The essays in this section all place themselves within contemporary post-essentialist discourse. In addressing contemporary film, they turn up yet more evidence of the disappearance of history, politics, art, narrative (grand and otherwise), significance, causality, the subject, and even gender. At the same time the films they address tend, in their anti-essentialism, to reverse an oft-cited postmodern maxim. In his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard talks of postmodernism presenting the unpresentable (“put[ting] forward the unpresentable in presentation itself”). In contradistinction, many of the films discussed in this section “unpresent the presentable” — a strategy which, I would argue, not only asserts the impossibility of representation in a post-essentialist context but also frees the spectator from presentation, hence from the domination of the text.

Much of what follows cannot be defined solely as postmodern. “Multiple coding” techniques such as montage, collage, citation, etc. are modernist. What I call “othering” can undoubtedly be found in literature of earlier periods. And much of what is said of counterfeiting in *To Live and Die in L.A.* may also apply to André Gide’s *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1926). However, the proliferation of strategies whose effect is to efface presence in the very method of presentation can indeed be characterized as postmodern.

Similarly, what follows is only a small piece of an enormous picture: one that includes, for instance, Derrida’s entire deconstructive project and the formidable critical apparatus that has developed around it. In fact, self-conscious strategies of “unpresenting” are found throughout modern and
AESTHETICS AND POSTMODERNISM

contemporary literature (philosophy, psychoanalysis, and literary criticism now included), drawing attention to the fact that language is by its very nature a form of unpresenting.

So of course is film, but it tries vehemently not to be. In fact, a major lure of film, as a recording medium, has always been the seeming authenticity of its presentations. So self-conscious unpresenting — defying the seeming nature of the medium — comes harder to filmmakers, especially those working in an entertainment system solidly committed to an ideology of Representation and the Real.

The struggle of film “against itself” makes for an interesting postmodern issue, particularly as movies begin to assert themselves as a vital part of the contemporary deconstructive enterprise.

One final qualification. The following remarks are preliminary and tentative. If there is validity to their general drift, there is also great need not only for amplification but for the refinement of terms, categories, and definitions.

The above having been said, allow me to hypothesize “unpresentation” in three manifestations: “multiple coding,” “othering,” and “presentation under erasure.”

Multiple Coding

By this I mean all the ways in which a text is coded “beyond itself”: allusion, citation, collage, pastiche, etc. (The term “intertextuality” might be used, but its implications are much broader than the topic at hand.) This consummately modernist strategy, evident in most of the films mentioned in the following essays, unpresents in a variety of ways. For one thing, it defeats the fetishism of unitary coding (collapsing all codes within a work into a master code: the “meaning of the work”) — fetishism which locks the consumer of the text into the presentation itself. Moreover, it gives and takes away at the same time. The text is there but not there because it is always pointing somewhere else. Moreover, the multiply coded text does not re-present the “elsewhere” (the original context), it only refers to it. Since both the current text and the original sources are decontextualized, one is left somewhere in between, faced with the challenge of creating one’s own context or of suspending the need for one altogether.

Time itself is unpresented. The present isn’t present but a series of references to a past, which itself fails to materialize. Simultaneously, this a-present and a-past, by being juxtaposed, are in effect spatialized and denied both their temporal nature and their linear or “narrative” comprehensibility.

Finally, referentiality (the very technique that multiple coding employs) is unpresented — at the same time used and denied because the referent(s) cannot be recovered.
FRANK BURKE

"Othering"

To illustrate what I mean by this term, I'll begin with an oft-quoted piece of writing by Foucault:

Transgression, then, is not limited to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night which it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity; the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity.³

What concerns me here is not so much Foucault's topic as his intellectual methodology, which consists of effacing identity in the very mode of presenting it — by turning the thing identified into its (or an) other. Foucault starts by giving us a term, "transgression," as part of a binary opposition (transgression/limit). This appears to be standard structuralist procedure in which each term maintains its own identity, in strict juxtaposition with its opposite. However, Foucault immediately begins to dissolve identity by denying the opposition ("transgression, then, is not limited to the limit as black to white"). Then, using simile, he defines the one thing in terms of (not in opposition to) the other. Transgression is like a lightning flash which "owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation" and whose very light "gives a dense and black intensity to the night which it denies." Finally, the originating term (as simile) disappears altogether into the other: "the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it is has given a name to obscurity."

Most important, what Foucault describes is not a single event culminating in closure. (That would be mere metamorphosis: one thing turning into another.) Instead, as his use of the phrase "a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust" makes clear, he is positing a never-ending process in which one thing is always turning into, without permanently becoming, an other. (The act of disappearance at the end of the quotation thus becomes provisional rather than final.) As was the case with multiple coding, we are presented with something that never is, in fact, "itself."

This is also the strategy of René Magritte's The False Mirror — as well as Arthur Kroker's strategy in discussing the artwork in a recent issue of the Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory. Magritte's painting presents an eye which reflects the sky it presumably observes. Eye is sky and vice versa. The identity of seer and seen is always that of the other, but without the original identity ever completely dissolving. As Kroker
puts it: "Always the site of the sky is disturbed and mediated by the inner horizon of the disembodied eye: all a matter of resemblance and nonidentity. A perfect refraction takes place in which the object viewed (signified) circles back and, in an instantaneous shift of perspective, becomes the locus . . . of signification itself."4

Turning to film, a complex example of “othering” is provided by William Friedkin’s To Live and Die in L.A. (later treated at length by Christopher Sharrett). Here the opposite terms involved are artist and criminal. The antagonist, Masters, is a painter turned counterfeiter. The moment he appears on screen, so does the assertion “directed by William Friedkin,” identifying the artist in the film with the artist of the film. The identification is at least twofold. As an “creator” involved in the mechanical reproduction of images Friedkin is a counterfeiter. As a maker of violent movies, who often “murders” the human images he presents, Friedkin is anti-social and destructive, not merely a counterfeiter. Counterfeiting and violence unite at the film’s end when Friedkin, having killed off his protagonist, Chance, replaces him with the duplicate or counterfeit Vukovich. (Chance’s former sidekick, Vukovich begins doing the very things Chance did earlier.) Then Friedkin goes one step further and ends the film with a completely unmotivated image (the duplicate or counterfeit) of Chance himself. (The very arbitrariness of Friedkin’s abrupt narrative shifts from Chance to Vukovich to image-of-Chance derives from Friedkin’s license not just as artist but as killer and counterfeiter.)

Of course the artist-as-criminal is not an uncommon 20th-century metaphor (and in instances such as Jean Genet, both metaphor and fact). A very recent manifestation is the Quebecois film Une zoo la nuit (which, incidentally, cites the work of Friedkin throughout). However, metaphor tends to maintain its two terms in a relationship that preserves the identity of each. I would argue that Friedkin, by introducing the issue of counterfeiting, and thus incorporating his own role as moviemaker into his configuration, creates a dynamic slide in which one term can’t be held separate from the other and always is, in fact, its other. In watching his movie we are witnessing the criminality of art and the artistry of crime always sliding into one another without the process of transformation ever becoming complete.5

Presentation Under Erasure

Perhaps the most distinctly postmodern strategy for unpresenting the presentable is offering the artwork/text/movie “under erasure,” to borrow a notion used extensively by Derrida.6 The films discussed in the following essays provide numerous examples. Yvonne Rainer’s The Man Who Envi ed Women is, as Peggy Phelan demonstrates, a film of “evacuation” — one which refuses to fill its narrative space with substantial presences (as conventional cinema tends to do), but instead continually empties itself.
out. Characterization occurs almost entirely as unpresentation. Trisha, the female protagonist, remains visually absent. The identity of the main male character, Jack, is effaced by doubling: he is played by two different actors, he has a girlfriend named Jack-ie, he speaks lines that are mere quotations from other sources (Raymond Chandler, Foucault), he has "visions" that are scenes from films.

The most profound instance of presenting "under erasure" is contained in Trisha's concluding thoughts as she seeks to redefine herself in relation/opposition to gender: "Not a new woman, not non-woman, or misanthropist, or anti-woman, and not non-practicing lesbian. Maybe un-woman is also the wrong term. A-woman is closer. A-womanliness." Here, with the use of the letter "a" we have both an article that designates ("a woman") and a prefix that negates ("a-woman"). Or, perhaps more accurately, the very act of defining is an act of erasing, the very mode of presentation defeats presentation.

(Having discussed the complex suitability of "a" — we will now follow Trisha's example and shift to "a-presentation" from "unpresentation." Only the awkwardness of the former, without an explanatory context, prevented its earlier use.)

Just as The Man Who Envied Women tells its story under erasure by thematizing evacuation, doubling characterization, and "a-defining" woman, To Live and Die in L.A. effaces its narrative in the very act of presentation by insisting that everything is counterfeit. All value, all enduring substance, disappear once story, filmmaker, and medium are reduced to a process of mere fraudulence and replication. (The film enters Baudrillard's simulacrum, which is contemporary hyperreality entirely under the sign of erasure.)

Insignificance, the recent Nicholas Roeg film, performs a similar act of effacement, beginning with its title and continuing with its recreation of historical figures (Marilyn Monroe, Albert Einstein, Joe Dimaggio, Joe McCarthy, Roy Cohn), under the erasure of total fictionalization. (See Sharrett's more extensive discussion.)

Finally, we cite Fellini, whose recent work is a virtual celebration of a-presentation. The title of Amarcord means (according to Fellini himself) "I remember," but there is no "I," no Fellini, in the film. In fact there is no main character or narrator — just a succession of vastly different narrators whose partial and fragmented "story" denies the possibility of coherent memory on the part of a unified subject or "I." (This is in deliberate contrast to Fellini's two preceding films, The Clowns and Roma, in which Fellini was indeed the main character and narrator.)

Casanova is a film made entirely under erasure. It is, in Fellini's words, "A film on nothingness ... A total absence of everything ... rendered without emotion — there are only forms that are outlined in masses, perspectives articulated in a frigid and hysterical repetition ... It is nonlife with its empty forms which are composed and decomposed, the charm
of an aquarium, an absentmindedness of sealike profundity, where everything is completely hidden and unknown because there is no human penetration or intimacy." With its deliberate mannerist excesses, its debasement of its own signifiers (oceans constructed out of garbage bags), its thematizing of pose and artifice, Casanova counterfeits itself, its story, and its "hero" from start to finish.

And the Ship Sails On effaces politics and history by simulating the outbreak of World War I but fictionalizing beyond recognition the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and the sinking of the Lusitania. This is identical to the method of historical fictionalization in Insignificance and is not so much an erasure of the film itself as presentation of the historical referent under erasure. (Both Fellini and Roeg are working in the realm of multiple coding as well.) Again we can cite Baudrillard's simulacrum of pure presentation without referentiality.

The phenomenon of a-presentation I've been seeking to address lends itself to several responses. On the level of content, divisions might be made between "positive" and "negative" forms. For instance, Trisha's concept of "a-womanliness" in The Man Who Envied Women appears to be constructive: a way of thematizing an escape from gender formulations (and binary opposition) rooted in logocentrism. (Her visual absence in the film also frees her from filmic objectification, if we assume that the gaze is inherently male.) Friedkin's, Roeg's, and Fellini's versions of erasure, on the other hand, seem to reflect a paralyzing sense of futility with regard to both art and history.

As methodology, however, a-presentation can, in all its forms, be seen as a useful tool for de-substantializing the artwork and our responses to it. By denying identity in the very means of presenting it, by forcing one beyond the given to the realm of erasure (the excluded, the suppressed, the ideologically determining), a-presentation defeats the kind of closure upon which traditional narrative has depended. By tuning one in both to the presentation and its denial, it promotes the kind of both-and, multirelational, thinking that is struggling to replace linear, binary thought.

Viewed in its most flattering light, a-presentation accords with the earliest, most utopian strains of postmodernism, which envisioned an expansion of consciousness promoted by revolutions in media and information systems. Viewed in less but still flattering light, a-presentation offers a method of resistance and opposition, as well as a means of recovering the erased. Viewed neutrally, it comprises a methodology of free play "just for the fun of it." Seen at its worst, it becomes part of late capitalism's campaign to divorce the individual from meaning, causality, and history and fuel the kind of schizophrenia (all signifying chains ruptured) on which late capitalism depends.¹⁰
Returning to the realm of film, let’s just conclude by saying that, all other things aside, a-presentation allows movies to disengage themselves from “all the Real’s big numbers” (Baudrillard) and to more fully assert themselves as a medium not of representation but of the “post” or (to take our lead again from Rainer) the “a”-real.

Notes

1. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 81. It should be emphasized that Lyotard is not advocating a return to presence or substantiality. The postmodern “searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable” (Ibid.).

2. My use of “erasure” is, as I acknowledge in the body of my text, derived from Derrida. However, other Derridean strategies such as the marking of supplements, the production of differences and undecidables, and the overrunning of borders and margins are equally relevant examples of “unpresenting” — as are the methods of “misreading” developed by American deconstructionists such as Paul de Man and Harold Bloom.


7. Rainer’s disfigurement of the visual image — her “optically degenerated shots,” to use her own term, is not inconsistent with the notion of “unpresenting.” However, disfiguring what is presented is somewhat different from presenting “under erasure” — i.e., giving and at the same time taking away.

8. One should not, however, confuse the wholesale contamination of counterfeiting in To Live and Die in L.A. with Baudrillard’s much more restricted use of the term in Simulations, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e) and Jean Baudrillard, 1983), pp. 83 ff.

10. Ihab Hassan still tends to represent postmodernism in its utopian mode (The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture — Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987). Andreas Huyssen represents a middle ground of both political engagement and appreciation of postmodernism (After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism — Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). Frederic Jameson is, of course, the most strident critic of postmodernism from a political point of view ("Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," New Left Review, no. 146 (July-August, 1984), 57).
Central to an understanding of postmodernism is the notion of the spectacle (as this term comes to us from Guy Debord¹) and its changing configuration. While Baudrillard’s concept of spectacle is probably correct in that the theatrical experience and the adjacent sense of the social are obsolete topics in the wake of cable television and the VCR, there is little question that an essential feature of postmodernism in the hegemony of the image. An evolving strategy in approaching postmodern culture is the examination of the technological and ideological direction of media and the construction of the bourgeois subject by them. I will argue that the depiction of the protagonist in current film narrative provides a sense of the particular ideology of postmodernism, the place of narrative in the recent milieu, and the changing notion of the self in the media landscape.

As we have learned from Laura Mulvey³ and others, the human image depicted in the cinema has often functioned as projection and ego ideal for the bourgeois subject. This notion must be contextualized, however, in a specific phase of image production and political economy. Postmodern cinema, even with the “nostalgia mode” which attempts to evoke longing for the “innocence” of the recent past, contains a contradictory view of the individual which ultimately cannot offer the solace of dominant ideology. While capitalist ideology is commonly asserted in the reactionary ‘80s, it is in contention with the culture industry’s exhaustion, its self-referentiality born out of the dearth of ideas as the demand for satisfactions increases while received myths supporting bourgeois narrative are dissimilated.
POSTMODERN CINEMA

What follows is necessarily tentative and heuristic: a typological approach toward mapping a particular cultural manifestation of the bourgeois self with attention to the notion that postmodernism is not one movement as such. Indeed, the cognitive mapping which Fredric Jameson has undertaken proves how extraordinarily complex postmodernism is as evidence of a major shift in world culture, and how previous strategies of historical periodization are obviously inadequate (while I am in agreement with Jameson's notion of a "spatialized" approach to postmodernism, I will suggest herein the importance of Reaganism, the 1980s, and the half-hearted attempt to recoup credibility for master narratives to the formation of postmodern experience). Nevertheless, this analysis must pay attention to the technological, economic, and cultural changes of the last ten years in particular for their evidencing of the climate of postindustrialism outlined by Daniel Bell and others, and more particularly for the tidal wave of reaction associated with the present massive cultural inversion. While there are compelling arguments for postmodernism as subversive (that is, as an extension of modernism, as a death knell for authorship, truth, all forms of representationalism), a dialectical approach makes postmodernism primarily the broad framework for a crisis in credibility both in the state and artistic production.

