repudiate such concerns, nor even simply to supplant the prevalent imaging of "woman artist as victim" which, it has been argued, serves also to perpetuate that condition by discouraging younger women from choosing cultural production as an option. Nor did it stem from the absence in Wieland's personal history of those conditions. In many ways the evidence of Wieland's work and life argues to the contrary, for as a woman artist she was blessed by the early acceptance of her work especially in cloth, the relative material comfort of a life which was free of children and allowed her a studio of her own, the freedom to work in costly materials including large oil canvases and even 35mm. film, and almost more important, the example of women artists and teachers who had preceded her. However in other ways she was deeply affected by the traditional constraints on women artists: the media treatment of her as an "artist's wife" (she was married to Michael Snow), the dismissal of the domestic subject matter of much of her work, the lack of serious critical appraisal, the marginalization of her creative production as "women's art", and so on<sup>10</sup> — not to mention her Dickensian childhood as an impoverished orphan.

My choosing to focus only on Wieland's work is related more firmly to current rethinking of the feminist project. Recently, in a remarkable resurrection of the old slogan "the personal is political", Teresa de Lauretis has reminded us of an essential notion of feminist work: the direct relation between sociality and subjectivity, or "self-consciousness" as a specific mode of knowledge that is the political apprehension of self in reality.<sup>11</sup> De Lauretis suggests that a major contribution of feminist work to the production of knowledge is a shift in the notion of identity. Feminist theory has embraced not the conception of the subject as the fragmented, flickering posthumanist subject constructed in division by language, the "I" continuously preempted in an unchangeable symbolic order, but rather a concept of a multiple, shifting, self-contradictory identity, a subject not divided in but at odds with language.<sup>12</sup> Although the concept of the subject which is muted, ellided or unrepresentable in dominant discourses still pertains, the new understanding is of an identity which one decides to reclaim and insists upon as a strategy. It is this emerging conception of a gendered and heteronomous subject that is initially defined by the consciousness of oppression that de Lauretis sees as an instance of an epistemological shift effected by feminism, a new way of thinking about culture as well as about knowledge itself. In feminist work, which addresses woman as social subject and engenders the subject as political, in the definition of self as political — in terms of the politics of everyday life which then enters the public sphere — we find a displacement of aesthetic hierarchies and generic categories which thus establishes the semiotic ground for a different production of reference and meaning.<sup>13</sup>

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De Lauretis thus effects a synthesis of tendencies in feminist film culture which, particularly in accounts from the 1970s, had been seen as a dichotomy. Both Silvia Bovenschen and Laura Mulvey have remarked on two separate concerns of the women's movement and two types of film work.<sup>14</sup> One is the documentary for purposes of political activism usually connected with consciousness-raising strategies and the search for positive images of women, and the other is the formal work on the medium which seeks to analyze and disengage ideological codes of representation. Bovenschen characterized this dichotomy as an "opposition between feminist demands and artistic production", and Mulvey saw them as two successive moments of feminist film culture, with the first period marked by the effort to change the content of cinematic representation and the second by the "fascination with the cinematic process" or the concern with the language of representation. But for de Lauretis, both questions of identification or self-definition and of the modes of envisaging ourselves as subjects are fundamental and inextricably bound-together questions for feminist theory and cultural production.<sup>15</sup>

In feminist cultural production, the rewriting of culture has often taken the form of an emphasis on women's enforced silence, their unspeakability, their marginalization from dominant discourses, and the necessity for speaking of and from that silence, thus inscribing into the picture of reality characters and events that were previously invisible, untold, unspoken. It was to be the contention of *Artist on Fire* that Wieland had been an exemplary instance of the insertion of the feminine into cultural discourse, not only through her early work in plastic and cloth and the tabletop films, but in the continuing themes of her work in all media over thirty years: the connections she drew between the earth, ecology, Canada as a nation, and the condition and potential of woman; and the eroticization of landscape, inter — and cross-species relationships, and the feminine body. Her insistence on the personal, intimate, and feminine not only bespeaks an identification of feminine discourse as emanating from the gender-specific separation of women from language, but the plurality of the modes of representation found in her work suggests a continual interrogation and transformation of conventional cultural discourses.

In the formal strategies she employs Wieland has continually reworked the materials of art. Her transformational work with women's traditional domestic crafts in the early quilts and embroideries must be read as an implicit assertion of the necessity of revising conventional definitions of appropriate forms, subjects, and materials for art. And her work in all media is characterized by a sensual hands-on personalism which has recently been seen as exceeding the terms of the modernist canon.

The short film *Hand-Tinting* is an excellent example. A closely edited piece composed of out-takes from an aborted industrial documentary, the film displays many of the characteristics of the structural cinema, which investigated the physical properties of film itself as a flat material utilizing

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light, projection, printing procedures and the illusion of movement. Such films emphasized the tensions among the physical materials, the spectator's perceptual processes, and the emotional or pictorial realities cinema has traditionally represented.<sup>16</sup> In *Hand-Tinting* Wieland reprinted sequences in negative, and employed repetition and looping of images, interspersed with black leader. The incomplete movements and gestures become isolated, lacking spatial depth and temporal completion, and thus negating the illusion of solid space created in realist cinema.<sup>17</sup> But Wieland goes further, for unlike the modernist austerity of the radical experiments of Michael Snow (to cite just one example), the film is characterized by Wieland's concern with women's positions as social subjects and the disasters of political power and domination. Rather than the "arbitrary" or "meaningless" images of many of the structural films (e.g. Snow's *Thirty Seconds in Montreal* or Tony Conrad's *Flicker Film*), Wieland selects images of disenfranchised black women which, under her treatment, construct a pre-semiotic examination of social rituals as pure rhythm and deconstruct facial and bodily signs of oppression and resistance. Finally, she imposes over all her personal domestic stamp, bathing the black and white footage in tubs of dye and piercing the celluloid with a sewing needle. The film glows with vivid colour and literally sparkles as the light strikes through the holes in the emulsion, effecting a visceral sensuality that partakes of the erotic. Kass Banning argues that in *Hand-Tinting* the formal demarcation of space is marked by gender division and that the film provides a site for a feminine imaginary, an unattainable excess.<sup>18</sup>

Wieland uses women's bodies and especially her own body not only as subject but as material for art. In the lithograph "Facing North", for example, she imprints her own facial skin onto the paper and places her lip print (with a special pigmented lipstick) in the appropriate position. The piece bears the mark of her body as well in the fingerprints which attest to the procedure of producing the facial print (the balance and hold of the arms and body in relation to the paper). Her own corporeality as both subject of the piece and process of production is thus immediately apparent.

In *Reason Over Passion*, there is a sequence in which Wieland films her own reflection in a mirror as she silently mouths the words to "O Canada". The image includes the bottom portion of her face and the top of the hand-held camera, containing again the traces of her body both as content and process. Kass Banning argues additionally that through its frantic and varied camera movement, its parodic reversals and repetitions, and its play upon language, meaning and silence, *Reason Over Passion* suggests "what cannot be represented: the rhythmic, vertiginous sensory experience which exceeds language and the propriety of the distinctions between the body and the environment, the body and meaning".<sup>19</sup> And in its feminization of technology, it reverses traditional conceptions of *tech-*

ne as male and *physis* as female. It dissolves the distinctions between body and landscape, technology and nature.<sup>20</sup>

*Water Sark* is marked throughout by Wieland's body. Her hand enters the frame to manipulate objects. Movement and manipulation dynamizes everything. Images are shot through a glass of water so that colours are blurred and shapes distorted. Water is poured into the frame to further disturb the image. The hand-held camera moves in and out and around the elements which are in turn moved, jiggled, tipped, and variously disturbed. A mirror moves at various speeds and angles to reflect or refract light. The filmic elements of light, colour, shape and movement are manipulated in a moment of ecstatic vision in which all the senses concatenate. It becomes virtually impossible to tell the limits of the movement of the objects, reflecting and refracting surfaces, and camera. As the kinaesthetic motion of the sequence reaches ecstasy, the sense of Wieland's corporeal presence is overwhelming. She films her reflection in mirrors holding the camera in one hand and a magnifying glass or distorting lens in the other, enlarging her winking eye or contorting her mouth in one hilarious sequence, and examining her exposed breast and nipple in a sequence that combines almost scientific contemplation with the expression of an erotic pleasure curiously without narcissism. Throughout, the film effects a sensual, poetic, and lighthearted spontaneity, with digressions and detours involving a toy boat, her cat, rubber gloves, and a transparent plastic veil. All of it is connected centrally to Wieland's own body, released from contemplation into ecstatic play.

Much of Wieland's work is marked by such elements: spontaneity, playfulness, sensuality, joyful discovery, the language of unconscious processes, and the traces of her own body as both image content and process of production. My delight in this work is a response not only to such characteristics, but to the respectful sense that her working methods are completely different from my own, which generally bear the marks of more consciously theoretical considerations. The exciting task of *Artist on Fire* was not only to engage with Wieland's work without succumbing to imitation, but to effect an interweaving of two opposite styles without producing one as comment upon the other.

As for the formal strategy employed in my work on Wieland's work I will address only one principal consideration here, and that is the one identified by de Lauretis as crucial for feminist work in general<sup>21</sup> and by both Bill Nichols and Tom Waugh as central to considerations of documentary: the question of address.<sup>22</sup>

In previous films I had attempted to explore the issue of feminine subjectivity and identification through specific treatment of the voice. From Duras' inspirational work on the articulation of a sonorous space of feminine subjectivity in *India Song* through Mulvey-Wollen's considerations of voice, language and address in *Riddles of the Sphinx*, and Patricia Gruben's multiple deployment of the codes of voice-over, direct address,

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and realist synchronized sound in *Sifted Evidence*, the use of multiple voices in feminist cinema has spoken from and to the excessive interiority of the maternal voice and its prototypical relation to voice-over narration in cinema. In *Speak Body* (1979) I began to work with this concept in a film which was clearly influenced as well by Joyce Wieland's avant-garde political films such as *Solidarity*. Hoping to achieve something like her combination of minimalist formal strategies with a political motive and content, I worked with constructed images and a political subject, abortion, which in feminist cinema had been largely consigned to the documentary mode. In that film I used a combination of scripted and unscripted/spontaneous/"documentary" female voices cut into a fragmented, multiple and contradictory voice-over which I hoped would not only challenge the masculine voice of authority that tends to characterize the use of voice-over in documentary cinema, but would also speak from and to feminine subjectivity in a film which deals with female experience and the perception and representation of the female body. The attempt was clearly more than simply to address a female spectatorship, but to position the spectator in a necessary identification with feminine subjectivity.

*Striptease* (1980) and *Storytelling* (1983) both employed variations around a similar use of the voice. In all three of these films, the use of many varieties of language, voice, and discourse was intended to effect a means of identification which would function in a way that was different from the conventional cinematic means of identification and communication. In *Striptease* the predominant variation was the resurrection of the good old talking head in combination with the fragmented and contradictory use of multiple voice-overs, in an attempt to combine an emphasis on female subjectivity with an empowering opportunity to speak, to engage directly with the spectator — for women who in their profession as strippers were the paradigmatically silent objects of the mastering male gaze. In *Storytelling* the voice-over disappeared altogether as I was trying to effect a collapse of the emphasis on multiplicity, contradiction, and interiority into direct address to the camera. Hoping to produce an interrogation of the conventional distinction between women as bearers and men as makers of culture, the film addresses the traditional function of the maternal voice as teller of stories, both bearer and producer of meaning.

In *Artist on Fire* once again the emphasis is on a direct engagement of the look and listen of the spectator, as the central structuring devices of the film are the direct address of the artist to camera/audience and the multiple, fragmented and unscripted voice-overs which combine various discourses: personal, academic, descriptive, analytical, and something approaching the poetic. In contrast to Wieland's voice, which is mixed clearly, completes sentences, speaks alone, and is corporealized (synchronized to her lip movements on screen), the unidentified, disembodied and inter-cut voice-overs are treated with an hallucinatory reverb and embedded in multiple tracks including sounds from Wieland's films, ad-

ditional sound effects, and music. The intended effect is of contrasting modes of address, identification, and subjectivity.

De Lauretis sums up her discussion of women's cinema with the assertion that the gender-specific division of women in language, the distance from official culture, the urge to imagine new forms of community and new images, as well as the consciousness of the subjective factor in all forms of work are themes which articulate the relation of subjective meaning and experience which en-genders the social subject as female. These issues are formally explored in women's cinema through the disjunction of image and voice, the reworking of narrative and narrated space, and the strategies of address that alter the forms and balance of traditional representation, either through the inscription of subjective space within the frame or through the construction of other discursive social spaces.<sup>23</sup> I do not intend to make claims about the success or failure of *Artist on Fire*, but certainly I would say that the intentions of the formal strategies of the film are consistent with de Lauretis' analysis.

As an endnote, let me add that the prevailing feminist theoretical discussion, de Lauretis and Silverman included, has, while asserting the originating function of documentary in feminist cinema and acknowledging its continuing role, nevertheless persists in defining and re-visioning almost exclusively in terms of dramatic fiction (however oppositionally constructed) and avant-garde cinema. My continued work in documentary is a strategic effort to reinsert the documentary mode into that discussion.

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Notes

1. Available in Canada from Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre — 67A Portland Street, Toronto, Ontario M5V 2M9 — and in the United States from Women Make Movies — Suite 211, 225 Lafayette Street, New York, New York 10012.
2. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
3. *Film Reader* no. 5, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1982.
4. "Textual Excess in Joyce Wieland's *Hand-Tinting*", *CineAction!*, Spring 1986; and "Reason Over Passion" Unpublished Paper, Art Gallery of Ontario, April 1987).
5. "The Feminine Body — Joyce Wieland's *Water Sark*" in *Dialogue*, ed. Pierre Veronneau, Michael Dorland & Seth Feldman (Montreal: Mediatexte Publications Inc., 1986).
6. Rabinowitz, 1987, 167.
7. For critical accounts of that rejection, see Kass Banning, "From Didactics to Desire", *Work in Progress: Building Feminist Culture*, ed. Rhea Tregobov, Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987, 157; and Rabinowitz, 1987, 189.
8. Rabinowitz, 1987, 171-179.
9. Unpublished Paper, Art Gallery of Ontario, April 1987.

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10. Outlined with appropriate invective in Kass Banning, "The Mummification of Mummy: Joyce Wieland as the AGO's First Living Other", *C Magazine* no. 13, Spring 1987.
11. "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts", *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 8.
12. de Lauretis, p. 9.
13. de Lauretis, p. 10.
14. Bovenschen, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?"; trans. Beth Weckmueller, *New German Critique*, no. 12, Winter 1977; Mulvey, "Feminism, Film and the Avant-Garde", *Framework* no. 10, Spring 1979.
15. "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema", *New German Critique* # 34, Winter 1985, 155; also published in de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
16. Rabinowitz, 1987, 120.
17. Rabinowitz, 1987, 161.
18. Banning, 1987, 159.
19. Banning, 1987, 161.
20. Banning, 1987, 159-161.
21. de Lauretis, 1985.
22. Nichols, "Documentary Theory and Practice", *Screen* vol. 17 no. 4, Winter 1976-77; also published as "The Documentary Film and Principles of Exposition" in Nichols' *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); and Waugh, "Acting to Play Onself: Notes on Performance in Documentary", *Film Acting and Performance*, ed. Carole Zucker (Montreal: Scarecrow Press), 1988.  
Kaja Silverman also takes up the issues of authorial voice and spectatorial address in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
23. de Lauretis, 1985, 174-5.

## CRUISING: THE SEMIOTICS OF S & M

*Stephen Snyder*

*Irrational fear is what interests me.*

William Friedkin

Not long into William Friedkin's *Cruising* (1980) the protagonist, Steve Burns (played by Al Pacino), in his role as an undercover investigator, wanders into a shop geared to a homosexual clientele. In response to Burns's queries about a rack of colored handkerchiefs, the proprietor explains in detail the semiotic codes related to the color and placement of each handkerchief:

- Burns: Excuse me. Could I ask you about these?  
Prop.: What about 'em?  
Burns: What are they for?  
Prop.: A light blue hanky in your left back pocket means you want a blow job. Right pocket means you give one. Grey one left side says you're a hustler, right side you're a buyer. Yellow one left side means you give golden shower, right side you receive. Red one ..  
Burns: Oh. Thanks.  
Prop.: See anything you want?  
Burns: Ah, I wanna... go home and think about it.  
Prop.: I'm sure you'll make the right choice.

Soon after, we see Burns in a bar with a yellow hanky in his back pocket. Perhaps it has been planted. When approached by a prospective "client," Burns acts as though he were unaware of the hanky's presence.

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These scenes serve to introduce three concerns of *Cruising*: 1) the culture in which Burns moves is elaborately "semiotic" — i.e., organized in terms of special codes, 2) detection (the principal genre subject of the film) is itself a coding process or system, 3) in a society given to coding, one may fall victim to the codes themselves (more specifically, one's power to imagine is subject to suppression by the authoritarian "semiosis" of culture).

The word "semiotic" has entered the general vocabulary so that even the dullest cinema student will have some notion of cultural codes and an understanding of what it means to identify hidden agendas in both culture and fiction. Such work, such semiotic emphasis, has made all academics detectives of a sort. As one such detective I find especially interesting an artist who works in the detection genre but uses semiology as trope of the moral conditions which concern him. More than anything, *Cruising* is, I think, about the fear of the unknown and about the human desire for authoritarian definition. The film documents the urge of "authority" to possess everything, to make the world *readable*. The film equally documents the urge of people with a confused sense of identity to accept such definition, whether sartorially (police uniforms) or spiritually (Stuart's continuing need to believe his killing is the actualization of his dead father's desire).<sup>1</sup>

### Jung, the Feminine, and (Dis)Integration

The environment of *Cruising* as some critics have noted, doubles as a psychological or social mirror, revealing a process of repression which characterizes the general culture and its institutions. Two critics, Nancy Hayles and Kathryn Rindskopf, have discussed the masculine/feminine themes of the film in explicitly Jungian terms.<sup>2</sup> They suggest, among other things, that the heavy-leather gay community depicted in the film can be seen as an extension of the aggressive macho-oriented society of the heterosexual world, typified by the police, which tends to suppress femininity in favour of masculine aggressiveness. The result in either world is a displacement of affection by aggression.

With any sign of tenderness or caring utterly repressed, hostility and aggression become the normative sexual response. Thus, say Hayles and Rindskopf, this shadowy underside of American life is only another expression of the sexual dominance and submission that the macho mentality accepts as normal. If murder is the logical end point of this mode of interaction, it is a response in which we are all in some way implicated.

This reading all makes sense, and I have no problem with the interpretation until the authors begin to deal with the psychology of Steve Burns, identifying the killer and his world (which has just been identified with masculine repression of the feminine) as the Jungian "shadow" side of Burns's personality. They note: "The tragedy of Pacino's quest is not that he fails to engage the shadow, but that in our society he cannot integrate

it within himself to become a whole person."<sup>3</sup> It is entirely possible that Burns integrates the shadow to a degree that he literally takes on the role of the killer (Stuart or whomever). On the other hand, we don't know much about Burns' final psychic state; in fact we know nothing. Friedkin lures us into making assumptions which may be as groundless as are those the police make about various suspects.

I grant that the heavy-leather world may evoke latent psychotic energies in Burns, but in what sense can integrating homosexuality into his psyche really be considered an act of Jungian individuation? It is one thing to recognize violence within oneself and another to recognize homosexuality. To integrate the shadow, on the argument of these critics, would *necessitate* Burns becoming bisexual. Maybe he should become so, but bisexuality is not what Jung meant by individuation, and I'm not convinced a Jungian view of the film makes sense.

One thing that *is* clear is that *Cruising* is to a very large extent about male possession, and what makes Friedkin's vision so very dark, I think, is his sense that *femininity* itself often initiates the urge for being possessed by male authority. At the end of *Cruising*, it is Nancy who begins to don the heavy-leather, police-like, garments which Burns has removed. In *The Exorcist*, Regan's problems begin with her own invitation to "Captain Howdy" to take possession of her. The desire to be completely possessed by an authoritarian masculine force, I think, involves more than a denial of the feminine; it invokes Lacan's sense of consciousness as nebulous desire which, in response to the feeling of "self-absence," allows itself to be possessed by signifying systems. The whole problem of self-integration in *Cruising*, then, has some twists to it. We are dealing with a society becoming hostile and aggressive and non-feminine (one only need listen to the patrolman, Cimone, or watch the functioning of the police department), and also with a society in which even the feminine powers, even the women, want to surrender to the most macho of the masculine institutions. The film makes a complex trope of this psychological dynamic in the image of the two gays arrested near the film's beginning; they are half in female drag and half in heavy-leather male uniform. In the first place, they are males who have opted for an outward expression of the "anima" side of their personalities. But they have also moved in the opposite direction, slipping the heavy-leather police uniform over their still-present female wigs and make-up. Remove one uniform to find another, and at bottom one finds a cataclysmic fear of absence coupled with the fact that the most macho self-image seems to be generated out of the most feminine. Whatever else this "police drag" suggests, it provides an image of artificial integration of two sides of a personality in which no real integration occurs. It seems possible to assert that there is *no* real feminine or masculine in these figures, only poses. Perhaps we are meant to see the "tri-laminated" sexual identity of these characters as a filmic deconstruction of the notion of self-integration.

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### Imagination and Creative Fantasy: Ghosts of the Self

Regarding a Jungian view of the film, we might ask the more fundamental question: does Friedkin's vision of things (despite his overt allusion at one point to Jung's book *Word and Image*) imply even the possibility of such a thing as a "whole self," or does it tend to see "self" as *all* role playing, as mirage, or as transient structuring of psychic energies erected upon a sense of absence, connected in memory, yet potentially disjunctive and competitive? Perhaps Friedkin's imagination moves as much in the territory of Lacan as Jung — or perhaps in the territory of neither. (As I write this essay, Friedkin's most recent film *Rampage* has presented an attack upon the *entire* psychoanalyzing establishment.) After removing all the disguises of self, we may find only undifferentiated energy or emptiness, a long grey ache. Personality interpretation as a set condition may be a useless concept; and Friedkin may be at home more with de Sade than anyone else. Still there seems to be a ghost of some kind within the character Friedkin presents — something akin to imagination or creative fantasy.

It is remarkably true that nearly all of Friedkin's films are concerned with masculine aggression and the consequences of excising feminine instincts and feelings from consciousness. There is little optimism in the films regarding the integration of the two instincts. Where "the feminine" does manifest itself, it appears already heavily indentured to and dominated by "the masculine." In *The Exorcist*, for example, the imperialization of women exists not only in Regan's demonic possession, but in the culture at large — although even here the condition is presented somewhat metaphorically: Regan's brutalization in the hospital, administered through the advanced all-male-controlled technology of rational science, is, for many, more effectively horrific than her more visible possession by a demon. Her environment proliferates with an ethnic melange of authoritarian males: fractious Jewish directors, alleged ex-Nazi servants, Wasp doctors, Greco-American exorcists. It would seem to be the whole system of rational order endowed with absolute authority which is the provocateur of the problems. Regan is only liberated from her possession when Father Karras takes into himself the aggressive hostile spirit and falls to his death. The authoritarian male and his shadow erase, not integrate, themselves.

Still, such evil does not exist *only* as a symbol or a psychological projection traceable to some logic of repression. There is something "real" about Regan's demon, something not accounted for by either the doctors', psychiatrists', or our own demystifying interpretation. Such shadows, it seems to me, are often pursued by a Friedkin character. Like one of those specks on the periphery of vision which disappears when looked for, Friedkin's shadow figures elude both integration and identification in the visual field of psychic life. In this respect, they are "truly dark" life energies which are not subject to causal analysis for they are always implicit in psychic life itself — in hunger, desire, sexuality, but also in the love of destruction,

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or unabashed self-aggrandizement. The most representative shadow figure is Charnier in *The French Connection*. He has a way of appearing spontaneously and of "getting free," of having his way and eluding the attempts of the law to pin him down. In this regard, it is Charnier and not Doyle who is the real protagonist of that film. He may have been born out of the *old* world (Europe), but he is thoroughly at home in the new (America). At film's end, inside a decaying, abandoned building, he disappears and, in effect, becomes a ghost.

Friedkin's shadow figures move on the periphery of life at the points forgotten or neglected but not completely buried. They are the ghosts in the machine, or perhaps the ghost lines of existence. They are also the fugitive bearers of the energies of fantasy, of image making. Perhaps they are displacements of society's fear, shadows of what a culture may suppress, an imaginative power which is never redeemed in order to be integrated into consciousness. The subterranean world of *Cruising*, covered with mock police uniform, suggests that imaginative activity has been arrested at a deep level. The subterraneans are constables of desire much as are the police they mimic; both are obsessed with codifying and ritualising behaviour. It is difficult to assert which is the shadow of which.

### Detection

William Spanos, in an intriguing essay, suggests that the detective is the archetypal figure of an age, whose spirit is continually manifested in its treatment of the world as a good story which can be decoded and, thus, whose problems all yield to rational solutions.<sup>4</sup> Spanos cites, for example, military thinking, as in Vietnam, or the tradition of logical positivism which has created a technology which controls us more than we control it. What interests Spanos is the growing trend of a kind of detective story in which the ends of codification are inevitably subverted by the mutability of its subject and by the fact that decodification is itself something of a ghost of the energies it proposes to decode. Spanos suggests the only explanatory "meaning" the new detective can discover is either the death of meaning or a meaning which reflects his need for value. The detection process (Spanos uses Heisenberg as his ultimate example) can discover only itself or the light by which it is even visible.

Following this line of thought for a minute, one can say that, traditionally, the detective story has been predicated on the premise that there must be something which can be detected, something which may be found in a story to explain a mystery, to de-mystify a situation (even if the mystery be an objectification of absence like the bird in *The Maltese Falcon*). Within the conventional context, the detective may become part of that which must be discovered or he may discover himself, but he seldom, in the old story, *grows into* the object of his search as he does, for example, in William Hjortstberg's *The Fallen Angel*. There is a counter tradition which,

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it seems to me starts to become prominent in the 1960s, a tradition in which the detective not only fails at finding a solution, but himself virtually disappears in some way. In John Boorman's *Point Blank* (1967), for example, the Lee Marvin protagonist, faced with the possibility that the things which he has unearthed form an insoluble self-perpetuating and destructive sign system — simply disappears into the gaps in the system (literally into the gaps in the walls of Alcatraz). In *Blow Up*, the photographer-detective disappears with the object of his search at the film's end; and most recently, in Sam Peckinpah's *The Osterman Weekend* (1984), the apparent unravelling of the mystery features a series of competing detectives who discover only the unobjectifiable ghostliness of the enterprise by which they are possessed.

