

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).¹

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.² 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."³ 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.⁴ 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)⁵ 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,"⁶ 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.