The nature of the postmodernism debate is for the most part well known, but the central points need to be recapitulated and situated vis-a-vis the role of narrative. Thus far postmodernism has been approached principally by examining major changes in critical theory and interpretations of mass culture. There are, at this stage, two lines of thought on the development of postmodernism. The French school, represented by Jean Baudrillard and Jean-Francois Lyotard, might be termed neo-Nietzschean in its assault on totalizing theories of history and language systems. Baudrillard's rhetoric, even with its extensive traces of Marxism, evidences the nihilism in much discourse of post-'68 France. At the heart of Baudrillard's analysis of culture is the notion of the simulacra — signifying practices empty of meaning, and end-product of Western representationalism — which he associates with an apocalyptic crisis of language. Although Baudrillard sketches the development of sign systems through various stages of capitalism's evolution — equating, for example, early iconic representation with feudalism, simulacra (computer graphics, media images) with the cybernetic revolution and corporatism — he stops short of programmatic response. While his analysis of the media is cogent, debunking both McLuhan's global village utopia and Orwell's omniscient police state, his key contribution is the notion of media "imploding," with meanings at odds with each other, cut off from any sense of referentiality. Baudrillard's ideas become important to an appreciation of cinema's gradual destruction of narrative line (reducing it to phantasmagoria), its illusiveness (even as the history of cinema is lost), and its preoccupation with its own technology.
Lyotard's position, while less nihilist, is also lacking in revolutionary response (aside from his recommendation of the \textit{petit recit} as a substitute for discredited master narrative) and inclined to take for granted the failure of Enlightenment ideas, including both radical social programs and totalizing notions of truth. For him postmodernism is oddly cyclical, a fallow or regressive period preceding the renewal of modernist commitments. At the center of his theory is the "crisis of legitimation," or the impossibility of "grand narratives" which previously gave credibility to the Enlightenment project and entire traditions of the West. The legitimation crisis encompasses broad concepts such as the idea of progress and more discrete narratives within them, for example, the myth of the questing hero. While also refusing traditional Marxist polemics (and that method's sense of the social), Lyotard suggests that delegitimation is not some organicist concept associated with cybernetic technology overtaking the centered, bourgeois subject, but a crisis caused by bourgeois society's confrontation with its myths (at one point Lyotard draws attention to the failure of the patriarchal narrative after Watergate, suggesting that society cannot find solace in myths perpetrated by the state apparatus, certainly not such current and bald manifestations as the Trilateral Commission). It is in the second school of thought represented by Fredric Jameson and, more recently, Terry Eagleton, that we find a truly syncretic approach to postmodernism, able to synthesize the work of the French Nietzscheans, but aimed more precisely at the Marxist analysis of culture and its relationship to economy. The Jameson project is forceful in viewing postmodernism as a site of struggle. Heavily influenced by Althusser (and Lacan), Jameson focuses on the construction of the bourgeois subject and the importance of the superstructure to the formation of ideology. His approach to postmodernism is that of a historical materialist, periodizing it within the development of late capitalism (as defined by Ernest Mandel) and the hegemony of supranational corporatism, while at the same time modifying a traditional historicist perspective considering postmodernism's manifestations in consciousness and in desperate cultural forms. Multinational capitalism's challenge to nation-state economics is finally a threat to the integrity of the bourgeois monadic subject; this postulate is the basis of Jameson's view of postmodernism's relation to self. For Jameson, the most important tendency of postmodernism is the ultimate reification of alienation, the attempt to co-opt all adversarial culture, to assert alienation as accepted state of being since the subject is cut off from any historical sense — lacking an understanding of causality, and asked to accept that utopian or radical options are naive or outdated. The subject is rendered "schizophrenic" in that his/her signifying chain and therefore historical consciousness are ruptured. The struggle of this new bourgeois subject provides the essential dissonance and "incoherence" of postmodernism which we find manifest in cultural phenomena such as cinematic narrative. Jameson's approach is useful in a number of ways, not the least of
which is its attention to the formation of a hermeneutics that acknowledges and incorporates poststructuralism's criticism of meaning, while at the same time sidestepping poststructuralism's move toward a new subjectivism. Jameson's Marxism is especially important to interpreting changes in causality and narrative closure in the current cinema, the function of which would be less available to us with many poststructuralist strategies.

The Failure of the Actantial Model

In applying the term "incoherence" to postmodernist cinema I am borrowing more from Robin Wood than Jameson in trying to suggest contemporary culture's conflicting, unresolved struggles of ideology. By "incoherence" I do not mean that certain texts are hopelessly confused and unreadable, but rather that they contain a number of positions in tense opposition, preventing narrative closure and the bourgeois realism to which Hollywood cinema aspires. This is not necessarily a laudable situation, since the incoherence of a work represents most often the unwillingness to part company with artistic conventions and the cultural assumptions supporting them rather than the depiction of a complex world-view. The destruction of narrative closure is a rather typical feature of modernism, co-opted by much commercial art. Yet the gestures of Artaud, Beckett, and Wilson, of Resnais, Buñuel, and Antonioni were very purposeful, questioning for the most part bourgeois consciousness while working consistently in the realm of representationalism. The incoherence of the Hollywood cinema of the 1980s is involved in the crisis of representationalism reduced to elements of its effects, acknowledging the self-referentiality of the avant garde while attempting to steer clear of a presentationalism which would suggest a new political awareness of the spectator. Also evident in this incoherence is that Hollywood cinema of the '80s continues to advance dominant ideology even as it demonstrates that previous notions of ideological consensus no longer exist; the impulses within Taxi Driver (1975) are far more pronounced, disturbing, and "schizophrenic" in Rambo (1985). Far from being an environment of surface gloss free of all adversarial signification, a domain of "hyperreality" cut off from political and economic circumstance, postmodernism is, as Jameson asserts, a logical product of late capitalism. More specifically, it can be approached as dominant culture's attempt to restore capitalism's legitimacy by effectively forgetting the last twenty years of history (hence the penchant for the 1950s, retro fashion, short hair, machismo, etc.). The project of "sealing over" Vietnam and Watergate is undermined, however, by the divided nature of texts, the schizophrenia of the subject.

The issue of the function of schizophrenia in postmodern culture is troublesome, with the predominant school, represented by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, arguing that "the stroll of the schizo, his glorious wandering, engenders a world created in the process of its tendency, its
coming apart, its decoding." The Deleuze/Guattari attack on psychoanalysis has become a central feature of postmodernist criticism and is important for its further conjuncture of the personal and the political. Unfortunately, the attack on both Freud and Marx becomes another chaotic, subjective revival of Nietzsche as it attempts to valorize the fragmented subject of late capitalism, the atomized self divorced from a code, without moorings, transformed into a "desiring machine." Terry Eagleton has termed this thinking the "most banal anarchist rhetoric," holding that Deleuze's and Guattari's "insistence upon desire's diffuse and perverse manifestations" and their refusal of hermeneutics effectively validates the ideology of consumer capitalism. The subject as described by Deleuze/Guattari seems quite close to Jameson's image of the postmodern self as consequence of the failed signifying chain. The major distinction here is that Deleuze/Guattari advances schizophrenia in a reevaluation of bourgeois interpretations of consciousness, also accepting the imperviousness of capital to revolutionary change. What is correct in both analyses is the transition in the model of the subject. The representation of the problem is clear in the cinema, where the traditional function of the subject is disrupted, and not in ways associated with, say, the existential anti-hero of late modernism (one thinks of James Bond, or the Man With No Name of the Sergio Leone westerns). The disruption of the protagonist's role tends to support Jameson's idea of postmodernism as cultural dominant; the commercial cinema applauds the various manifestations of the schizophrenic hero and refuses to see the necessity of closure to the narrative, even when there appears risk to the ideological enterprise. Tiresome linear exposition dependent on notions of narrative causality is obviated in the age of video. Traditional bourgeois strategy is realized in the divorce of the subject from narrative (history), in distorting or repressing the causal factors which create the subject. Postmodernism as dominant mode suggests that the adversarial tendencies of modernism and the avant garde are eroded; this rather simplistic idea pays insufficient attention, however, to lawful historical processes and the site of struggle which postmodernism actually is.

The schizophrenic subject of postmodernism can be diagnosed with the aid of A.J. Greimas's actantial model, the failure of which in the current environment tends to refer us to Lyotard's legitimation crisis. In Greimas's classically scientistic structural narratology, traditional narrative derives its force from the notion of a send/actant, a representative of symbolic values, who gives a message to the subject, who in turn is able to make choices (good vs. evil, etc.) and to disperse this knowledge to receivers, as well as confront oppositional factions and finally to achieve the desired object. Put simply, the figure is viewed as repository of specific social forces rather than individual subject as such. Greimas provides a sample of this schematic which might apply to a basic "grand narrative" from Lyotard's formula:
POSTMODERN CINEMA

Subject .................................. philosopher
Object .................................. world
Sender .................................. God
Receiver ................................. mankind
Opponent ............................... matter
Helper .................................. mind

Obviously there is implied in this schematic a consensus regarding received notions of order. While the actantial model may be seen as reducible to language alone, the idea that it is involved, as Fredric Jameson notes, in the production of meaning draws our attention to its value at a time when meaning is evacuated from narrative even as certain formal structures occasionally remain. Elements of essential Western narratives (the rise of the charismatic figure, the quest, the destruction of the other) depend on traditional conceptions of truth and its repositories. Structural models are among the grand narratives which have been under seige in the recent period, but Greimas's argument is proven in the obverse. The protagonist of postmodern cinema cannot receive a message since there is no sender (God, law) to transmit it, no social order to answer to, and no objective to attain, although the framework and motions of all the above remain reasonably intact (this is in contrast to avant-garde drama, which forces us to recognize the futility of the heroic function by destroying narrative structure).

The PSYCHO Sequels: Fanfare for the Schizophrenic

As Alfred Hitchcock finds a secure place in the pantheon of film directors (during a time when the legendary Hollywood auteurs are seen as part of a dead cultural past), with the chief work of his late period canonized,19 it is significant that Psycho (1960) should become the object of industry fetishization. The two recent "sequels" to Hitchcock's film, Richard Franklin's Psycho II (1984) and Anthony Perkins Psycho III (1986) both expend upon and dilute the original film's sense of pervasive psychosis in bourgeois culture. The films move Norman Bates to center stage, valorizing him as a kind of patron saint for the psychotic killers who have dominated the horror film of the last two decades (as the psychotic changed from monster to recognizable other), and, by so doing, present him as a representative bourgeois figure. That this point should digress so much from the ideas of the original Psycho causes us to view the new films in a specific cultural context.

Norman Bates is indeed the hero of these films, an overarching presence, the "Hamlet of the horror film."20 Bates's appearance roughly in the middle of the first film, creating what at first seems to be a new narrative line, works to demonstrate the victimization of Norman and Marion Crane (and indeed most of the major characters of the film) by patriarchy and capital-
ism, by the forces of repression. The social apocalypse of the film is only tangentially to do with Norman; he is primarily a figure acted upon, as is Marion, by vicious social forces constituting the mockingly absurd vision found in the first glimpses of the avant garde (Buchner's Woyzeck). The unrecuperability of society suggested in the final images of Psycho (the death's head grin, the car emerging from the swamp) are used in a parodical fashion in Psycho II and III, but a parody drained of irony (for all the visual references to Hitchcock) and critical objective, giving us Jameson's notion of pastiche. Psycho II reaffirms the uselessness of psychoanalysis, of "knowing" anything about behavior, thus bolstering a central premise of the contemporary horror film. This idea is even more extreme than in Psycho, with an emphasis on circularity: Norman ends up where he began twenty years earlier. Also reaffirmed, through Lila Loomis's attempt to destroy Norman, is Psycho's sense of the pervasiveness of schizophrenia. The focus of criticism is not, as in the original film, bourgeois culture (Hitchcock referred to Marion Crane as a "perfectly ordinary bourgeois"); rather, the concern is with the original Psycho as object. Hollywood recycling its past material during a time of cultural regression and bankruptcy does not at this stage seem unusual, nor does the constant allusion and hommage (all these now seem familiar indices of postmodernism); valorizing Norman and creating a situation of the schizophrenic triumphant (while at the same time removing Psycho's vision of society at a standstill) give the two sequels a kind of centrality in the postmodern cinema. While neither Psycho II nor Psycho III acts as prelude to a new phase of filmmaking in the manner of Hitchcock's work, they represent very adequately Hollywood's current situation as well as bourgeois society's confrontation with the notion of madness as consequence of repression. Norman Bates's predicament no longer places him as an adversary to dominant culture (in Psycho he is certainly perceived as a threat); in the sequels, particularly Perkins' film, Bates is a sympathetic figure representative of madness as a cultural given, especially with Psycho III's peculiarly millenial notion of a complete cycle in time, with Norman entrapped and forced backward in time by transpsychical crisis. Psycho III goes so far as to address religion as the foundation of patriarchy and repression (the first words uttered as the screen remains black are "There is no God!"). The plight of Maureen to free herself from the ultimate patriarchal institution is a much more deliberate, a mannered rendering of Marion Crane's flight from Phoenix. The psychopathology of Norman's helper Duane (his sadism, fetishism, scopophilia) carries further the two films' depiction of pervasive insanity and apocalypse. Yet this situation, with Norman moving through the world as chronic victim and as simultaneously evil and benevolent overseer, never allows for a critical practice. Attention does not diverge from these films as cultural celebration of themselves, culminating in the "apotheosis" shots at the end of both films. The final shot of Psycho II — Albert Whitlock's animated illustra-
tion of the Bates house with Norman alone on the top step — becomes a signature still devoid of the spectral aspect of the original black-and-white publicity shot for Hitchcock's film. This last image is a model of explanation in understanding the film's relationship to the original. The specific "anxiety of influence" the film projects effectively transforms the work to which it refers. By so doing, Psycho II gives us an example of postmodernism's transformation of the protagonist. The collection of shots (the shower sequence, the peephole, the staircase and cellar of the Bates house) in Psycho II and III, with their excessive "insider jokes" and hommage (which assume that the audience consists of cineastes) give Hitchcock's film a new status as cultural artifact but destroys its historical position as a work of art. The postwar anguish which Psycho projects so well (elucidated in Robin Woods's Hitchcock's Films) is erased as Psycho now becomes merely the first film in a series, outside the historical context. Jameson's thinking is especially applicable here: Norman Bates is no longer schizophrenic, nor is he representative of existentialist anomic, alienation, or burn-out. He is a megastar phantasm above all; as such his ailment makes him no more adversarial to dominant culture than the Iran-Contra scandal, Wheel of Fortune, Frankie Goes to Hollywood — all have a moment in the hyperreal media setting. The real shock of Psycho, so well examined by Robin Wood, is that film's sense of the absurd in the wake of Hiroshima and Auschwitz, of a world not governed by vague metaphysical forces. Psycho is absurdism's central contribution to popular culture. Psycho II and III remove absurdism's moralism and nihilism, quieting the last great voice of modernist anxiety as the popular cinema asks us to acquiesce to a madness which it refuses to analyze.