In *Cruising*, the detective not only disappears (metaphorically vanishes early in the film when his captain asks him if he would like to disappear), but apparently resurfaces either as a new, better version of detective Edelson or as a potential form of that criminal for whom he has been seeking. Burns may or may not undergo a process of self-discovery, but he does *become* one of several possible objects of his quest, and he discovers the inability of discovery, at least in a conventional sense. His act of looking at the world interpretively, even semiologically, as containing solutions to rational problems, opens something of a gap within his consciousness which can be filled by neither structure nor language. That gap opens upon his own potential to be anything. As suggested earlier, the Steve Burns character is posed between alternative symbolic-semiological systems: that of the police and that of the gay group which parodies the police as something of a shadow. In either world one is, as Lacan might say, possessed by the signifying chains. Friedkin's gift is to see the degree to which such possession can be ghostly and terrifying. The identity engendered by the signifying chain is never exactly "there." And the fixity of the signifying system, with its inability to recognize the ghostliness of its enterprise, condemns the spirits it tries to name to an invisibility which is, in fact, paradoxically visible everywhere by film's end. We are never sure we see the killer in the film because (as Robin Wood points out)<sup>5</sup> he/she/it permeates the society. We can solve the crime, as does Steve Burns, only to learn we haven't solved anything.

Ultimately that which we and he pursue is the ghost of "an identity," of "self" itself. If the ghost of self eludes us after all, it is no less real for being ghostly; its locus lies somewhere in the gap between the semiotic assumptions of the police (who need to textualize the world in order to deal with violence) and the heavy-leather world (whose apparently separate reality is only an image of the other). The issue of self is something more than the idea of Derridean free play between signifiers. In Friedkin's sense we are inhabited by a ghost; we cannot see it, because it inhabits our organs of perception. We are (like Burns) the object of the detection quest but we can't be found in the detection radar screen. We can see ourselves

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only with the powers of fantasy but those powers are, as well, the object for exclusion by the detection quest. It is the relegation of fantasy to the role of a strictly underworld activity which mutates fantasy into a form of demonic possession. It is difficult, for example, to rid oneself of demons (as in the *Exorcist*) without ridding oneself of spiritual perception (Father Karras).

Fragmentation vs. Rational Order

The conditions of fragmentation, the issue of authoritarianism, and the obsession with order and unity are all present in the opening "coda" of the film. A tug boat cruising in New York harbour encounters a severed human arm — thus the fragmentation of man is a thematic point of departure. The arm is taken to the police lab where it is discussed as a problem of cause and effect, a problem as well of the re-unification of the body (dead, not alive, of course).

- Cop: See if you can match it to that torso that came in last month. Otherwise, you know doc, circumstances undetermined, pending a police investigation.
- Coroner: We got a hand here. If we can get a fingerprint, we can make this a homicide.
- Cop: You give me a cause of death, doc. You know I can't prosecute a homicide without a cause of death.
- Coroner: This is just a body count to you guys.

The purpose of this exchange is to provide more than a melodramatic subplot. It encapsulates the problem of "rational" perception, perception which recognizes only those facts which conform to its internal necessity for order. In a metaphorical way, the scene suggests that the required adherence to a codified process of identifying "causes" and "effects" makes impossible an "official" perception of the obvious — murder. (A man doesn't live long enough to cut off his arm and throw it into the river, and corpse fragments aren't dumped in the harbour by medical schools.) This perceptual problem is repeated some minutes later when Edelson's gay informant fails to open Edelson's eyes to the perverse behaviour of Officer Cimone. "Listen to what I'm saying," he cries, but Edelson throws him out because he is being asked to recognize that one of "his own" is involved in crime — and thus to question his rationalist assumptions about his world. Edelson can't "hear," for his organs of perception are the very things being called into question.

Immediately prior to his meeting Burns, Edelson is shown playing chess with a small computer. Thus, the film clearly identifies him as an authoritarian rationalist and, soon after, as a "paternalist" (when Burns enters the office for an interview). He is inclined to force facts and people onto a Procrustean bed rather than alter the bed; he fits Burns to a predetermined

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image of "victim" and sends Steve out, like a dutiful son, to do his own dirty work. Then he denies Burns's information, treating him like a child too witless to understand anything. Edelson's most glaring disregard of "chaos" involves his response to Burns's confession that he is cracking up. Edelson simply hands him a Columbia yearbook and commands him to find a killer: "I need you." Even when he believes that he has caught in Stuart the killer he needs to catch, he offers him a radically reduced sentence if he will confess and thus "clean up" the problem. Obviously Edelson is far past caring (as far as we can tell) about Stuart's danger to society; danger is a problem only insofar as it creates messes.

Paradoxically, despite Edelson's and the police's attempts to impose solutions and connections ("fit the arm to a torso"), police activity is fraught with disconnection. Early in his investigation, Burns, wired with a microphone, fingers a suspect and takes him to a hotel to get evidence. Communication between Burns and the police cruiser fails, however, and cops madly rush into the building (there are 20 of them to cover one man), upsetting the set-up. A couple of scenes later, Burns's refuses to explain his undercover job to Nancy, provoking her to suggest that they "cut loose" from each other for awhile. Clearly, the police, and even more the authoritarian mentality they represent, are implicated in the fragmentation process they are trying to reverse. They are, to a degree, part of the killer for whom they are looking.

At the same time, the film's gay subculture directly imitates the police as though the authoritarianism of the police had laminated itself upon them. The likeness extends beyond the similarity of their garb and obsessions. Both are self-enclosed fragments of a larger system. Both make contact with the world by "cruising." Each wants to isolate and enclose itself in its own logic and image. Both minimize the role of individuality and irrational change by codifying it. Each sanctifies one principle of male supremacy. Each is haunted by ghosts of indeterminacy despite efforts to excise them. Both worship the image of the Father. Then, when Nancy begins donning Steve's gay attire at film's end, she extends the process of imitation and duplication even beyond the mirroring worlds of cops/macho subculture. The pattern of authoritarian supremacy becomes a vast and complete circle as all individuality is subsumed into the semiological ordering system whose image is the suppressive policeman.

The upshot of collectivization in the film is sterility. And indeed, impotence is considered as a *motive* and a metaphor by the film from the first time we learn "the killer" is firing blanks, i.e., is sterile. And in Stuart's case, the sterility is a physical manifestation of his psychic sterility — self-willed incarceration in the role of a child, a role fostered by a domineering parent whose own ghostly authoritarianism reflects that of the police.

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Stuart, the Father, and Psychological Indeterminacy

Stuart is the person whom the police eventually "finger" for the homosexual murders. He is not merely obsessed with what he believes is the dictate of his dead father ("Do not be gay"), but feels the need to pretend to his friend that his father is still alive. Most of what we learn about Stuart is drawn from a scene late in the film when Burns, looking for evidence, breaks into Stuart's room illegally. Friedkin's camera passes slowly over the room. A print of a Goya painting of Christ hangs on a wall, there is a mosaic of photographs of Stuart as a child, a poster proclaiming "common sense" and another which reads, "Augustine's *City of God*: Unravelling the Power Game." His adherence to his dead father is complemented by the accoutrements in the room which suggest that he is in some way attracted to the authoritarianism of Christianity or Catholicism. Finally Burns opens the closet where he finds the two dominant elements of Stuart's inner identity: a cluster of mock police uniforms and a shoe box of unmailed letters to his dead father. We are allowed to read two of these letters. The first clearly documents Stuart's need for parental approval and, hence, authoritarian definition:

... to understand it. One day they will. I know they will. I want with all my heart to make you proud of me. I desperately need to have you respect what I do & what I am.

Someday I'll be able to tell you all I've done to make you look up to me. But I ought not to have said this much. It seems we don't learn anything from experience, but just go on repeating the mistakes of the past.

Your Son,

Stuart

I don't believe it is possible to worship another person, even Dad, as much as Stuart does without wanting to kill him. Stuart's self-abasement is too set against his own inner clock of life. The cycle of father worship in the film insures a repetition of violence and identity loss. Stuart's second letter documents the course his imagination has taken in rebellion against his total father worship. Dad becomes projected, I think, as a dark, demonic power:

I feel my thoughts being born somewhere in my head I can feel them taking shape. If only I could stop thinking. I can't stop but I feel I'm on the verge of a discovery of some sort. Yesterday in the park I saw an enormous dark shape. It seemed to hang suspended & dripped from the trees like a mass of tar jelly. At its center was a bright red glow.

Beneath the glaze of madness in this vision is the intimation that this tar blob projected from Stuart's subconsciousness will provide him, like

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the Son-of-Sam killer, with an authoritarian voice to sanction killing. We never know whether Stuart is actually the killer, but when he returns home and discovers the mused letters, we see a flashback to scenes of the first two murders in the film. We may either suppose Stuart is the actual killer or that such a killing is a product of his absorption in Dad. There is no real certitude that Stuart, the apprehended killer, is actually guilty of the crimes. His fingerprints might have been on the quarter by chance, along with several others. Nor do the crimes cease with his apprehension; indeed, they are somehow indigenous to the environment. In fact, if one watches the film closely (with the magic of video tape), it seems fairly certain that Stuart is *not* the killer we see initially in the film. The early killer has a different face (insofar as we can see it), a radically different hair style (closely curled as opposed to Stuart's long, straight hair), a different voice and, from what we can see, a different mouth. (His voice, in fact, sounds to me like that of Stuart's father.) He does not wear Stuart's characteristic police hat nor use Stuart's kind of knife, and, unlike Stuart, he *does* wear large mirror glasses. There are, then, probably at least two different killers, one with potential motives of impotence and emotional arrest (stemming from parental disapproval), another with who-knows-what motives.

In any event, the profile of violence in the film does not wholly conform to any specific version of psychology: Jungian, Freudian or Lacanian. Stuart's attempt to please his dead father fits Freud's notion of parent/child interaction (especially as Freud discusses it in *Moses and Monotheism*), and one could force much of the film into Freud's mold. Dad is, after all, the primal authority figure for most of us. Freud, however, explains male homosexuality not as too much Dad, but as too little — the complete absence of a father figure (*Leonardo*). The total vision does not quite fit the film, for presumably Stuart might be crazy but not gay. And he might resemble Edelson or one of his lackeys. Homosexuality has no real explanation in the film other than fear of otherness. The male is so determined by the father that he can relate only to other images of paternalism.

### Ted Bailey, Art, and the Indeterminacy of Crime

Ted Bailey, the one friend Burns makes after immersing himself in the gay subculture, seems to possess all those powers of open expression largely denied elsewhere in the film. He is friendly, open, and apparently honest about his feelings, his lover Gregory, his dreams, desires and so forth. Bailey is also a would-be artist, specifically a playwright, who reminds us of the close connection between theatricality and identity in this film. (All the victims, as well as the one apprehended suspect, Stuart, are artists: actors, writers, musicians.) Ted's desire for recognition ("I'm destined to be recognized"), echoes the compulsion for external definition that characterizes so many of the film's major figures.

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Ted is also a romantic, who writes old style comedies, now out of fashion. He holds a sort of private fantasy which isn't tolerated by the police-like macho Gregory (there is nothing lightly romantic about his argument with Gregory or his death). Bailey, as the nicest guy in the film and the most visible artist of non-conformity, is perhaps killed for his personal fantasy life. He could be the victim of any number of people — Gregory, Steve, or some possible second or third lover who, in keeping with subculture life, remains disconnected from all other relationships.

Ted's death raises major questions by the film's conclusion, and if the film has a point, it seems to be that no easy answers are at hand. Ted is killed, in one sense, by his vulnerability, gentleness, "femininity" (all intolerable within the world of the film). On the other hand, he is a victim of the inexplicable itself. The concluding ambiguities consolidate a great deal of the film: a world presuming certain connections, a world escaping those assumptions. The police want to connect a killer with a body, but the killer is too diffuse. They want to piece together a body from its parts, but they can't get enough parts. We want to connect Burns with latent homosexuality and (not so latent) violence, but we're not sure what psychological pressures move him.

Burns, like everything else, is to a degree, a blank. Thus, when we as critics assert such things as: "implicit in Pacino's fury is his unacknowledged sexual attraction to his gay friend and his sexual jealousy of the lover,"<sup>6</sup> we are only "repeating the mistakes" of society in the film, projecting our own need for order onto systemless fragments. (Similarly, taking the presence of Jung's book *Word and Image* in Stuart's room as an interpretive key to the film misses the dramatic fact that Jung's book is one of Stu's possessions and has engendered no visible creative change in Stu's own life.) I think the ambiguity of Burns's character is an essential ingredient of the narrative and a reminder of the weakness of all cause-and-effect system building.

Word, Image, and Absence

The most we see is a process of Burns learning to see (or perhaps a parody of that process). The title of Jung's book, *Word and Image*, provides a rather self-conscious point of reference to the whole world/image issue in the film. Word consciousness and image consciousness are initially quite separate in Friedkin's world, word being associated with fragmentation and delusive explanation, image with the life of the imagination. The police are, quite obviously, bound up by the logical contradictions of the language of regulations which controls their activity (no murder without a cause of death or an identity, etc.). The investigation only takes off when Edelson drops some Columbia yearbook pictures in front of Burns. Burns either invents or discovers a connection between Stuart and the gay world through images and becomes a kind of spy. He then, however, applies the

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rational word consciousness of the police world to the images he uncovers, putting together pieces of evidence in a way that resembles reconstruction of the corpse. Moreover, what he finally sees in Stuart seems to be only what he has been conditioned to see by the system. His assumptions and conclusions and his provocation of a showdown with Stuart make clear that, despite his involvement in the chaotic and irrational world of heavy-leather, Burns, not only retains but perfects the cause-and-effect logic of the dominant culture.

His final "look" (and ours) becomes the most telling. Freed from his "mission" after putting a stop to Stuart (which has *not* put a stop to the homosexual killings), Burns returns to Nancy's apartment. As she is trying on his black leather garb, he is in the bathroom shaving. Perhaps he hears the jangle of his suit keys approaching (although in the prints I have seen one can only hear the classical music piece on the phonograph). He looks up, and we see a somewhat stunned expression on his face. What we also see is *him* looking out at *us* through the mirror. (We cannot help be reminded of the earlier image of the killer and his victim together in the hotel mirror.) One is tempted to say that Burns has seen for the first time what has been in back of him throughout the film — us. In a sense we are, as the society participating in the problem, the shadow which has been haunting Burns since his immersion in the underworld. We are the absent yet present, the ghost in the machine, the spectatorially separate-yet-implicated. Moreover, we are absent not only to Burns but to ourselves (we, after all, do not appear in his mirror). The same might be said with regard to the mysterious object pulled by a tug boat as the film fades to black (we see the rope but not what it is attached to). Whatever it is is defined only by its absence. It may even be us, but for that reason, we will *never* see it, since all we see are reflections/projections (including films).

In short, we never directly see the source of mystery — it remains invisible to the kinds of lenses we turn on the world. We are especially blind to the extent that the source of the mystery (as of Ted Bailey's death) may lie implicitly within us.

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### Notes

1. Robin Wood has published an excellent study of the "issue of authoritarianism in the film in his book *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Wood interprets the film in a Freudian light, suggesting the violence in the film emanates collectively from a culture trying to please an authoritarian father who is only a ghost. I agree with everything in the Wood discussion but I should like to extend the interpretation along a number of other lines, especially those leading to an even bleaker view of consciousness than Wood's.

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2. Nancy Hayles and Kathryn Rindskopf, "The Shadow of Violence," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 8:2 (1980), pp. 2-8.
3. Ibid. Jung's theory includes the notion that when the shadow side of a personality fails to be integrated, the shadow may turn demonic in some way; yet we are still faced with the contradiction that Burns never evinces a serious psychological problem until exposed to the figures of that world, who are themselves *all* victims of *anima denial*. They are what Burns could become by denial, but he is initially a fairly integrated (masculine-feminine) person. The killer can't, strictly speaking, be a shadow and a form of the anima. Thus, what Burns meets in the "subterranean" trip may embody potential powers of himself, but if they are anima forms, they are also victims of established anima perversion. There may be nothing in this world capable of healthy integration. Perhaps the real tragedy of a Friedkin world is not that people can't see their shadow sides, but that the anima is so thoroughly displaced and suppressed that it can no longer be encountered at all. Like Regan in *The Exorcist*, Burns is trapped in a hell marked by the complete absence of feminine forms.
4. William V. Spanos, "The Detective and the Boundary," *Boundary 2* 1:1 (1974), pp. 147-168.
5. *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*, pp. 58ff.
6. Hayles and Rindskopf.

## THE LAST STRANGER: *QUERELLE* AND CULTURAL SIMULATION

*Christopher Sharrett*

When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity, and authenticity.

Jean Baudrillard

For Fassbinder's story is a history of a sellout, a sellout of the new style life. The man who once, in his early work, had rejected the customary shot/countershots, tracks, and zooms became in the end a master of a style he had himself discredited, the practitioner of a banal craft. In this way he became the bootlicking mirror image of the German establishment, the showpiece, in the guise of an outsider, of a corrupt and disaster-stricken Germany into whose favorite and most syrupy clichés he breathed new life, without any of the irony or the checks you would expect from a detached or objective mind. It was a pact forged by the outsider with the old oligarchs of the film industry, to turn the overworked formulas of "*Heimat-film*" into those of the faggot film.

Hans-Jürgen Syberberg  
on Fassbinder's death

Syberberg's blast should be seen not simply as a condemnation, an anti-eulogy for his colleague, but as a criticism of the schizophrenia which has developed into the dominant mode of consciousness of postmodernism.<sup>1</sup> For Syberberg, Fassbinder's work represents the stalemate of Western so-

ciety, caught between mythic and ideological readings of history, but inevitably opting for the comfort of mythic (patriarchal) structures. Although the West has found the traditional mythic narratives supporting capital to be increasingly ludicrous in the wake of Nazism and imperialist ventures of the postwar years, it currently finds genuine ideological consciousness distasteful, naive, and insupportable after May '68 and the failures of numerous radical or bourgeois democratic movements of the sixties. (The situation in the U.S. describes the problem ideally: rather than recognize the historical lesson of Vietnam and Watergate, the populace has turned to the myth of regeneration through violence, pretending that the crises of the past twenty years were aberrations).

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's career is an acute representation of this predicament, although Syberberg misses the true resolution to Fassbinder's aesthetic and ideological positions. While Fassbinder, an artist of consciousness, attacked representation and illusionism, he was nevertheless a product (like most of the New German directors) of a "neocolonial" political and economic system. Raised on American popular culture,<sup>2</sup> he remained enamored of Sirk and Fuller, of genre cinema, of narrativity, and dreamed of a "German Hollywood" at the same time that he decried the postwar ravaging of Germany by multinational corporate interests. Nonetheless, Fassbinder attempted to undermine the centrality of the American imperialist culture with cynicism and a Brechtian distance in his artistic practice. Still, Syberberg accuses Fassbinder of refusing to confront directly the objects of Western fascination (including the gaze itself) within the text of a work, as in Syberberg's own *Our Hitler* and *Parsifal*. Syberberg has never suggested that his work has successfully parted company with the hero myth or the dream of Utopia embodied in the narratives of journey and recovery. Rather, he holds that his Brecht/Wagner conjunction has demonstrated the need for a critical apparatus within the artwork itself, as the audience of postmodernism remains in limbo between representation and presentation, between patriarchal myth and historical analysis.

Syberberg's assault on Fassbinder's work, especially his critique of Fassbinder's "Syberbergian" last reel of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* — with its pastiche apocalypse-cum-puppet show — is based on the notion that Fassbinder appropriated an effect, a style, without removing it from the province of illusionism and without either incorporating it within or distancing it from what is essentially a melodrama. Fassbinder's problem then, according to Syberberg, is common to the cultural inversion of postmodernism.<sup>3</sup> Syberberg's tirade is ironic in that the real subject for investigation, Fassbinder's last film, is nowhere in evidence. *Querelle*, the film utilizing the greatest "Syberberg-effect," and demonstrating the lesson Syberberg has to teach, is Fassbinder's most important achievement as a work representative of the postmodern temperament.

*Querelle de Brest*, Genet's 1947 novel, has been analyzed chiefly in terms of its Dostoyevskian themes of degradation, penance, and redemption, and

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for concerns usually associated with Genet.<sup>4</sup> It is remarkable and fortuitous that his project should have been taken on at a point just before the filmmaker's death. It has been suggested that *Querelle* is a transitional work rather than a "final testament"; it is important that the audience is forced to confront this work as a text on which is inscribed a significant transition in cultural history.

What is foregrounded in *Querelle* is an exploration of the mediated environment of postmodernism that has unwittingly bankrupted subjects of fascination in capitalist production and the Western narrative tradition. *Querelle de Brest* has the distinction of being an ideal model for intertextual discourse, exemplifying the need to reevaluate the subtexts of works within changing historical circumstances. In the hands of Fassbinder, *Querelle* becomes a device for the examination of a depleted signifying practice.

The "death of the hero," or the collapse of hero mythologies central to Western narrative art, is the subject of increased scholarly and popular discourse,<sup>5</sup> particularly as the patriarchal ideology underneath this master narratives becomes temporarily appealing in the reactionary climate of the 1980s. Not ironically, *The Saturday Evening Post* has published an article outlining the transmutation of the hero myth that is relevant to an understanding of *Querelle's* exegesis.<sup>6</sup> With the anxiety associated with that Silent Majority publication, the *Post* describes the transference of the public's collective fascination from figures of historical relevance (MacArthur, Lindbergh) to entertainers whose presence, although heavily mediated, affected cultural transformation and, as signifiers, had some foundation in the Real (Elvis Presley, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe). The situation is now quite troublesome. The historical dimension is inscribed with the names of "Dynasty" and "Dallas" characters — and Reagan as well — all as free-floating signifiers divorced from the referential, thus reinforcing delusions of the Imaginary. What the *Post* has informally described is the precession/procession of simulacra outline by Baudrillard:

- \*it [the image] is the reflection of a basic reality
- \*it masks and perverts a basic reality
- \*it marks the absence of a basic reality
- \*it bears no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum<sup>7</sup>

The relevance of Baudrillard's precession formula to the hero myth is the rupture of the myth from its signifying practice and historical role. *Querelle*, in its positioning the star/hero, has a unique place in this discourse. In *Querelle*, we do not have Dean/Presley/Brando incarnating within the field of the postwar spectacle Orphic/Dionysian myths, but Brad Davis — with a peculiarly characteristic slouch, cigarette centered in the mouth, eyes wary — simulating Dean/Presley/Brando. The film's sexual politics, i.e., its representation of homosexuality, must be approached exclusively

through the exploration of the bankrupt signifying practice it undertakes. *Querelle* can be understood only as "pure cinema," wherein the signifier (sexual and otherwise) is no longer adversarial but decorative, necessitating a discussion of the co-optation of sexual politics previously seen as adversarial by the dominant culture. The film's discourse is also a representation of the purely superstructural rebellion undertaken by adversarial sexuality, a rebellion now dissolved in the media. Questions about the disappearance of "love"<sup>8</sup> in the film and *Querelle's* static text become obviated by this form of address.

Like much of the allusive art of postmodernism,<sup>9</sup> *Querelle* contains an array of references to the implosion of meaning<sup>10</sup> in narration to the point that its ostensible subject (criminality/sexual alienation) is actually erased. Fassbinder has constructed a Black Mass (with dolorous liturgical soundtrack) for the earlier cinematic communion centered on the sexual charisma of the movie star, or, rather, for the cult of male eros which has substituted for the chivalric romances and the sagas of the epic enablers. The simulacra have taken predominance as the hero no longer has an association with the political or the historical. It is not coincidental that Lt. Seblon — the repressed homosexual who idealizes *Querelle* — should function in the film not as the authorial *raisonneur* of Genet's novel, but as a figure for the mediation of desire with which the audience can identify. Seblon refers also to Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*, the invert who represents a cultural and ideological dilemma, viz., the torpor of the bourgeois *fin de siècle* (now become *fin-de-millennium*) temperament, driven into masochism and apocalypse out of an exaggerated self-image and expectation.<sup>11</sup> The Romantic idealization of Tadzio in *Death in Venice*, particularly when considered within the epic scope of Visconti's film version, reminds bourgeois society of its tacit contract in this enterprise, a pathological fixation located first in the bourgeois ideology of High Modernism, then in the particular scopophilia of postmodern culture. Fassbinder's *Querelle* pursues the crisis of Mann's novella and Visconti's film but in a reflexive manner, viewing the crisis at its end-point. The aspiration of Lt. Seblon must be contexted in its specific cinematic configuration. Seblon is, after all, Franco Nero, and necessarily becomes a simulacrum more so than Dirk Bogarde in *Death in Venice*, whose referential is a certain literary and historical reality. The beefcake hero of *Camelot* and *A Professional Gun* and numerous American and European grade-B genre films, Nero throws the cognoscenti back onto a contemplation of cinema's nurturing of the cult of male beauty.<sup>12</sup> Could the casting of Franco Nero be a joke? We attend also to the fact that Martin Sheen, a James Dean simulacrum, was an alternative to Brad Davis at an early stage of the film's production.<sup>13</sup> The gaze itself, as it is focused on the simulacra of Hollywood "Homeros"<sup>14</sup> is given its requiem in *Querelle*, along with some of the ideological assumptions underneath that phase of aesthetic production.

The term "simulacrum" may seem overextended or inaccurate in this

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discussion, particularly when applied to someone like Martin Sheen (really an elder statesman of the cinema already reproduced in teen-idol simulations), who could more easily be termed an "imitation" or an actor "influenced" by another. The concept of the simulacrum, as used by Baudrillard, refers to the copy for which no original exists, the philosophical contention from antiquity which finds its concrete example in computer-generated imagery. The basis for the concept is the divorce of the image from representation, not just of a figurative sort, but in terms of the image's foundation in history and a mode of production. The Hollywood star was always in a precarious position in the representation process, but the increased cloning of stars, advancing rapidly with the voraciousness of the spectacle, has thrown the star into the category of the simulacrum. The undifferentiated chaos in which the star/hero is located is at the crux of Querelle's parody. Brad Davis and Martin Sheen become simulacra as we perceive their separation, in the current environment, from the radical assumptions that made a James Dean part of an adversarial cultural tendency.

It would be erroneous to periodize the destruction of male eros/divine enabler within the time frame increasingly associated with postmodernism (the past twenty-five years or so). Both the erasure of Dean/Presley/Brando as adversarial signifiers and the recycling of such figures as "trash archetypes" (fully enunciated myths produced in the mediascape as kitschy posters and associated souvenir art) are part of a long-term Enlightenment project, one that returns the concepts of sacrifice and hierarchy to Christianity. In his painstaking study of the representation of Christ's sexuality in Renaissance art and its erasure by the Enlightenment mind, Leo Steinberg notes that the depiction of Christ's genitals in Renaissance iconography affirmed the concept of God's alliance with the human condition.<sup>15</sup> The puritan ideology constituting the "modern oblivion" to which Christ's sexuality was consigned effectively destroyed the humanization of the divine, the merger of the sacred and the profane. The tendency to appropriate the most progressive aspects of Christianity, and to re-define them in terms that will validate hierarchical systems and prevent class consciousness, have been controlling aspects of image production in the West. The setting of a progressive myth representing a transitional historical moment within a production system which can co-opt and overwhelm it is, of course, a feature of bourgeois ideology evidenced continually in the history of representation.

The signifying practice of the cinema inadvertently accomplished much in halting the desacralization process by the incarnation of its various pagan messiahs: the rough trade, hustlers, bums, and cultural rebels who proliferated in popular art at mid-century. The sensibility underneath this practice was represented very well by the work of Tennessee Williams, al-

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ready perceived as a "Southern Gothic version of Jean Genet for his mixing of sex, death, and salvation in beguiling contradiction."<sup>16</sup>

The sensibility of Williams (indeed shared by Genet) demonstrates the relevance of the homosexual experience to the mythic impulses of the narrative tradition; the influence is of such a magnitude as to necessarily cause it to be moved into a range of cultural and ideological discourse beyond the parochial limits both of conservative critics and Williams' and Genet's protectors within the gay intelligentsia. The myth of the dying and reviving god, the hero who brings fertility to the land, is absolutely central to Williams' plays and to their filmic renderings — in particular *Orpheus Descending*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *Night of the Iguana*. The myth of the fertility god, a conservative emblem in the hands of T.S. Eliot, became for Williams representative of an important moment of radical culture flux. The charismatic stranger who is "the influence of evil, disruption, or destruction"<sup>17</sup> and threatens the established order becomes a concept of enormous relevance, perhaps for the last time, in the upheaval which began in the 1950s and culminated in the activity of the 60s. Recent evidence<sup>18</sup> that Williams may have rewritten *Battle of Angels* (later *Orpheus Descending*) so that the central figure, Val Xavier, becomes a wandering guitar player allegorizing the rise of Elvis Presley, suggests Williams' prescience and the preeminence of the myth in question. Although the mid-50s rebel hero became a representation of an assault on sexual and racial assumptions and a force disturbing to Eisenhower America, the figure was also circumscribed not only by the problematical hero myth and its attendant cult of individualism, but by the desire generated by the gaze, by the culture industry that turned even vital, activist individuals (Brando lived up to his image) into effigies.

The commodification process implicit in the gaze becomes the death knell to this final manifestation of the hero myth, a manifestation wanting in credibility at its outset due to its production circumstance. The language "consensus" inscribed in the cinema's myth of the hero, in this phase of modernism and of image production, is exposed in *Querelle* as a fraud. Notwithstanding the audience-industry relationship, the myth in question is seen by Fassbinder's project as fraudulent because of its superficiality and circumscription by the narcissistic gaze. The stasis and staginess of *Querelle* which so upset critics is Fassbinder's Syberbergian maneuver: Genet's criminal becomes a conceit for exposing both the Hollywood narrative (upon which Fassbinder was always dependent) and audience positioning in this narrative tradition.

The parodic element to *Querelle* is immediately available. The theme of the journeying, revivifying hero was already there, explicit in Genet's novel,<sup>19</sup> except that Genet unlike Williams, turns it on its ear. While Val Xavier in *Orpheus Descending* becomes a symbol of sexual liberation and racial harmony for the women of Two River County, *Querelle* brings alienation and inversion to the city of Brest. The notion of the stranger caus-

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ing a *disruptive* as well as redemptive process is essential to the hero myth and the messianic impulse; the revolutionizing of society necessarily brings a phase of upheaval, an element visible in the narrative of the New Testament and the epic romances. In Fassbinder, the emphasis on the disruptive function is meant to precipitate a reevaluation of the premises of the myth itself. *Querelle* demonstrates that as the population remains fixed on the gaze,<sup>20</sup> unable to apprehend the myth as collective *projection*, the disruptive function becomes predominant. The tendency of the bourgeois as audience, with its association of the hero with the primacy of individualism, is to project the figure solely as ideal ego rather than as an image signifying a transitional historical moment. Examples of the relationship between the gaze and the hero as metaphorical figure are rife in the international cinema.

Films such as *The Fugitive Kind* (*Orpheus Descending*) propose the hero as an awakened radical potential in the population.<sup>21</sup> Other, more mainstream films of Hollywood narrative demonstrate how easily co-opted this archetypal myth is (particularly when it is understood precisely as "archetypal" and metaphysical rather than created by a language system, as Levi Strauss would approach the topic), and how it is ultimately inadequate in providing metaphors of revolutionary change. Joshua Logan's *Picnic* (based on Inge's play — a watered-down variation of a theme developed by Williams) suggests that not only can bourgeois society be easily recuperated after the stranger's passing, but that the stranger's principal function is as object of the gaze. This problem is represented in Hal Carter (William Holden), both through narrative strategy and in the film's famous ad campaign (Kim Novak kneeling behind Holden as he demurely covers/brandishes his nude torso, a device borrowed from Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire*). Such narratives, at best, merely reverse (temporarily) the scopophilic construct in which the female is usually the object. In *Picnic* (and in the far more conservative *Shane*) the changes posited are relatively superficial, and never address class relations or the politics of the intimate. At the same time that *Picnic* offers a challenge to upwardly mobile capital (Hal Carter's betrayal by Benson and Madge's rejection of Benson in favour of Carter) and to sexual mores of Middle America, the film waxes nostalgic in its Norman Rockwell depiction of 50s culture. More important, the only narrative that could "follow" *Picnic* would be a tempestuous romance between Madge and Hal. The sense of disruption figured in such films has more to do with a "shaking up" of society only to permit its recuperation. Narrative closure becomes complete, along with concepts of bourgeois normality.

Pasolini's *Teorema* is the most radical challenge to the messianic (patriarchal) impulse underneath the hero myth prior to *Querelle*. The film occupies a kind of middle ground in its thesis on the hero, since the Stranger (Terence Stamp) unleashes a number of disruptive forces within a bourgeois family — signifying the overturning of society — while at the same

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time being delineated by Pasolini as projection. The distinction between this film and, say, *Picnic* is the parodic attitude toward the heroic figure. In one important sequence, the Stranger poses in the manner of a Bernini saint as the daughter takes snapshots, suggesting a sardonic self-consciousness on the part of the object of fascination — self-consciousness missing from the populace. The film occupies “middle ground” since the parody is limited, as well as the film’s revolutionary faith. While the notion of the hero and the primacy of individualism are sent up, the disruptive forces unleashed suggest no specific revolutionary program beyond anarchy and the attack on bourgeois sexuality and religiosity. *Teorema* is certainly the inverse of *Shane* (with which it is often compared),<sup>22</sup> but the heroic process is kept relatively intact not only through the heavy mediation by this myth but because of a traditional Marxist perspective toward the social. More problematic is the Stranger’s radicalizing function being reducible to a kind of “atomic individualism,”<sup>23</sup> with its key images alluding as much to Christian iconography as to the literal and figurative wasteland of postwar industrial society.<sup>24</sup>

*Querelle* is a more “advanced” film not in a revolutionary sense but in its situation within the culture of simulation and its total refusal of the idea of the social which provided consensus to the heroic narrative. The forces *Querelle* unleashes are *merely* disruptive: they are in no way efficacious from the standpoints of recuperation or transformation. Fassbinder establishes this quickly in a voice over passage by the Narrator, reworked from Genet, as we gaze at Brad Davis:

Gradually we have come to recognize how *Querelle*, already part of our flesh and blood, grows larger inside ourselves, how he germinates within our souls and feeds from the best we have in us. Now that we acknowledge that *Querelle* is part of us, we want him to become a hero even to those who would deny him. When we follow his growth within us, we can see how perfect he is as a hero and how he will be fulfilled in his ending, an ending that is to be both his destiny and desire. The drama we wish to relate is the transposition of the familiar Event, and *Querelle* is its revelation. We can further say of this event that it is comparable to the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary by the Archangel Gabriel.<sup>25</sup>

Fassbinder’s “belief” in *Querelle* is manifestly less than Genet’s. The entirety of the preceding narration is a metatheatrical gesture. The “gradual” process of *Querelle*’s adoration by Seblon/the audience is involved wholly in projection; that is, in the construction of *Querelle* as ego ideal through the gaze. The audience does not study the process of the hero’s “growth within us” in a self-conscious manner, which would deny the myth through its articulation. Fassbinder suggests that projection as such must remain intact for the hero to be accepted “even by those who would deny him” (read: by those who would see this figure as merely part of an historical

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process). The insight of this passage is in the notion of the individual becoming a transcendent subject at the moment that the projection of the bourgeois collectivity is complete. Querelle becomes a hero only insofar as he is desired, and as individuals recognize this desire saturating the community. Seblon's personal inadequacy (his scopophilia and inversion signified both by his fixation on Querelle and his attraction to imagery such as his art books in general) recapitulates the Aschenbach/Tadzio construct alluded to earlier. Such Romantic self deprecation is transmuted into the media simulacrum of Seblon.

The operation of the Imaginary necessary to sustain this form of narrative is assaulted, however, with Querelle as subject performing at odds with the projection of his perceivers. Querelle represents a reified alienation traditional to Genet which in the cinematic context takes on the messianic configuration associated with the star/hero. The aggrandizement of alienation is made clear by the presence of Franco Nero as interlocutor, as signifier of this manifestation of projection in pop culture. A constant sense of irony informs Fassbinder's delineation of the hero myth; Querelle's "blood sacrifice" (the killing of Vic) has no relationship to the "humiliation" envisaged by Seblon, who sees Querelle as a messiah out of his exaggerated self image, his feeling that he "lacks the charm to subjugate someone else."<sup>26</sup> Seblon's role as a Naval officer does not represent him as a "closet case" (although he admits to this), nor is his position as voyeur distinguished merely by his class security and Romantic longing for ideal beauty (as in *Death in Venice*). His scopophilia is wholly of a bourgeois cast, with its ego projection built on associations of sexual charisma with power. But Seblon's projections, which form the text of his life, dissolve as the projection/fantasy of this mediated figure dissolves in the narrative. The figures of the gay counterculture threatening to bourgeois society, including Theo, Mario (in his "hot cop" phase), Nono, and Querelle himself, are so heavily mediated by pop culture (the Village People, etc.) as to be innocuous as figures of ideological change.

A great virtue of Fassbinder's rendering of the novel is his adherence to Genet's sense of theatre, or, rather, to performance as essential to interaction in bourgeois society. As it is developed in the cinema, Genet's theatricality exposes projection as a byproduct of the experience of the gaze, making the incorporation of the means of the oppressor one element of Genet's theme of identification clearer in film than it is in novelistic or dramatic presentation. Although unconscious of the phenomenon operating transpsychically among them, the characters of the film lose their fascination for Querelle as the Self/Other demarcation dissolves and as Querelle is made human. The process of humanization in this case, in contrast to the myth underneath the projection of Seblon/the narrator, actually "desanctifies" Querelle. While the messianic figures of the Christian tradition dispel alienation, Querelle, as signifier of the total alienation of the simulated environment (mediated society), represents the individual's

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viability only as image. Thus, it is very difficult to see Genet's work as other than parodic in Fassbinder's hands. The exaggerated desire centered on Querelle explodes gradually, first with Querelle's attempt to "give in" to Seblon on the docks of Brest, then with the final alienation of Lysianne, keeper of the brothel/inn theatre.

Until about midway into the narrative, when Querelle becomes involved fully in the affairs of the world (the Gil episode), Querelle is the quintessential subject of idealization central to the Romantic style and the scopophilic drive advanced by bourgeois ideology. Relationships as projection continue in the choreographed duel (itself a parody of male bonding rituals) between Querelle and his brother, a confrontation based on the notion of Querelle as ideal (or "evil") Other in a parody of the good/bad brother construct. At this point a mock procession to Calvary interrupts the action of the narrative itself, exploring the operation of myth in the most presentational manner. Then, with the attempted reciprocation by Querelle with his admirer (Seblon), and with the exposure of Querelle as merely flesh (a criminal), Querelle is abandoned. Querelle is a hero only when static, not when fully involved in the narrative (history). The emblematic stills of the film are of Brad Davis leaning against a lamppost (quoting numerous images of the 50s rebels), or Davis covered with soot from the *Vengeur's* boiler room (Dean in *Giant*).<sup>27</sup> At the film's conclusion, these images are returned to us, as Querelle is offered as transcendent subject even as alienation within society is complete (represented by the pathetic situation of Lysianne). There is no irony here, since the "Angel of the Apocalypse" has proceeded into the range of the simulacra: the social has ceased to exist.

Querelle's apotheosis occurs at the moment he enters "the lofty region where mirror images converge and are united."<sup>28</sup> Yet while the narrative suggests the myth's final reification, the narrative ends up running in two separate directions; the audience is hyperconscious by now of Fassbinder's presentation of Querelle as myth, and the very presentational ending underscores the beginning of Querelle's failure, the disintegration of his credibility as myth for the characters in the narrative. None of this signifies, however, that the dimension of the historical has been entered into and the mythical left behind. Even as Querelle begins to collapse under the projection of the collectivity and the myth that has been constructed around him, his receding does not prevent the recuperation of the idealization process. The political lesson of the film, and Fassbinder's most incisive remark on postmodernism (irrespective of Syberberg), is the bolstering of the commodity status of the image. The film, very fittingly, ends up as a "beautiful" coffee table book, each still of which recalls Hollywood and the cinematic history which "masked" the fact that the image, in constantly repeating the myth, has destroyed the bourgeois narrative/history which has depended on mythic consciousness for its survival. We are left with the frozen moment of the still, the image as pure exchange value.

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The audience is made complicit in a situation which Genet could not have intuited at a time before the triumph of the spectacle and "technotronic"<sup>29</sup> society. The myth of the hero which Hollywood tried to recuperate but bankrupted is chronicled and eulogized in *Querelle*. The historical situation (and fate) of the spectator within the climate of post-modernism becomes aligned to the degree of recognition that

narcissism, sadomasochism, a hyperactive will and imagination combined with unusual passivity in practical matters, a compulsive attraction to ritual, and a tendency to take the sign for the substance ... are qualities that belong to ... Genet's heroes, and to the Genet who reveals himself in his style.<sup>30</sup>

This extends as well to the transpsychical crisis which has incorporated the spectator into this style.

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Notes

1. The definitive discussion of schizophrenia as emblem of post-modernism is in Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-modern Culture*, Hal Foster, ed. (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 111 — 126. A more developed version of this essay is Jameson's "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984), pp. 53-94.
2. This is discussed in John Sandford, *The New German Cinema* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1980), pp. 63-103.
3. See the cited discussions of postmodernism by Jameson.
4. Representative works are Richard N. Coe, *The Vision of Jean Genet: A Study of His Poems, Plays and Novels* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), pp. 170-213; Bettina Knapp, *Jean Genet* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1968), pp. 70-87; Philip Thody, *Jean Genet: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), pp. 119-141.
5. The range of (ideologically divergent) discourse can be seen in, for example, the special issue of the arts journal *ZG*, No.8 (the "Heroes" number), and in the various publications of the Popular Culture Association, including Ray Browne and Marshall W. Fishbank, eds., *The Hero in Transition* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983).
6. Jay Stuller, "Legends that Will Not Die," *The Saturday Evening Post*, July/August, 1985, pp. 42-54.
7. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 11.
8. Paul Taylor and Adrian Martin, "Where is Love? Describing *Querelle*," *ZG*, No. 12, Fall, 1984, p. 19. A discussion of *Querelle*'s sexual politics is in James Roy MacBean, "Between Kitsch and Fascism: Notes on Fassbinder, Pasolini, (Homo)sexual Politics, the Exotic, the Erotic and Other consuming Passions," *Cineaste*, Vol. XIII, No. 4, 1984, pp. 12-30.

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9. See Noel Carroll, "The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (and beyond)," *October* 20, pp. 51-83.
10. This concept is derived from Baudrillard's piece "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media," in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities...or the End of the Social*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), pp. 95 — 113.
11. I refer here to the notion of desire developed in René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structures*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965).
12. See for example, Donald Spoto, *Camerado: Hollywood and the American Man* (New York: Plume/New American Library, 1978), and also Michael Malone, *Heroes of Eros: Male Sexuality in the Movies* (New York: Dutton, 1979).
13. Described in Dieter Schidor's foreword to Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Querelle: The Film Book* trans. Arthur S. Wensinger and Richard H. Wood (New York & Munich: Schirmer/Mosel-Grove Press, 1983), p. 7.
14. See Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1972), p. 17, *passim*. Also relevant to this discussion is Tyler's *Sex Psyche, Etcetera in the Film* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 73-78.
15. Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon/October Books, 1983), p. 11.
16. Foster Hirsch, *A Portrait of the Artist: The Plays of Tennessee Williams* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1979), p. 14.
17. John Howlett, *James Dean: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), p. 128.
18. Elaine Dundy, *Elvis and Gladys* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 298-300.
19. See Tom F. Driver, *Jean Genet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 22.
20. Probably the most incisive discussion of the gaze and the cinematic experience is Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," reprinted in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (Boston: Godine, 1985), pp. 361-375. I might suggest that also relevant to my comments on spectator relationship to the star/hero is Parker Tyler's description of Brando portrayed "with a maximum of artifice" in *One-Eyed Jacks*. See Tyler's *Sex, Psyche, Etcetera in the Cinema*, p. 76.
21. An intelligent comment on the changing cultural perception of the heroic enabler is in John E. Mack's remarkable biography of *T.E. Lawrence, A Prince of Our Disorder* (New York: Little Brown, 1976), pp. 198-242. A transitional figure in the bourgeois conception of heroic individualism, mention of Lawrence is appropriate to this discussion. The work of Herman Melville now seems an especially important prelude to *Querelle*. See Robert K. Martin, *Hero, Captain, Stranger: Male Friendship, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Sea Novels of Herman Melville* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986).
22. Raymond Durgnat, *Sexual Alienation in the Cinema: The Dynamics of Sexual Freedom* (London: Studio Vista, 1972), p. 211.
23. *Ibid*, p. 219.
24. *Ibid*, pp. 212-220.
25. *Querelle: The Film Book*, p. 81.

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26. Ibid., p. 132.
27. The movement of these figures into simulations (and the periodizing and trivialization of revolt in the postwar years) is seen in, for example, David Dalton and Ron Cayen, *James Dean: American Icon* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1984) and Jerry Tillotson, "James Dean: End of the Cult Gods?" in *Hollywood Studio Magazine*, May, 1984, pp. 8-11.
28. *Querelle: The Film Book*, p. 174.
29. This is the "end of ideology" concept of the rightist strategist of postindustrialism, Zbigniew Brzezinski. See *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technotronic Era* (New York: Penguin Books, 1970).
30. Tom F. Driver, p. 22.

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## HISTORY TO HYSTERIA: FELLINI'S *CASANOVA* MEETS BAUDRILLARD

*Dale Bradley*

*Identity is untenable: it is death, since it fails to inscribe its own death.*

Jean Baudrillard<sup>1</sup>

The untenability of identity is the nucleus around which Fellini's *Casanova* orbits. There is no subject, history or myth in this film, there is only simulation. In addressing this movie we will be informed by the following guideposts: 1. The presence of the simulacrum means the absence of history and a subsequent ungrounding of any real referents for the subject. 2. The only avenue left for the subject who desires the affirmation of its being is the "hysteric production" of signs of the real: the creation of hyperreal effects and, in essence, a hyperreal subject. 3. Hysteric production takes the form of a search for referentiality that can only end in failure because the object of the search is a phantom reality created from the subject's desire for the real.

Though Baudrillard's conception of the simulacrum will prove crucial to our consideration of Fellini's *Casanova*, we will not simply employ the former to explain the latter. Rather, we will play one off against the other. More precisely, we will play the figure of Casanova through the simulacrum in order to write a critical third text out of the two (Baudrillard, Fellini) before us.

History to Simulation: Evolution and Disarticulation

Central to our discussion is Baudrillard's simulation-related notion of "the structural law of value" — a "law" which evolves from and seeks to replace its two antecedents: the natural and the commodity laws of value. Also important is the *relationship* of these three laws, which form what Baudrillard terms the "Three Orders of Simulation": the *counterfeit*, *production*, then *simulation*.<sup>2</sup> It is the third order that primarily interests us, with the *progression* of the various simulacra being particularly important for several reasons. 1. The progression from a natural to a structural law of value can serve as a model for a similar movement from history to simulation via myth. 2. Simulation today, severed as it is from the real and history, has nevertheless built upon the ruins of its predecessors. Simulation thus has to be understood as having important (though admittedly tenuous and tangential) connections to history and, in particular, with myth. 3. The order of simulation makes clear the fact that history is lost to simulation. The disarticulation of the real and its simulation is foregrounded and the way is cleared for the creation of hyperreal effects.

The movement from history to simulation takes place through a series of evolutionary disarticulations. In Fellini's *Casanova* the protagonist is decidedly not represented as an historical figure. Fellini himself describes his film as "a film on nothingness: there is no ideology, sensation, feeling; there are no emotions of even an aesthetic character; there is especially no eighteenth century and, consequently, no historical point of view of a historical-critical or sociological nature".<sup>3</sup> Here, in one grand statement, Fellini has dismissed Casanova from the burden of representing history in any manner whatsoever. This dismissal moves Casanova into the realm of the mythic:

(I)t is clear why (Casanova) has become a myth, because he is a nothingness, a universality without meaning ... a complete lack of individuality, the indeterminate — that's it. In the indeterminate, there always resides a great fascination, because the indeterminate is the great collectivity that gathers everything together, confirms everything, exalts everything, breaks up everything in a system of coercive and unalterable exchange.<sup>4</sup>

Fellini's conception of Casanova's mythic status moves Casanova beyond myth and into simulation. The "system of coercive and unalterable exchange" that he mentions is what we have earlier encountered under the guise of the structural law of value. Myth cannot be said to be indeterminate or a nothingness because it has specific meanings for the culture that produces it and can only exist for as long as it is usable by that culture. Myth also depends on history for its generation (and society for its "use value" and perpetuation) whereas simulation has no need of history. Barthes has this to say on myth and its relation to history:

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(O)ne can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things.<sup>5</sup>

The connection (and evolution) of myth to history is clear and what Fellini is discussing should not be considered to be myth but simulation.

It seems appropriate here to clarify the evolution of history to myth to simulation by means of a chart.

### The Three Orders of Simulation (after Baudrillard)

Order of Simulation	Dominant Scheme	Law of Value	Representational Manifestations
<i>First</i>	<i>Counterfeit</i>	<i>Natural</i>	<i>History</i>
<i>Second</i>	<i>Production</i>	<i>Commodity</i>	<i>Myth</i>
<i>Third</i>	<i>Simulation</i>	<i>Structural</i>	<i>Hyperreal</i>

The fourth column is our addition and is titled as it is in order to emphasize the fact that it deals with modes of representation as they occur within each particular phase of simulation. For example, the dominant form of representation in the third order of simulation is the creation of the hyperreal. This must be distinguished from the first and second order's representational manifestations, which are, respectively, history and myth. The fourth column proposes that there are differing modes of representation in the various orders of the simulacra. These varying modes should not be taken as absolutes, but are useful if considered as dominant within their particular order of simulation. Reading the chart horizontally yields a "syntagmatic" view of a particular order of simulation. The first order takes on an historic discursive form by way of the counterfeit of seemingly natural events. The second order of simulation is marked by the production, by way of "commodification", of mythic discourses. Finally, and of greatest interest to us, the third order of simulation's structural orientation begets a discourse that is hyperreal. Because the fourth column is intended to indicate modes of representation the term "hyperreal" is preferable to "simulation". It is important, however, to note that simulation may also be used in reference to the discourses that the third order of simulation produces. Hyperreality can be thought of as a result of a simulational world and as such it becomes a specific subset of it.

The difference between simulation and hyperreality is to be found in their differing focus in relation to signs and reality: where simulation is concerned with reference, hyperreality is concerned with representation. We have changed the orientation of simulation and hyperreality here from states of being or situations into means by which to understand those states

of being. It is for this reason that we may speak of simulation as having a "concern" or "focus". It is, of course, ourselves that do the focusing by way of employing simulation and hyperreality as critical tools. Nevertheless, it is along the aforementioned lines that the division of hyperrealism and simulation will be drawn.

Reading the chart vertically reveals its "paradigmatic" dimension, which is to say, its evolutionary connections. What concerns us here is our addition to Baudrillard's scheme; that of the movement from history to simulation via myth. As Barthes noted, myth is founded upon history. In our scheme it could be said that myth "evolves" from history and that the logical extrapolation is that simulation (in the form of hyperreal representations) evolves from myth. Baudrillard echoes this in a discussion of the order of simulation when he says; "each configuration of value is resumed by the following in a higher code of simulation. And each phase of value integrates into its own apparatus the anterior apparatus as a phantom reference, a puppet or simulation reference".<sup>6</sup>

Fellini's *Casanova* is a simulational representation precisely because it begins with the mythic and not with the historic. Myth has a certain value as a commodity for society because it is traded amongst its members through various discourses. Simulation, on the other hand, is not placed under this controlling structure of exchange. Instead, it becomes a controlling structure itself for the culture that has entered into the age of the hyperreal. The hyperreal's "phantom reference" is myth; "history" is the myth that preceded *it*. At this stage myth, as a vessel of abstract cultural values, becomes reality — and the "phantom reference" for the hyperreal. It is exploded into self-parody as it is broken down and freely exchanged in the simulacrum. Its ties to history are severed and with the loss of those ties the cultural value that myth once (supposedly) had is also lost.

Accordingly, the figure of Casanova ceases to be historic and his mythic status becomes ridiculous and self-effacing. Fellini can call Casanova both a nothingness and a universality because, as a figure, Casanova is an absence given presence through a process of being "written". Casanova's "nothingness" is a result of his hyperreality, his existence only as sign. His "universality" arises from the infinite associations that may arise from his sign quality. Casanova is universal insofar as he is open to exchange within the simulacrum.

### Semantic Cancellation: Subject and Hysteric Production

#### *Identity and Cancellation*

The question now raised is how the subject (represented for us ultimately by Casanova) seeks identity under such conditions. With history lost and the myths produced from that history exploded, the simulacrum becomes the territory of human action, replacing the lost territory of the real. Identity becomes a process by which the subject creates a sign-construct that

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is intended to be identical with that subject. Identity becomes the loss of one's territory of subjectivity and its replacement as a place in the simulational map. Identity is thus sought in the association of the body with an identical, hyperreal version of the subject in the simulacrum.

Under these circumstances, identity indeed becomes untenable. For further insight on the matter, we again turn to Baudrillard. Here, he is discussing systems of power within the simulacrum, but his statements may be read as a discussion of the individual. (In our scheme the individual is a system seeking self-definition):

Any system approaching perfect operationality is approaching its own death. When the system declares: "A is A" or "two and two make four," it simultaneously arrives at the point of complete power and total ridicule — in other words, of probable and immediate subversion. At this point it takes only a straw to collapse the whole system.<sup>7</sup>

The process of identity-definition (the ability to state that a group of signs is synonymous with an existent being) is thus subverted by the simulacrum. The point at which the identity process aims is, in fact, also the point at which identity breaks down ( $A = A$ ). Because there can be no assured reference to reality in the simulacrum the assertion that a grouping of signs (under the name of identity) is directly related to some individual who exists in the real world simply cannot be made. In actuality these attempts merely serve to point out the construction of identity from signs and signs alone. Arthur Kroker picks up on this and describes it in this manner:

In Baudrillard's world, we are in flight through a vast, social apparatus which has, as its principle of motion, an inner, semiological transformation of every particle of experience — bodies, labour, power, money, speech — through an empty cycle of abstract, symbolic exchanges .... The rules surrounding the "cycle of liquidation" at the heart of power and the sign remain constant: a fantastic "semantic cancellation" at the centre of the exchange process; a relentless "semiological reduction" of experience to the tautology of binary language; the "satellisation of the real"; an "inner semiurgy" which works to impose symbols without original referents; the sovereignty of the "structural law of value".<sup>8</sup>

The key here is the term "semantic cancellation" for it embodies the duplicitous nature of the sign in relation to identity. Signs replace reality while representing it and thus is the original referent effaced. Identity in the simulacrum is thus "the liquidation of experience by the empty language of the sign".<sup>9</sup> Identity becomes the mere simulation of experience.