The Disruption of the Quest

The impossibility of the chivalric quest, with its notion of the destruction of the other or its incorporation into the dominant order,\textsuperscript{23} has become a feature of genre art in postmodernism. Certain genres which depended heavily on the chivalric quest for a depiction of the civilizing experience have disappeared except for some transmogrified forms — the western is the most obvious example. Other genres which still have some relevance to the contemporary sense of the social show a marked disruption or involution of the quest, causing a difficulty in the construction of the protagonist, his/her identification with the other, audience identification with the protagonist's purpose, and the logic of the narrative enterprise. William Friedkin's To Live and Die in L.A. (1985), ballyhooed as the "French Connection of the 80s," indeed contains some ideological and structural similarities to the Vietnam-era crime film, but with a configuration peculiar to the current cultural situation. The attempt by Secret Service agent Richard Chance to crack a counterfeiting ring operated by a
CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

particularly pathological villain named Masters provides the framework on which the *film policier* is traditionally structured.

The obsessional behavior of Chance and his similarity to Masters is not so much an extension of Popeye Doyle's relationship to Charnier, nor is the "descent into inferno" element of *To Live and Die in L.A.* a summation of ideas in *French Connection* (1972) and *Cruising* (1981). The hero's conduct, his sense of self and very metabolism, seem affected by the specific ideological and cultural circumstances inscribed in the postmodern temperament, specifically:

1. The age of Reagan as controlling backdrop. The opening scene shows the secret agents escorting the President to an engagement at a Los Angeles hotel. The soundtrack contains excerpts of Reagan's "Second American Revolution" speech (on tax reform), transmitted over the hotel's public address system. Reagan is a saturating presence, one not challenged by the central characters of the film (in contrast, say, to the disrespect for authority in *Dirty Harry*). Reagan icons appear regularly, along with numerous patriotic symbols (the flags on the Presidential limousine are among the film's first images). The ideological tension of the Reagan period's affirmation of "traditional values" is explicit to every motif of the film, including the central image of the dollar bill (given an especially privileged montage sequence in Masters' counterfeiting lab) and the protection and acquisition of capital at any cost, summarizing the survival-of-the-fittest ethic of entrepreneurial free enterprise. This ethic is finally exploded with the counterfeiting motif itself, the confusion between "real" and "fake" money, between the real and simulation. The evacuation of reason from political discourse, the public figure as fleeting media celebrity, and the increased interconnection between consumerism and the spectacle are sufficient to involve Reaganism in the mapping of the postmodern.

2. The break-up of rational, calculated thought and the jumbling of cause and effect. Much has already been made of this film's reliance on the aesthetics of the rock video, with the over-emphasis on quick insert shots not as an Eisensteinian dialectical synthesis, but as a piling-up of stills, of very discrete "fictive acts" to substitute for narrative. The de-emphasis of narrative does not follow modernism's project of calling into question traditional diegesis; rather, it caters to the diminished audience interest in matters of cause and effect as the image takes precedence in the field of the spectacle.

The fragmentation of Chance as recognizable genre protagonist is effectuated by elements of the film's text growing out of these two categories. During the agents' protection of Reagan, Chance corners a suicidal terrorist who is "ready to die." Without contexting this moment, the film's attack
POSTMODERN CINEMA

on causality is associated with the dominant ideology’s fostering of an apolitical, irrational view of political violence. 25 This ahistorical approach to diegesis is essential to the film. While there is no sense that Chance or his partner John Vukovich are in opposition to the dominant ideology, both their construction as characters and their operation in the film’s narrative set up enormous contradictions. The strategy of casting a virtual unknown (William Petersen) in the role of Richard Chance undermines both traditional expectations of protagonist centrality and audience identification. The intertextual resonance of Chance’s name (John Wayne in Rio Bravo) is no doubt lost on the contemporary audience; for cineastes the reference is subverted by Chance’s rather pathetic situation. More important, the narcissism inscribed in the character (the posturing in tight jeans) is a hyperbolic play on the history of male eros in the cinema, here conjoined to the sense of overwhelming avarice consuming the world of film. This sensibility is visible in the film’s every gesture, including Chance’s brutal mistreatment of a young woman acting as his informant; his cavalier plan to rob a diamond smuggler (resulting in the murder of a fellow agent); and, most significantly, his sudden, brutal murder at the conclusion, marking the “erasure” of the protagonist as the narrative’s unifying principle. That a quick shot of Petersen should be inserted following the end credits invites us to contemplate the film’s relinquishing of the idea of protagonist, and of the star as purely decorative icon. This final image of the film works as coda, just as the video-influenced main title sequence introduced images central to the film’s plot, much in the manner of the “teaser” prelude to the television police show. This coda is unusual in its reference to the traditional subject of fascination in the various action/adventure genres. The quick shot of Chance’s face suggests the figure which can no longer be recuperated.

Jameson’s notion of pastiche has relevance to the film’s play on exposition. The use of titles to signify the passage of time (“Tuesday, 11:35 a.m”) becomes a gratuitous graphic device since little is added to suspense, and the decorative aspect of the titles (a different typescript is used each time they appear) becomes less than a conceit, lacking any usefulness as a reference of genre convention. The sequence in the studio of the dwarf artist (whose workplace is a literal pastiche of styles) and the “music video” sequence of Masters producing counterfeit plates are among the moments whose vacuousness and grotesquerie amplify the ideological tensions of the film. Chance’s careerism and (it would seem) acceptance of the political and economic system are counterposed with shots of L.A.-as-junkyard, random destruction of consumer goods, the acceptance and co-optation of kinky sexuality (the behavior of Chance, Masters, and their girlfriends), the eventual acceptance by the relatively moral Vukovich of his dead partner’s role as “protector” of Chance’s informant (who attempted to betray the two agents to escape her sexual bondage). The car chase sequence, an “updating” of the famous French Connection scene, may be emblematic
of the politics of the film, with the manic Chance driving directly into oncoming traffic, in suicidal opposition to the society his office supposedly protects. (Repetition-compulsion and the associated death wish figure prominently in the characters' overall behavior and are represented best by Chance's bridge-jumping hobby).

As a summary statement on the self-destruction and utterly amoral aspect of late capitalism, *To Live and Die in L.A.* would be a brilliant work, particularly in its debunking of the protagonist as a figure acting as a repository of social consensus. The talisman the hero traditionally pursues, which establishes his potency and centered position as effectuator of historical change, has gradually disappeared along with the source of mythic power which validated the hero once the talisman had been achieved. While frustration associated with a collapsing sense of the social impedes (and moves to the fringe) the heroes of *The French Connection* and *Dirty Harry*, Chance and Vukovich are in a more precarious position according to notions of order embodied in genre conventions. Popeye Doyle is able to crack a drug ring; Harry Callahan tracks down and kills the psychotic kidnapper/assassin. Chance's action, in contrast, is circular. At no time is he in possession of an object whose symbolic value authorizes him as protector of the social, even the disintegrating social reflected in the worlds of Popeye Doyle and Dirty Harry. The stolen satchel of cash (stolen, as it turns out, from a colleague), which Chance smashes open with frustrated abandon, contains nothing. The attempt to trap Masters' ring, confused with Chance's desire to avenge a dead partner, results in Chance's own death, the "resurrection" of Vukovich as Chance's replacement, and the repetition of the same cycles in time. Most interesting is the depiction of the revenge motif and the code of male camaraderie and professionalism on which it depends. *To Live and Die in L.A.* might be called a "revenge film" since its action depends on Chance's drive to avenge the murder of his partner/mentor Jim Hart. Chance's rapid (and easy) transformation into a thief and murderer (accompanied by hysteria and near-madness) suggests the pathology under numerous male action/adventure genres. Still, the ennui that emerges from the film's sense that all bets are off (an ennui similar to "Miami Vice," itself dependent on the derivative angst elements of *Blade Runner* and neo-film noir) is overwhelmed by a decorative signification.

The portrayal of the quest in narrative art becomes difficult (from the standpoint of supporting received nations of patriarchal myth, hierarchy, and bourgeois order) as texts exhaust myths by repetition and self-referentiality. The self-destructive enterprise of "naming" myth, as Barthes and Levi-Strauss have informed us, has destroyed its usefulness as a support mechanism for realism, yet this process is at the heart of much contemporary filmmaking. Walter Hill's *Streets of Fire* (1984) and Clint Eastwood's *Pale Rider* (1985), remakes of *The Searchers* and *Shane* respectively, represent an extreme phase of narration wherein myth is deliberately foregrounded, but not for the purpose of calling into question
assumptions of dominant culture which enforce myth. Walter Hill invokes Borges to describe *Streets of Fire* (subtitled "a rock and roll fable") as a "mick-epic...about Soldier Boy rescuing the Queen of the Hop from the Leader of the Pack." 

The site of struggle within this work is its attempt to form an apotheosis out of postwar pop culture. The assumption is that rock and roll represents the last heroic art form; although the enterprise of constituting rock culture as founding myth seems sensible on the face of it, the project has already been done both by critics (the work of Greil Marcus) and by various contemporary stars who attempt to appropriate the mythic aspects of their forebears (Bruce Springsteen's amalgamation of Dylan, Elvis, and Motown; Michael Jackson's and Price's allusions to the Beatles; David Bowie's pop-star-as-messiah construction). More significant than the failure of this mythic invocation is the allusion not to the traditional narrative of journey and recovery, but to John Ford's westerns, with Soldier Boy (Michael Pare) corresponding to Ethan Edwards, supporting actors filling the Jeffrey Hunter, Natalie Wood, and Henry Brandon roles (William Dafoe is Scar as cycle outlaw — this aspect of the counterculture is portrayed as wholly villainous rather than as the surviving free spirit of the frontier common to 60s mythology). The most obvious comparison is with *Taxi Driver*, which has also been examined in terms of its reference to *The Searchers*. While *Taxi Driver* inflects the myths of journey and recovery, coming at last to an ideological stalemant representative of the tense circumstances of the mid-70s, *Streets of Fire* suggests postindustrial America as a place capable of recouping myth although it is strategy made empty by its self-consciousness.

Clint Eastwood's *Pale Rider*, a scene-by-scene remake of *Shane*, is quite problematical as a work of the new cinema of allusion. On the one hand, the attempt to appropriate the charm and myths of Stevens' film seems both mercenary and of a piece with the recouping of patriarchal myth in the Reagan period; however, Eastwood's film at points verges on progressive tendencies in deconstructing the genre and the actor/director's star image (a similar project is evident in Richard Tuggle's *Tightrope* (1984), which shows the Eastwood-detective character as pathological and alienated, a notion only suggested in *Dirty Harry*). In *Pale Rider*, the Eastwood character (the Preacher) is much more overtly involved in invoking myth than Stevens' film, going so far as to refer both to the narrative of the knight errant and, biblical apocalypse. Yet the Eastwood character's inflation of mythical attributes of the hero (compare, for example, the boulder-smashing sequence [rather Arthurian] with the stump-raising scene in *Shane*) is peculiarly offset by his sexual encounter with Megan, giving him the connotation of fertility god. If the Preacher is an evocation of both Christian and pagan myths, his symbolic function as a radical potentiality in the community returns these myths to a progressive stature. While the Preacher's final showdown with Stockburn and his deputies is depicted as an epic good vs. evil confrontation, it is significant that evil is situated squarely
CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

in the figure of the lawman, and the lawman as defender of industrial capital. The only precedent for such an idea is the revisionist western of the late 60s and early 70s, such as *The Wild Bunch* and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*; Eastwood has rarely been thought to share the complex sensibility of Peckinpah and certainly not the counter-culture attitude of Altman. The diegesis suggests that the awareness of the mythic figure as metaphor (the rallying of the miners) and the Preacher's farewell, while repeating the last scene of *Shane*, forces the mythic content to the limit and calls into question the validity of the messianic figure as prime mover. Yet we are left with the figure of Eastwood and the primacy of the star figure. The ideological tensions in the construction of the protagonist are much more severe in *Pale Rider* than in *Streets of Fire* in regard to associations with genre conventions. *Pale Rider*'s referentiality takes it beyond the surface gloss and the emptying-out-of-history within *Streets of Fire*.

The Mad Max films of Australian director George Miller are somewhere in the middle of this group in their pastiche of elements from postwar mass culture and their attention to the formation of mythic consciousness in the age of mass media. The Road Warrior (1982) and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) both tread a fine line between parodical comment on the archetypal narrative of journey and recovery and a pastiche which attempts a new myth out of the wreckage of popular culture. *Beyond Thunderdome* is by far the most allusive of the Mad Max cycle (with references to *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Sergio Leone's westerns, *Lord of the Flies,* and TV game shows) suggesting the genre film's increased consciousness of itself as text. While Mad Max is portrayed as the "timeless" hero in the manner of the "wandering knight, samurai, or gunslinger," the self-consciousness of this enunciation disrupts the subject's credibility as myth. In *Beyond Thunderdome* the authority of the charismatic hero is challenged since Max is explicitly a product of projection; the Crack in the Earth sequence, where Max is seen as a savior to the lost tribe of feral children is a remark on the messianic impulse as a fundamentally regressive and ahistorical tendency. By sending up this predominant myth of the narrative tradition the Mad Max films have an alluring and radical cast, but the dangerous notion of the post-nuclear landscape as both wasteland and the new wilderness filled with potential has reverberations not only of Eliot but of the conservative narrative the films seem to parody. But his film represents the inexorable tendency in popular and high art (this distinction has dissolved) to present narrative as sheer text.

Like films such as *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* (1984), the Mad Max films invite us to take pleasure in contemplating conventions for their own sake — as a free play of signifiers, if you will — recognizing the exhausted nature of genres. Yet, like *Blade Runner* (1982), a comparatively progressive work, nostalgia for lost innocence saturates the Mad Max films, and the hero, although depicted as a fabrication, is ultimately restored (both
POSTMODERN CINEMA

The Road Warrier and Beyond Thunderdome conclude on the image of a solitary Max). This tension is emblematic of the struggle between representation and presentation that has taken on new characteristics on postmodernism, as the boundary between art and life blurs in a way counter to the utopian ambitions of modernism. Mad Max is explicitly a pastiche not for the legacy he inherits from the heroic epic, but for his figuration as end-product of media culture. The references to the television western, biker moves, and punk culture remove these forms from the province of discrete, individual works or cultural tendencies. The synthesis of these forms is problematical. While this fusion in the Mad Max films represents the achievement of a significant modernist goal (contemplation of received myths as pure narrative), the characteristic postmodern attributes of celebrating a disrupted alphabet, the hodge-podge of styles, genres, and language systems, is equally apparent and implicitly reactionary. The Mad Max films, more than most of the current science-fiction genre, address the messianic impulse and the artistic conventions the impulse has generated in narrative. Once we perceive the failure of the master narrative of the messiah and the bankruptcy of its conventions, the question remains as to whether a non-mythic understanding of narrative (and history) is preferable; Beyond Thunderdome, while thoroughly sending up the myth of the hero now mediated by the cinema, suggests that cultural entrapment by patriarchal myth is inevitable.