*Hysteria and Production*

Here we should recall Baudrillard's assertion that the hyperreal "becomes reality for its own sake, the fetishism of the lost object — no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination".<sup>10</sup> The lost object of fetishism in the simulacrum is the real, and its ritual extermination takes the form of its definition; the resulting semantic cancellation inherent in stating that  $A = A$ . Similarly, the subject assembles its identical self in signs in the hope that these signs represent and refer to reality. However, with the real lost, the inability to access the real merely begets an increase in the attempts to define, and hence, possess it. Baudrillard: "whence the characteristic hysteria of our time: the hysteria of production and overproduction of the real...What society seeks through production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes it".<sup>11</sup> The production of meaning is purely circular as one definition leads to another and so on. Production becomes a kind of continual defense against collapsing  $A = A$  systems, a continual deferral of the inevitable realization of the nothingness at the centre of such systems. The systems referred to can be either power systems (i.e. the state) or personal (the subject and identity). The point is that sign production is simply that: the production of signs.

This is the world envisaged in Fellini's *Casanova*. It is a world wherein Casanova finds only chaos and non-meaning and enters into the hysteric production of a binding narrative. His memoir/narration is a method by which to create an identical/identity Casanova out of signs.

It is perhaps only here that history has any real meaning in the film. History is significant only insofar as it provides for Fellini the opportunity to obviate and ridicule hysteric production. Casanova, as an eighteenth century figure, comes to represent the Enlightenment and the beginnings of the rationalist project. Simulation, however, is the end of that project. No longer is it plausible to believe in the mighty power of the mind to discern eternal truths or fundamental laws upon which societies may be run. Casanova is thus awash in the simulacrum, caught by the undertow of hyperrealism and unable to free himself.

*Spectacle: Venus and Venice*

The opening sequence presents, at the height of communal celebration, an unsuccessful attempt to raise the bust of Venus from the canals of Venice. The first images following the credits introduce us to the spectacle of simulated existence. Venice is not presented as history but as spectacle. Everywhere there are masks, humanity is effaced in favour of aestheticized representation. The individual is invisible in the sea of spectacle and similarity/repetition. It is not until the end of this sequence that we discover Casanova is also in the crowd. He alone is plucked out and individuated from the mass. In a sense, we already know the "identity" of this man since history and myth have often presented it to us. On the other hand, the

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film is about to reveal that the identity we know as "Casanova" is no more than a sign and that the subject to which it ostensibly refers (Giacomo Girolamo Casanova, b. 1725 — d.1778) is completely lost to us.

It is here that Casanova's narrative begins. Indeed, it is his narrative that brings Casanova forth. From now on we will only experience Casanova insofar as he exists as memoir (a point to be discussed in more depth shortly).

We must note here the connection between Casanova's emergence from the simulacrous world and the failed raising of the statue. The statue is lifted, and a poet reads aloud: "Venice, our Queen! Venus, our Queen!". Venus, goddess of love is immediately allied with the spectacle of Venice. The bust itself is an enormous crowned head of a woman. Sexuality, spectacle and art are conflated. This is the beginning of hysteric production.

Moreover as "Queen" the statue represents authority — initiating a quest for *originating* power and legitimation. Moreover, the bust is that of a woman, aligning women with origin. This introduces a crucial paradox within the film. Woman is, on the one hand, presentable only in aestheticized form (only as representation). Yet woman is not a subject within a simulacrum (as Casanova is) but representative of the unattainable goal of the real. Woman then = myth which, from the perspective of the simulation is (all that's left of) the real. The particular choice of Venus (goddess of love) as mother indicates that all women will serve as mother/origin figures — transforming Casanova's sexual exploits into a parable of a search for origins. The failure to raise the statue sets up the futility of the search for origin. Reality (even the reality of myth) remains inaccessible, submerged in the depths of simulation.

The fact that the bust is a work of art combines with its role as embodiment of origins to turn art itself into a means of accessing origins, a path to the real. (This, of course, is "self-denying" in that art is a creation of signs, making the "reality" accessed through artistic production itself no more than an aesthetic creation.) Art is a construction and surfacing of the real out of the glassy pool of possibilities. However, with the failure of the art work to "materialize," art (and representation in general) is denied its referentiality and instead is seen to be simulational.

The bust represents nothing. As the film progresses we will find no Queen, no origin, no real. The bust refers to nothing but itself and the desire of its producers to have icons of the real. Its subsequent raising thus becomes a raising of the mythic to the real. This all takes place within the space of spectacle. The entire action is an hysteric attempt to ground meaning, to find a centre for the discourses of art and sexuality, to establish the possibility of reference by imposing meaning on symbol.

All that emerges from the water before the bust is submerged are its eyes. Directed outward, the gaze of the statue reflects its own simulational being. There is nothing behind the eyes, no reality waiting to be accessed, no mystic authority to condemn or condone the festival's participants.

There is only the empty gaze of a sign construct, the singular nothingness of an attempted  $A=A$  equation.

Kroker, in a discussion on Magritte's painting *The False Mirror*, has this to say about the eye:

In the symbology of the disembodied eye, a mirroring-effect is in progress in which the *terms* of the relation (signifier and signified, but also all of the antinomies across the table of classical discourse) refract back and forth as image and counter-image in the endless curvature of a tautology.<sup>12</sup>

The eyes of the statue are thus simple reflections of the spectacle that produced them. There is no real to be accessed behind the gaze because all that lies behind those eyes is the reflected spectacle of their production. There is no seeing beyond the simulacrum, everything is contained within its systems of free exchange. Although the loss of the statue at first indicates a concomitant loss of the possibility of origin-access, it is really no loss at all. The loss of the real has already occurred since the entire episode takes place within the simulational world of spectacle. The loss of the statue simply means that one particular attempt at meaning production has been lost. The rest of the film is essentially a series of repetitions of this sequence: the desire for origins, the transfer of that desire onto an image of woman (often very maternal) and the subsequent loss of that image. The Giantess, for instance, is discovered at water's edge as Casanova is readying himself for suicide within the waters of simulation and the cycle of desire and denial is repeated.

The final images of the film place Casanova on ice. The film finally achieves the ultimate representation of the "surficial" nature of simulation, the final implosion of A into A. Access even to the unlimited play of signs is denied since it is locked beneath the ice. Casanova is permanently preserved in the perfectly cold and static world of a simulational moment. Time is lost because there is no history, and Casanova exists as pure sign. He is no longer even a subject within a simulacrum, but has attained the status of sign itself. He is simply a term awaiting combination or exchange; he is a word. No longer Casanova, he has become effaced in the creation of the identity-giving, identical sign-construct, "Casanova".

### *The Subject of Narration*

There is another sense in which the image or concept of the eye operates in Fellini's *Casanova*. Fellini says of the film that there is a "total absence of everything ... there are only forms that are outlined in masses, perspectives articulated in a frigid and hysterical repetition".<sup>13</sup> This supports much of what has been observed, especially with regard to hysteric production. The important thing here is that Fellini is discussing the text's own production, rather than the world it represents. His statement makes it clear that the film is to be perceived as spectacle rather than history or

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psychological exploration. The film is presented as a narrative creation of the figure of Casanova. This statement has two meanings. First it can be understood to mean that the film is a story about Casanova by Casanova himself. This is, to some extent, true if we consider that the film is ostensibly based upon Casanova's memoirs. Second, it says that Casanova is a nothing that is, somehow, "narrativized" into existence. Casanova is no more than the creation of the narrative, and the narrative thus reflects back on itself as a kind of documentation of its own creative process. We can think of the Venus/Venice statue here and apply it to the film itself: the film is akin to the statue, a construct that holds no meaning beyond the reflection of its own production.

Throughout the film the only connecting thread between sequences is Casanova's "autobiographical" narration of events. Perhaps the most significant example is his escape from a Venetian prison. In lieu of an actual escape we are presented only with Casanova's narration of it. (We see him emerging through the roof of the prison, but we are not told how he got free of his jailers.) It is, in short, a simulated escape,<sup>14</sup> which, like so much else in the film, is "performed" in the theatrical rather than existential sense, thus condensing Casanova, as both narrator and protagonist, into the single term of performer. Moreover, the collapse of all event into narration means that Casanova's story is not *about* him, it *is* him.

In fact, Fellini's (and Casanova's) use of voice-over narration becomes the ultimate storytelling technique in the representation of simulated identity. Casanova becomes a figure of desire rather than of history: the desire of the narrator to be known and admired as "Casanova." A again becomes A as Casanova creates an identity out of signs (the narrative itself), then becomes identical with it.

The culmination of this process is Casanova's discovery, late in the film, of his image plastered by feces to a wall in the latrine of Waldenstein castle. At last Casanova has an image to point to of himself. (He calls it a "striking likeness" and becomes momentarily mesmerized by it.) He has become sufficiently "identical" that he can become a model for representation. More than that, he can enjoy endless reduplication and distribution (as can the copies of his memoirs and, in fact, Fellini's film). He has passed beyond the necessity of self-definition, hence he has passed beyond the need for narration. He can bring his story to a close and die (same thing).

Fellini captures much of this through a shot in which Casanova, walking away from the portrait, creates a shadow which covers it. This is a moment of complete reversibility. The image puts a face on the shadow and the shadow gives a body to the face. Both image and shadow are, however, incorporeal and as such point to the ghostly existence of Casanova. He becomes the portrait of a shadow, or as Fellini would describe it, "the indeterminate". This single shot gives us all of Casanova without giving us any of him and it is a crucial visual moment in which  $A=A$ .

*The Social Spectacle*

In the simulacrum there exists no higher authority that can confer its acceptance/power upon Casanova. Since everything exists in a free exchange of signs, power systems can only remain intact so long as they are recognized and supported by sycophants like Casanova. Every court Casanova visits is a chaotic spectacle wherein power and authority are absent and resurrected only through Casanova's dependency. The Pope is a childish, leering, buffoon who commands little obeisance — and then only through his position and the signs that surround it. The final authority figure, the Duke of Waldenstein, is, significantly, away on a trip.

Casanova's sycophancy is a direct result of his need for identity and for confirmation by a power that exists outside the simulacrum. Only such an originary power could enforce reference. Only something beyond the unlimited play of signs could definitively state that A does indeed equal A. Because there is no such authority Casanova's desire for real identity can never be affirmed, and the fear of "semantic cancellation" begets the hysteric and endless production of systems of absent power.

Conclusion

As implied earlier, Fellini's *Casanova* ends with a death. What dies in fact are the vestiges of the mythic incarnation of Casanova. (Historically, Casanova was dead from the outset, replaced with a mythic stand-in.) At the end of the film this mythic version also dies, affirming the the film's operation in the mode not of myth but of simulation. The voice-over ends here and we see Casanova's eyes, in extreme close-up. They recall the statue's eyes from the opening scene inasmuch as we may sense something behind them. But what it might be is unclear since Fellini has denied us any knowledge of Casanova as anything but sign throughout the film. We may impute terror, frustration, illness but these remain conjectures only. His physical death is pure hypothesis, pure sign, the ultimate glorification of himself as tragic hero/immortal. His narrative demands this sort of ending in order to complete the A=A process. This would be the ending of a typical myth-generating narrative, and could be taken as such, unless we consider that Casanova has already died the death of an erased referent.

If we interpret this scene in this manner then the concluding scene on the frozen canal becomes highly significant. Casanova is positioned now to be handed down through history as sign, and as such, he exists only in the rarefied atmosphere of the linguistic signifier. He looks partially as he did at the film's beginning. His youth is restored, but he now has the taut plasticity of a waxen image, a perfected representation. Authority, in the form of the Pope, finally confers its blessing upon him and he enters the illusory world of power (illusory because it too exists and is engendered only by the *signs* of power and obedience to those signs). He is reunited with his love: the mechanical doll who perfectly symbolizes the

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mechanized and masturbatory sexuality of the simulacrum. Most important, however, is the presence of his mother. Her appearance completes the search for origins that guides the film.

The "real" origin, however, is the sign itself and, more specifically, the sign of Casanova. The film loops back on itself and the end becomes the pre-condition for the beginning. Casanova's establishment as pure sign is a necessary condition for the functioning of all that has preceded it. The final scene brings all the major elements of the film together (origin, authority, individual, sign, sexuality) in one final act of simulation; the simulated dream. This scene can be read in at least two ways: 1) as the afterlife of a dead referent (Casanova as subject) who is reborn as sign (the hyperreal Casanova); or 2) as the final questing dream of Casanova who, on the brink of death, imagines the culmination of all of his desires to be the establishment and validation of his own hyperreal identity. Both interpretations are rich in implication but the significance of each is exactly the same. Either way one looks at it, Casanova remains a hyperreal subject condemned to semantic cancellation.<sup>15</sup>

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### Notes

1. Jean Baudrillard, "The Structural Law of Value and the Order of the Simulacra", trans. Charles Levin in *The Structural Allegory: Reconstructive Encounters With the New French Thought*, ed. John Fekete (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) p. 58.
2. "The Structural Law of Value," p. 61.
3. Aldo Tassone, "Casanova: An Interview with Federico Fellini", in *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) p. 28.
4. Tassone, p. 30.
5. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin Books, 1985), p. 110.
6. "The Structural Law of Value," p. 56.
7. "The Structural Law of Value," p. 58.
8. Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 123.
9. Kroker/Cook, p. 123.
10. "The Structural Law of Value," p. 70.
11. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 44.
12. Kroker/Cook, p. 81.
13. Tassone, p. 28.
14. This is particularly ironic since Casanova's escape apparently has some verifiable basis in fact, unlike most everything else in Fellini's reconstruction of Casanova's memoirs.
15. My thanks to Frank Burke for his editorial assistance.

## FOR A CANADIAN PHILOSOPHY: GEORGE GRANT

*Ian Angus*

On September 27, 1988, George Grant died, bringing to an end an iconoclastic intellectual career engaged with national and international political events of the last fifty years. His defence of Canada's membership in the British Empire as a buttress against the U.S., his famous lament for the defeat of John Diefenbaker's Conservative government, his opposition to the Vietnam War, his positive response to the independence movement in Quebec, his opposition to the testing of the Cruise missile — time after time he met the challenge of speaking to the central political currents that have formed the country. For this he was marginalized by the intellectual establishment in Canada. In particular, the guardians of the title "philosopher" refused him the hard-earned recognition of his original contribution to the creation of a truly Canadian philosophy.

I first met George Grant in 1972 when he gave a lecture at the University of Waterloo on "Ideology." At that time students were well aware of the dismal failure of almost all of our professors to address Vietnam and Canadian complicity in the war, which was the central issue facing us at the time. Many further concerns circled out from this centre — the opposition of the Western governments to self-determination by colonized people in Africa and Asia, the obedient kow-towing of successive Canadian governments to American pressure, the vast inequalities of wealth and power existing within relatively affluent societies, and the key role of universities in providing apologies for this system and technical improvements to sustain it. Only a miniscule proportion of Canada's so-called intellectuals

## GEORGE GRANT

would even discuss these issues, let alone help provide us with the tools we needed to come to some understanding of the situation and act on it.

That evening George Grant spoke of the colonization of Canadian universities by American professors and their liberal ideology and of the role of so-called value-free social science in maintaining order in an unjust society. Most important for us, he connected this general analysis to the horror of Vietnam and the truth it bespoke of the imperialist drive of the American empire. He was willing to call this empire "capitalist," as we insisted, but he also called it "technological." We were less sure of this word, though it did seem to clarify the way in which recent technological advancements were used for destruction, rather than for meeting human needs. To our surprise, we had found a conservative who felt keenly the public responsibility of the philosophical calling, who spoke both passionately and analytically of our subordinate position in Canada, and of the global consequences of the American empire.

The lecture ended with a discussion of whether conservatives and socialists had more in common than either had with the liberal establishment. I didn't realize it then, but this dialogue cut to the root of what is most distinctive in Canadian politics — the centrality of community, ethnicity, and history as against the liberal focus on individuals and their interests.

Grant was always at the centre of discussions like this. The "Red Tory" appellation, though it was used widely and loosely later, emerged from his example. How many other conservatives, either then or today, would address these radical questions about contemporary society? His conservatism was more like the conservationism of the ecology movement than the Conservative Party. As Grant said, like the liberals, they have bought into the ideology of profit and progress. In the end, Grant thought himself beyond conservatism too. During his later years he described his goal as "simply to think what we are doing." But the beacon of his philosophical formulations were always vivified by his passionate concern for the good life as it could be lived here and now.

What better description of a philosopher? But there have been many who did not think so. In a characteristic gesture, David Gauthier, then (1979) Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Toronto, reviewed a volume of essays on Grant entitled *George Grant in Process* for the Bulletin of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. He outlined the disparity between professional philosophers who have chosen to concentrate on the tools of thought (such as logical or linguistic analysis, or on the methods of scientific research) and those, like Grant, who have directed themselves to the real issues posed by living. Gauthier concluded that Grant avoided the confrontation of his views with the methods of current philosophical analysis, that he was unknown by such professional philosophers, and that, therefore, he could not be Canada's foremost political philosopher. As he said, "If he will not speak with the

current philosophical tongue, then they will not listen to his lamentation.” This quasi-official rejection, the kind of view that has expelled and persecuted genuine philosophical thinking for decades in this country, states that because Grant does not talk to them he is not a philosopher. Thus, the basic criterion for a philosopher is the holding of a position in a university philosophy department — not only a positivistic, but a circular and self-serving, definition. No wonder Grant chose to direct his energies elsewhere! That our greatest philosopher has been treated this way is bad enough, that this situation continues to haunt successive generations of Canadians who have attempted to find a philosophical articulation for the politics and history of Canada is inexcusable.

When I began teaching in the Department of Communication at Simon Fraser University in 1981, I had all my students in communication theory read Grant. In lectures there was no difficulty in getting across. They all knew that Grant was saying something important and that it went to the heart of what this country is. Certainly they wanted clarification of what was said and why. Certainly they wanted to argue with him and to bring their experience to bear on his formulations. This is as it should be — each generation contributing to the dialogue that forges our idea of ourselves. But not for a minute did they doubt his honesty, his clarity and boldness, his grasp of some part of the truth. While the establishment apologists marginalized Grant, it was possible to speak over their heads to students and others who are engaged with passionate thinking of this country and their place in its future.

In Canadian Studies, on the other hand, Grant was lionized. In a sense, his position was a justification of their existence. Yet the forces pushing university and intellectual life to conformity and self-satisfaction are alive and well there too. Grant's presence was always unsettling. At a Canadian Studies after-dinner speech at the Learned's in Halifax (1982), Grant addressed the question of what it meant to study ourselves. He quoted Heidegger to the effect that the modern conception of knowledge involves “summoning forth to give its reasons.” Bowing to those from outside, mostly the U.S., he acknowledged that others could summon us forth and demand our reasons, but argued that we would not do well to look at ourselves that way. Unlike his writing, which begins with a sure and clear statement of an issue, his speaking voice began slowly, tentatively, clearing a common ground. It gathered direction and conviction, and thundered to a paradoxical conclusion. “My study of Rousseau is a Canadian study.” Some were amazed, some outraged, and some carry with them still such characteristic Grantian sayings that have helped in forging intellectual direction and in gathering strength.

Grant was four-square against parochialism. He meant: Take up the task to think Canada, put your questions to the past and the future, and put them to the best thinkers. Without their help in bringing our national, bi-national, multi-national, experience to philosophical articulation, we will

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remain a backwater, and will deserve to be so. Argue with Rousseau; argue with Plato; through this dialogue we will make Canadian philosophy.

With his death, there will come a pressure for canonization. He will be respected and quoted, probably at the cost of being read and criticized, which is what every philosopher wants. Let us not forget that George Grant was only able to begin to formulate Canadian philosophy by going outside the canons, by disturbing the boundaries between disciplines and the boundaries between thought and life. The tradition of philosophical questioning that forges a national tradition is yet to be accomplished in Canada. Grant began that doing, which will take generations to complete. The future will memorialize him, the past has ignored him, the present needs to continue the dialogue with him.

Let us press against the boundaries, trudge into the wilderness, risk snow-blindness, and bring the bush to thought. That is our solidarity with George Grant — our needing, remembering, and questioning the George Grant trail, some markers as we go our own way. Let them have their chairs of philosophy, their self-congratulation in stuffy rooms. There are many of us who will not forget George Grant.

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## JUSTICE IN THE THOUGHT OF GEORGE GRANT

*Geoffrey R. Martin*

George Grant is undoubtedly Canada's most provocative and probably most misunderstood thinker. Compared to other philosophers, his work is widely known among non-specialists largely because he considered his thought a public matter and went out of his way to deliver it to large numbers via radio talks and public addresses. Partly due to these efforts, Grant has more enemies than friends, at least among liberals and progressives. The essence of the liberal critique is that Grant is merely a nostalgic, tire-some remnant of a traditional class that has been by-passed by progress and has not reconciled itself to the better life that now exists.<sup>1</sup> For example, John W. Holmes, the dean of Canada's "Middle Power" diplomatic corps, says of Grant: "Nostalgia is seductive. The Grantian vision of our bucolic Canadian paradise lost is somewhat reminiscent of the lament of the Reaganites for the world of Booth Tarkington and the Land of Oz."<sup>2</sup> For Roland Puccetti, Grant is a leading figure in the "Mausoleum," rather than the "Searchlight" tradition, of philosophy because he rejects

just about everything that has been done by philosophers since the time of Bacon and Descartes. It is all intellectual heresy, a corruption of the Good and the True: saving exceptions being the historical turning back to and thus partial rejuvenation of Ancient Verities found in Hegel and Nietzsche.<sup>3</sup>

These sentiments represent the increasing reaction to Grant in the late 1980s.

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Many observers of the public scene, like Robert S. McElvaine,<sup>4</sup> are speaking openly of the fact that North America, and the West more generally, is going through a political transformation, away from the "conservatism" of the last twenty years, towards a new kind of "progressivism" that is not yet fully developed or manifested. Evidence of this change may be seen in the declining repute of Reagan-style conservatism in North American politics and the rise of an admittedly twisted liberalism, all part of what Michael Weinstein has called "state-sponsored community."<sup>5</sup> The health authorities of Sweden propose to set up an "AIDS colony" on an island near Stockholm, for example, to "protect" the healthy population, and so far they have met surprisingly little public resistance.<sup>6</sup> Measures like this — the use of the "positive" state in the "public interest" — are likely to be more common in the coming years as the population becomes accustomed to state leadership and initiative in the interests of "justice."

In this new environment it will be easier for people to slur and misrepresent thinkers like Grant, both in writing and conversation, with charges of nostalgia and antiquarianism. Grant's thought and its influence among thoughtful people is not secure and cannot be taken for granted because it already appears to many to be more and more irrelevant as time passes. Despite this, we are seeing few efforts to recover and defend the truth in Grant. Much of the current criticism of Grant's thought is valuable in itself but focusses rather narrowly on certain aspects like technology, or his ethics and nationalism.<sup>7</sup> He published his first article over forty years ago and yet little has been done to try to understand his work as a whole. Joan O'Donovan comes closest to this, yet even her analysis does not answer the question of how the publications of the 1970s and 1980s fit in with his earlier work.<sup>8</sup>

It is therefore the goal of this essay to begin the recovery outlined above by examining both the continuity and the flux in Grant's thought through the identification of a single theme around which the diversity of his thought clusters. In this essay I argue that in his latest book, *Technology and Justice*, Grant has returned full-circle: in the 1940s and 1950s his public writing displayed certainty based on Kantian liberalism with a relatively benign view of modern life. In comparison to his critique of modernity made in the 1960s and 1970s, Grant now expresses total certainty once again, based on "God as Goodness," and also more readily identifies the positive aspects of modernity.

As we will see, George Grant's chief occupation during his forty years of scholarship has not been negative or destructive, nor merely the act of tearing down what exists while failing to offer "positive," "theoretically acceptable alternatives," as Ian Box has suggested.<sup>9</sup> Rather, it is my claim that much of his effort has been directed toward the positive reconstructing of society, consistent with a dominant sense of justice. One might suggest that almost any of Grant's major concepts, like "technology," "modernity," or "the Good," also provide a theme through which to un-

derstand the entirety of his efforts. The advantage of justice is that it is central to all of his writings, from 1944 until the present, and allows us to see the continuity and variation within his thought. Technology was not a major concern for Grant until the 1960s, and modernity and the Good were of little importance before 1950.

One more issue, that of method, must be resolved before I proceed. How can one best understand the essence of a thinker like Grant? First, the background of the thinker — his loyalist roots, for instance — must be considered, then his works, and influences, in the order of their composition. Ironically, the historicist Antonio Gramsci makes the strongest argument for this strategy. We should, he says, examine the catalogue of the thinker's works, "even those most easily overlooked, in chronological order, divided according to intrinsic criteria." In addition, the "[s]earch for the *Leitmotiv* [sic], for the rhythm of the thought as it develops, should be more important than that for single casual affirmations and isolated aphorisms."<sup>10</sup> It is toward an understanding of Grant's "leading theme" that this paper is devoted.

### Justice as "Proper Conservatism"

George Grant's scholarly activities began toward the end of the Second World War and focussed on the question of whether Canada was a "nation" and whether it should remain part of the British Commonwealth. In "Have We a Canadian Nation?" Grant answered yes, Canada was developing as a nation, and must seek out principles to organize the community around, for "unless we know why we exist, unless we know what we are trying to build here in Canada ... we will inevitably be shaped by the REPUBLIC," the United States.<sup>11</sup> Post-1783 British North America, in rejecting the American Revolution, was conservative in the sense that it had always sought to preserve order over the excesses of freedom found in the United States. For Grant, it was right and just that Canada should become a strong independent nation. In *The Empire: Yes or No?*, Grant clearly believes that postwar justice will be served by a strong British Empire, a "third force" that will prevent U.S./U.S.S.R. dominance of the new international organization and of the postwar world.<sup>12</sup>

Even in 1944, justice, as the mediator between inward life and outward existence, and the state as the individual writ large, were present in Grant's thought. Canada must strengthen its national existence, and this "strength can only come from within ourselves.... Only if we can build up within ourselves a way of life that justifies our existence will we continue to exist."<sup>13</sup> Justice in the inward life and in the outward existence would continue to be an important part of Grant's thought. In fact, as we will see, at different points in his life one or the other of these two elements is given a dominant role in his writing.

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This early work laid the foundations for the first definition of justice in Grant's thought, which can be referred to as "proper conservatism" or Kantian liberalism. After his return from Britain in the late 1940s, Oxford doctorate in hand, Grant turned his attention to what he at first identified as the conflict between the classical belief in the transcendent and the modern belief that the explanation and end of life is found in the world. During this period, which spanned the 1950s until the publication of his first major work, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (1959), Grant conceived of justice as a sort of "proper conservatism" (his own phrase) which required that people try to reconcile Natural Law with modern progress.<sup>14</sup> As we will see, the terms which characterize Grant's thought at that time, especially in *Philosophy*, were moral law, freedom, progress, and self-legislation. *Philosophy* concluded this approach to justice, which was developed in numerous articles during the 1950s.

In 1956, for example, Grant put forward this early conception of justice in an article entitled "The Uses of Freedom: A word and our world." The concept of freedom, he said, was in a state of confusion because thinkers from vastly different perspectives used "freedom" very differently, and this confusion worked "against the good life."<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, freedom had a different meaning for classicists, who accept some form of transcendence, than for the modern who believed that the world holds the key to both the meaning and the method of human life. "And as most educated people, consciously or unconsciously, have been divided within themselves by this conflict, their uses of the word 'freedom' are a product of their own division" ("Freedom," 516). He attributed the decline of the classical and the rise of the modern to the particular circumstances of Protestant religion (Puritanism in North America), which "brought into the western world a fresh interest in action through its intense desire to shape the world to God's purposes" ("Freedom," 519), which clearly predominated over the "spiritual inwardness" generally associated with Puritanism. Like *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, "The Uses of Freedom" was a pre-Vatican II work, and Grant did not anticipate that the Roman Catholic Church would further abandon Natural Law in the face of modernity. So during the 1950s there was a conflict within people between the classical and the modern account of life, and Grant saw that the trend of the disappearance of inwardness/contemplation/limit, in favour of hedonism/freedom, had to be arrested.

"The view of freedom appears most clearly in a negative form, that is in the dying out on this continent of personal relations, art, philosophy and prayer" ("Freedom," 524). In each of these cases, the growth of the "progressive spirit" led to the remaking of the world — manipulation — toward the realization of our latest desires. Humans inevitably became objectified because they were open to manipulation just like everything else. The rise of hedonism makes art only "an imaginative coating to existence rather than ... the recognition and statement of reality," and hence it can

never successfully compete with science as the society's "gate to reality" ("Freedom," 525-526). Importantly, at this stage Grant did not believe that the disease would necessarily be terminal. The history of the loss of all "reference to the transcendent" and the rise of "worldly reformism" must not simply be seen as a loss, he says, because "[o]ur continent in this century has had its great moments." Specifically, until recently the medical profession was a fine example of the best the human spirit had to offer, and there was good in the hope of the "liberal democratic faith," despite the fact that it undermined the transcendent. Nor can we know the extent of the debasement, because the verdict is not yet in on the efforts of the elite to revive transcendence. "The Uses of Freedom" ends in a particularly appropriate way, with the author offering a contingent prediction that "[a]s thought about our proper end disappears," the social elite will increasingly "pour" pleasure and perversion into the "vacuum." Remarkably, he concludes that "[h]ow God shall reconcile the world to Himself is not a matter we can comprehend."

If in 1956 Grant's early conception of "Justice as 'Proper Conservatism'" was still developing, by 1959 it had reached its height. In the United States edition, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* was appropriately subtitled "An Essay on the fabric of Western Culture and the need for a new moral philosophy." Grant's chief goal was to light at least part of the way to this new moral philosophy. The term "proper conservatism" comes from the concluding chapter, entitled "Law, Freedom and Progress," in which Grant tried to answer the key question: "How can we think out a conception of law which does not deny the truth of our freedom or the truth of progress?" (*Philosophy*, 98). His terminology had changed from previous years but the thrust was similar. Law, in this case, was the rule by which people lived, and was his main vehicle for discussing questions of justice. While Natural Law declined in influence in recent centuries, the "progressive spirit" became more influential, and since we must accept that both will now always exist, the problem is developing a law that can reconcile the two. Grant defined Natural Law as "the assertion that there is an order in the universe, and that right action for us human beings consists in attuning ourselves to that order" (*Philosophy*, 28), while the "progressive spirit" was the view that humans are the "makers of history, the makers of our own laws ... authentically free since nothing beyond us limits what we should do" (*Philosophy*, 42). The general goal of the book is to restore "moral philosophy" to its previous rigour, for recently it "has come to be associated with vague uplift" (*Philosophy*, v). The chief dilemma is that as the space program indicates, "[m]en may not long remain bound to the earth, but will they remain bound by anything in what they do?" (*Philosophy*, 98).

Looking at 1959, it is quite correct to conclude that we are surrounded by meaninglessness, and that contrary to Natural Law we cannot identify the order in the universe. The state of the world is synonymously a call

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to action to make it better, if we, like Grant, fall "on the side of law" and if we accept that there is a "meaning in existence" even in the midst of the disorder. Perhaps this affirmation is only "a matter of faith for me," but if we look at the world "[t]he need for an absolute moral law is evident, just when the difficulties of thinking such a law are also most evident." There is a disunion between the individual character, which arises from faith and intellectual power, and that which can only preserve its integrity by defending itself from modern thought, for "[t]hose who are touched by the modern world less and less maintain any sense of limit." Nevertheless we need to develop a new set of modern standards, which will only work if this new law "fully recognizes the freedom of the spirit" instead of seeming external to human will (*Philosophy*, 100-102). As Kant said, a law is moral only if it is freely obeyed, and so the new law for modern society must be a law that the free will follow willingly, though at the same time this law cannot pander to every whim.

Inevitably, there is an element of conservatism in this Kantian proposal because the law must restrain the progressive spirit from breaching the prescribed limits, since "the truth of conservatism is the truth of order and limit, both in social and personal life." However, it must be "proper conservatism" because conservatism as we know it does not address the problem of overcoming evil and in fact often requires that evils be perpetuated in the form of the rule of capital and the "right of the greedy to turn all activities into sources of personal gain." A proper conservatism would be "an order which gives form to persons, to families, to education, to worship, to politics, and to the economic system" (*Philosophy*, 108-109). It might seem odd that Kantian liberalism and "Proper Conservatism" are consistent, since liberal and conservative are supposed to be opposite to one another. The confusion is caused by the changing definitions of the two during the last two centuries. "Conservatism" is now an ideology of transformation where liberalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, exemplified by Adam Smith, once was. Elements of conservatism were found in the thought of classical liberals like Lord Acton because, like the early Grant, and unlike twentieth century liberals, they had a clear sense of limit and restraint to offset the expansiveness of freedom and democracy.

### Justice as Self-Determination

For George Grant the 1960s represented both a deepening of his analysis of the 1950s, culminating in his philosophical master-work of 1969, *Time as History*, and a shift back to the analysis of the Canadian situation, which culminated in his 1965 work *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*.<sup>16</sup> During this decade Grant moved from Halifax back to his native Ontario, and concurrently entered a phase in which his published writings displayed much greater distress toward the tendencies of

modern life. An examination of the evolution of Grant's conception of justice will reveal the importance of the concept of self-determination in Grant's complaint against the United States and, notably, the bulk of English Canada. The lament, the crying out "at the death or at the dying of something loved" (*Lament*, 2), was directed in this case at the final verdict that Canada had no future as a sovereign state. Again the concept of "the Good," which I suggested was connected to justice in "The Uses of Freedom," makes an appearance, not in explicit connection to life under Natural Law, but to the existence of a small "unimportant country." For Grant and many of his generation Canada was the only country they could claim allegiance to, and its sovereignty appeared to be the only prospect for justice in a world in which the "liberal homogeneous state" was spreading, outward, chiefly from the United States. The terminology in this period represented a shift away from the Kantian and toward the Hegelian, and from inwardness to outwardness.

The main difference between *Lament* and his previous scholarship lies in the level of analysis. In *Philosophy* Grant addressed himself mainly to the North American continent, urging the creation of a new moral system to represent a synthesis between Natural Law, represented by Canada, and the Progressive Spirit, represented by the United States. In the early 1960s, two things happened simultaneously. As his analysis of modernity deepened (later discussed with respect to his published work from 1967-69), his hope for the above continent-wide synthesis waned, just as he was hearing the death-rattle of a country in which such changes might otherwise have been manageable. By the early 1960s the struggle that Grant addressed was no longer within the individual but with a spirit in the world, the progressive spirit. John Diefenbaker represented the last gasp of the Canadian possibility, as a real, albeit junior, partner with the United States in leading the "noble" Western civilization.

For this reason *Lament* is full of references to both Canadian sovereignty and to the prospects for conservatism in the modern age, and these two are inextricably linked. "The impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada" (*Lament*, 68), though it is crucial to mention that conservatism no longer meant what it did in 1959. Conservatism now stands, ultimately, for any system of thought which tries to resist the age-of-progress steamroller. Hence, the conservatism which was distinguished from "proper conservatism" is now seen to be part of the overwhelming liberal majority. The Americans who call themselves conservatives, like Barry Goldwater, were really "old-fashioned" liberals, followers of John Locke, and this was increasingly true of Canada's newly-named "Progressive Conservative" party.<sup>17</sup> So what Grant called "proper conservatism" in 1959 was by 1965 anything, including socialism, that would prevent the Monster-to-the-South from swallowing the more traditional society to the north. Socialism typically meant the "use of the government to restrain greed in the name of social good .... In doing so, was it not appealing to the con-

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servative idea of social order against the liberal idea of freedom?" (*Lament*, 59).

In the 1950s achieving justice meant arriving, generally, at a new synthesis of Natural Law and the Progressive Spirit. Early in the 1960s, one of his foci became that of insuring that a people would have the possibility of resisting domination by the global liberal capitalist ideology emanating mainly from the United States. Shades of this concern would appear later in his opposition to the U.S. war in Vietnam, not only a bloody affair but also another struggle between the forces of empire and the forces of self-determination. The discussion of *Lament*, an important book in itself, is really only a preparation for a discussion of Grant's more important philosophical work of this decade, *Time as History*. In retrospect, *Lament* appears as a work of transition between a period in which Grant believed that a revival of Natural Law was possible, and the later period in which he diagnosed the full "darkness" of modernity. *Time as History*, inspired as it was by his reading of Leo Strauss and Jacques Ellul,<sup>18</sup> brought him into a full deconstruction of modernity.

### Justice as the Vanquished

The early 1960s was a time of transition for Grant, from hope about our public prospects to resignation, and from activism to greater understanding. For this reason, some of his essays written between 1960 and 1965 reflect the tension of the transition and have even warranted self-rebuttal.<sup>19</sup> In the case of "Religion and the State" (1963), upon its reprinting in his *Technology and Empire* (1968), the author decided to warn the reader of the defects of the effort. One of the two purposes of including the article in the volume, he says, was that it illustrated "the futility of conservatism as a theoretical standpoint in our era." To understand what the "technological society really is," we must understand that "to partake even dimly in the riches of Athens or Jerusalem should be to know that one is outside the public realm of the age of progress" (*Empire*, 43-4).

No doubt his realization that classical and modern thought were irreconcilable came partly from his examination of the Strauss-Kojève debate, an account of which is also found in the 1968 volume. In "Tyranny and Wisdom," Grant examines the debate between Leo Strauss and Alexander Kojève on their respective answers to the question of whether the movement toward the "universal and homogeneous state" posited by Hegel is good or not, and whether the classical or the modern provides a better understanding of and a more potent defence against tyranny. Drawing on *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Kojève argued that the universal and homogeneous state is the best social order for humanity. As Grant says, Strauss, drawing on Xenophon's *Hiero*, makes the opposite case on the basis on "an account of philosophy which Kojève does not accept," specifically that "political philosophy stands or falls according to its ability

to transcend history, i.e., by its ability to make statements about the best social order the truth of which is independent of changing historical epochs" (*Empire*, 91-92). From this we can see the source for Grant's movement from a concept of justice which emphasized self-determination to a concept which denied that public justice could exist in the fully modern world. In a way, for Grant the Strauss/Kojève debate symbolized the struggle between justice and modernity. The influence of Strauss on Grant meant that he now understood exactly why justice (traditionally-defined) and modernity were irreconcilable. Therefore, his thought in the 1960s delved into modernity and its roots, and diagnosed the disease, a task which he completed in 1969.

Between 1965 and 1969 Grant also read and took to heart the work of Jacques Ellul, on technology, Martin Heidegger, and especially Friedrich Nietzsche, which is apparent in the rest of the selections in *Technology and Empire*. In "Canadian Fate and Imperialism," "A Platitude," and "In Defence of North America," Grant made primary use of concepts like technology, will, and mastery, none of which had been accorded much before. This also represents a return to the inward life after the concern for the outer world represented by *Lament for a Nation*. At the root of his present problematic was the idea that "[t]he dominant tendency of the western world has been to divide history from nature and to consider history as dynamic and nature controllable as externality" (*Empire*, 72). This is the beginning of Grant's wonderful critique of technological life, for while these ideas are consistent in many ways with his work during the 1950s and early 1960s, by 1967 his critique was much more powerful, sweeping and far-reaching. The rise of the Western world has meant the rise of the will to mastery, of the view that the world is ours to shape, that history has conquered nature, leading to imperialism, the destruction of any limits to the dominance over nature, and an externalized view of humanity which makes it fit to be manipulated as an inanimate object.

"Technique is ourselves" because technology is no longer outside of us, but is inside, part of us, and has won the battle for dominance within us. We have now become *means* rather than ends, and are hence integral to technology because of the way we calculate, function, and work — these are the limits of our horizon. Beyond the "will to mastery" is Heidegger's "will to will," our present situation, where nothing matters beyond worship of human will. Our desires are directed to activities, like moon walks and mountain climbs, in which no other motive exists except the extension of our mastery. "As our liberal horizons fade in the winter of nihilism, and as the dominating amongst us see themselves within no horizon except their own creating of the world, the pure will to technology ... more and more gives sole content to ... creating" (*Empire*, 40). Justice has been vanquished because we have even lost the language through which we might understand the nature of the Good. "In human life there must always be place for love of the good" (*Empire*, 73), but we have "no words

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which cleave together and summon out of uncertainty the good of which we may sense the dispossession" (*Empire*, 139). The situation is so desperate that "we have lost our ability to judge whether an absence of something was in fact a deprivation" because "technological society has stripped us above all of the very systems of meaning which disclosed the highest purposes of man" (*Empire*, 137).

Grant's greatest philosophical work was yet to come. *Time as History*, a series of essays delivered as the 1969 Massey Lectures broadcast on CBC Radio, is Grant's full treatment of Nietzsche and the culmination of a decade's work.<sup>20</sup> For most thinkers *Time as History* could have been the crowning philosophical achievement, since it appears to be the culmination of a life's work. The themes of *Time as History* are familiar enough, but Grant had never before given them such coherent and exhaustive treatment. Terms like chance and uncertainty take on a new prominence. At the root is the idea that the English language has become the language of destiny and if we are to understand the direction in which humanity is moving we would do well to understand some of the chief concepts in the language, especially that of "history." History in the past has never meant what it means today. It means both the "study of the past" and "human existing." More importantly, we believe that we are "historical beings" who can solve the riddle of ourselves by examining our historical development. History was once separate from nature and for a long time we held on to Natural Law by believing that even as nature changed, Natural Law and the rules derived from it and which we were to live by, remained more or less constant. This modern conception of history, present in the thought of Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, described "the human situation in which we are not only made but make." Humans were part of evolution but they also had the capacity to act as the "spearhead [which] can consciously direct the very process." For Grant, we conceive of history as action-oriented, just as Benedetto Croce argued was the case (*Time*, 6-7).

Given this sense of history, humanity developed in the last several centuries a number of attitudes about the world which explain very neatly our development. Because of "mastery through prediction over human and non-human nature" and the idea that human accomplishments would "unfold" as time passed, modern society and its ideologies became oriented toward progress, mastery of the future, and issuing periodic calls-to-action to members of the human collective. Because of this concern for the future and for protecting ourselves against uncertainty, "we all more and more truly exist in the collective, and less and less pursue purposes which transcend it." This future orientation also makes humans the most powerful and the most violent of creatures. We have cultivated "resolute will" instead of contemplation in ourselves because of this orientation, boundless desire has replaced limits, and creation has more and more concerned itself with creation for its own sake, "the 'creation' of novelties." Meaning is found not in what exists, "but in that which we can yet bring to be"

(*Time*, 12, 19-20). As Arthur Kroker has said in his fine discussion, "*Time as History* ... contains a formidable and comprehensive phenomenology of the modern mind .... Grant reverses the usual critique of technology by compelling us to examine the implications of the Western mind and the modern personality in the development of technological society."<sup>21</sup>

Grant turns to Nietzsche because he "thought the conception of time as history more comprehensively than any other modern thinker before or since" (*Time*, 22). Not only did Nietzsche have a sense of history, but he also understood that "there are no reasons to justify belief in the goodness of rationality as our given purpose," nor has any transcendent idea developed to take the place of God, which we realized was a horizon and could no longer believe in (*Time*, 28-30). The belief in rationality led to science, which undermined the belief in rationality as something more than part of science. The problem is, "we cannot deny history and retreat into a destroyed past," and yet "how can we overcome the blighting effect of living without horizons?" Justice as the vanquished is well illustrated here because justice, which was a creature of the past, is, like the past, dead. Modernity has been attacking justice for several centuries and it was Nietzsche who finally helped Grant see that modernity has emerged as the victor.

As for the remainder of *Time as History*, Grant finds that Nietzsche's analysis of modern society has been fully realized in our age. The "last men" are in the majority in technological society and live in "debased happiness," and the "nihilists" would "rather will nothing than have nothing to will" (*Time*, 34). Both are gripped by the spirit of revenge, and neither deserve to be masters of the earth. Grant objects to Nietzsche's urging of *amor fati*, saying that we cannot love fate "unless ... there could appear, however rarely, intimations of ... perfection in which our desires for good find their rest and their fulfillment" (*Time*, 46). Our only resort, in the midst of the darkness we find around us, is to search for intimations of deprivals, including an idea of the Good. As always with Grant, he tried to leave us with hope and some reason to seek the Good despite the brilliant discussion of the death of justice and the dominance of progress, action, and time as history.

### Justice for the Vanquished

After *Time as History*, many readers of George Grant's work had difficulty in understanding the "new" direction he adopted in the 1970s. Why, after he delivered the final blow to modernity, did he take up a series of ethical issues in which, on the surface, he appears to assume many things about society which he denied in the late 1960s, including the prospects for reviving Natural Law as a ground for social conduct? Grant's predecessor as Canada's most important philosopher, Harold Innis, also became less and less hopeful about the future of the modern world and Canada, and

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yet his response was to explore history itself rather than to discuss primarily the Canadian/Western situation. In *English-Speaking Justice*, his major work of 1974, Grant chose to re-engage himself in public ethical debate, but this represented a radicalization of his thought rather than a moderation, in that the focus was to demonstrate that liberal technological society was unjust even according to its own historically-developed principles.<sup>22</sup> This shift toward the public ethical debate is also a shift and rebalancing, from the concern for inward justice in *Time as History* to a greater concern for the outward. This entailed a redefinition of justice, which I refer to as "Justice for the Vanquished." It was perfectly consistent with what we knew to be Grant's opinions, though in the past they were expressed less strongly.

During the 1960s, Grant believed "deprivals" meant that the best that humans could hope to do in the modern world was to listen for intimations of the Good, for we could never be certain of it. As he wrote in 1968, "to listen for the intimations of deprivation requires attempting a distinction between our individual history and any account which might be possible of what belongs to man as man."<sup>23</sup> At that time Grant recognized that his conception of the Good might only be a result of his circumstances. Despite this, whereas *Time as History* pointed to the death of justice, at least on the surface *English-Speaking Justice* appeared as an effort in favour of a "traditional" view of justice. As the title suggests, the latter is about the present defects in the English-speaking account of justice, and Grant is not at all reluctant to identify right and wrong. In this book, abortion, euthanasia, and exploitation of the weak are wrong, and Grant wants to do something about them. Canada had amended its abortion law in 1969 to permit abortions when the life or well-being of the woman was judged to be in danger, and the *Roe v. Wade* decision, which outlawed certain state restrictions on the availability of abortions in the United States, had just been handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

A number of elements in the book also shed light on Grant's motives for writing it, and on the meaning of justice. On the surface, this book is about the failure of justice based on social contractarianism. After defining liberalism and noting that a persuasive moral case can be made today only by using the language of liberalism, Grant devotes much of the book to a critique of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, one of the most popular modern discussions of its kind. In other words, after noting that only liberal discourse can have an impact in modern society, Grant proceeds to show that liberal bourgeois society is unjust even according to *its own principles*, let alone his own. His chief complaint about Rawls's work is that it offers a contractarian view of justice by drawing on thinkers like Locke and Kant, but neglects the elements of tradition, like reason in Kant, which informed those thinkers' views. The impact of this neglect is that Rawls cannot "state clearly what it is about human beings which makes them worthy of high political respect. Where Kant is clear concerning this, Rawls

is not" (*English*, 33). Grant is also unhappy with the rules generated by Rawls. "His account of the substance of justice puts together the claims of bourgeois individualism and progressive equality, typical of official American liberalism" (*English*, 40-41). It is hard to imagine a more scathing criticism from someone who believes in a classical, transcendent sense of justice: "All that need be said about Rawls's approach to classical philosophy is that in a book on justice there are four times as many references to a certain professor [sic] Arrow as there are to Plato" (*English*, 95).

The real provocation in *English-Speaking Justice* comes in the final section, in which Grant makes the case against the contractual view of justice which places the idea of individual rights above the idea of Good. If we can say that a foetus is not a person, then "[w]hat is it about any members of our species which makes the liberal rights of justice their due?" (*English*, 71). If we can deny the label of "person" to a foetus, then why not deny it to every other weakling in society? What of the mentally handicapped, the criminal, the mentally or terminally ill? Can liberalism itself survive if we place "convenience" ("individual rights") over "good"? What we have, in other words, is a situation in which one's strength or weakness determines the sort of "justice" that one receives. "The price for large scale equality under the direction of the 'creative' will be injustice for the very weak" (*English*, 84). In other words, modern contractarianism claims to provide justice to persons in society and yet provides no basic principle, beyond the erratic legal interpretation of the Constitution, to ensure that all who deserve protection will receive it.

Grant's consistent support for justice as a balance in the inward life leading to justice in the external plays a noticeable role in his critique of Rawlsian thought and of the modern definition of the self. "As justice is conceived as the external convenience of contract, it obviously has less and less to do with the good ordering of the inward life." It is problematic to define justice as "conventional and contractual" since such a definition undermines the mutual interdependence of "inward and outward justice" (in the sense that just relations come from and support inward justice) (*English*, 84-85).

While *Time as History* explored the development of intolerance of the flesh, *English-Speaking Justice* identified the implications of this intolerance for modern society. While Grant's goal is apparently to "understand" technological society, he writes here with unprecedented passion. As he says in the book's final passage, our "lack of tradition of thought is one reason why it is improbable that the transcendence of justice over technology will be lived among English-speaking people", but we get the definite sense that we are obliged to try (*English*, 89).

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### Justice as Faith and Love

Grant's last major published work, *Technology and Justice*, represents a new public affirmation of his faith in goodness and a return, full-circle, to the certainty which was so clearly part of his work in the 1950s.<sup>24</sup> This new certainty is based on a public affirmation of his belief in "God as Goodness," followed by a critique of modernity bringing out both the positive and the negative. Ever since his conversion in the 1940s Grant has been a strong believer in the Christian God, and his current faith does not appear to be substantively different from his faith of the 1950s.

There is continuity in his religious belief over time, but flux in the role of this religious belief in his thought. His belief in "God as Goodness" has not been this important or prominent since the 1950s. It appears, however, that Grant's new locale has more to do with this full-circle return than a change in Grant himself.<sup>25</sup> Even his most despairing critiques of modernity, written during the sixties and early seventies, raised the issue of goodness in light of the criticisms levelled against modern injustices.

George Santayana once commented that "the freest spirit must have some birthplace, some *locus standi* from which to view the world and some innate passion by which to judge it."<sup>26</sup> For Santayana this place was Avila, in Central Spain; for Grant, it was in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In Halifax (with its "intimations" of tradition and community), Grant seemed to be at home intellectually. His most profound thought comes from his time in Southern Ontario, but the writing seems unsettled in comparison to the work completed in Halifax in both the 1950s and 1980s.

The four most important "new" themes in *Technology and Justice* are: his now-total affirmation of 'Goodness' generally and Christianity specifically; his emphasis on the ever-presence and need for faith, defined by Simone Weil as "the experience that the intelligence is enlightened by love" (*Technology*, 38); a renewed concern for the language of the technological society; and the way in which viewing the human as "object" has undermined humanistic studies in the university. *Technology* carries forward past themes, but whereas *English Speaking Justice* addressed justice for the vanquished, Grant's strongest affirmation of Christianity yet, as a "lover of Plato within Christianity" (*Technology*, 90), has broadened his conception of justice to address the problem of bringing love of the "beauty of otherness" back into life. Again, where in *English Speaking Justice* Grant leaned toward the outward life, he has once again taken up the inward life. There is still the critique of the rights-oriented society, and of abortion and euthanasia, but criticism of the adoption of "value" (which usurped the place of Good) and "quality of life" now run throughout the work.

It is important to note that Grant's affirmation of Christianity has come even more clearly at the expense of Friedrich Nietzsche, who clearly occupied a central place in his thought in the late 1960s. In this book Grant demonstrates that one can accept Nietzsche or Christianity, but not both,

and if one accepts Christianity, then Nietzsche must be demoted. If Grant accepts Natural Law, that Goodness which transcends the ages, then he must criticize Nietzschean Historicism, which stipulates that "all thought (particularly the highest) depends, even in its very essence, on a particular set of existing experienced circumstances" (*Technology*, 84). In *Time as History* Grant recognized the truth in Nietzsche, but nonetheless rejected his thought; but in *Technology* he is much more negatively disposed toward Nietzsche than he was in the late 1960s. In a number of places Nietzsche is associated, inadvertently or otherwise, with syndromes which he diagnosed but did not necessarily support. In "The Language of Euthanasia," co-written with Sheila Grant, Grant, in criticizing the "quality of life" criterion applied today, comments that "[i]t must be remembered that 'quality of life' was made central to the political thought of the philosopher Nietzsche, who taught the sacred right of 'merciless extinction' of large masses of men" (*Technology*, 115). This is the full articulation of that part of Grant, present in Chapter 5 of *Time as History*, which both recognizes the diagnostic truth of Nietzsche and opposes the implications of the truth on Platonic grounds.