The Cult of the Body and the New Patriotism

The most representative films of the 1980s (aside from Flashdance, Porky's and coming-of age films aimed at the adolescent audience or the spectator-as-adolescent) are those which attempt to restore, like the political climate which produces them, the full, unchallenged authority of the charismatic, patriarchal male. The oiled-muscleman-with-machine-gun genre, with its wish-fulfillment violence and rewriting of failed U.S. adventurism, may appear simply an outgrowth of 80s reaction rather than a manifestation of anything as extraordinarily complex as postmodernism. Yet these films are as much of a piece with the postmodern temperament as the recycling of “Leave it to Beaver,” or the restoration of the father with a few concessions to the shards of the liberal consensus in “The Cosby Show.” The place of these films in the current discourse is secured because the hero narrative is strained not by a clever process of deconstruction (as in Beyond Thunderdome), but by the most deliberate, vulgar hyperbole which pushes the action film protagonist beyond the apparent ideological agenda, into the realm of parody and pastiche. The male is depicted as accomplished professional, so fully developed mentally and physically as to suggest the New Man or similar notions associated with classical fascism; the idea of the hero as divinely-ordained emissary further enhances a kind of master-race mentality driving the full recuperation of the pro-
CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

tagonist in the mainstream cinema of the decade. The representative examples here are, of course, the Stallone/Schwarzenegger cycles. As in the earlier examples cited, the contradictions often appear puzzling since, unlike the Mad Max films, the ideological agenda of these films does not invite us to view them as pure discourse.

The ideological basis of the Stallone/Schwarzenegger cycles proceeds naturally from (a) the narcissism and inversion of the new cult of the body (aerobics culture, dieting, etc.) as "the body, beauty and sexuality are imposed as new universals in the name of the rights of the new man, emancipated by abundance and the cybernetic revolution," and (b) the attempt at a clear demarcation of self and other which returns the spectator to the primal myths of the American civilizing experience (e.g., the inherent evil of specified racial and political minorities). This project is undermined, particularly in Rambo (1985) and Commando (1985), by contradictions which must be seen simply as the result of the attempts actively to suppress the past twenty years of history, the lessons of which are becoming apparent in a period of recuperation. More important, repetitive emphasis on machismo and patriotism has the effect (noted earlier) of destroying myth by successive enunciation and transformation into narrative. The process is evident in the pivotal sequence of virtually all the Stallone/Schwarzenegger films, which consists of a montage of the hero "suiting up" in ritualistic fashion, the camera focused tightly on sections of well-oiled torso rapidly adorned with knives, bandoliers of ammunition, grenades, and the like, culminating in the camera's confrontation with a full figure of the protagonist, a kind of apotheosis effect. This type of sequence has more affinities with a scene in Dawn of the Dead (the survivalists raid a gun store) than with Kurosawa's samurai films or the final-march-to-the-showdown of The Magnificent Seven (1962) or The Wild Bunch (1969). Since the Stallone/Schwarzenegger films lack the conscious parody of George Romero's zombie epic, the "suit-up" sequence ends with the Schwarzenegger character's glance at himself in a full-length mirror; this narcissism and reduction of the male to object of the gaze support the salvific function of the protagonist and the politics of the neoconservative cinema of the 1980s. It should be noted that the male-as-object-of-the-gaze has appeared earlier in works where the male figure functions as a threat to the status quo (cf. Picnic, The Fugitive Kind). The fixation on male beauty was associated with the male's incipient androgyny and a presence disruptive to bourgeoisie moves. The beefcake of Rambo, Commando, Cobra (1986), and Raw Deal co-opts that tendency, interpolating it into the new cult of the body and a very tired definition of "cool." Yet this fetishism effectively destroys the charismatic authority of the hero (one could hardly imagine a "suit-up" beefcake sequence in The Sands of Iwo Jima or High Sierra) whose status depended on mythical values.

An extension of the fetishistic approach to the star/hero is the blurring of the male protagonist in the commodity landscape, the circumscription
of action by the world of commodities, and the increased sense of the work itself as product. The Stallone/Schwarzenegger films concentrate heavily on new, state-of-the-art weaponry and transportation (the press kit for Cobra spotlights the guns and autos used by the Stallone character). Given the control of studios by transnational corporate concerns, films are virtual advertisements for consumer capitalism. Rambo, produced by Tri-Star (interfaced with Coca-Cola), features Coca-Cola products in several privileged scenes. Cobra advertises Pepsi products during the supermarket shoot-out, and a rooftop chase privileges large, Blade Runner-style neon billboards. Commando advertises a variety of sporting goods and specialized weaponry. The star quality of Stallone/Schwarzenegger (and the politics they ostensibly represent) runs into conflict with their construction as salesmen and ultimately as commodities. While this commodification process may be seen as a natural development of the dominant ideology, the issue here is the contradiction within this ideology in terms of fulfilling its purpose of guaranteeing the hegemony of corporatism. The charismatic, autonomous hero and the myth of the civilizing experience and the bourgeois normality he represents are disturbed as attention drifts to the surface gloss of the image, and particularly to the hero as mass-produced simulation. The prologue to Cobra is heavily dependent on Magnum Force (1973), yet the urgency and despair of the Dirty Harry films is lost, since as Cobra suggests a world overcome by barbarism, with crime depicted from a nonsensical perspective divorcing it from historical process or potential cure. Marion Corbetti (Stallone) is not Dirty Harry since he is not a fringe figure of the power structure (police work is fun rather than alienating or demoralizing, and he is therefore into the traditional rightist vigilante); the pastiche element comes largely from an essential ignorance of genre conventions and the foregrounding and self-absorption of the star. Pastiche here is born not from parody but from Hollywood's tendency to repack-age and hyperbolize previous images.

The political agenda of the Stallone/Schwarzenegger cycle is consistently skewed in several directions. Ted Kotcheff's First Blood (1982), which introduced Stallone's enormously successful Rambo character, might be termed the capstone to the cycle of incoherent texts of the 1970s and 80s noted by Robin Wood. The traditional cult of individualism in this film is interwoven with a portrayal of the explosion of the bourgeois community and the hero's unwillingness to half the catastrophe. The progenitor of this tendency is probably The Chase (1965), but a more immediate influence on First Blood is Rolling Thunder, with its sense of the warrior returning to a corrupt America against which he must use his military skills. First Blood's step beyond Rolling Thunder is its depiction of the town sheriff as symbol of ideological contradiction. Sheriff Teasle's pointless war against returning veteran John Rambo suggests society's wish to divest itself of all responsibility in the Vietnam War. While the film exploits the image of the veteran as psychotic killing machine, First Blood is notewor-
thy in depicting the full force of the veteran's rage directed at the community. The tide of rage is stemmed at the conclusion by the recuperation of the military's image in the person of Colonel Trautman, who, although an almost risible Dr. Frankenstein ("I created him") is a focus of sympathy as he emerges as Rambo's father-figure and therapist. The credibility of the military and social normality are restored by Trautman's mediation; Rambo's last outburst of anger is directed at "those maggots at the airport" and the protest movement of the sixties. Although the bulk of the film portrays the veteran as victim and as counterculture figure, the characterization is deliberately cut in half and motivations abruptly reversed. The impetus is the exploitation of rage and cynicism in the post-Watergate period simultaneous with recognition of the new tide of reaction.

Rambo: First Blood Part II is a more forceful recuperation of the dominant ideology and American myth, but with contradictions remaining concerning the construction of the protagonist. The film's ahistorical depiction of the Vietnam War and the attempt to draw the audience into the fantasy of Rambo's revenge as a payback for lost honor ("this time he's fighting for all of us") are secondary to the recreation of mythic landscape. Rambo, we are told, is part American Indian (noble savage whose magic and survivalist instincts have been appropriated), part German (ideal disciplined warrior romanticized, not ironically, by postwar American cinema). The myth of journey and recovery is enhanced by the other (Vietnamese, Russians) recognizable by racial characteristics rather than political convictions. The overtly propagandistic tone of the film is disrupted not only by the trotting-out of some very ragged myths, but by the ill-defined sense of Rambo's symbolic origins, the "sender" (in Greimas's term) supplying the hero's narrative value. It can be argued that Rambo in the end restores truth in the self, with the hero cast adrift in the tradition of frontier individualism. But Rambo's threat to the CIA bureaucrat Murdock and the frenzied assault on the computer bank represents not so much rightist individualism but the anxiety of the depoliticized proletariat and middle class. The frustration and schizoid political vision of these classes in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate are effectively marshalled by the film. There is little question that the chauvinism planted in the narrative and the film's advertising ("the film that has all America cheering") have been successful, both in terms of the film's box-office profits and its advancement of false consciousness. Yet Rambo's reactionary project is informed by the same contradictions as the majority of films of the period, with the intertextual conflicts of the dominant order leaving the self directionless.

Similarly, the films featuring former body-building star Arnold Schwarzenegger are involved, through their texts' conflicts, in the erasure of the hero at the same time that they assert a particular vision of the monadic self to bolster patriarchy and "traditional values." The politics of a film such as Commando, a shameless exploitation of the Rambo phenomenon, are polyglot and synthetic in a way which depends on the utter naivete and
The depoliticization of the audience. In this film Col. John Matrix (Schwarzenegger) is forced by Latino thugs to rescue a right-wing Latin-American dictator the CIA apparently deposed; the impulse here is the revision of the CIA's image from that in *Three Days of the Condor* (a post-Watergate film) and the valorization of military virtues as Matrix undertakes an impossible one-man course of action similar to Rambo's. More central to the Schwarzenegger films, however, is the sense of protagonist as object. Although Schwarzenegger's attempts at humor tend to send up his character, the goal of *Commando* and *Raw Deal* (and, even more significantly, *The Terminator*) is the utter reduction of the subject to the commodity status alluded to earlier. The careless amalgamation of genres; the fetishizing of specialized weaponry, technology, and consumer products; the incursion of rock video stylistics; the erosion of authorship Hollywood cherished in the wake of auteurism (*Raw Deal's* soundtrack is by Filmscore, a corporate entity using computerized synthesizers to create musical scores on contract) debunk the hero's role as purveyor of myth, particularly if we accept the Barthesian notion of ideology's dependence on the unconscious fusion of nature and culture in the creation of myth. The repetition of a variety of prevalent images from the media landscape commodifies even the fictive act, removing it from a referential in the mythic dimension. The tendencies coalesce in James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), which foregrounds the inevitability of apocalypse seen in the Mad Max films, without those works' sense of reflexivity. The aggressive nihilism of this film rejects the assertion of *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Robocop* (1987) that the human soul will survive its incorporation into the cybernetic technology of postindustrialism. The killer-robot protagonist (Schwarzenegger) signifies more particularly the co-optation of punk/new wave culture into the dominant tendency of reified alienation; punk is depicted as essentially nihilistic and self-destructive rather than genuinely adversarial, and is strongly associated here with the body fetishism of the rest of the Stallone/Schwarzenegger cycle.

The cult of violence, narcissism, and chauvinism circulating around *Rambo, Commando, Cobra, Predator*, et al; on the face of it represents a regressive cultural tendency, particularly in the restoration of phallocentrism and the charismatic male authority figure. As in the other works, the signification here is increasingly emptied of meaning. The exploits of television's World Wrestling Federation exemplifies on a similar scale the same tendencies and contradictions: sport and entertainment, politics and spectacle blur to a point that credibility in the form's ideology deteriorates. The lumpenized elements originally constituting the wrestling audience have receded somewhat to include the middle class as the rightist and vigilante ideology (the state [referee] is never trustworthy) television wrestling capitalizes on in the Reagan period becomes the underpinning of the form. The interchangeability of good guy and bad guy, the scrapping of rules, the commodification of superstars serve, like Rambo, to demonstrate the des-
struction of a referential base in the midst of a negative political education. While such phenomena exploit reaction, they also ultimately call into question the assumptions underneath larger, “legitimate” entertainments (in this case sports overall) and their role in perpetuating false consciousness.

The Decentered Subject and the New Pop Underground

An unusual feature of the cinema of the late 1960s-early 70s was the underground cult film, or midnight movie, probably inaugurated with the long run of Alejandro Jodorowsky’s El Topo (1971) at New York’s now defunct Elgin Cinema. A variety of films, from avant-garde classics (Un Chien Andalou) to provocative, obscure works of the Third World cinema (Antonio das Mortes, Viva la Muerte) became part of a concelebration at the witching hour. The gesture involved the creation of an avant-garde cinema appealing to upper middle-class urban and suburban youth whose tastes ran increasingly toward shock effects rather than the experiments of, say, the New American Cinema. The market for the midnight movie has remained constant, although fare available for this audience has changed in its configuration. While certain films seem explicitly designed for cult status for a relatively large urban audience (Subway, Repo Man, Liquid Sky, Eraserhead), theaters are finding that a number of mainstream films fill the midnight slot very well (Apocalypse Now, A Clockwork Orange, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre). What is most compelling is the eventual reach of the cult film, with Repo Man, Liquid Sky, and others attracting a large suburban audience particularly as they appear on videotape. The emergence of the cult film, eventually incorporating tacky Russ Meyer and Edward Wood schlock, suggests not the birth of an improvised or ready-made avant-garde cinema which would be the province of radical youth, but an attention to cinema for particular aspects of its spectacle and ultimately, in the terms of postmodern theory, its loss of affect.

While such films as George Romero’s zombie trilogy (Night of the Living Dead, et al.) contain the apocalyptic vision attractive to the mid-night commune of the 80s audience, the punk/new wave trends of the late 70s introduced a style that would run counter to the nihilism and rage of the post-Watergate horror, sci-fi, and war films, and certainly against the quasi-mystical esoterica of some of the Third World cinema. Films such as Liquid Sky (1983) and Repo Man (1984) seem almost to have used Jameson as a blueprint in defining a celebration of alienation, or, rather, in defining boredom and insentience as states of consciousness replacing alienation’s implied protest of industrial society. Jameson’s comment on the passing of the Edie Sedgewick burn-out case as paradigm of late modernist angst is realized in Liquid Sky’s vision of the Warhol scene (especially Anne Carlyle’s “Mayflower stock” monologue as she masks herself in fluorescent make-up). The twins portrayed by Anne Carlyle depict not the liberation of androgyny but blank inversion, narcissim, masochism.
Schizophrenia without any sense of crisis is represented in the monotone of the dialogue ("got any drugs?"); the transcendence previously ascribed to the drug experience is dissolved in the empty science-fiction device of the alien saucer, an idea used also in Alex Cox's *Repo Man* to suggest the wasted effort of narrative closure and the silliness of the genre film's utopianism. Luc Besson's *Subway* (1985) makes use of a *Star Wars* image to effect a similar comment on the emptiness of genres and the social assumptions supporting artistic convention.