In the third essay in the book, "Nietzsche and the Ancients: Philosophy and Scholarship," the question of the new treatment of Nietzsche is illuminated. Whereas Grant had in the past praised Nietzsche's acuity in diagnosing modernity, we now find that he admits the genius in Nietzsche while attacking the implications of the content of the thought. Reading Nietzsche is necessary to understanding modernity, he says, but the risk is that doing so will undermine the study of the classics, specifically Plato, as a means of finding truth. Nietzsche should be taught, but only from the perspective that the teacher "rejects Nietzsche's doctrine," and that "he is a teacher of evil." It is as though in affirming Christianity publicly to this extent, Grant has found it necessary to advise the teacher to do what amounts to "inoculating" students against the truth in Nietzsche's thought on the ground that it might undermine faith in goodness.<sup>27</sup>

It would seem that his new certainty about the Good is accompanied by what is undoubtedly his strongest affirmation of the positive side of modern society since 1959. In his writing Grant has always emphasized that he seeks to examine the costs borne by life in the technological age; he makes no claim that there are only costs and no benefits. In this respect *Technology and Justice* contains what is perhaps his strongest recognition of the benefits of modern life. Of equality, he says that before one speaks against it one should consider "what it was like for those at the bottom of the ladder when the principle of equality was modified by the principle of hierarchy." As for technology, "[w]ho cannot be grateful for electric light; who cannot be aware that physics has made potential the destruction of all life on this planet?" (*Technology*, 59, 61).

Finally, in Grant's thought, the Platonic conception of justice as the mediator between the inward and the outward life once again holds an impor-

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tant place. He argues that historically, for those who were likely to rule, it "was necessary to understand justice within the whole scheme of the cosmos." (*Technology*, 57-58). Internal justice, as least in the form of "good habits," led to proficiency in leadership.

### Conclusion

George Grant has had a long scholarly career which, because of the breadth of his activities, might seem confusing and inconsistent at first glance. The concept of justice has allowed us to see both the unity of his efforts as well as the variation over time. His scholarship is unified by his deep concern for building a just society, whether it was the Canadian nation in the 1940s, the U.S.-Canadian alliance in the 1950s, or society in the ethical darkness of the 1970s and 1980s. A Platonic sense of justice is to be found in his earliest writings, and there is an intriguing variation, almost oscillation, over time between justice in the individual's inward life and justice in the individual's outward conduct in society.

His latest work shows that before his death he returned to a public position of certainty, now based on faith in goodness, while acknowledging both the good and the bad in the modern world. However, it is clear that George Grant will be best remembered for his work on Canadian nationalism, which remains the most accessible and "relevant" of his thought. That work took the form of a "lament," but the lament should now be made for the uncertain future of Grant's legacy. We should lament the fact that Grant will never be appreciated by modern progressives, whether they are Marxists, feminists, or national liberationists. Grant's discourse has little appeal for members of these groups because he was always too ambivalent about progress, as well as about what should be done to improve the conditions of the oppressed. The final Grantian irony may be the cruellest one of all: those who would benefit most from Grant's teachings (e.g. progressives) will not or cannot do so.

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### Notes

I am grateful to Michael Weinstein for his encouragement and help in this project. I would also like to thank the three anonymous *CJPST* readers for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. An early attack of this sort is found in R. K. Crook, "Modernization and Nostalgia," *Queen's Quarterly* 73(2), (1966).
2. John W. Holmes, *Life With Uncle: The Canadian American Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 112.

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3. R. Puccetti, "The Mausoleum and The Searchlight: Two Views of Philosophy" *Dalhousie Review* 60(1), (1988) p. 138.
4. Robert S. McElvaine, *The End of the Conservative Era: Liberalism after Reagan* (New York: Arbor House, 1987).
5. Michael A. Weinstein, "The Dark Night of the Liberal Spirit and the Dawn of the Savage," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 12(1-2), (1988) p. 179.
6. See Chris Mosey, "Swedes plan escape-proof AIDS colony on island", *Toronto Star*, 13 November 1987; "Sweden to isolate drug addicts carrying AIDS virus", *Calgary Herald*, 14 November 1987.
7. I have in mind works like Ian Box, "George Grant and the Embrace of Technology," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 15(3), (1982); Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuban/Grant* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984); S. J. R. Noel, "Domination and Myth in the Works of George Grant and C. B. Macpherson," *Dalhousie Review* 59(3), (1979); Michael A. Weinstein, "Lament and Utopia: Responses to American Empire in George Grant and Leopoldo Zea," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 5(3), (1981); and many of the essays, taken individually, in Larry Schmidt (ed.), *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: Anansi, 1978).
8. Joan E. O'Donovan, *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). She provides an excellent account of Grant's life and religious faith, but does not adequately explain Grant's transition from the work of the late 1960s to that of the 1970s, for example.
9. Box, p. 504.
10. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (eds.), (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 383-4.
11. George Grant, "Have We a Canadian Nation?" (*Dalhousie*) *Public Affairs*, 8 (1944), pp. 161-166.
12. George Grant, *The Empire: Yes or No?* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1945), pp. 6-7.
13. Grant, "Have We a Canadian Nation?" p. 166.
14. George Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1959), p. 109. Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*Philosophy*) and page numbers.
15. George Grant, "The Uses of Freedom: A word and our world," *Queen's Quarterly*, 62 (1956), pp. 515-527. Subsequent references will be indicated by title ("Freedom") and page numbers.
16. George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965). Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*Lament*) and page numbers.
17. It is interesting to note that in his book *One-Eyed Kings*, (Toronto: Collins, 1986), Ron Graham argues that the three Canadian political parties now represent simply variants of liberalism: "Classical Liberal" (Progressive Conservative), "Modern Liberal" (Liberal), and "Radical Liberal" (New Democratic Party).
18. Grant points out the influence himself in Larry Schmidt (ed.) *George Grant in Process*, pp. 65 and 80.

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19. "Religion and the State" (1963) and "Tyranny and Wisdom" (1964) in *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America*, (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1969), are good examples of this tendency. Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*Empire*) and page numbers.
20. George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969).
21. Kroker, p. 46.
22. George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1974/1985). Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*English*) and page numbers.
23. George Grant, "A Platitude", *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America*, p. 140.
24. George Grant, *Technology and Justice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*Technology*) and page numbers.
25. Personal interview with George Grant, July 25, 1987.
26. George Santayana, *Persons and Places* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 97.
27. Grant used the term "inoculation" to refer to the traditional attitude of English-speaking intellectuals to Nietzsche, in *Time as History*, p. 23.

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## WRITING VIOLENCE: KATHY ACKER'S TATTOOS

*Victoria Burke*

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Kathy Acker. *Empire Of The Senseless*. London: Pan Books, Ltd. and New York: Grove Press, 1988. 229 pp.

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### Plagiarism

As likely to provoke denial as social criticism, Kathy Acker's latest novel, *Empire Of The Senseless*, like her previous work, is a caustic, dadaist splicing of stolen rethought literature to defiant language and twisted contemporary theory. Acker's methods are those of W. S. Burroughs, her writings postmodern cut-ups.<sup>1</sup> Acker has rewritten scenes from de Sade, lines from Ginsberg, tales from 1001 Arabian Nights, and characters from Gibson into a punky street vocabulary and grafted them onto barrages of criticism about transnational capital and hegemonic power structures, which weave through dramas of father/daughter incest, maternal suicide, and lover betrayal. Acker has never attempted to disguise what she herself calls her plagiarism.<sup>2</sup> It is one among many of her uncivilized methods aimed at blasting through "institutionalized meaning, institutionalized language, control, fixation, judgement, prison."<sup>3</sup>

Acker's poisoned pen circumscribes a "world full of people who no longer feel,"<sup>4</sup> where the CIA performs Nazi experiments on prisoners, where the "AMA controls death because they can make more profit off the living,"<sup>5</sup> and where the words and ideas of liberation are taboo. It is a world of concrete, graffiti, and violence. A world whose fuel for excessive production is the exploitation of those who have, historically, been least able to object (women, children, minorities, and third world countries). The enemies here are corporations, government bureaucracy, and interpersonal carelessness. Rendered bare without the illusion that a suc-

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cessfully functioning democratic government operates in our best interests, or that scientific experimentation is anything other than masturbatory, sadistic, and profitable, this empire (the USA) is likely to make you feel "empty and sick."<sup>6</sup>

*Empire Of The Senseless* follows Abhor and Thivai, star-crossed co-protagonists, on picaresque journeys through degradation, loss, and betrayal. However, like most picaresque journeys, they are not without hope. Their adventures are deconstructive gestures which, perhaps, "[designate] the crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmer beyond the closure can be glimpsed."<sup>7</sup> The glimmer beyond the closure of hegemonic patriarchy is the possibility of another type of writing which does not foreclose the diversity of human voices into a single possible type of (rational) writing. Reason, writes Acker, "always homogenizes and reduces, represses and unifies phenomena or actuality into what can be perceived and so controlled."<sup>8</sup> Acker's plagiarism, her use of foul language, her shocking narratives of incest, murder, and suicide aim at cutting through rational discourse. Rational discourse, which, in its certainty and authority, is one-dimensional and totalitarian: it smooths over the violence perpetrated by our institutions, silencing those with different visions.

### Abhor and Thivai

Abhor and Thivai first encounter each other in a scene rewritten from William Gibson's sci-fi novel *Neuromancer*, a novel set amid corporate surveillance, computer mainframe crime, and the mysterious control exerted by a certain "artificial intelligence" named Neuro(necro)mancer. *Neuromancer* is set in a wildly unfamiliar century where civilization functions beneath artificial sky, most people are cyborgs, and human consciousness can leave the material body to circulate on the information network commonly known as cyberspace. Gibson's protagonist, Case, is a cyberspace cowboy who "runs" the network to make his shady living. Thivai's role as a pirate in *Empire Of The Senseless* is parallel to Gibson's cowboy protagonist, Case. Neither can have relations with women unless they are destructive and silencing for the woman. Neither can bear en(case)ment in the living flesh of their own bodies. Case is able to leave his body at will, "jacked into a cyberspace deck that project[s] his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that [is] the matrix."<sup>9</sup> (The matrix is a vast transnational information network stretching from Tokyo to the Boston-Atlanta Sprawl and beyond: "bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void."<sup>10</sup>) Case's engineered consciousness is a product of war experiments. (In Acker, it's Dr. Schreber who wants to experiment on Thivai.) Case is hooked on "the bodiless exaltation of cyberspace."<sup>11</sup> Return to en(case)ment in the materiality of his own body was, for him, The Fall.

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Case and Thivai's disembodiment are key to Acker's fears: she is worried about the loss of what Burroughs calls "The Third Mind,"<sup>12</sup> created when two minds meet. Thivai doesn't seem to be able to do anything but betray Abhor: turning her into the police, coming up with absurd schemes to get her out of prison — schemes so theoretical that they cannot be put into practice — warning her (for her own good) that she cannot do what she wants to do because she hasn't read the appropriate text about it. Abhor is someone he can never seem to reach, despite his desires to do so. For Thivai, all women are prostitutes:

I went back in to get something to eat. While I was choking on some nuts, the girl sat on my shoulders so that her cunt juice ran down my neck. The skin at the back of my neck and my eyes felt allergic. My eyes were burning as they should be. I took hold of her thighs. I ran my hands around them. I put my mouth on them. I bent her forward so I could run my hands up and into the ass. Red head backwards, she kissed me on the lips. I had her ass.

Dinosaur, who was a stuffed animal, was sitting next to us. Dinosaur was a female therefore a prostitute. I could see her cunt. Cherries were sitting on top of her thighs."<sup>13</sup>

Thivai is unable to discover any other vision of women than as an irrational and parasitic species, who exists primarily to be ejaculated into. Unable to arrive at The Third Mind together, Abhor and Thivai are involved in a repetition compulsion cycle of betrayal and longing, which ends when Abhor finally leaves a farewell note to Thivai's friend, not Thivai:

Both of you would be better off if you'd [sic] at least admit that you think that women aren't human, but that men are. You believe that women are wet washcloths you can use to wash the grime off different parts of your body or to fling into the face of another person (a male). Every time I talk to one of you, I feel like I'm taking layers of my own epidermis, which are layers of still freshly bloody scar tissue, black, brown, and red, and tearing each one of them off so more and more of my blood shoots into your face. This is what writing is to me a woman.

Even though I love you, Mark, because you're a man, I hate you. I'll explain why.

The whole world is men's bloody fantasies.

For example: Thivai decided that he was going to be a pirate. Therefore: we were going to be pirates. If I didn't want to be a pirate, I had to be a victim. Because, if I didn't want to be a pirate, I was rejecting all that he is. He, then, had to make me either repent my rejection or too helpless to reject him. Then, he decided that he loved me. By the time he decided that I was in jail...<sup>14</sup>

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Even after this letter, Thivai cannot or will not understand, the ways in which his being oppresses Abhor. Before Abhor rides away on her motorcycle for the last time, he tells her that she cannot ride a motorcycle because she has not read "The Highway Code."

### Forbidden Language

The journey of the picaro is traditionally an endless journey. Picaresque novels tend to be truncated rather than brought to closure. The journey of the picaro is a search for an elusive destination. In many picaresque novels, the search seems to be desire for return to the unchaotic unconditional warmth of the womb, the pre-linguistic... Eden. Acker's picaros are on similar searches, but not for a place prior to the domination of reason, patriarchy, and institutions. These picaros desire "access to the territory in which everything can and should be said."<sup>15</sup> As Acker explores this territory, she targets one sacred American institution after another: the presidency, the CIA, the AMA, the family. She shows heterosexuality, as exhibited in Abhor and Thivai, to be a worn out fetish, irredeemably flawed by carelessness and mutual sadism. The only nonabusive sexual interchange in the book occurs between two men: a sailor and a tattooist.

Indeed, Acker dedicates *Empire Of The Senseless* to her tattooist. The tattooist inscribes painful hieroglyphics directly onto the flesh as in the "far seas ... [where] people lived harmoniously with themselves and their environments. Their writing was tattooing or marking directly onto the flesh."<sup>16</sup> Tattooing is the writing of an ancient amazon civilization who resisted expulsion from their capital city, Athens, as long as they could.<sup>17</sup> Now the tattoo is taboo and associated with the biker, the sailor, the prostitute, the outlaw. A recovery of the tattoo for Acker, is not only a gesture toward what the French feminists would call body writing; but an index to The Third Mind, the transferential moment, between the sailor and the tattooist when the tattooist doubts his power and the sailor fears the pain of the inscription. As Abhor ponders, "it seemed to me that the body, the material, must matter. My body must matter to me. If my body mattered to me, and what else was any text: I could not choose to be celibate."<sup>18</sup>

The forbidden is, for Acker, the site from which the forces which repress and deny may be deconstructed: "speaking precisely what the codes forbid breaks down the codes."<sup>19</sup> Thivai, and particularly Abhor's, adventures provide access to these forbidden notions. Acker is not popular with reviewers, but not because her writing fails. Like dirty words which would get our mouths washed out with soap when we uttered them as children, Acker's words violate the codes. It is not surprising that Acker is considered offensive: "The mouth was and continues to be the most threatening opening of the feminine body: it can eventually express what shouldn't

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be expressed, reveal the hidden desire, unleash the menacing differences which upset the core of the phallogocentric, paternalistic discourse."<sup>20</sup>

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Notes

1. Burroughs, W. S. *The Third Mind*. New York: The Viking Press, 1978.
2. Jurek, Thom & Pat Smith. "Plagiarism and the Crucifixion of Creativity: An Interview With Kathy Acker." Unpublished interview with Kathy Acker. Transcription by Paula Moritz. Kathy Acker's previous novels, *Don Quixote* and *Great Expectations*, are cut-ups of the familiar classics.
3. Acker, Kathy. *Empire Of The Senseless*. London: Pan Books Ltd., 1988, p. 134.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
6. Feinstein, Elaine. *London Times*. May 5, 1988. p. 17b. To Feinstein, this remark is meant as criticism, however, it would seem that only powerful writing would provoke these feelings.
7. Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974. p. 14.
8. Acker, op. cit., p. 12.
9. Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books 1984, p. 5.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
12. Burroughs, op. cit., p. 6.
13. Acker, op. cit. p. 93.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
15. Valenzuela, Luisa. "Dirty Words." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Fall 1986. p. 13.
16. Acker, op. cit., p. 139.
17. Wittig, Monique and Sande Zeig. *Lesbian Peoples: Material For A Dictionary*. New York: Avon Books, 1979. p. 137.
18. Acker, op. cit., p. 64.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
20. Valenzuela, op. cit., p. 13.

“EVERYWHERE THE ELECTRIC:”  
SCIENCE AND LITERATURE  
IN THE AGE OF THE CYBER

*John de la Mothe*

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Ludmilla Jordanova (Ed.), *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and Literature*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986. 351 pp.

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1

Alienation and authentic experience are the chief incongruent categories through which we must sift to organize what we mean when we say “modernism”: that condition in which the shock of the new is perpetually mitigated by science (changing our conceptions of ourselves) and technology (changing our relationships with nature). Despite the ensuing interpretive confusion, however, a surprisingly common and uncannily enduring assumption about the modern element in literature has persisted for more than half a century. Well before Hugh Kenner, Harry Levin, or Irving Howe<sup>1</sup> were inclined to artificially seal off the period for the purposes of study, the work of critics as different as Leavis and Lukacs was already structured by a shared presupposition that modern literature acts

out of the loss of something primary that it wishes to regain. Implicitly but constantly amongst critics of the earlier century, the growing authority of science and technology has fueled this sense of loss.

Lionel Trilling's crisp designation of the literary "will to modernity" as the redemptive search for a realm "beyond the reach of culture" remains as clear a definition as available on what is axiomatic in our literary assumptions about the modern<sup>2</sup>. Despite subsequent vicissitudes of the aims and procedures of literary criticism, this presupposition has remained tenaciously paradigmatic, even determining the otherwise antithetical projects of such revisionist historiographers of literature as Fredric Jameson who simultaneously maintains both our normative understanding of modernism and our desire to change it.

The ironies of Trilling's prose, however, suggest that literary modernism is far different from our inherited sense of it. Precise to a fault, Trilling's diction calls attention to some unlikely contingencies that his otherwise classical arguments detonate. For Trilling, an exemplary High Modernist such as James Joyce stands as such because he fully represents "this intense conviction of the existence of the self apart from culture."<sup>3</sup> Yet, unavoidably, the sly protestations of Trilling's rhetoric brings another factor into play. If, indeed, it is culture that "knows" then how can it know any realm other than, or "beyond," itself? The intuitive response lies torn between a happy denial of Milan Kundera's hypothesis that "life is elsewhere" and the tired collapse into the Enlightenment's tarnished promise of progress. What does this paradox of liberation suggest for literature? What aesthetic or discursive horizon does it close off or otherwise demarcate? For Trilling, and for many of literary critics, the answer is plain: the exemplary "will to modernity" — the need, in Trilling's words, "to believe that there is some point at which it is possible to stand beyond the reach of culture"<sup>4</sup> — is an expression of the need to reject "how entirely implicated in culture we all are."<sup>5</sup>

2

What kind of culture do we have? Within a fully modernist (i.e., trans-literary) context, what are the sources of authority and rupture which dictate or otherwise influence the forms of cultural response open to us? To some degree, the books under review here derive a measure of unity from the contextual mode of interpretation in so far as their authors insist on recognizing (and responding to) the all-embracing technological character of the social life-world. A tacit assumption of the literary-historical approach used in these books is the idea that culture is cognitive and meaning-generating. This conception is very much like that held by Clifford Geertz and other symbolic anthropologists — and equally difficult to operationalize. As Geertz defines it, a culture "consists of socially established structures of meaning"; these structures are conceptual frameworks or tem-

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plates that enable members of the culture to interpret the signs and symbols, practices and events that constitute their direct experience, and thereby to participate in the unending argument about meanings, values, and purposes that help set up a society's course of change.<sup>6</sup>

In practice, however, anthropologists, cultural theorists, and literary critics need to deploy the concept of culture in significantly different ways. Anthropologists, perhaps because of their longstanding preoccupation with relatively small, homogenous, pre-industrial societies, have tended to emphasize the unifying aspects of culture, whereas cultural theorists and literary critics (including the authors represented here) need to emphasize the dissonant and self-contradictory aspects. The books reviewed here try, with varying degrees of success, to mask this conflict, to pretend that it isn't there and that the literary process is a "knowing and intimate" partner of science (i.e., sharing in its authority). Clearly, this runs counter to Trilling's insightful observation that the very form of modern culture's existence "is struggle, or at least debate — it is nothing if not dialectic."<sup>7</sup>

### 3

Of course, for readers of this journal, such an observation is familiar as modernity is understood to open a series of paradoxes which are important — at the level of subject, style, and logic — to observers of the literary and "post-literary" scenes. After all, the literature of modernity is essentially a literature about transformations in the public world and in its associated consciousness. The actual date of the advent of "the modern" varies in different accounts, as do the characteristics identified by various writers. Nearly all accounts, however, have in common their concern for the public worlds of work, rationalization, politics, and city life. As such the literature of modernity coincides, in effect, with that well-documented process of the separation between the public and private realms.

### 4

Within this context, if we take seriously Weber's notion of an expanding rationalization, of the advent of a totally administered world which spells the end of the individual, then we must consider technology and science, as they are now, as the deepest languages of politics, economy, advertising, and desire. They condition the histories that confront us on every corner of the Metropolis and that constitute our horizon. In so doing they contain both a moment of danger and opportunity, and, as a result, may not force us to be free, but encourage us to perpetually rethink the relationship between technic and society. They offer what amounts to a frenzied drive to liberty through a seductively disguised promise of reconciliation between the private and public via an ongoing historical amnesia. They constantly revise our images of ourselves as makers of a history

we pathologically cannot recall due, in part, to the looming presence of some questionable (but assured) future. Thus, they provide the perfect focus for a modernist literature as they establish the method, logic, and rationale for the fulfillment of contemporary literature's deepest wish — the eclipse of culture.<sup>8</sup>

## 5

As a result, the authority of science and technology, which expresses itself in all domains, is accepted by literature, and emulated. For example, in the age of transparent technology, modernist literature has evolved parallel technologies of its own, both difficult and obscure. "Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes," the epigraph to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, claims the sponsorship of the fabulous technologist and warns us against expecting such books as we've been used to. Arcane skills, "ignotas artes", such as those that enabled the Wright Brothers to triumph at Kitty Hawk, have gone into its fashioning. Their machine had nothing to hide — you could see every moving part, like Joyce's prose — and yet it challenged comprehension. They first flew it in December 1903 and by January 7, 1904 James Joyce had effectively adopted the persona of Daedalus. Like the technology of its time, literary modernism sought, as evidenced by books like *Ulysses* and poems like *The Cantos* by Ezra Pound, to share in technology's authority and to become deeply technological.

This occurred at all levels. The internal combustion engine altered our perceptions of rhythm; X-rays made plausible transparent planes of matter; the wireless superimposed the voices of twenty countries (*Finnegan's Wake*); and newsreel quick-cutting promoted *The Waste Land*. Words moved on wires. Distant voices sounded in our ears. And under the most rigorous scrutiny, the text itself began to dissolve. Thus technology increasingly re-defined the role of words and ourselves in relation to the text and to nature. It simultaneously embodied and promoted an aesthetic and a world view. The "gear and girder" technologies of the early twentieth century totally displaced the still dominant Romantic view of a holistic, spiritual world. When the twentieth century poet, William Carlos Williams, called the poem "a machine made of words," he presumed a very different world from that of Henry David Thoreau who wrote in 1844 that "poetry... ..is a natural fruit."<sup>9</sup> This nineteenth century belief that nature, the human imagination, and art were unitary, maternal and cogenerative changed radically under the machine assumptions of the twentieth.

## 6

Although it was technology that was most visible to modernist literature, science, and particularly the early revolution in physics, was soon to be fully implicated in literature's attempt to coopt technology and move

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beyond culture. By 1921, when Albert Einstein visited the United States, the physicist had become a folk hero and the new physics was front page news. The models of science presented by Werner Heisenberg, Max Planck, Albert Einstein, and popularizers like Aldred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, were dramatically different from nineteenth century models of science and appealed directly to the modernist aesthetic.

Einstein's original formulation of the special theory of relativity from 1905 stated that whereas an event viewed from two separate moving observers may appear different to each, neither observer would be wrong or encounter contradictions if he or she used the same basic laws of physics. For example, the speed of light is a constant. This might lead to contradictions, since one person observing a light beam might be moving faster than another person observing the same light beam. What happened, according to Einstein, was that the nature of time and space is altered by motion while the laws of physics remain unchanged. Einstein's later work on general relativity then extended his ideas to cover curved time and gravitation.

Max Planck's work also concerned light and motion, but he concentrated on sub-atomic phenomenon. In 1900, Planck discovered that electrons absorbed or emitted light in quantum units. He also found that there was a constant by which to measure the value of such energy exchanges. These findings required the abandonment of the notion of a continuum of energy; Einstein later showed that Planck's findings suggested that light was composed of particles and behaved, or could be treated, as a wave.

Werner Heisenberg's 1927 work on the uncertainty principle, building on the work of Planck and Einstein, proposed that the error in position measurement times the error in momentum measurement can never be less than one half of Planck's Constant — said another way, that the position and speed of an atomic particle cannot both be known.

The story goes on. The new physics broke down the framework of classical physics, suggesting that space and time were fluid, and that phenomena changed depending on how they were observed (light being sometimes a particle and sometimes a wave, for example). As the old edifice of certainty was eroded, most physicists agreed that the difficulty of defining light or measuring sub-atomic *wavicles* was not due to the failings of scientific instrumentation but to the actual, ambiguous nature of the physical universe, a universe of "fuzzy" statistical probabilities. This ambiguity appealed to, and under-scored, the ambiguities of the modern Metropolis.

If the new physics changed our ideas about the nature of the universe, popular and literary accounts often misrepresented the implications and meaning of the scientific findings. Consequently, in their zeal to be modern, science became related in literature to democracy, free will, Bergsonian philosophy, the uncertainty of life in the Metropolis, and to the literary experiments that toyed with perspective or emphasized motion.

Nevertheless, the original *angst* of literature — its need to move beyond culture, its desire to emulate and gain the authority of science and technology — remained. Pressured by a lagging readership for novels and poems, an unsympathetic press, and by such assertions as those made by Gertrude Stein's brother, Leo, that progress in the arts lagged behind "scientific" progress<sup>10</sup> and by Lionel Trilling, who shrewdly noted that "in an age of science prestige is to be gained by approximating the methods of science,"<sup>11</sup> literature insisted on carving out an identity that was expressly dependent on science and technology. Many writers, poets and critics tried to borrow the growing science-based prestige in order to declare a place of their own. Some also argued that, to be relevant, the arts had to address the issues of the practical and technological world which people lived in. At the same time, many also saw themselves as being defenders of literature and human values *against* the very scientific (machine) age from which they were trying to derive authority and popularity. Thus, there were contradictions in the positions taken by those who wanted to both use and resist the effects of science and technology.

Given such complicity and weight, then, what has become of the relationship between science and literature? It is clear that there are influences, just as there are scars of rupture and envies of authority. But what is, or should be, the relationship?

In asking this question it should come as no surprise that a growing concern within literary and cultural criticism focuses precisely on this question. Far more substantial than a simple reaction to the hegemonic frameworks of C. P. Snow's *Two Cultures* or Aldous Huxley's *Literature and Science*<sup>12</sup> in this area, this movement has become so widespread and formalized in recent years that the Modern Languages Association has sanctioned the establishment of a Society for Literature and Science. Nevertheless, there are problems.

Throwing around such comfortable but overwhelmingly complicated terms as "science", "literature", and "culture" might well indicate a failure to appreciate the multiplicity of meanings that they imply and the complexity of activity that they mask. To say that science and literature are products of the same culture is to say little until all three terms are understood specifically.

The formula "science and literature" which governs the books noted here announces, through the "and," a difference; the innocuous copula becomes more problematic than the difficult major terms. "And" implies relationship of course, but (para)tactically refuses to define it. The "and"

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also intimates the oddity of the relationship: what can the two have to do with each other? While it insists on implying that the relationship matters.

Reading through the books noted above, a shared conviction becomes clear that the relationship matters because, despite the enormity the subject and the terms, the conjunction of the two sometimes radically separated worlds of discourse represented by science and literature can help to illuminate the other and to demystify each as they sit under cloaks of unmerited cultural authority. As such, it forces us to address issues which are of ultimate importance to the way our culture and our societies are currently being shaped. Surely this is a noble and scholarly pursuit, but how is it achieved?

In most of the books under review here (those by Hugh Kenner and Leo Marx excepted), the "method" is to seek common ground between science and literature in their "cultural and social histor[ies], paying close attention to original texts. Any divorce between text and context is undesirable,"<sup>13</sup> however with the transformation of science into a mere "discourse" it becomes increasingly difficult to define precisely what science is as opposed to, say, literature and culture. Science is reduced to a two dimensional text, devoid of social organization or epistemological energy. In so doing, it becomes irritatingly clear that the methods employed by Jordanova and Levine in particular are such that while embodying the anxious desire of modern literature to stand beyond culture and to share the authority of science and technology, what they do is hide within a strong but unenlightening context of "Culture". The result is not very satisfying or very helpful. If the first and primary lesson of these volumes is that science and literature are mutually embedded in culture, nourish and illuminate each other, then surely this does not get us very far. As noted sociologist of science, Steven Shapin, complains: "work is often thought to be completed when it can be concluded that 'science is not autonomous' or that science is an integral part of our culture,' or even that there are interesting parallels or homologies between scientific thought and social structures."<sup>14</sup> Clearly this is not enough, nor is it entirely honest. Yet this is the tenor of the books by Jordanova and Levine.

Far more satisfying are the works by Steinman and Tichi who make no excessive claims for the "congruities between science and literature." In *Made in America*, Lisa Steinman focuses on the developing poetry and poetics of William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Marianne Moore, three poets who stayed in America at a time when exile was fashionable, and who concerned themselves with defining the place of poetry in the machine age. Her assessments of the influences on imagery and style in a period in which science and technology were unabashedly glorified and make open possibilities for further work and make for compelling reading. In the slightly less successful, but still worthwhile, *Shifting Gears*, Cecilia Tichi presents a richly illustrated exploration of the American era of gear-and-girder technology — from the automobile and harvesting

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machine to bridges and skyscrapers — in which she argues that the technology re-defined the human role in relation to nature. It fostered a perception of the material world as a complex of component parts, such as meshing gears, rolling bearings, pushing pistons, in which prominent American writers (including Dos Passos and Williams) became “designer-engineers” of the word, using their prefabricated, manufactured components in poems and prose. As designers they enacted, in style and structure, the new technological values.

Finally, by far the most insightful and economic of the contributions under review here are those of Hugh Kenner and Leo Marx. In *The Mechanical Muse*, Kenner brings his usual wit and erudition to bear in a series of essays on the response of literary Modernists to their changing technological environments. In creative examinations of such familiar figures as Pound, Joyce, Eliot, and Beckett, Kenner looks at how inventions as various as the Lino-type, typewriter, subway, and computer have altered the way the world was viewed and depicted. In comparison, Marx’s contribution is less even, but this can be forgiven when some of the essays (collected from nearly forty years of criticism) are as full of cheek, argument, and (at times) brilliance as demonstrated in “The Neo-Romantic Critique of Science,” “The Machine in the Garden,” and “American Literary Culture and the Fatalistic View of Technology.”

9

Clearly, the vast range of problems that are of concern to literary and cultural critics in the areas of science and literature are of importance. In an age that has not only gone post-literate<sup>15</sup> and “post-modern”<sup>16</sup> but post-scientific as well — in the sense that the products, conceptions and activities of science are no longer heroic and visible, but pervasively embodied — critics can no longer casually prod the text of past experiments and hope to say something meaningful about the process of cultural change. The problem can no longer be solved, as Bertrand Russell once put it, “by a community which use[s] machines without being enthusiastic about them”.<sup>17</sup> In the age of the cyber, the relationship between science and literature can only be usefully discussed by recognizing the nature of the environment. As Walt Whitman said: “everywhere the electric!”<sup>18</sup>

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Notes

1. Harry Levin, “What Was Modernism?” in *Refractions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1960; Irving Howe, “The Culture of Modernism,” in *Decline of the New*, New York:

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- Horizon, 1970; Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, New York: University of California Press, 1971.
2. Originally published by Lionel Trilling as *Freud and the Crisis of Our Culture*, Boston: Beacon, 1955.
  3. *Ibid.*, p.102.
  4. *Ibid.*, p.93.
  5. *Ibid.*, p.91.
  6. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in his *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, p.12.
  7. Lionel Trilling, "Reality in America," in his *The Liberal Imagination: Essays in Literature and Society*, New York: Anchor Books, 1950, p.7.
  8. Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984, p.125.
  9. Cecilia Tichi, *Shifting Gears*, University of North Carolina Press, 1987, p.xiii.
  10. Leo Stein, "American Optimism", in *The Seven Arts*, 1917.
  11. Lionel Trilling, "The Sense of the Past," in Ronald Primeau (Ed.), *Influx: Essays on Literary Influence*, New York: Kennikat Press, 1977, p.23.
  12. C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge University Press, 1960; Aldous Huxley, *Literature and Science*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1963.
  13. Ludmilla Jordanova, "Introduction", in *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and Literature*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986, p.17. A typographical error on the cover casts doubt as to whether the book is subtitled "science and literature" or "science as literature."
  14. Steven Shapin, "History of Science and Its Sociological Reconstruction," in *History of Science*, 20, 1982, p.176.
  15. B.W. Powe, *A Climate Charged*, Toronto: Mosaic, 1984.
  16. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (eds.), *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*, Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1987.
  17. Bertrand Russell, "Things That Have Moulded Me," in *Dial*, 83, September 1927, p.184.
  18. Walt Whitman, *The Wanderers*.

## NOTES TOWARD THE REVIVAL OF THE JEWISH LEFT

*Norman Levine*

The fact that Martin Buber's socialism differed so completely from Marxian socialism, testifies to the multiple intellectual currents which contributed to the shaping of nineteenth-century radicalism. Indeed, in his book *Paths to Utopia*, Buber not only criticized the ideology of Karl Marx, but also clearly identified the left-wing tradition from which he drew his inspiration. *Paths in Utopia* attacked Marxism as both authoritarian and statist.<sup>1</sup> Echoing Bakunin's criticism of Marx, Buber also felt that Marxist socialism must necessarily lead to the state capitalism of the Soviet Union under Stalin, state ownership by a minority class, which perpetuated the alienation and dehumanization of the laboring masses. Conversely, the radicalism which informed Buber's socialism came from Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Saint-Simon.<sup>2</sup> A member of the Jewish left, Buber represented the Utopian socialism which both Marx and Engels denounced in *The Communist Manifesto*.<sup>3</sup>

According to Marx and Engels, Utopian socialism was politically ineffectual because it did not understand the realities of class domination, class struggle, and revolution. The attempt to distinguish Marxian socialism from Utopianism, which Marx and Engels began in *The Communist Manifesto*, was continued by Engels in a work he published in 1880 called *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.<sup>4</sup> In this work, Engels distinguished the anarcho-communism of the Utopians from the scientific socialism of Marx and himself. According to Engels, scientific socialism provided a clear understanding of the materialist forces that determined the movement of history, and therefore comprehended the structures of political power that existed at

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a given historical moment, while Utopian socialism remained basically concerned with humanist-anthropological issues, such as personal autonomy and interpersonal harmony. Frankly acknowledging his anarcho-communist roots, asserting his derivation from Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Gustav Landauer, Buber met the Engelsian challenge directly by affirming that socialism must be predicated upon a Utopian humanist-anthropological core. Buber chose to be an advocate of communitarian socialism because it was only in the anarcho-socialist tradition that the commitment to personal authenticity and reciprocity, the ground of any I-Thou relationship, remained an inherent part.

Regardless of the separate intellectual traditions which flowed into the thought of Marx and Buber, both were social and political radicals. They differed and they were alike; both sought to transform and reconstruct society, although each had different models of a future society in mind. This essay is an attempt to uncover the ideational components of Buber's radicalism, and to isolate those ideas which formed the ground of Buber's anarcho-communism. This probe into Buber's left-wing politics will show that he and Marx shared a common belief in the historicity and transformative capacity of man. The ideological core of the radicalism of both Marx and Buber was their mutual commitment to the idea that human action helped create not only history, but man himself. In isolating those ideas which served as the ground of Buber's radicalism, this essay will also establish the intellectual prerequisites for any revival of Jewish leftist thought.

Buber rebelled, as Marx had rebelled, against bourgeois, liberal civilization. Nevertheless, when Marx turned to the Hegelian concepts of *praxis* and objectification in his rejection of bourgeois civilization, Buber turned to the reified, toward a mystical unity between the conditioned subjective and the unconditioned eternal. The tensions and the polarity between Marx and Buber represented the chasms and rifts that were tearing western society apart during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Marx, Marxists, and Buber rejected the liberal middle, the world of Adam Smith, Herbert Spencer, Thomas Jefferson, and John Stewart Mill. Marx furthered the tradition of the revolutionary left-wing Hegelians and hoped that through the overthrow of capitalism the social causes for the dehumanization and alienation of man would end. Buber extended the tradition of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Bergson, for he hoped that through intuition, encounter, meeting and dialogue the communication of man with man, regardless of its social context, would be enhanced and thus the deformation and fragmentation of human experience in the contemporary would be overcome.

Buber began his intellectual quest in search of a philosophical anthropology. Throughout his lifetime, Buber was to consider many intellectual frameworks, but as a young man Buber was seeking unconditional and unlimited statements about the nature of the human species. As part of

his quest for an ontology of human nature, Buber was forced to redefine the nature and practice of philosophy in general.

For Buber, philosophy must depart from this fixation with problems of cognition. Being an anti-Kantian, Buber was well aware that for philosophy to be primarily concerned with the question, How do I Know? was to limit thought to analyzing the extent of the separation between subject and object and to perceive man as being involved in receiving sensation and in structuring those sensations in a rational order. Man was thereby truncated: he was halved. In the Kantian context, man was understood solely in his sensory and logical (that is, mental) components. Buber, however, preferred to begin philosophy with Feuerbach and Nietzsche. Speculation should not begin with the question How Does Man Know? but rather the question How Does Man Live? Buber was concerned with the whole man: not with the separation between subject and object but with the unity between man and man. Based upon an anthropology, philosophy must investigate how the experience of individual life could be heightened, how existence could be authenticated both for the self and for the entire community. The aim of philosophy was not analytics, but morality and humanism.<sup>5</sup>

Like many rebels against *fin de siècle* capitalist society, Buber saw the mass as the chief threat to authentic and creative human existence. The mass was the source of anonymity and of conformity, and the cause of the loss of self, of true decision, of creative anxiety. In the first half of the twentieth century, Buber was to witness the rise of a totalitarianism of the right in Germany and/or a totalitarianism of the left in Russia. In Buber's eyes, the coming into being of national socialist and communist authoritarianism was a direct outgrowth of the mass society created by the bourgeoisie at the end of the nineteenth century. Echoing Kierkegaard, Buber maintained that true meaning was only possible where there was a true and autonomous individual. Without the immediate, the subjective, the conditional there could be no unity and oneness with the unconditional, the eternal, or God as person.<sup>6</sup>

Man, for Buber, was a being who acted; and while God was the primary active agent in the universe, man was the secondary generative agent. Man was created with the capacity for decision.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, because man had the capacity for choice he was visited with the pains of anxiety, and as a consequence of his freedom he experienced guilt. Nevertheless, Buber's vision of man as active subjectivity, did not permit him to succumb to pessimism, and neither did Buber fall prey to any philosophy of irrationalism. Even though an admirer and student of the intuitionist philosophy of Dilthey and Bergson, Buber never surrendered the hope that the real world could be logically understood. Intuition, or *verstehen*, for Buber, meant the extension of our understanding to the minds and feelings of other men, not the denial of the powers of the human mind to rationally comprehend the social and physical universe. Buber's Existentialism did

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not lead him to an acceptance of historical despair, or the concept of human powerlessness. Conversely, his Existential doctrine of active subjectivity and decision compelled him to accept possibility, to expect the future to witness productive human acts and choices.

Central to Buber's philosophical anthropology, was his belief that man was a subordinate active participant in the ongoing process of creation.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Buber took his idea of man's partial participation in creation as being one of the crucial concepts of the Hebrew religion.<sup>9</sup> Buber was able to inventively combine the Hassidic myth of *Shekinah* with his Judaic thesis of shared and mutual creation. According to Hassidic mysticism, sparks from God's soul were trapped or lost in the physical world, and the Hassidic believed that a good or just human act would free the *Shekinah* to return to God or else redeem its existence on earth.<sup>10</sup> Buber called this sacramental existence, which meant that a loving, confirming, or enhancing act was a sacrament because it glorified or redeemed God's spirit in this world. Whether in its Existential form of openness to the future, or in its supernatural form of redemption of the *Shekinah*, Buber's message was the same: the immediacy of the human action was a partial sharing in the process of creation. Genesis was the work of God, but it was also the intent of God that the continuing evolution of history be dependent upon human activity.

Buber's synthesis, of an existentialism which arose from the German philosophical tradition, with a religiosity, which was based primarily on Biblical Judaism, was a creative blending of intellectual originality. There were three levels to Buber's intellectual artifice: the Judaic, the Existential, and the mystical. The Hassidic gave to Buber's synthesis the passion, inspiration, and heat which were lacking in the other two elements. Mysticism supplied the Buber synthesis with ecstasy, with the supernatural assurance of final consummation. The German philosophical tradition, however, offered to Buber the necessary concepts for his theory of encounter, the dialogue of mutual revelation, the I-Thou drama. Relationship was primary for Buber, who depicted two kinds of primary relationships. First, the I-It, which involved the approach of the I to the non-personal inanimate world; second, the I-Thou, which involved the approach of the I to the interpersonal world. To Buber all authentic existence entailed meeting, encounter, dialogue. It was in the dialogic relationship between I and Thou that God existed.<sup>11</sup>

Buber first became aware of the I-Thou concept in the writing of Ludwig Feuerbach.<sup>12</sup> By means of the dialogical principle, Buber could overcome a traditional problem of philosophy, the subject-object dilemma, but more importantly, the dialogical principle served as a means by which Buber could interpret the Old Testament. Buber was a personalist, and in his biblical scholarship God was always seen in a discursive relationship with the Hebrews. God always talked to the Hebrews. The meeting between God and man was thus an I-Thou encounter, or since the primal

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act of god was dialogical, then God could only be discovered in personalist dialogical meetings. For Buber, authentic existence was immediate existence, for life was authentic when the divine or the eternal were present in every moment. In "The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul," Buber wrote:

One center of the Jewish soul is the primeval experience that God is wholly raised above man, that he is beyond the grasp of man, and yet that he is present in an immediate relationship with these human beings who are absolutely incommensurable with him, and that he faces them. To know both these things at the same time, so that they cannot be separated, constitutes the living core of every believing Jewish soul, to know both, "God in heaven," that is, in complete hiddenness, and man "on earth," that is, in the fragmentation of the world of his sense and his understanding; God in the perfection and incomprehensibility of his being, and man in the contradiction of this strange existence from birth to death — and between both, immediacy.<sup>13</sup>

There were two parts to Buber's philosophy of unity. First, the idea of presentness. Authentic existence required that God or the eternal be now, be existent in every lived moment. God could not be postponed for Buber, nor removed from the lived moment.<sup>14</sup> Second, the immediacy of God entailed the idea of unity between the particular and the divine.<sup>15</sup> If God were present in each moment, then conversely each moment participated in and was a reflection of the eternal.<sup>16</sup> The second part of Buber's doctrine of unity could be called the notion of simultaneity, the belief that each moment was simultaneously itself and a part of the spirit — *nuine life is united life.*<sup>17</sup> The fragmentation of the everyday, the loss of oneness between man and his environment was a product of the separation of the secular and religious in the contemporary world.<sup>18</sup>

Gershom Scholem has placed Buber within the Jewish messianic tradition.<sup>19</sup> Like many Jewish radicals of the twentieth century, such as Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Gustav Landauer, and George Lukacs, Buber has accentuated the themes of historicity, possibility, and human realization in time. The Jewish messianic tradition was based on the idea that the redemption of man would take place in time, and Buber perpetuated this tradition by stressing the importance of future, possibility, and history to human actions. Man must act so as to create his own redemption. If man was to participate in his own self-realization, he must be conceived as both a historical being, as well as a being of possibility. For Buber, as for all messianic thought, the future must exist as a realm of freedom, and history must exist as the temporal ground in which the possibilities of human fulfillment were brought into being by human deeds. In Buber, this messianic impulse was never de-transcendentalized. The Creation theme showed that God had produced a world of openness. The divine act of bringing the universe and man into existence showed that when human activity

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itself brought forth actualization, such actions were based on a sacral communion: man was fulfilling the possibilities that the divine had implanted into Creation.<sup>20</sup>

Buber was careful to distinguish two kinds of messianic hope: the prophetic and the apocalyptic. Buber defined prophetic messianism as follows: "[that] which at any given moment sees every person addressed by it as endowed, in a degree not to be determined beforehand, with the power to participate by his decisions and deeds in the preparing of Redemption."<sup>21</sup> In his book, *The Prophetic Faith*, Buber also defined the prophetic tradition as devoted to the realization of Redemption through human action. Within Buber's theology, messianic propheticism related to human intervention and modification of the external world.

Apocalyptic messianism was quite different: Buber defended it as "the redemptive process in all its details, its very hour and course, has been fixed from everlasting and for whose accomplishments human beings are only used as tools, though what is immutably fixed may yet be 'unveiled' to them, revealed, and they be assigned their function."<sup>22</sup> In short, prophetic messianism referred to a history and future produced as a result of human actions, while apocalyptic messianism referred to a history and future produced by an intervention of forces external to and beyond the control of man. Part of Buber's rejection of Marxism came from the fact that he identified it with apocalyptic messianism. In Marxism, human history was controlled by impersonal economic forces which operated beyond the control of human will. Condemning Marxism as a form of economic determinism, Buber's understanding of Marx was marred because he uncritically associated it with Stalinist Bolshevism. The Marxism of the Second International and of the Third International were both determinist ideologies, so Buber uncritically accepted economic determinism as representing the essence of the Marxist theory of history.

The major distinction between Buber and Marx is the separation between prophetic messianism and the philosophy of *praxis*. The Marxist philosophy of *praxis* was predicated upon the idea of immanence. Human actions, the agency of generation, were immanent in the world and so the historical process was an exemplification of the unity of subject and object. Marx believed in a philosophy of identity, in which the anthropological subject cast its own image upon the objective course of history.<sup>23</sup> The concept of historicity within the philosophy of *praxis* was composed of three constituent ideas: 1) that history was the predicate of the anthropological being of man; 2) that man himself was historicized because both his ideology and his psychology were constantly changing in terms of the sociological conditions in which they were embedded; and 3) that, both as the subject and product of history, the progress of man could only unfold in time. In prophetic messianism, human actions contributed toward the unfolding of history because they were revelatory and redemptive. Man fulfilled the design of God because his actions revealed the presence of

the transcendent in history and were themselves redemptive. They contributed to the realization of the possibilities that were latent in Creation. Buber did not believe in a philosophy of identity, for a separation existed between the I and Thou; in a dialogic relationship the subject was divorced from its respondent. The historical world, for Buber, was not a testament to the unity of subject and object; rather, the historical world only possessed symbolic significance. The material world was an allegory of God's intent, and in Buber's philosophy of non-identity the creation of design or order was a divine form of predication.

Even though Marx and Buber had major differences over the meaning of history, points of conjuncture existed as well. Buber shared with Marx some presuppositions regarding points 2 and 3 of Marx's definition of history (for clarification see the above paragraph). Within the transcendental framework of his thought, Buber shared with Marx the idea that man himself was process, that man was a journey through time (point 2). Buber, assuming the transcendental structure of his thought, also agreed with Marx that human fulfillment must take place in time (point 3). From this perspective, Buber was an expression of the Jewish messianic tradition. The Jewish messiah was an historical event, an entrance into the temporal-historical domain. On the basis of this Jewish messianic heritage, Buber could agree with Marx that human fulfillment was an event that could only take place in history.

Furthermore, Marx and Buber shared some common beliefs on the relationship between the human subject and the historical object. For both, the subject was an active force. For Buber, the obligation of the subject was to reveal the *Shekinah*, to discover the nature of the Creation that God had pre-determined in history. The Buberian subject, an active force, was not constitutive, but *uncovered* reality. Both Marx and Buber understood history as possibility and as openness.<sup>24</sup>

A revival of left-wing Judaism can only begin by making this concept of history an intellectual prerequisite.<sup>25</sup> The basis for a revival of left-wing Judaism must therefore be the acceptance of philosophical principles that open to, or project toward a political progressivism. Left-wing Judaism is based upon the assumption that culture must have an emancipatory function; the notion of history as possibility and openness is one element of an emancipatory culture.<sup>26</sup>

The work of Emil Fackenheim starkly contrasts to that of Buber, and represents the difference between Midrashic Judaism and prophetic messianism. While Buber was the seer of social Utopianism, Fackenheim is the spokesman of the post-Holocaust malaise. While Buber's philosophy was a strategy for the future and the yet-to-come, Fackenheim's philosophy is a tactic of confinement, for it prevents dreaming and over-reaching.<sup>27</sup> Fackenheim isolated himself from the emancipatory, both in the theological and political sense, when he rejected the left-wing Hegelian idea that history was the realm of potentiality and promise that was shared, although

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in different ways, by both Marx and Buber.<sup>28</sup> In the post-Auschwitz age, Fackenheim expressed the survivors' revenge against history, the attempt on the part of twentieth century disillusionment to bury the sacralization of the political. By destroying the political transcendental, Fackenheim sought to retain the religious transcendental. As contrary to a "theology of hope,"<sup>29</sup> Fackenheim offered theological paradox.

In order to demonstrate the wide gulf between prophetic messianism and Fackenheim's Midrashic Judaism, and to show that Fackenheim's thought precludes emancipation and leads to the confinement of possibility, I will analyze his thought under four categories: 1) The preservation of religious transcendence; 2) the Holocaust interpretation of European intellectual history; 3) the preservation of the legitimacy of Jewish particularity; 4) the Holocaust interpretation of the European existentialist tradition from Kierkegaard to Heidegger.

### The Preservation of Religious Transcendence

Emil Fackenheim is one of the major voices of Holocaust theology. He looks upon Auschwitz as the most important event in Jewish history since the destruction of the Second Temple. Fackenheim conducts a rabbinic pre-emption of Auschwitz, and uses the genocidal act as an empirical fact by which to understand God and to judge human history. His is a clerical seizure of the genocidal act, an attempt to create a theology of Auschwitz as a means to better comprehend the nature of God as well as the nature of human action in time.

Like a wound that will never heal, Auschwitz drove a lesion between Man and God. If you attempt to save God, then the Holocaust will give you no answer. If you attempt to save history, then the Holocaust will give you all the answers. In other words, the genocidal act cannot be made to accord with the idea of a loving God, so that Auschwitz cannot teach us anything about why God abandoned the Jews in the death camps. The only thing that Auschwitz can teach us about God is that he is absent from history. The existence of incarnate evil is contradictory to the concept of a loving God who intervenes in time, and so the existence of incarnate evil means that God does not intervene in the realm of man. While the Holocaust is a testament to the absence of God, it is also a testament to the absolute truth of history. The truth of history as the site of the genocidal act becomes established as the consequence of a God who refuses to enter into human time.

Fackenheim's Midrashic Judaism proposed a vision of history in which the transcendental and the secular were severed. There is no divine-human dialogue in Fackenheim, rather a God who is not only inscrutable, but also absent. Fackenheim does not talk of a total withdrawal of God from man but does speak of a tension that exists between the transcendent and the secular. In his book *The Jewish Return Into History*, Fackenheim defines

Midrashi existence in the following terms: "Midrashic cannot embrace a 'progressive view' of history, for this would dispense with the need for the acting of God."<sup>30</sup> Not only did Midrashic Judaism uphold the categorical separation between history and the sacral, but it also denied the possibility that man can know the transcendental. In *The Jewish Return Into History*, Fackenheim characterizes the Midrash as teaching "life lived with problems"<sup>31</sup> and of the "inherent and inevitable tension between contingent historical present and absolute messianic future."<sup>32</sup>

Fackenheim's response to Auschwitz parallels Theodor Adorno's reaction, who in his *Negative Dialectic*, spoke of the collapse of the theory of identity.<sup>33</sup> Looking upon the beastiality of the Second World War, Adorno stated that there was no rational basis for assuming the identity between subject and object, and Fackenheim's Midrashic Judaism can be looked upon as the theological equivalent of the subject-object uncoupling. In the prophetic messianism, Buber upheld the belief in a divine-human unity, while in Midrashic Judaism Fackenheim uncouples this connection. Buber's prophetic messianism was a product of the *fin-de-siècle* romantic rebellion against capitalist society in which the pre-World War One generation of Ernst Bloch, George Lukács, and Walter Benjamin dreamt of the possibilities of human and societal transformation. Fackenheim's Midrashic Judaism is an outgrowth of Auschwitz and Stalin, the post-World War Two world that had to confront the cold light of disenchantment, not only the horrors of Hitlerism but also the failures of Marxism to transform society. There is a difference between absence and abandonment, so while Fackenheim's God does not reject mankind, he leaves humanity in existential puzzlement.

If one begins theology from the point of Auschwitz, and employs the genocidal act to help define the nature of god, then one is forced to conclude that God's presence is not manifest in history. This is precisely the strategy from which Fackenheim argues the priority of religious transcendence. Having broken the identity between the divine and the human, from a divine-human encounter to a divine-human estrangement, Fackenheim rejects history in favor of Deity. Claiming the impossibility of historical salvation, Fackenheim looks upon religious transcendence as the ontic datum of life and upon salvation as an act of this transcendental Grace.

### The Holocaust Interpretation of European Intellectual History

Fackenheim's philosophy of non-identity led him to attack any form of political eschatology. When Fackenheim de-hyphenated the encounter between man and God, he did this to prevent any sacralization of the political. Because of the chiliastic claims of Hitlerism, and because of the failures of Stalinism which then served to impugn the entire history of socialism, Fackenheim attached all forms of political messianism (political messianism is synonymous with the apocalyptic messianism which Buber rejected). For Fackenheim, the sacred political was a form of idolatry, it was a

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fetishism that drew attention away from religious transcendence and it was this idolatry of history which must be rebuked.