Among the more popular of the new cult films, *Repo Man* contains a rendering of the subject influenced strongly by punk/new wave, a cultural tendency whose "coolness" has caused it to be seen as synonymous in many respects with the spirit of the postmodern. The "beyond alienation" attitude and nihilism of much punk/new wave have made it available for absorption by media (as is apparent in the case of *The Terminator*); as co-optation proceeds, the tendency continues to exemplify the contradictions of postmodernism. *Repo Man*'s portrayal of punk culture is heavily interwoven with a parody of American history as mediated through film genres. Otto, the young grocery-clerk-turned-repossession-man, finds himself on a contemporary adventure of journey and recovery in the Southwestern wasteland, except that the Grail turns out to be martian-controlled sedan loaded with radioactive material, and El Dorado is the grimier, chintzy sections of Los Angeles. Bud, Otto's repo mentor, fills the old man/young acolyte construct of countless westerns, particularly as played by Harry Dean Stanton. Stanton's presence as kind of deracinated, Beckett-like frontiersman of latter-day genre films is noticeable, especially with his performance in Wenders' *Paris, Texas*). Otto is portrayed by Emilio Estevez, whose obvious physical resemblance to his father Martin Sheen has resonances; Sheen's own place in American film was established with *Apocalypse Now*, that epic of the failure of the Grail narrative and the entirety of American myth.

*Repo Man* is not, however, concerned with a further attack on the consumer wasteland and the demise of the American dream. Instead, the film uses the sarcasm of punk/new wave to demonstrate the disappearance of the demarcation line between adversarial and mainstream culture. Otto's punk haircut is appropriate to his job as grocery clerk and to his night life as slam-dancing punker. Otto's partner at the grocery store sings a 7-UP jingle, interchangeable with rock and roll, which is depicted as absolutely co-opted and commodified. The film's one moment of anguish is Otto alone in the night singing a modified version of a TV theme song about kids' "dedication to [our] favorite shows" ("The Jeffersons! Saturday Night Live!...") Otto's gestures of defiance at the family and media culture (he makes sarcastic cracks as his stoned-out parents watch a TV evangelist) and at organized religion (he casually tosses a plastic Virgin Mary out of a repossession car) are subsumed under the larger idea that Otto joins "the team" (the repo men). The jab at careerism and corporate culture (wives auto
matically become "repo wives") is undermined by Otto's own acquiescence, by his random assaults on the property of the poor simultaneous with his pranks at the repo headquarters or repossession of a thug's Chrysler. Otto's shift from sub-culture to the arrogant, depoliticized petit-bourgeois does not place him in the position of the acted-upon comedic subject of absurdism even as diegesis constantly tends toward the absurd with causal-ity attacked. Otto's movements are essentially his own; he is soulless and utterly adaptable, able to incorporate his anger (largely aimed at the self) into survivalism. The facile sci-fi comedy that gives the film its deliberate-ly fake dénouement has nothing to do with Otto, since Otto as centered subject has little to do with the film.

*Subway*, like Jean-Jacques Beineiz's *Diva* and *The Moon in the Gutter*, might be termed a European equivalent of *To Live and Die in L.A.* and similar "rock video films"; the manic pace of the American films is mitigated somewhat, but the assault on received wisdom (the use of Shakespeare, Sartre, Aristotle, and Frank Sinatra in the epigraph), the emphasis on gloss, and the primacy given to the sense of the film as aggregate of shots make the correspondence noticeable. In *Subway*, a young con artist (Christopher Lambert) flees in a tuxedo from police and former prey to take refuge in the metro. He quickly integrates into the bizarre underground city life (including a rollerskating bandit, a superhuman strongman), resumes a relationship with his *baute monde* girlfriend, and, for unspecified reason, forms a rock band. The band's reggae-like song "It's Only Mystery" forms a set-piece of the film (the song's opening lyric queries, "Why do we go on watching this fucking TV? We're so bored, we don't even care what we see"). The tradition of the alienated criminal/dandy of the postwar French cinema (the New Wave but particularly Jean-Pierre Melville) is the back-drop for this exercise, much as the crime films of Don Siegel are for *To Live and Die in L.A.* and *Cobra*. The Lambert character's particularly French anomie becomes so exaggerated that he dissolves into the narrative, to be recuperated mockingly in the final frame; the gesture is similar to Richard Chance's (*To Live and Die in L.A.*) recuperation after the hysterical amorality extending Dirty Harry's sense of a cop as disaffected outsider. In *To Live and Die in L.A.*, however, the protagonist has some direct, logical links to a generic tradition which allows, at least for a time, for a sense of monadic self. In *Subway* the Protagonist is con man, roue, bum, entrepreneur, hipster, finally no one at all, a cipher seen as sum of generic conventions.

Beineix's *The Moon in the Gutter* (1983) shares with *Subway* the preoc-cupation of French postmodern cinema with allusion to cinematic styles, even specific images from earlier films, to a point where interest in the protagonist's fate is subjugated. Where *Subway'*s point of reference is the crime film and some elements of the *fantastique*, *The Moon in the Gutter* refers to, among others, Van Sternberg and the film adaptations of Tennes-see Williams's plays. Like Lambert, the Gerard Depardieu character of
Beineix's film is a vaguely resonant icon of cinema's past; even the film's tempestuous emotions and sexual dynamics are rendered as devices by their bold elaboration (In one shot of the film, the camera pans up very slowly from Depardieu's feet to his head, lovingly revealing the isolated, forlorn male figure much in the way Brando and his progeny were used by a generation of filmmakers).

The loss of affect and preoccupation with allusionism are increasingly components of "mainstream" cult films such as Nicholas Roeg's Insignificance (1985). The relevant feature of Roeg's film is that, like the novels of E.L. Doctorow, it addresses the notion of the disappearance of "real history" as history becomes pop narrative, confined and distorted by mediation. Insignificance (in the logo, "sign" is written in boldface) may be the first self-conscious gesture of the cinema in demonstrating for the mass audience the disruption of signification by turning into free play a well-organized form (the history play) that deals with a specific period of the American past and the "meeting" of historical personages. In the film Marilyn Monroe, Einstein, Joe McCarthy/Roy Cohn, and Joe DiMaggio meet in an imaginary 50s which is simultaneously a landscape of the imagination where past, present, and future merge as creation stands at the brink of apocalypse. The idea of historical figures meeting in the ante-chamber of hell has roots in tradition, but its postmodern manifestation in the plays of Tom Stoppard and Sam Shepard, and the films of Hans-Jurgen Syberberg suggests historical figures as projections, and the impossibility of learning from history. For some artists (Syberberg) history has simply been annihilated; for others (Doctorow) a concern for social progress has evaporated. The kind of anxiety in both of these modes is shared somewhat by Insignificance, which reverses the patriarchal notion advanced by Hollywood that the individual shapes history. The Great Man concept is replaced here not by the idea of the individual as product of historical forces, but by the idea of the existence of the past only as media apparition. The discourse here is neither grand nor abstract (the film is minus, for example, the epic sexual encounter of Billy the Kid and Jean Harlow of Michael McClure's Star); the political resonances of McCarthy/Cohn's brutal assault on the Monroe figure are diluted as the characters are returned to a pop imaginary. Einstein's recriminations ("I didn't choose America. I don't care") don't constitute a radical depiction of what a progressive consciousness might have thought (this would move the film too close to tragedy); rather, they reinforce the character as a subject of collective fascination, a "famous" person whose peculiarities as well as convictions have been amplified by media culture until the figure becomes a simulation. The legends surrounding Einstein become equal to Monroe's Seven Year Itch pose, McCarthy/Cohn's unctuous, belligerent manner, DiMaggio's swagger. Personal style supercedes the historical moment: McCarthyism only vaguely encompasses the Monroe calendar photograph and Einstein's absentmindedness as the historical referential is trivialized. The irony of the ap-
proach of *Insignificance* to the historical personage is that while the film overturns Hollywood's depiction of the individual as prime mover (the main thrust of the epic and similar genres), its point is the impossibility of apprehension. The trashing of traditional representational narrative strategies, ultimately advancing the disappearance of the protagonist, is ironically key to the emergence in art of a depoliticized, ahistorical consciousness that can be seen as a culmination to the bourgeois world-view.

That the cult or "limited audience" film should become central to an understanding of bourgeois ideological drift in the 1980s is reflected in David Byrne's *True Stories* and David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (both 1986). While both films are aimed at the urban "up-scale" audience, they have received the kind of notoriety associated with image proliferation in the current culture industry, and more particularly with the increased taste for the *outre* which has made the lower budget cult film, previously at the firing of industry economically and ideologically, the touchstone for the political temper of postmodernism. The protagonist's position is important to both films as an indicator of the reactionary and progressive poles of the new style. In rock star Byrne's *True Stories* the protagonist/narrator is actually a traditional authorial *raisonneur* and a means by which Byrne ("rock's renaissance man" according to *Time* magazine) can be showcased as genius and as chronicler of the new situation. Assembling (stealing?) numerous narrative devices from sources ranging from Fellini to Syberberg, Byrne assumes a disingenuous, affected role of disinterested raconteur of late capitalist *Kitsch* and alienation as he takes the audience to a bicentennial celebration in a suburban Texas town. Byrne's deadpan stroll through staged vignettes (a woman who lives in bed, a couple who communicate only through their children, a grotesque Roma-style fashion show in a shopping mall) has the effect of introducing to the mass audience the cool distance associated with Warhol, along with alienation-as-state-of-being central to Warhol's attitude. The force of Warhol's films and paintings came, however, from an awareness of the horrors of alienation basic to modernism. Warhol's celebrity portraits and his *Death and Disaster* series, while aware of their position as simulacra, had enough bearing on the real to establish a genuine moral force. Warhol the stroller was always close to the dissipated nineteenth-century habitue of salon and street, now hiding his illness and torpor behind sunglasses. Byrne, on the other hand, offers what can be seen dramatically as straightforward (and not too insightful) parody, while simultaneously suggesting good health in himself and society. Pastiche is complete in *True Stories* since the film, in trying to remove itself from any ideological project, lacks a moral center. We must modify this, however, since the film has no controlling aesthetic. While parody is present, it does not have an educative, critical function; rather, it evokes a snide laughter from the upwardly-mobile urban bourgeoisie at lumpen bourgeois elements. At the same time the film is sewn together with rock videos and elegant, campy still-life (derived from the style of William Eggleston) which
POSTMODERN CINEMA

this same audience consumes as postmodernism's aggrandizement and commodification of the banal accelerates.

David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* makes use of postmodernism's retro mode to suggest rather forthrightly the underside of bourgeois culture. Unlike *True Stories*, which also associates the 1980s with the 50s, *Blue Velvet*'s images form a conjunction of the psychological and the political to effectuate criticism amidst a very disjunct narrative. The protagonist Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan), another strolling schizo, wanders from "Leave it to Beaver's" suburbia into a hellish across-the-tracks metonym for the Id. While the MacGuffin for this journey is Jeffrey's "need to know more" about a possible murder plot, the need is linked to a wish to obliterate the father, beginning with the opening image of the father's stroke on the oversaturated green of Jeffrey's front lawn (followed by the macrozoom into the turbulent unconscious of the earth), ending with the fall of Frank (Dennis Hopper), the terrible father who caricatures the head of the primal horde. The impotence and impending fall of this father is suggested by his "loss of breath" (his inhaling from a plastic oxygen mask) and his perversion of the primal scene which the "child," Jeffrey, witnesses. The arrival of utopia, still suburban 50s but primarily matriarchal, is subverted by the appearance of artificial robins which fulfill, in a very presentational manner, the wish-dream of Jeffrey's girlfriend. *Blue Velvet*, with its use of the retro-mode to suggest the foolishness of patriarchy, signifies the progressive tendencies surfacing in the fringe cinema; *True Stories*, on the other hand, evidences the chic reaction of the 80s as it satirizes alienation while refusing to admit to an ideological agenda, or a critical project of any sort.

Conclusion

A concern of this paper has been the characteristics of postmodern culture as much as the representation of a certain facet in the cinema. Obviously the debate over postmodernism, although already treated with a kind of collective yawn as the *au courant* topic of academe, is vital to an understanding of the current political/economic situation internationally. Jameson and others (particularly the group associated with the *New Left Review*) are convinced at this point of postmodernism as an index of the dynamics of late capitalism; the notion of the site of struggle previously mentioned may indicate something far more severe in terms of the impossibility of bourgeois myths as they are mediated by art, even as image producers attempt to resurrect and prop up these myths with a vengeance during a period of reaction and recuperation. The death of the hero and the coming apart of the actantial model in bourgeois narrative art must suggest to us the bankruptcy of patriarchy and its ability to transmit symbolic values. Whether it is the absurd contradictions and worn-out signifying methods of *Rambo*, or the tendency of *Streets of Fire* and *Mad Max* to treat conventions and the myths generating them as pure text, it is clear that a cri-
CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

sis point is approaching. It would be foolish and precipitous to take heart in this as we face a period of great intellectual impoverishment in the cinema, but the evidence is such that the postmodern style, in form and elsewhere, is a prelude to a non-mythic consciousness of art and history.

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Notes


6. Ibid., 14.

7. Jameson's most significant work on this topic thus far is his "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in New Left Review 146 (July/August 1984): 53-94.


11. The term is associated principally with the work of Baudrillard. It has been appropriated recently by Umberto Eco in his Travels in Hyperreality, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1986).


15. Eagleton, 69.


POSTMODERN CINEMA

18. Ibid., 208.


23. The function of the quest is discussed in Michel de Certeau, Heterologies: Discourse on the Other, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), xiii.


25. This view is encouraged, not ironically, by government officials and sectors of the media. In the current period, the depiction of terrorists as Other is accomplished usually by association with socialist ideology; a fairly common strategy, however, is to portray the terrorist as product of an amorphous although objective evil for the purpose of debunking ideology itself and its relationship to violence. A representative example is Claire Sterling, The Terror Network (New York: Berkley, 1982). Sterling attributes to Mehmet Ali Agca (convicted of shooting the Pope) the remark “I am neither left-wing nor right-wing. Ideology doesn’t interest me. The important thing is to be an international terrorist (297).” For Sterling, Agca’s remark “went far to illuminate the decade ahead to us.”

26. Liner notes to the soundtrack album of Streets of Fire (MCA-5492)


30. See my “Myth, Male Fantasy, and Simulacra: The Hero as Pastiche in Mad Max and The Road Warrior,” Journal of Popular Film and Television 13, no.2 (Summer 1985), 80-91.

31. This idea is suggested in much of the publicity material for the film. See Michael Stein, “George Miller on Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome, Fantastic Films 45 (August 1985), 20.


33. See Robin Wood, “‘80s Hollywood.”


39. Danny Peary, *Cult Movies* (New York: Dell, 1981). Peary’s work (now two volumes) is part of a growing body of fan material attempting to define a film subculture.

40. See Jameson, p.68.
Near the end of Yvonne Rainer’s recent film, *The Man Who Envied Women*, the frame is filled for the second time with Donald Judd’s large grey concrete sculptures luxuriating in an open Texas field. The camera walks across these sculptures like fingers over a piano: they seem to hold a kind of tune half hidden, half audible. The sculptures are concrete outlines of squares the color of tombstones. The heaviness of their frame accentuates the hollowness of the air they embrace. Like a Wittgensteinian word game, or better still, like Mark Strand’s witty poem “Keeping Things Whole”, Judd’s sculptures suggest that “space” is that which negotiates between airy fields (infinite possibilities) and concrete architecture (finite facts), while not residing entirely in either the one or the other. As Strand puts it anthropomorphically: “When I walk/I part the air/ and always the air moves in/to fill the spaces/where my body’s been/”. Filling in the spaces created by departing persons, places, and things is the central concern of *The Man Who Envied Women*. Judd’s sculptures, with their refusal to locate or define a spatial point of origin or termination, are the objective correlative for the difficult idea of space that Rainer’s film alternatively vigilantly argues for, and whimsically hopes for. In this combination of argument and hope Rainer’s film resembles some of the best work of Jean-Luc Godard.