In his attempt to preserve the non-identity between history and the divine, his major enemy proved to be Hegel and the Left-Wing Hegelians.<sup>34</sup> Fackenheim attacked that part of Hegel and the Hegelian tradition which presumed that the perfection of man can be realized in time. He saw Hegel as a great watershed in the intellectual history of the West, and he viewed the western history of ideas as dividing into two great streams in the post-Hegelian world: the existential stream of Kierkegaard, and the tradition of political sacralization of the Left-Wing Hegelians and Karl Marx. Fackenheim used the Holocaust as a criteria by which to judge western cultural history. The Holocaust proved that the Hegelian identity between history and the divine was invalid, and therefore the entire Left-Wing Hegelian tradition, out of which Marx arose, was based upon an erroneous assumption. Additionally, those philosophies which were predicated upon the human estrangement form of transcendence, the religious existentialism of Kierkegaard, and the atheistic existentialism of Heidegger began on proper philosophic assumptions.

Fackenheim's Holocaust view of European Intellectual History was influenced by Karl Lowith's *From Hegel to Nietzsche*,<sup>35</sup> to whom Fackenheim acknowledged his indebtedness. Lowith also saw the cultural history of Europe dividing after the great Hegelian synthesis, but as a humanist with Leftist sympathies Lowith tended to uphold the Left-Wing Hegelian tradition. *From Hegel to Nietzsche* describes the Hegelian synthesis as continuing through Marx, predicated upon the subject-object identity, while beginning to dissolve in Nietzsche who detached man from history and looked upon redemption as a privative act. Fackenheim's Holocaust view of European Intellectual History was essentially a response of the Hegelian middle to Lowith.<sup>36</sup> Instead of seeing the philosophy of identity as a source of cultural renaissance, Fackenheim attacked the history-divine hyphenation, rejected the sacralization of politics embodied in Left-Wing Hegelianism, and found in existential privativism a sound basis on which to build an ethic of human salvation. What Lowith saw as a source of cultural decadence, the rise of existential individualism, Fackenheim experienced as a source of cultural rejuvenation.

Nonetheless, Fackenheim also attacked the Left-Wing Hegelians because of their supposed anti-Semitism, and echoed the sentiments of Edmund Silberner, who accused the entire European left of anti-Semitism. The underlying political factor in the anti-Semitism issue was the hostility between nationalism and socialist internationalism, and Fackenheim clearly aligned himself with Zionist nationalism when he found the universalism of the Left-Wing Hegelian a threat to Jewish identity. In his *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, Fackenheim looked upon Marx's "On The Jewish Question" as an expression of anti-Semitic stereotypes.<sup>37</sup> Without getting into the issue of "On the Jewish Question," the fact that

Fackenheim branded a large part of the Left as anti-Semitic placed him in the camp of those Jews who rejected the Labor Zionist synthesis of Socialism and nationalism and embraced the nationalist right against Marxism.<sup>38</sup>

Fackenheim's conservatism, the tactics of confinement which he pursued, were not only manifest in relation to Lowith and the issue of Socialist anti-Semitism, but also in relation to Hegel. His book, *The Religious Dimensions in Hegel's Thought*, sought to establish a Hegelian Middle. Fackenheim had clearly separated himself from the Hegelian Left, and he sought to avoid the Hegelian Right with its glorification of the State, and hoped to establish a Hegelian Middle, which was believed to be the central pillar of Hegel's thought in his religious speculations. Basing itself for the most part on Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*, the Hegelian Middle wished to show that the "Hegelian philosophy as a whole — reconciles the content of the true religious faith with the remainder of man's *Weltanschauung*."<sup>39</sup> Seeking to protect the priority of the transcendental, the Hegelian Middle found the Hegelian project encapsulated in the idea that "philosophy cannot exist without religion — [and how it came to] encompass religion in its own being."<sup>40</sup> Fackenheim wrote his Hegel book in 1967 as a defense of Hegelian religiosity, but the book must also be seen as a rejoinder against the contemporary renewal of a Left-Wing interpretation of Hegel. Fackenheim did not mention, or even consider in his text, the early economic writing of Hegel which was published in 1967 and acted as a starting-point for the contemporary left-wing interpretation of Hegel. He did allude to the *Early Theological Writings*, but was silent about Hegel's *System der Sittlichkeit* and the *Jenenser Realphilosophie I and II* in which Hegel speculated about human economic labor and the human constitution of the world.<sup>41</sup> A student of Hegel must take the *System der Sittlichkeit* and the *Jenenser Realphilosophie I and II* into account because Hegel cannot be judged solely in terms of his religious thought, but also as someone who speculated on the powers of man to construct his own social universe. Fackenheim chose to ignore these documents, as well as Georg Lukács' *Die Junge Hegel*, Manfred Reidel's *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft und Staat*, and Jean Hyppolite's *Genèse et Structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel*, three books which re-introduced a radical vision of Hegel.<sup>42</sup> Fackenheim decided not to inform himself concerning a major school of Hegel scholarship which presented a re-statement of the Left-Wing tradition of the 1840s, a Hegel concerned with alienation, estrangement, dehumanization, while aware of man's economic life as solely a product of human activity. When one places Fackenheim's book *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought* into the context of contemporary neo-Left Wing interpretations of Hegel, his tactics of confinement are uncovered. The cultural strategy of Fackenheim's book was to block a revival of the history-divine unity which characterized the 1840 Left-Wing Hegelians. Fackenheim wished to ensure that Hegel was not again co-opted by the radicals, rather that Hegel was con-

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fined within the religio-transcendental cosmos. In this way, history would not again be viewed as a sacralized process.

### The Preservation of the Legitimacy of Jewish Particularity

Among the many ideas which the Enlightenment bequeathed to contemporary society, two have particular relevance to our discussion of Fackenheim. One of these ideas concerns freedom and self-determination, an idea developed by Spinoza and fulfilled by Hegel, and which was the basis of the Hegelian notion of the human-divine conjuncture. Fackenheim's attack upon the Enlightenment was supported by his Midrashic philosophy of non-identity and non-immanence. The Enlightenment notion of the universality of man is the second of these ideas. Beginning with a cosmopolitan basis, proponents of the Enlightenment assumed that all men shared a wide range of anthropological characteristics, that a common naturalistic humanity pulled them together, and that humans particularly tended to disappear in the universal claim of a common species being.

Not only did Fackenheim seek to make Auschwitz the *ontic datum* from which to begin theology, but he also sought to make Jewish particularity one of the criteria by which to judge western thought. Fackenheim's nationalism made him an opponent to Enlightenment universalism, because Fackenheim saw a threat to the preservation of Hebraic uniqueness in that cosmopolitan urge. Cosmopolitanism carried to its ultimate end would produce the same result as Auschwitz: it would end in Hebraic extinction. Since the survival of Jewish particularity was based on the unimpeachable beginnings of Fackenheim's Midrashic Judaism, Fackenheim was an advocate of nationalism in opposition to the universalistic claims of the eighteenth century. On this issue as well, Fackenheim emerged an exponent of bourgeois nationalism as opposed to a progressive internationalism.

Since the defense of national particularity became a criteria for the evaluation of western culture, Fackenheim was led to denounce the universalizing elements in the thought of Spinoza and Hegel. Specifically, Spinoza was taken as an example of a thinker whose intellectual dedication to cosmopolitanism led him ultimately to renounce his Judaism. Fackenheim looked upon Spinoza as an irrefutable example of how a total commitment to universality would lead to religious apostasy.<sup>43</sup> The spirit of Spinoza, in fact, was taken by Fackenheim as representing the three major dangers of Midrashic Judaism: a call for a universal anthropology, the advocacy of a concept of absolute human self-determination, and the assault upon religious transcendentalism. Furthermore, Fackenheim also denounced Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion* for its lack of understanding of Hebraic particularity.<sup>44</sup> The Hegelian claim that Christian Catholicism amounted to a transcendence of Judaic uniqueness, appeared to Fackenheim as a basic flaw in Hegel's philosophical reconstruction of religion.

The need to defend Jewish specificity led Fackenheim into a strategy of confinement. The requirements of advocating Jewish nationalism, forced Fackenheim's Midrashic Judaism to oppose the best Enlightenment traditions. Midrashic Judaism emerged as a tactic of limitation, because its need to maintain Jewish specificity prevented it from affirming progressive, universalistic tendencies. The intellectual requirements of Jewish specificity did not lead to historic openness or possibility, but reverted back to nineteenth century forces and nationalism by which the Jews indeed survived (Israel), but also by which they were nearly extinguished (Auschwitz). Judaism should not be called to the defense of outmoded historical forms of existence, and this is what a tactic of limitation achieves. Midrashic Judaism, as articulated by Fackenheim, has become allied with some of the most regressive aspects European culture: it has become associated with nationalism, it has assumed an anti-Enlightenment posture and when it was reflected in twentieth century thought its beginnings were found in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Midrashic Judaism has become joined to the darker side of nineteenth and twentieth century European cultures, and it is well to compare the prophetic messianism of Buber, who dreamt of a bi-national state in Israel, and although this dream collapsed, Buber still left us with a promising dream.

### The Holocaust Interpretation of European Existentialism

Fackenheim's attempt to preserve existentialism and exclude Marxism was evident in his approach to Sartre. Just as Fackenheim presented a distorted view of Hegel, so, too, he put forth a distorted view of Sartre.<sup>45</sup> When Fackenheim wrote on Hegel, he deleted any mention of Hegel's *System der Sittlichkeit* and the *Jenenser Realphilosophie I and II*. When Fackenheim wrote on Sartre, he treated him solely in terms of *Being and Nothingness*, failing to mention Sartre's Marxist period and Sartre's Marxist work, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, which was a revision of his early *Being and Nothingness*. Fackenheim arbitrarily decided to overlook vital aspects of the work of Hegel and Sartre which tended to contradict his interpretation of these men, and presented a biased picture, ensuring a Hegel and a Sartre with which he could work.

For Fackenheim, Sartrean existentialism contained a Midrashic insight relating to the non-identity of man in history. Fackenheim wrote of Sartre:

Condemned to be free, Sartrean man is condemned because situated by forces absolutely outside his control, and free because forced to choose absolutely inside the conditions of his situatedness — radical dualism thus manifests itself: for his situation a man is wholly nonresponsible, for he can neither alter it nor escape from it, for his own very being within the situation he is wholly responsible for what he is and well he is wholly his own 'project'.<sup>46</sup>

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This passage, although not taken from *Being and Nothingness*, expressed the ahistorical, individualistic sentiments of that work, but Fackenheim refused to comment on Sartre's later historical engagement. Sartre was led to embrace historicity: he did enter the French Communist Party, and allied himself to the Third World Revolution through Castro and Fanon and Maoism, and wrote *A Critique of Dialectical Reason* in which he embraced Marxism. Sartre's existential description of historical anxiety and dread was basically a pre-World War Two phenomena, and Fackenheim totally failed to explain how existentialism (Sartre) and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) became linked with Marxism to produce a philosophy of historical engagement in the period after the Second World War. Sartre, comprehended in his entirety, was not a spokesman of Midrashic ahistoricity, but an exponent of the philosophy of the human constitution of the social.

Fackenheim also found relevance between Heidegger's metaphysics and Midrashic Judaism, although he obviously judged Heidegger's Nazi period as unforgivable. He wrote of Heidegger:

Man's being in the world is said by Heidegger to consist of his inability to transcend his situatedness-in-the-world: in the final analysis this is his being-toward-death. However, this latter is 'unauthentic' when it is toward death-in-general, and 'authentic' only when it is each man's being-toward his-own-death.<sup>47</sup>

Fackenheim learned from Heidegger's metaphysics because it was grounded upon the assumption of the dysjuncture between the subject and the transcendental, but rejected a metaphysics of hope as articulated by Ernst Bloch. Fackenheim was extremely critical of Ernst Bloch<sup>48</sup>, finding in him a form of political sacralization which he thought abhorrent. Fackenheim could learn from a metaphysics of non-identity, but he looked upon a metaphysics of messianic hope as entirely misdirected.

The revival of Left-Wing Judaism can only develop through a return of Jewish thought to the tradition of Buber's prophetic messianism and Marx's philosophy of *praxis*. Gerson Scholem in his essay, "Reflections of Jewish Theology," looked upon prophetic messianism as one of the most vital ideas in Judaic philosophy.<sup>49</sup> Despite the important differences between prophetic messianism and the philosophy of *praxis*, both share the assumption that history is to some degree a social production. A theology which takes its point of departure from the Holocaust, as Fackenheim's contemporary version of Midrashic thought does, can only lead to a closed view of history. Fackenheim's theologizing of the Holocaust did violence to the theme of Creation as Revelation. Following Buber in this regard, and dedicated to the Hassidic tradition, Scholem began his theology from the idea of Creation as Revelation, and thus committed himself to the idea of an ongoing creation in which man must contribute to the unfolding of the future.<sup>50</sup> Prophetic messianism and the theme of Creation as Revelation are connected, and both commit one to the concept that history is possi-

bility that can be actualized.

A revival of Left-Wing Judaism through a return to prophetic messianism does not imply that the failures and excesses of Jewish political utopianism will be overlooked. In this regard the millenarian impulse of George Lukacs stands as testimony, for there is a bloody gulf between the chiliaric expectations of *History and Class Consciousness* and the Stalinist Gulag. *History and Class Consciousness* was a product of the apocalyptic dreams of the 1917 to 1921 period when it appeared likely that the Communist revolution would break out of Russia and spread to Hungary and Germany, the core of Central Europe; but these millenarian hopes were dashed when Communist expansionism was replaced by Stalin's socialism in one country. History did not turn out the way that Lukacs wanted, and Adorno was aware of this when he wrote of the de-hyphenation between the subject and history. Jurgen Habermas also criticized Lukacs for his belief in a philosophy of identity, and Habermas, like most of the Frankfurt School, presumed the separation between subject and object.<sup>51</sup> History is not merely the objectification of man, and this Luckacsian Left-Hegelian exaggeration must be put aside.

There is a distinction, however, between identity and constitution. Identity implies a human-historical union, while constitution refers to the subject as one generative agent in the shaping of the future. Identity implies a subject-object synthesis, while constitution refers to the social subject as one creative agent in the shaping of the future. Identity implies a subject-object fusion, while constitution entails that human actions are forces of intervention in history. Left-Wing Judaism does not attempt to revive the philosophy of identity or subject-object unity, but it does emphasize the role of human actions as interventionist forces in the making of history.

Judaism looks upon history from a Hegelian perspective, as the educative process of mankind. Human actions are constitutive of history, but human beings only learn about the efficacy of their actions after the fact. Like Hegel's Owl of Minerva, which only takes flight at evening, so human knowledge is reflexive. History is an educative process, in which one learns the effect of actions only after the fact.

Left-Wing Zionism must associate itself with the universalizing trends of the Enlightenment. This does not mean that Jewish particularism need be erased in a humanist cosmopolitanism. It means that proponents of Left-Wing Zionism must seek a reconciliation with the Enlightenment historiography of Condorcet and Turgot, and with the idea of progressive historical development. Left-Wing Zionism must also recover Spinoza's message that the subject is its own self-determination. The Spinozist concept of human self-determination is the prerequisite for the idea of historical progressivism.

Lastly, the failure of Labor Zionism, the dream of Aaron Liberman, Nachman Syrkin, and Ber Borochov, did not mean that the hope of uniting Jewish nationalism with a socialist society was merely an empty chimera. It

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was a concept which essentially grew out of East European Jewry on the part of those few persons who wished to apply the Jewish messianic ideal to society and to the "subgroup" of dedicated followers who surrounded them. Labor Zionism never grew into a mass movement because the Jews in the period of the Russian Revolution had no nation-state, and when they gained a nation-state in Palestine the immediately pressing historical conditions called for the nationalist defense of the territory that they had conquered. In the history of the modern world since the French Revolution, no people have conducted a socialist revolution without first having won a nation-state, and no people inside a nation-state ever led a socialist revolution unless a significant portion of that people were proletarian. In Russia, in the time of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Jews lacked both prerequisites, since they possessed no nation-state and their population was not significantly proletarian. Because of the larger Russian revolutionary forces, Jewish proletarian aspirations, the Bund, was co-opted by the momentum of the Russian (Bolshevik) proletarian overthrow of the Romanov Empire, and Jewish nationalist hopes in Russia were subordinated to the needs of the new Soviet state in order to achieve internal coherence through the suppression of nationalist demands, not only of Jews but of the plethora of minority groups in Russia. The most important Jewish social movement in Russia after the 1905 Revolution was emancipation through emigration. The Black Hundred programs created a Palestinianism, as well as an exodus mentality whose outlet was the United States. After 1905, with the passing of Borochoy, the Jewish intelligentsia, namely Trotsky and Martov, abandoned the Jewish masses and committed themselves to the Russian proletarian struggle. The inability of Labor Zionism to become a powerful political force in Jewish statecraft does not give witness to the irreconcilability of nationalism and socialism. Where the Jews were socialist, their nationalist ambitions were defeated, and where they were nationalist their socialist hopes were thwarted. These paradoxes were due to the fact that the prevailing forces in their socialist phase were socialist internationalism, while the dominant forces in their nationalist phase were Arab anti-Zionism. Jewish socialism had to wait for the acquisition of a territorial base, and again must wait for the reconciliation between Hebrew and Moslem.<sup>52</sup> Buber saw this as well, and it was one of the reasons he so ardently desired an Arab-Israeli rapprochement. A settlement of the territorial problems in the Middle East is the prelude to our rebirth of Jewish humanism.

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### Notes

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3. Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & co., 1972), pp. 331-362.
4. Fredrick Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," in *Marx-Engels Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), pp. 379-398.
5. Martin Buber, "What is Man?" in *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1967), pp. 118-205. Oriental philosophy was very appealing to Buber because of its accent on humanism and ethics. For the humanistic basis of Chinese philosophy see the following essays by Buber: "The Teaching of the Tao," in *Pointing the Way* pp. 31-35; "China and U.S.," (New York: Harper & Row, 1957). In addition see "The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism," in *On Judaism*, ed. Natuhum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), pp. 56-78.
6. Martin Buber, "The Question to the Single One," in *Between Man and Man*, pp. 40-82.
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8. Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: The MacMillan Co. 1949).
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10. Martin Buber, *Mamre* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946). Also see Buber's *The Way of Man, According to the Teachings of Hasidism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950).
11. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Schribner's Sons, 1958).
12. Martin Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," in *Between Man and Man*, pp. 209-224. Also *Moses*.
13. Martin Buber, "Two Foci of the Jewish Soul," in *Israel and the World*, pp. 30-31.
14. Martin Buber, "The Teaching of Tao," in *Pointing the Way*, p. 34.
15. Martin Buber, *The Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952).
16. Martin Buber, *Good and Evil* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 130. For a further definition of evil see "The Faith of Judaism" in *Israel and the World*, p. 18.
17. Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 104. For additional comments on the problem of guilt, see "Healing Through Meeting," in *Pointing the Way*, p. 95.
18. Ibid.
19. Gershom Scholen, "Martin Buber's Conception of Judaism," in *Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 160-163. For a more complete presentation of Scholem's thinking on messianism, see her definitive study *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).
20. On the theme of divine-human co-authorship in history, see Buber's *The Kingship of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp.99-135. This book clearly presents Buber's ideas concerning the mutual participation of God and man in history.
21. Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 10.
22. Ibid.

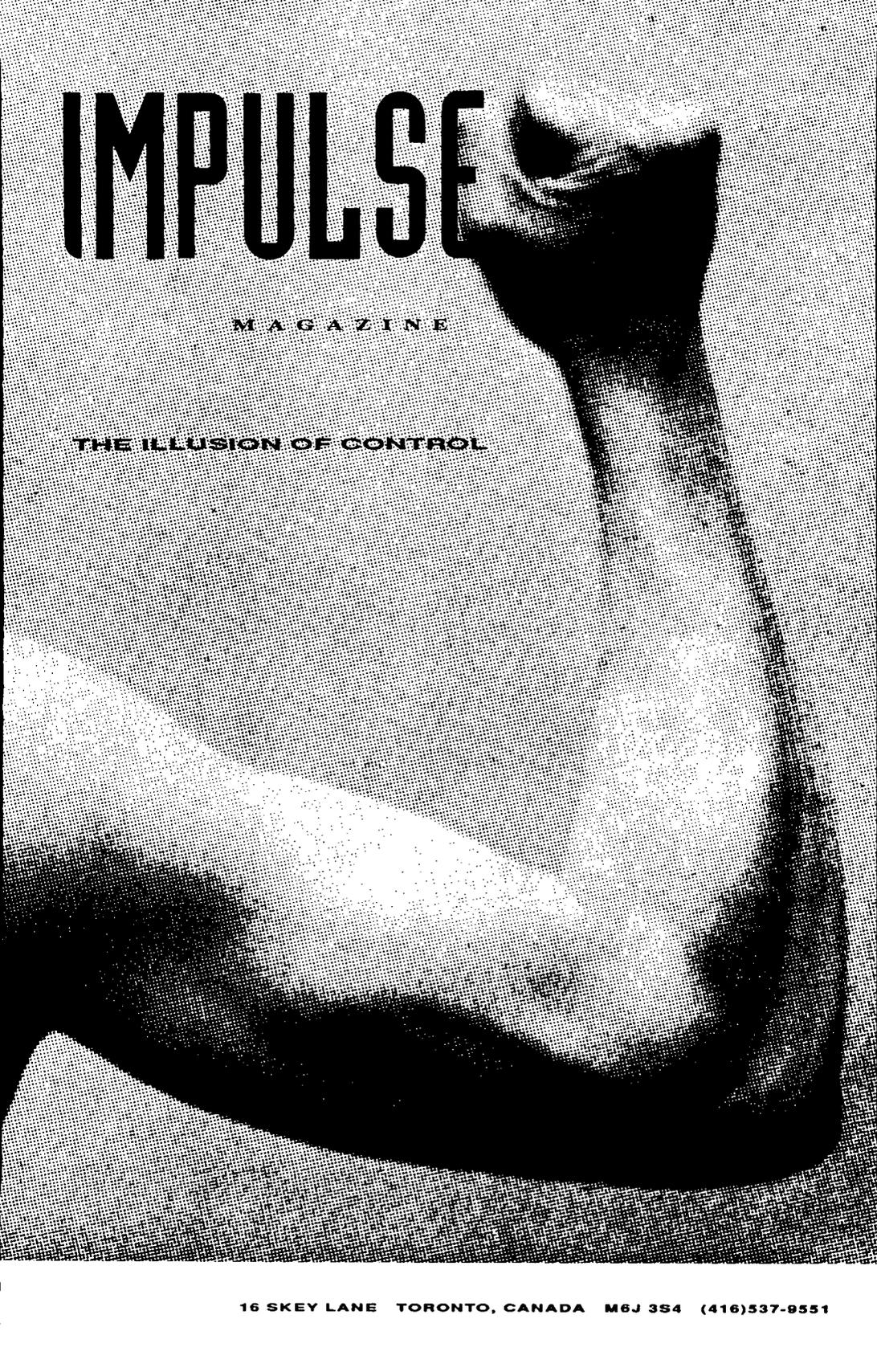
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23. For an excellent discussion of the philosophy of *praxis* in Marx, see Nathan Rotenstreich, *Basic Problems of Marx's Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).
24. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), p. 314.
25. Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 56.
26. In other articles, I have touched upon the need for Jewish theology to reassociate itself with the messianic tradition. See the two following essays which I wrote: "The Jewish Revolution is Not Complete," *Judaism* (Spring, 1974), pp. 193-201; "On the Necessity of a Jewish Marxist Dialogue" *Judaism* (Winter, 1976), pp. 107-114.
27. On this point, see the work of Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). The actual phrase which Jameson uses is "strategy of confinement," "and he means any theoretic order which does not carry with it an emancipatory possibility. The term emancipatory should be understood as the removal of any barriers toward the further advancement of human freedom. Although I use a different phrase, I am indebted to Fredric Jameson on this point, and I use the phrase emancipation to mean an additional step in the conquest of human freedom. The phrase tactic of confinement should take the place of a now outmoded basically nineteenth century term, "bourgeois thought."
28. I am aware that Fackenheim and I have different interpretations of Martin Buber's work. I see Buber as an expression of the Jewish messianic tradition, and I am supported in this view by Gerson Scholem. In Scholem's work, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, he distinguishes between prophetic and apocalyptic messianism and places Buber in the prophetic heritage. A different interpretation is offered by Fackenheim who emphasized Buber's Existentialism and his proto-Midrashism. At the end of his life, according to Fackenheim, Buber grew doubtful of the divine-human union and moved instead to the idea of a divine-human dysjuncture. For me, the Scholemian interpretation is the correct one.
29. Refer to the work of Jurgen Moltman, *A Theology of Hope*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). It is interesting that the experience of Hitlerism and the Holocaust have led to contradictory tendencies in contemporary Christian and Jewish theology. Anguished by their passivity as well as complicity in the horrors of the Third Reich, Christian theologians are moving toward history: attempting to understand history as the domain where some form of the divine must be realized. Following Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and rejecting the Lutheran divorce between the divine and the secular, the theologians understand that holiness must also be found in history. On the other hand, some Jewish theologians, finding the Holocaust incomprehensible, are moving away from history. Since they feel that history has rejected them, they in turn now reject history.
30. Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return Into History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 263.
31. *Ibid.* p. 263.
32. *Ibid.* p. 276.
33. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966).
34. On this point, see the following books by Fackenheim: *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), pp. 70-170; *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), pp. 103-146.
35. Karl Lowith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, trans.

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36. On the question of the Hegelian Middle, see Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana, University Press, 1967).
37. Fackenheim, *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, pp. 146-148.
38. I have written on this point in my "Lenin on Jewish Nationalism," *Bulletin of the Wiener Library* (August, 1980), pp. 42-54. In that essay I show that Lenin, at least, was not anti-Semitic. Although my article concerns Lenin specifically, it was intended as a refutation of the whole Silberner school. The question of the relationship between Marx himself and Marxism in general and the Jews is a complex one, and I plan to write about that at a future date, but at the moment it is valid to say that the Zionist nationalist right attack on Marxism as generically anti-Semitic is not only simplistic but also smacks of a witch-hunt.
39. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought*, p. 116.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
41. These writings are to be found in J. Hoffmeister, *Hegel's Samtliche Werke* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1932).
42. A full bibliographic reference to each of these books follows: George Lukacs *Die Junge Hegel* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1970); Manfred Reidel, *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft und Staat* (Neuwied; Luchterhand, 1970); Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel* (Paris: J. Urin, 1947).
43. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 31-102.
44. Fackenheim, *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, pp. 151-153.
45. *Ibid.* pp. 203-212.
46. *Ibid.* p. 206.
47. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. 153.
48. Fackenheim, *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, pp. 151-153.
49. Gerson Scholem, "Reflections on Jewish Theology," in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 278-285.
50. *Ibid.* pp. 275-278.
51. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 339.
52. Frankel, Jonathan, *Prophecy and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 50.
53. For a fuller discussion of the matter of Jewish nationalism, see my essay "The Colonial Image and the Jew," *Bibliothèque Rosenthaliana* (University of Amsterdam: Winter, 1974).

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