More interesting than the visual absence of the image of Trisha the female protagonist, is Rainer’s innovative expansion of the possibilities of the surface of the film. Using video transfers as kind of windows (frames-within-frames), grainy super-8 as an interruption of the smoother surface
of the film, the fragments from classic Hollywood and avant-garde films as Jack's interior mental landscapes, Rainer disallows the pleasureable illusion of a visually polished art piece and forces in its stead a reconfiguration of the traditional architecture of the frame. Rainer describes her attempt to break down the frame as a: "disruption of the glossy, unified surface of professional cinematography by means of optically degenerated shots within an otherwise seamlessly edited narrative sequence... I'm talking about films where in every scene you have to decide anew the priorities of looking and listening." This refusal to maintain a "unified [visual] surface" mirrors the film's disdain for traditional narrative coherence and progression. In place of the spatial and temporal homogeneity we expect in narrative films, Rainer creates a much more difficult unity.

The Man Who Envied Women's subject is not so much "a week in the life of Trisha," although it is partially that; the film is mainly interested in chronicling the manifestations and consequences of the pervasive malaise of spatial envy. This subject makes issues as apparently diverse as the politics of Central America, the Manhattan real estate crunch, the vicissitudes of sexual and social relations, the virility and impotence of poststructuralism, and the medicalization of women's bodies, seem deeply intertwined. Imperialism in Central America and New York love affairs are similar, for example, in that they are each motivated, in part, by the desire to gain space. In Rainer's film the latter is wryly represented by the only half-funny one liner: "When are we getting married so I can have your apartment when we get divorced?" The Central American situation, as we shall see, is treated much more somberly. Using a collage of "moving pictures" as a kind of collective interpretive Rorschach, Rainer is able to swing a wide and fluid net over these seemingly unrelated topics. These moving pictures function as a kind of classical Chorus which punctuate the drama Rainer's film unfolds. Initially assembled by the visually absent but-very-present Trisha, they are recreated and rearranged no less than six times in the film; their spatial rearrangements parallel the shifting spaces and stories of spatial envy which animate The Man Who Envied Women.

Rather than beginning with a "feeling for form," Rainer's film begins by underlining the incoherence of form. Postulating that form always involves the possession (imaginative or actual) of space, Rainer begins her narrative proper with Trisha's double loss of space. After moving out of the apartment she shares with Jack, she is evicted from her studio. Trisha, the mysteriously elusive artist, begins between "spaces"; she is dis-possessed. She can create only in fragmented images, in cut-outs that she must — perform — leave behind. This is the parable of loss, of always fragmented and interrupted formal concentration that the film slowly unfolds. Rainer's consistent disruption of the frame's space technically mirrors Trisha's cut up "home" and her cut-out art.

Trisha's opening monologue is just the first layer of Rainer's associative meditation on the implications of losing and gaining space:
It was a hard week. I split up with my husband of four years and moved into my studio. The water heater broke and flooded the textile merchant downstairs. I bloodied up a pair of white linen pants. The Senate voted for nerve gas and my gynecologist went down in Korean Airlines flight #007. The worst of it was the gynecologist. He used to put booties on the stirrups and his speculum was always warm.

Although these events are linked in time, they are linked in other more subtle ways as well. To put it simply, albeit crudely: splitting up with Jack sets off a series of dismissals and departures. Trisha's flooding menstrual blood and her studio's flooding water heater are alike in their fits of unruliness against their spatial confines. This private and individual unruliness moreover, finds its public and political image in the dark drama of Korean Airlines flight #007. Overstepping, overflowing, or flying over the boundaries of space, no matter how visible or invisible such boundaries might appear, can have tragic consequences.

Trisha's overflowing menstrual blood is crucial; Rainer's title plays on the Freudian notion that women are beset with penis envy. Part of Rainer's aim is to turn the tables: she wants to suggest that men envy women in part because of their internal biological space. (Women, as it were, carry their "air space" inside them. To employ this metaphor psychoanalytically, and from the woman's point of view, violations of "air space" are acts of power: the physiological and social arrangements of heterosexuality combine to maintain women in a subordinate position to men. To suggest that male sexual desire is motivated at least partially by spatial envy, a country and western song might phrase it "hunger for a home", rape becomes not only a logical, but an inevitable consequence of the psychological-physiological architecture of heterosexuality.) Rainer uses the woman's body and the functions of its still mysterious spaces as a kind of lens through which contemporary "problems" can be evaluated. She tries to link the mind that thinks and the body that feels in a specifically womanly way. One might say she attempts to reinvestigate the traditional oppositions of Western metaphysics, in the wake of Derrida, from a feminist point of view.

Part of her correction to the story poststructuralism tells is stylistic. Metaphysics in Rainer's view cannot go too long without a joke; the film's most serious moments (with the exception of the last ten minutes or so) are continually undercut with a joke. In what J. Hoberman thinks is the best line in the film, Rainer, in a distorted off-center close-up reminiscent of Hitchcock, invites "all menstruating women [to] please leave the theatre." This invitation is symptomatic of Rainer's most congenial habit of mind. Her most consistent impulse, and her most comfortable perspective, is from a distance — almost over her shoulder. This is not a film that asks the spectator to like the characters, to enjoy the scenery, to laugh heartily, or to nod one's head knowingly at all the familiar conversation. The
effort at the heart of this film is as engaged in throwing you out as it is in settling you in.

I

Returning again to the enabling fiction of the analyst/analysand which she explored in *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980), Rainer’s troubled and troubling male protagonist Jack Deller begins the film “on the couch.” Deller’s doctor is off-screen and voiceless (perhaps the ultimate representation of Rogerian client-centered therapy), and his confessions are actually the ponderously sounding words of Raymond Chandler’s letters and diaries. Rainer’s frequent tendency to have characters quote from other texts is part of her larger argument with narrative, and specifically with her sense that narrative constructs (inevitably) singular characters and singular points of view: by disallowing her characters’ singular linguistic habits she prohibits as well a singular habit of mind and a singular point of view. In a 1985 article in *Wide Angle*, Rainer comments that her indefatigably quoting characters help “foreground not only the production of narrative but its frustration and cancellation as well...Words are uttered but not possessed by my performers as they operate within the filmic frame but do not propel a filmic plot.” Deller sees himself as a man more gifted and blessed than troubled and cursed. He is a university professor — he teaches film theory, sort of — with Leftist leanings who uses words to seduce everyone (especially himself) into a cocoon of babel more hypnotic than revelatory. During his “sessions” Jack sits in a chair facing the camera. He sits on the left side of the frame, and continually gazes beyond the left vertical end imposed by the frame. This invisible space is acutely present in his monologues, just as the visually absent Trisha is acutely present in the narrative texture of the film. Jack, more than any other character in the film, is desperately dependent upon an audience. That the audience for his intimate meanderings turns out to be “the spectator” who is forced into the position of “the doctor,” is just one overt example of Rainer’s obsessive tendency to suggest that film’s effort to address is, absolutely, dependent upon an erasure. The first word of the film, “doctor,” addresses someone who is not there. The standard critical claim that the spectator always identifies with the camera requires that the camera become a surrogate spectator. The camera, in so becoming, literally effaces the spectator. The power of the camera’s eye (the potentially ideal I/eye) in addition to showing us objects and lending us its gaze, also shows us up. The space of the frame can be rented or leased but it can never be owned. The camera’s vision is presented but not possessed in much the way Rainer’s characters “utter but do not possess” their own language. The illusion of cinema’s visual realism is radically denied by Rainer’s meandering and deliberately disunified visual frames. Her most sustained investigation of the ontology of the filmic image occurs, suitably, in Jack’s struggle to separate and make
coherent his parcelled past: that is, in Jack’s sessions with the invisible doctor.

At one point, Jack sits in his chair facing the doctor/spectator to the left, and the camera moves back to reveal an audience completely absorbed in watching the film clips playing next to his head. The scene is unsettling. The film clip is from *The Night of the Living Dead*, and the spectators begin to attack each other as the film images grow more chaotic and the sound track more discursive (in a three way phone conversation Trisha summarizes Chodorow’s and Dinnerstein’s arguments and ruminates on the associations between the name “Jack Deller” and fairy tales). Despite all the aural and visual ornamentation, this sequence forces the spectator to reexperience the acute psychic discomfort that comes from the recognition of the profound connection between voyeurism and cinema. There is nothing original about this connection of course, but what is original (and awful) is the disturbing connection this particular sequence demands. The mayhem produced by the images of *The Night of the Living Dead* literally incites the audience to perform its own aggressive mayhem. Given that these clips are in the same spatial frame as Jack’s “confessions,” the underlying connection implicitly suggests that psychoanalysis, like cinema, in relying on “projection” as its paradigmatic principle, is inherently voyeuristic. To discover that the only position one can take in this “long shot” is the role of the doctor is to discover as well that one’s interest in Jack (cinematically and psychoanalytically) stems from a desire to “treat” him. More uncomfortably, it is to realize that one’s interest in the similarities between the “cinematic apparatus” and the psychoanalytic paradigm stems from the spectator’s own desire to be “treated.”

Jack’s central concern in these sessions is his relationship to women, a relationship that undergoes a radical change after the death of his first wife. Trisha, his second wife, has left him after four years, in part because of his inability to be faithful. His well-designed explanations for his lack of fidelity essentially consist of his belief that after his idealized first wife died, he became incapable of seeing women as anything other than sacred gifts. To turn down such a gift verges on the sacrilegious — and our Jack is no heretic. One gift he has inherited from Trisha, a gift he did not ask for, is her “art work.” Jack asks Trisha to take it with her when she moves out. She says she’ll return for it. Insofar as *The Man Who Envied Women* has a narrative “plot,” it is this early promise of return that the film uses as its departing point. Like everything else, the meeting is interrupted, even superseded, by the promise of another meeting between Jack and Jack-ie (Raynal), who are also ex-lovers. This meeting actually does occur, and it is from the unsettling perspective of their relationship that almost all of the varied threads the film unwinds come together. But as we wait for the party, the “meaning” of the art that is left behind, the hieroglyphics of an unreachable — both visually and romantically — artist, consume more and more of Jack’s attention.
This artwork is a collage of magazine clippings; three come from *The Sunday New York Times* and two come from *Mother Jones*. They include: an “About Men” column written by a priest, an ad for a Central American cigar which features a rich man and his dog as the Barthesian “sign” of success, and a gruesome photograph of decapitated bodies with a caption which seems to identify one of the victims as a six month old Guatemalan child. The spatial arrangement of these images is continually revised. Off-screen voices create narratives of coherence about them. The connection between the cigar ad and the mutilated bodies is described allegorically: the successful cigar-selling man profits, both directly and indirectly, from the mutilation and death of Salvadorean peasants. The United States’ interest in Central America is read as an imperial lust for the control of geographic space.

The plea for the “emotional” space of men represented by the “About Men” column is seen both economically (guess who profits?) and socially. That the space for this column occupies the Sunday paper, while the “Hers” column is put in the “Home” section of Thursday’s *Times* (“among the latest sofas”) is seen as an ideological manifestation of the privilege of space. More subtly, as the woman’s voice narrates her objection to the partitioning of column space in a slightly whining way, the column becomes another source of spatial envy as well.

The ad for the menopausal drug is seen as part of the larger treatment of “women’s problems” historically. It is linked to the themes of sexual difference in poststructural discourse. The precise relationship of the (by now) axiomatic connection between the textual body and the sexual body is explored with a twist that would make Roland Barthes cringe. Rather than seeing this connection as the source of Barthes’ *jouissance*, a kind of perpetual foreplay which teases one to contemplate a mental and spiritual communion so intense it holds the potential for infinite ecstasy, Rainer suggests that the link between the mind that thinks and the body that feels is one of loss — a kind of permanent grief. Early on, Trisha makes a provocative connection between the ovaries and the brain: “The ovaries of a seven month old fetus contain almost 1,000,000 egg cells. From then on, the ova constantly decrease in number without replenishment. The only other cells to do this are those of the brain.” The mutual process of dropping eggs and losing brain cells, neither of which are regenerative, revises the traditional (masculine) “mind/body split” into a more radical affinity. The body that feels and the mind that thinks are unified in their similar physiological movement from abundance to loss. The brain and the ovary then are the physiological kernels which sow, or so it would seem, a metaphysics not to acquisition, but of inevitable depletion.

The horrific image of the decapitated bodies (the split between the body and the mind so complete as to make Western metaphysics a pathetic understatement), is the image that elicits the deepest meditation. In one of the only moments of unification between the sound track and the image
track, the voice of one of the off-screen commentators (Martha Rosler's) breaks off as Deller's hand trails away from the wall after shifting the images around in an effort to bury the gruesome image (and the naked bodies) under all the other clippings. It is a moving sequence, not only because Deller at last seems "in sync" with the world of the film, but also because one of the questions of "owning space" hinges — apparently absolutely — on someone else losing it.

This relationship is explored with a poignant befuddlement as Rainer follows the sequence of public hearings called to consider Manhattan's recent proposal to allocate housing funds to artists moving into the Lower East Side. The idea behind this plan was to keep New York City as a congenial "space" for art and artists — a cynical observer might say that the idea exposes New York's own imperial lust for cultural supremacy — but no matter: contemplating "moving to Jersey" is viewed with equal horror by all members of the hearings. One of the unfortunate consequences of this proposal was that it pitted the artists against the ethnic working-class whose very presence in Rainer's overtly theoretical film, calls into question the efficacy of art and the aesthetic impulse to manipulate and re-order space for some artistic good. The immense space of Donald Judd's sculptural field and the huge canvases of Leon Golub suddenly seem absurd: do "images" and "representations" deserve/need to consume so much space? Do we participate in the construction and maintenance of a world in which "representation" literally dominates our lives, and robs some people of four walls? "Almost overnight we met the enemy," Trisha declares, "and it was us."

II

If the spatial arrangements and rearrangements of Trisha's abandoned art work (work that has fallen under the gaze of hyper-articulate eyes) constitute the melody of the film, part of its rhythmic structure comes from Jack's magic headphones. Like some fantastic state-of-a-future-art walkman, Jack's oversized mechanical ears make him privy to the conversations of Manhattan street-strollers. It is perhaps the triPLICATE repetition of these scenes that prompts Hoberman to dub Rainer "the Purple Rose of Soho," and to compare her films to Woody Allen's. Rainer's one-liners are dry and infectious. They are also obsessively concerned with sex. The space between Jack's ears, by implication, seems overloaded with sexual puns: his head selectively receives the world from a sexual point of view.

In the first issue of Motion Picture, Rainer writes that the purpose of these scenes is to convey the idea that the city, for Jack, is a "place full of sexual anxiety, obsession, and verbal assault, litanies of sexual distress...[It is] a barrage — a veritable eruption — of ordinarily repressed material." But the problem is that the conversations are all in one-key: if it is a jungle it specializes in one animal. More importantly, these jokes are all about sex-
ual stereotypes: gay men as housewives, feminism as a badge of admittance for politically correct men to a wider set of women's bedrooms, and so on. If these clichés are supposed to frighten a man who spouts off the subtle seductions of Foucault and who speaks of the cinematic apparatus as an intimate echo of Lacanian subjectivity, then he is in really sorry shape. But I think Rainer's aim and its effect are quite different. We tend not, I think, to take these lines as symptomatic of Jack's fear: we tend to take them as welcome comic relief.

Jackie is not speaking to Jack: she addresses a different spectator altogether. She seems to be addressing on/off-screen Trisha. Or at least, it would seem that Trisha hears Jackie more clearly than Jack does. Jackie's voice, thick with a French accent, is passionate and sounds half sleepy. She wears a kind of shimmering gown that half reveals her breasts. The camera scrutinizes her with a pleasure it simply cannot find in Jack. She rolls her tongue around these amazingly large words with the strange wonder of a French woman speaking English as if for the first time; the sounds of the words resonant with the confidence of their own originality, they are sure they have never been spoken in quite this way before. As I watch this scene I feel as if the theatre will collapse under all these words; as if there should be a rating for films based solely on the number of words spoken into little rooms; as if seduction is made up of nothing but words.

This slow seduction underscores Jack's ironic insistence on repeating Foucault's axiom: "There is no opposition between what is said and what is done." As Jack and Jackie move intellectually further and further apart, their bodies move closer and closer together. As Jack continually repeats Foucault's arguments about the ubiquitous dispersion of power, Jackie categorizes and delimits differences in the power to discriminate power. Jack is content to ignore "what is said" for what might "be done." He seems not to hear a thing she says. Jackie is, in almost a literal sense, speaking a different language:

Only the naive humanist feminist thinks she can change something by changing her consciousness; the rigorous feminist plumbs the hidden depths of subjectivity, studies its construction in language...winds through the labyrinth to find not a monster but a new position of the subject...One awkward consequence of the freudomarxist marriage presided over by language, is to open up an inviting space for marxist and feminist laborers which can only be defined by the systematic evacuation of certain questions — political, economic, and above all historical questions...Theory as a watchdog is a poor creature: not because it is nasty or destructive but because for attacking the analysis of confrontation it simply has no teeth.

As if this is the permission Rainer has been waiting for, the remainder of The Man Who Envied Women moves steadily away from the theoretical
pronouncement (the world of Jack) to a more personal, and more tentative meditation. We move more comfortably and more completely into the world of the imagination. This world, entered only through the portal of the feminine, is formally invoked (evoked?) by Jackie, who again borrows Morris' words:

Passing from the realm of the theory of the subject to the shifty spaces of feminine writing is like emerging from a horror movie to a costume ball...Feminine writing lures with an invitation to licenence, gaiety, laughter, desire and dissolution, a fluid exchange of partners of indefinite identity.

Underscoring this change in mental space Rainer cuts to Trisha's narration of a dream. She dreams her mother and Jack are lovers. Both mother and daughter are played by Rainer. Just as Trisha seems to accept that her mother is Jack's lover, the mother watches Jack and Trisha (disguised behind a paper mask) in bed together. Now Trisha is furious. But the dream is so obviously funny, so clearly a willful Oedipal reconfiguration that Trisha's refusal to laugh seems hilarious. Trisha's eyes are so completely disguised she is apparently unable to see herself. Fittingly, slinking through this "Oedipal extravaganza" — the phrase is Rainer's — is a one-eyed cat. Cut back to the hallway. Jack and Jackie are embracing all the rhetorical possibilities of physically embracing.

And then again Trisha's voice: "If a girl takes her eyes off Lacan and Derrida long enough to look she may discover she is the invisible man." That the film's invisible woman, Trisha, says this only heightens the irony; the film abandons the poetics of theory and individual masculinity for a more persuasive look at Trisha's moving pictures.

As it happens when theory is not the loudest voice in the room, what the eye sees when it looks again is a different image altogether. Trisha's concluding ruminations, unlike Jack's initial confessions, are tentative and groping:

Lately I've been thinking yet again I can't live without men but I can live without a man. I've had this thought before, but this time the idea is not colored by stigma or despair for finality. I know that there will sometimes be excruciating sadness but I also know something is different now, something in the direction of unwomanliness. Not a new woman, not non-woman, or misanthropist, or anti-woman, and not non-practicing lesbian. Maybe un-woman is also the wrong term. A-woman is closer. A-womanly A-womanliness.

I must admit that I'm not sure what Trisha means by this. She seems willing and ready to bury Jack's hold on her. And ready to bury something larger as well. Among the more enigmatically haunting sequences in the film is an early one in which Trisha complains that her father chose this week to "pop out." In Trisha's various retellings of her stories of "life
PEGGY PHELAN

with Jack” there is a feeling that she is telling the story of life with Pop as well. Trisha’s exasperation with the way the memory of her father intrudes upon her recollection of “life with Jack” speaks to the doubleness of the pain of mourning. The father, like Jack, intrudes on Trisha — both as a maddeningly inadequate presence and as a persistent and unwelcome absence. This is all in the realm of speculation — there is little direct reference to this in the film. But what is germane to Trisha’s announcement of “something different now” is the persistent hope that if a-womanliness means anything at all, it might have some impact on Trisha’s Oedipal dreams. With Pop and Jack tucked back in the suitcase, maybe Trisha, her mother, and the one-eyed cat can create a new dream. One that may well be filled with “excruciating sadness,” but one that might yet be allowed the representation of a dream-text, one that might raise the hiterto repressed.

We return again to the art work — for one last rearrangement. This time Rainer asks, “If this were an art work how would you critique it?” The answer brilliantly recasts the connections between the images and suggests that spatial arrangements, artistic and rationalistic, are inherently political. I quote just briefly from Rosler’s long argument:

I would feel I was being tricked into trying to deal with things that have become incommensurable as though they weren’t incommensurable. That I was being told that the myths of civility at home and the problems of daily life are only a veneer over the truth that the state destroys people. It is as though I were being told that when dealing with the ultimate, my worries about how I live my life in America are not important.

She then goes on to elucidate the ways in which the arrangements of the images tell political and visual stories. The uncaring emotional facade of men that the “About Men” column argues against, “determine[s] how we conduct our foreign policy. It isn’t only a matter of economic interest, but of how we choose to pursue that interest. If we’re willing to grind up other people because we can’t be bothered to feel about them then it does matter.” What she argues for then is a new notion of spatial privilege — an anti-privilege; or maybe that’s the wrong term — privilegelessness is closer. A world in which the space one occupies (publicly and privately) is not subject to or the object of envy; a world that Judd’s sculptural embraces create when their spatial beginnings and endings cannot be defined or located.

The fact that the sculptures themselves dominate a wide open field in Texas underlines the distance we need to traverse before such an ideal spatial arrangement might occur. Judd’s sculptures, in other words, demand a second look. Rainer’s film proposes a democracy of spatial equality so radical that its very proposal requires a continual rearrangement not only of the images in the frame but of the frame itself.
I said earlier that the identification between the camera and the spectator inevitably effaces the power of the spectator and that implied within this effacement there was a failure of address. Jack’s sessions which address an absent doctor and are augmented by films addressed to an audience alert to other texts, underscore the difficulty of filmic address. The spectator is the film’s invisible hearer, its unseen doctor and deliverer of catharsis. At the “Narrative Poetics Conference” in April at Ohio State University, Teresa DeLauretis argued that Rainer’s film encouraged her to feel addressed as a woman spectator and that the success of this fullsome address was one of the greatest achievements of The Man Who Envied Women. DeLauretis contended that the film saw as a woman sees and that it did not bow to the conventions of the male gaze (conventions that DeLauretis has long been skeptical about but are nonetheless recognized by most feminist film critics) and thus advanced both feminist film theory and film practice. Insofar as the distinction between gender specific points-of-view has any validity, it is certainly true that The Man Who Envied Women is animated from and for a women’s eye. My earlier point was more concerned with underlining the challenge of Rainer’s film in terms of address itself. By upsetting the conventions of filmic point of view (e.g.: not showing Trisha at all and thus making it impossible to follow her gaze; the conflicting narrative angles of the plot(s) et al.), Rainer also challenges the conventions of filmic address. By “address” I mean not only the complicated and complicating processes of identification between “character” and spectator, but also the more simple feeling of belongingness — as if one is invited and encouraged to be engaged. More than simply saying post-Brecht that film, and avant-garde film in particular, makes the spectator feel alienated — makes the spectator recognize the gap between the technical camera eye and her own eye, I’m trying to say that what Rainer’s film suggests is that film’s deep dependency on point-of-view (gender specific or otherwise) as the primary means by which the spectator is given intimate access to a kind of knowledge, no matter how relative — as in the elegant equivocations of Roshomon — is what needs to be dismantled and understood as a seductive fiction. Insofar as Trisha’s concluding remarks about “a-womanliness” can be seen as an abandonment of gender as a shorthand notion of identity, it would seem that Rainer is trying to abandon the ownership of (and perhaps film’s conspiracy in the maintenance of) single identity itself.

The relationships between language, image, and character are individually and collectively rearranged in The Man Who Envied Women. Rainer’s ambitious film underlines the ways in which narrative coherence demands and creates a spectator alert to a too simple coherence. The project of the film is not to delineate the reasons and motivations for Jack’s envy of Trisha or Jack-ie; nor is it the story of Jack’s transformation from bully to lover;
I don't even think it's about the way in which film theory informs film practice although that is sort of distractingly interesting. I think the film is actually about the appetite to rearrange and reconfigure the connections between image, language and character in film, the desire to rearrange and reconfigure sexual relationships in "Life" and economic-political-spatial relationships in "Art" and in "The World," and I think it is about Rainer's own appetite for a new aesthetic of filmic architecture. (I ought to stress that I believe there is a difference between delineating an appetite for something and delineating the thing itself. *The Man Who Envied Women* is much more of a proposal and speculative dream than it is a programmatic manifesto; this too is in keeping with Rainer's witty metaphysics and Trisha's wide ruminations).

"Filmic architecture" borders on the oxymoronic: architecture tends to connote stability and the fixing of and within space. It tends to connote sculptural fields like Judd's and towers like Trump's. Rainer's *filmic architecture* takes flexibility and flow as defining principles, and film's inevitable failure to meet the desire to fix or possess space itself as its philosophic spine. *The Man Who Envied Women* rejuvenates the political/aesthetic agenda of the avant-garde film in its method, and it challenges contemporary critical theory's thralldom with masculinist modes in its argument. *The Man Who Envied Women* challenges theory's own desire for possession and coherence. Theory's panting after discursive space is perhaps not only a logical but an inevitable consequence of the desperation and parcelling out of "space" in critical discourse itself. Film studies, feminist or otherwise, exists in a discursive space that encourages (even demands) "possession." The bitter irony, of course, is that film's most radical potential lies in its resistance to being possessed or owned.

Film's ability to move pictures continuously, to endlessly rearrange the cut-outs by which and through which we come to see and project identity and ownership, and through which we come to desire them both, demonstrates as well the importance of challenging our own comfort with the conventions of coherence. In film, the particularly comfortable conventions are sharply delineated points of view (owning stories) and the modes of address typical of narrative and documentary film. From the first ten minutes of super-8 film, through the video "documentary" of the housing hearings, Rainer constantly manipulates the surface of her film. We, like Jack, are left with cut-outs whose "meaning" lies in its potential to be endlessly rearranged. What makes this film more than a smart leftist manifesto, is the innovative way in which Rainer matches her political vision of privilegelessness with the aesthetic possibilities of interrupted and shared filmic space. Rainer degrades the values of the ownership of ideas, discourse, and Manhattan lofts, by continually rearranging what we expect film to own: the space of its frame.

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Notes

1. The Man Who Envied Women. 16 mm, color, 125 min., 1985. Distributed by First Run Features, 153 Waverly Place, New York, New York, 10014, CFDC, 67A Portland St., Toronto, Ontario, M5V 2M9. All quotes unless otherwise noted are from the film. Art Simon discussed this paper with me with admirable patience and insight. I thank him and hereby absolve him of responsibility for what follows.

2. Rainer, "Some Ruminations around Cinematic Antidotes to the Oedipal Net (les) while Playing with DeLauraedipus Mulvey, or, He May Be Off Screen, but..." The Independent, April, 1986: 25.


6. DeLauretis' talk was delivered with humor and polemical zeal. The Conference was held between April 10-12, 1986. Rainer was present at the conference, and The Man Who Envied Women was shown the night before DeLauretis' talk. Rainer answered questions after the screening but did not comment publicly after DeLauretis' talk.
DECONSTRUCTING FELLINI

Frank Burke

Fellini’s work tends to be identified with the European art film movement of the late 50s and early 60s (La Strada, La Dolce Vita) then with the emancipatory romanticism of the mid and late 60s (8 1/2, Juliet of the Spirits, Fellini Satyricon). His films of the 70s and 80s have not received the attention enjoyed by his earlier films. As a result, he is viewed principally as a high modernist and, especially, as the kind of romantic/individualist artist prized by high modernism. Concomitantly, his films tend to be seen as romantically affirmative, closed works whose closure is consistent with both bourgeois art and the privileged, separate nature of art in high modernism.

Ironically, Fellini’s films, even from the sixties, serve to undermine both romantic individualism and Fellini’s own persona as romantic artist. At the same time, his films either dissolve or attack both closure and the separation of art from life. In 8 1/2 (1963), Guido (a Fellini surrogate), never completes his film (a strange hybrid of self-centered autobiography and escapist science fiction). Moreover, after his individuality and egoistic separateness are dissolved, and he merges with all the human images from his past, Guido himself disappears. The film ends without Guido or even his symbolic reincarnation as the boy in white, with only a dark circus arena, an unsettling site of both presence and absence, out of which something new may or may not be born. Gone are both the single, heroic identity and the sense of affirmative closure upon which bourgeois romanticism depends.

What happens to Guido in 8 1/2 happens to Fellini himself as main character in The Clowns (1970) and Fellini’s Roma (1972). By the end of
the former, Fellini as director is replaced by an old clown who tells a story which, in taking on a life of its own, narrates *The Clowns* to its conclusion. The story is about the inseparability of death and life, absence and presence, as it confirms both the demise and the resurrectibility of the art of the clown. It too ends in the domain of openness, its concluding circus arena — like that of *8 1/2* — a space of indeterminate futures, cleared of limiting specificity.

At the end of *Roma*, Fellini has again disappeared as narrator/director. Present only as camera eye, he becomes absorbed in the balletic dance of motorcyclists who weave their way among the monuments of Rome (the past) and out onto the Via Cristoforo Colombo. The motorcyclists, though communal and synchronized, are also depersonalized by their gear; the roar of their engines is threatening as well as energizing; their encircling “occupation” of Rome suggests the destructiveness of the Visigoths and Vandals as well as the positive potential of contemporary life-on-the-move. (Moreover, the Via Cristoforo Colombo not only implies discovery of a new world, it leads to the E.U.R. district of Rome, product and symbol of Italy’s repressive past under Fascism.)

In short, Fellini’s identity becomes absorbed in a process of “futuring” which involves decentering (leaving the filmic and historic centre of Rome), dehumanization, the death of identity, and a hurtling-forth amidst images that offer no romantic assurances or conclusions whatsoever.

In all three films, Fellinian process is much like Derridean difference or differentiation, constantly effacing presences, encountering traces rather than origins, affirming the activity of life rather than its meanings or moments of closure.

These films, from Fellini’s middle period, tend to originate in a context of romantic individualism which includes a modernist predisposition toward the completed, whole artwork (Guido and Fellini himself seeking to make movies). Then they proceed to deconstruct romanticism and modernism, working through to a postmodernist situation and sensibility.

One film from his later period, *City of Women* (1980), does the same. Here, we have a dream-memory which functions as the film within the film (the closed artwork), with Snaporaz as dreamer-director as well as romantic lead. The dreamwork gradually pushes Snaporaz beyond his totalizing fantasies of women (eliminating also his romantic alter ego, Cazzone) and breaks its own boundaries as dream, leaving Snaporaz in an awakened state, on the move, in a train surrounded by actual women rather than mere symbols of his own wish-fulfillment. Again, the culminating condition is one of open-endedness. The women are “real” yet they originated in his dream — as did the train journey and — his now broken glasses. We don’t have reality versus dream, conscious vs. unconscious, we have both. Moreover, the movie concludes with an ending and a beginning. The train enters a tunnel, the screen goes dark, and the credits roll by, signifying that the movie is over. Yet after the credits a small light appears
FRANK BURKE

at the end of the tunnel, breaking the traditional concluding barrier of the film itself. As at the end of Roma, we have perpetual motion. In addition, though the entry into the tunnel (given the thrust of the film and Snaporaz’s age) suggests death, the light at the end suggests new life. As at the end of The Clowns we are left with both death and life — coupled here with both darkness and light — rather than one or the other.

In contrast to City of Women, Fellini’s other recent films tend to operate principally or solely in a negative mode — focusing on the limitations of closure, hierarchy, romantic individualism, static harmony or unity, without escaping a world caught in those limitations.

Fellini has said of Amarcord (1974): “another title I wanted to give it was Il borgo, in the sense of a medieval enclosure, a lack of information, a lack of contact with the unheard of, the new . . . .”6 The small town in Amarcord is the most obvious form of closure in the film. However, the narrative mode of memory, suggested by the meaning of the title (“I remember”), is equally important — and one which is never opened out the way it is at the end of City of Women. Moreover, the town “narrates” its existence through a series of rituals such as the burning of the witch of winter and the gathering of April 21, whose yearly repetition (like the coming of the puffs of spring) suggests mere cycliness (identicality, sameness in terms of deconstruction) rather than difference and novelty.7

The attempted compensation for entrapment in the film is romantic fantasy, imported from the States via movies and the ocean liner Rex, and most insidiously fulfilled by Mussolini and his myth of Italian superiority. Fascism and America converge in the film’s final scene with the marriage of Gradisca to a carabiniere, whose marriage moves him only to proclaim Viva Italia! and who is described by a wedding guest as Gradisca’s Gary Cooper. Of course the joining of the town sex goddess to a petty Mussolini in an institution that is supposed to provide happiness ever after makes the romantic alternative just another closed ending. Unlike Roma and City of Women, Amarcord ends with no sense of forward motion, just the sense of entropic conclusion.

Interestingly, though the film moves to a dead end, Fellini, in talking about his and friends’ response to the film, suggests a favorite postmodern strategy, “resistance” or “refusal,” as a counterbalance to closure: “psychologically, it would [be] more accurate to speak of a kind of heartrending refusal of something which once belonged to you, of something which made you, of something which you still are. And in this refusal, there is always something sad, tortured, and tortuous. You speak of that infamous school, of that stupid and dull life together, of ridiculous dreams, of the bruises that you have dragged along with you forever, of a complete refusal of that life.” Yet for Fellini, the “refusal” proves ultimately to be a failed strategy: “. . . at the same time, you know very well that unfortunately you had no other life, you had only that one.”8 One ultimately collapses into,
becomes identical with, the negative memory of *Amarcord*, rather than maintaining an energizing distance.

*Fellini's Casanova* (1976) is Fellini's painful disembowelling of Casanova as romantic hero: as writer/creator, as lover, as loved one, and most important, as fatuous persona of all three. Moreover, it is Fellini's unmasking of the dark side of romanticism: fascism. All this is suggested by Fellini's comments on the film: "Casanova for me does not exist . . . . There is nothing in *The History of My Life*, it recalls nothing to you, nothing! . . . He has gone all over the world, and it is as if he never got out of bed . . . . Who knows what Casanova was like? We are evaluating the character of a book . . . a loud, annoying, despicable character . . . a man who possesses the stupidity, the arrogance, and the bumptiousness of the barracks and the church . . . . He is a man who does not even allow you to be ignorant, he superimposes himself on everything . . . . A fascist."9

Not just an attack on his main character, *Fellini's Casanova* is a critique of a rigid hierarchical society, characterized in part by the Inquisition, whose suppression turns potential creators into posturers and sycophants, directing most of their attention to impressing authority and the rest to seducing women.

Living in this society, Casanova becomes little more than a pseudointellectual Snaporaz who cannot awaken from his adolescent fantasy of feminine conquest, salvation, and perfection. Accordingly, in contrast to Snaporaz, Casanova ends his film under the influence of the unconscious, recalling a dream he had the night before in which he returned to Venice and, with the blessing of his mother and the Pope, danced one final dance with his mechanical doll partner, Rosalba.

Unlike Guido in *8 1/2* and Fellini in *The Clowns* and *Roma*, Casanova never escapes his identity, his persona, or his own autobiographical fictions.

*The Orchestra Rehearsal* (1979) is Fellini's most blatant attack on closed art, static harmony, and hierarchy. Its setting is an old oratory, perfectly acoustically — hence perfectly sealed off from the outside world. The musicians, under the authority of the conductor, seek some kind of elusive perfection — an ideal held solely in the conductor's mind. The orchestra is hierarchized not only by the conductor, but by union representatives, a mafioso "capo orchestra," and a kind of natural ranking among the musicians themselves from percussionists (mostly Neopolitans we are told) to violinists (presumably Northern Italians!).

The art process itself is one of repression and projection. The extreme temperamental and biographical differences among the musicians, their radically self-centered obsession with their own instruments, are gradually levelled by conformity. First the majority of the orchestra band together in a rebellion against authority which diminishes rather than affirms self-expression. Then, when the insulated world of the oratory is shattered by a wrecking ball, the rebellion is quickly abandoned. The orchestra restores the conductor to his podium, and devotes itself to the piece of music he
FRANK BURKE

has been seeking to impose on them from early in the movie. All individuality, all difference, has been eliminated. Order becomes complete within the world of the artwork. (Even the seeming threat posed by the wrecking ball seems neutralized by the false harmony of the orchestra.)

Central to this story of imposed and escapist unity is the character of the conductor, a German authoritarian romantic in the tradition of Wagner. He is the artist as dictator, locked into and perpetuating a system of art as power and submission. At the film's end, when the piece is concluded, he cannot abandon his role as conductor. He must criticize and insult, demanding ever more rehearsal. There must be no way out of this endlessly repetitive, hence fully closed, world of art.

And the Ship Sails On (1983) concludes what might be called Fellini's "late trilogy" of dead and deadening art. Here the form of isolate artistry becomes opera rather than autobiography (Casanova) or the symphony (The Orchestra Rehearsal), and the site becomes an ocean liner rather than Casanova's decadent imagination or an oratory. There are numerous similarities to The Orchestra Rehearsal. The ship and the opera troupe are hierarchies much like the symphony. Authority becomes increasingly dominant and finally comes altogether from without. (The Austro-Hungarian battleship combines in effect the roles of wrecking ball and German conductor as exogenous motivating force by the end.) Differences among the opera stars are repressed in favor of false harmonies: first the pilgrimage to scatter Edmea Tetua's ashes near her birthplace (harmony as worship), then the various operatic performances that accompany the attack of the Austro-Hungarian ship and the evacuation of the ocean liner (harmony as elitist art).

Underpinning the movement of the film is, of course, the romantic myth of the great artist (Tetua), as well as the romantic illusions of the various passengers who somehow live through or in lingering competition with her. The implied logic of the film is similar to that of The Orchestra Rehearsal: romantic mystification creates a closed inner world of fantasy while the outer world gets increasingly out of hand and exerts increasing authority over the isolate romantic world.

And the Ship Sails On is also a film about film — and about film-as-closure. In the opening sequence, we move from documentary camera work (film as presumed reality) to increasingly sophisticated cinematic techniques (closeups, editing) which reveal film's manipulation, structuring, and "de-realizing" of the found world. Moreover, color is introduced as realism (a mere technological, aesthetic achievement), not as heightened or increased reality. In fact, the colorization of the images coincides with the movement from documentary to filmed opera or musical comedy — i.e., pure escapist cinema.

In addition, the credits are accompanied by the sound of a projector, emphasizing that the film we are watching is a completed product, quite separate from the world it presumably reveals, mechanically reproduced for a theatre audience. It is not a form of immediate, living access to the
DECONSTRUCTING FELLINI

world it represents. By film's end, as all becomes mechanized melodrama and opera, complete with happy ending, the emphasis on disassociated projection is even more pronounced. Moreover, the final image — an iris in to darkness — emphasizes mere laboratory technique, superimposed on the film stock, even further removing the film from the reality it supposedly represents. (The iris in is, of course, a dramatic instance of closure and contrasts directly with the small iris of light that opens out the tunnel at the end of City of Women.)

The dissociation between film and reality is accentuated by the role of the journalist who serves often as our major link to the action. It becomes clear early on, as he is banished to a corner of the dining room, that his awareness of what's happening (hence our knowledge derived from him) is partial in the extreme. Paradoxically, though his limits (and even self-doubt) as a journalist pervade the film, he becomes our sole source of information. We are forced to accept only his version of the facts — a version which itself is full of tentative hypotheses rather than persuasive documentation.

Though Fellini's use of an unreliable journalist-narrator is a strategy found in his early work ("The Matrimonial Agency," 1953) it also serves as a link between the late trilogy of "dead art" and Fellini's most recent work, Ginger and Fred (1986). Here media replaces art altogether, instead of remaining in its service. Fellini's journalist-narrator becomes the vast consciousness-programming network of television.

In Ginger and Fred, television serves as the new fascism for Fellini. Its initial presence seems casual: a placard at the train station, displaying the name of the Christmas special ("Ed Ecco a Voi") on which Amelia and Pippo (Ginger and Fred) are to appear. Yet even here, the world of television arrests Amelia's attention and dictates her movement. Soon, actual television transmissions appear and begin to rivet the characters' attention (e.g., the soccer game at the hotel). Amelia herself uses the tv in her room to unwind. Then, she and Pippo are moved inexorably toward the tv station and the show. As this happens, all transmissions begin to come from one station — and consist only of announcements relating to the Christmas spectacular. Even Fellini's camera eye becomes slave to the tv monitor, dutifully revealing guests in the network cafeteria as they are described by the female tv announcer.

Once Amelia and Pippo are inside the studio and past the security checkpoint, their entrapment becomes complete. (Pippo, fearing this, throws a brief revolutionary tantrum before going through security setting off the alarm with his horseshoe.) Amelia and Pippo become Ginger and Fred, they are regimented into the mechanistic schedule of the show, and they become subservient in the presence of the smugly authoritarian network president. Their remaining freedom consists only of a few moments of self-expression and rebellion during a power failure — moments whose authenticity is undercut by the setting: the stage of a tv studio. As soon
as the lights return, Ginger and Fred resume their place within the show's rigid scheme of things.

Because Amelia's and Pippo's relationship is ruled by the pervasive authority of television, their personal identities remain subordinate to their stage identities of Ginger and Fred. They have no opportunity to (re)establish contact or develop a meaningful partnership. Even in the final scene, as they reach a moment of potential honesty and directness at the train station, they are interrupted by autograph seekers who restore them to their roles as Ginger and Fred.

For Fellini, television clearly serves not only as the new fascism, but as the new god and santa claus, dispensing love, spirit, good will, and gifts on Christmas day. It is the latest commodity form in a consumer society (the preponderance of food commercials makes the link between television and consumption quite clear). It derives from the willingness of people to be programmed, and it fuels their desire for passive acceptance of meaning from without.

The nature of television programming provides perhaps the most graphic instance of false harmony in Fellini's later work. It also harkens back to his early work, combining two favorite Fellinian arenas of entertainment: the variety theatre and the circus. Acts follow one another with virtually no connection, no principle of integration. A cow with 18 teats can coexist with a levitating monk and 24 dancing dwarfs. Interspersed are sausage and olive oil commercials. The only thing that holds the show together is the fact that it occupies a continuous time slot.

The television show is, of course, a closed form in much the same way as is a memoir, symphony, opera, or projected film. However, in its radically disjunctive embodiment of both fragmentation and closure, it is even more symptomatic of our current world — our quest for order among the ruins — than the art forms of Fellini's preceding movies.

Like Fellini's analysis of the dis-integrating and authoritarian nature of television, his continuing examination of the limits of art, closure, and romantic individualism attest to the relevance of his recent work as both critique and expression of contemporaneity. They indicate that, despite his diminishing visibility on the international film scene, Fellini is working diligently and self-critically on issues of urgency in the realm of cultural articulation.

Notes

1. My sense of how Fellini is currently perceived is derived largely from discussions with other film scholars concerning the neglect of Fellini's work on the part of film theorists and critics. Indicatively, Fellini's name does not appear in the index of Movies and Methods. Vol. II: An Anthology, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985) — a 743-page compilation of contemporary film theory and analysis.
Attacks on Fellini-as-romantic are typified by Robert Phillip Kolker's remarks in *The Altering Eye: Contemporary International Cinema* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983): "Fellini [has] slipped back to a melodramatic mode via expressionism, an autobiographical expressionism in which the structures of memory and fantasy are limned out with history relegated to a backdrop and nostalgia elevated above analysis. He returns to a romanticism that insists that the productions of the artist's life and imagination must be of interest simply because they are the productions of the artist" (p. 87).

2. Modernism's privileging of the autonomy of art is described as follows by Andreas Huyssen: "Contrary to the avantgarde's intention to merge art and life, modernism always remained bound up with the more traditional notion of the autonomous artwork, with the construction of form and meaning ... and with the specialized status of the aesthetic" (After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism — Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986 — p. 192). Modernism's tendency to privilege closed form and the finished art object is addressed by Ihab Hassan in *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), p. 91.

3. E.U.R. was begun as a monument to Fascist architecture and ideology, though it was not completed until long after the second world war.


5. In terms of Fellini's feature films, I consider his early period to embrace *Variety Lights* (1950) through *La Dolce Vita* (1960), his middle period to include *8 1/2* through *Roma*, and his late period to commence with *Amarcord*.


7. The sense of a dead end is emphasized by Fellini in describing the response of close friends to the film: "... what is it that agitates if everything in the film is ridiculous? It is because you sense that it is your Italy, it is you, because you sense that if today you are able to look with an almost impious eye at this thing, at the same time it is your mirror. And then, notwithstanding that, you sense that there is no time left for another kind of life and that this thing from which you wish to detach yourself and which you judge without pity is the only life you have had." *Amarcord* in Bondanella, p. 26.

