

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

RE-READING "AGAINST THE GRAIN":  
THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF STRATEGIES  
OF FILMIC RESISTANCE

by

MARK BETZ

A THESIS

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THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF STRATEGIES OF FILMIC RESISTANCE

BY

MARK BETZ

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba  
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MASTER OF ARTS

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## Acknowledgments

My interest in cinema has been long-standing, but my decision to make the study of film my life's work in general and to produce this thesis in particular would be simply unthinkable without the attention and guidance of the teachers I have studied with at the University of Manitoba, most particularly Drs. Frank Burke, Brian McIlroy, Stephen Snyder, George Toles, and Eugene Walz. As readers of this thesis, Dr. Margaret Groome and Dr. Carl Matheson provided invaluable advice. Dr. John Palatella of Rochester offered germane and helpful comments at a particularly crucial stage. But my largest debt of thanks goes to George Toles, who taught me that personal investment must underpin any critical activity, and whose understanding, patience, and support have sustained me throughout the writing of this thesis.

For my parents

Isabel and William

## Introduction

A total description draws all phenomena around a single centre--a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape; a general history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion.

--Michel Foucault (1969)<sup>1</sup>

To write about film in the current academic climate requires a certain amount of risk-taking. The pervasive influence of a wide variety of discourses, ranging from semiotics to reception theory, from cultural studies to psychoanalysis, from feminism to ethnography, has produced an atmosphere of such heterogeneity that the student of film must be ever-vigilant in formulating his/her critical position, lest s/he fail to acknowledge fully the assumptions and the implications of that position within the matrixes of both the social sphere and the field of film studies. The debates concerning the political efficacy of speaking from certain positions over others can only be described as fierce, and with good reason: the stakes are high indeed if one ascribes to Michel Foucault's argument that language, knowledge, and power are constituted and affirmed by specific "discursive practices," film (and the various languages circulating through and around it) being merely one among many that serve as sites of contestation for a claim to "truth."<sup>2</sup> Attendant with such an assertion is a distrust of projects which attempt to provide a totalizing metalanguage yielding the truth--i.e., those discourses claiming absolute knowledge, willing themselves (through a long process of historical and institutional validation) into a "regime of truth."

Needless to say, I share such a distrust. I am aware as well of the institutional value inherent in allying myself with a post-structuralist thinker like Foucault: in certain quarters *his* discourse stands for truth, and those are precisely the quarters in which I am most interested. I am not being facetious when I say that this is precisely one of the risks I

mentioned in my opening sentence. Nevertheless, I begin with Foucault because I think his work serves as a locus for many of the specific issues I wish to address in this thesis. I see an explicitly political usefulness in many (but certainly not all) of Foucault's theoretical formulations of society, particularly as they relate to contemporary film culture and analysis. I would assert for example, *pace* Foucault, that the meanings of the world are in a constant state of flux, of becoming, which means that there can be no stable "truths," only perspectives. The discourses which speak (from, for) such perspectives are therefore historically contingent and open to change. All of these perspectives form the social matrix; all are involved in the relations of power. And the social formation is not a democratic one: it is based upon huge inequities of power whereby certain discourses (and subjects speaking by/through them) hold sway over others. The way in which one chooses to speak, then, the discursive practice s/he (literally) embodies, is thus contestatory. The onus for a critic invested in challenging various "regimes of truth" is therefore on demonstrating their contingency, unsettling their purported stability, giving voice to the discourses (and subjects) they oppress.

The questions that these assertions produce for both films themselves and the way in which one chooses to analyze them are ones which I believe have been and should continue to be asked in the field of film studies: whose interests do they serve? what relations of domination do they maintain or challenge? Indeed, these questions not only suggest that films have real political effects on those who watch and study them; they also present the possibility of resisting certain oppressive discursive modes of address, of actually playing a part in altering the relations of power. In short, such a position attempts not to interpret a film (or the world) but to change oneself and, by implication, others--the result being a shift in the domain of debate away from the purely academic, which characterizes much of the film theory and criticism claiming to be "apolitical."

This Foucaultian formulation is far from exhaustive, and I have chosen to emphasize its more utopian implications over its disciplinary and pessimistic ones--another

risk.<sup>3</sup> But I think that the exhilarating possibilities produced by this emphasis make the risk more than worth it, for they point out the simultaneous sense of responsibility and agency necessary for any critic invested in changing, through the very practice of criticism, the current social relations of power which dominate and marginalize various groups: women, non-European ethnicities, the colonized, the working class, people of color, gays and lesbians, the very old and the very young, and all of the combinations thereof. I invoke Foucault as my starting point to emphasize as well my particular interest in class-based materialist politics, which I feel has become the middle (and often missing) term of the “race/class/gender” triad of identity politics. The least explicitly “visible” of the three, class (and, with it, nationalism and Empire) seems to me the most difficult to discuss without the “benefit” of a specialized theoretical vocabulary, especially in a country that constantly trumpets its classlessness. This reason alone demonstrates to me the need to assert its importance, to critique the various institutions that contribute to its invisibility. And insofar as post-World War II French Marxism provided the theoretical basis upon which current practices of identity politics both inside and outside the academy base themselves, I find it particularly important to analyze how it was used and why it has been all but invalidated as a mode of societal critique. Such institutional historiography is, I think, necessary for film studies at the present moment: it engages the field as an institution, addresses the (changing) histories of its critical methodologies, and reflects upon the place of the individual film scholar, theoretician, critic, and teacher invested in “progressive” politics of all types and emphases.

To be a motor of history rather than simply an effect of it--this is, I believe, the goal of my particular critical practice. It has also largely been the goal of the bulk of theoretically informed critical writing on the cinema since the late 1960s. Because I cannot address the manifold ways in which this goal has manifested itself in the last 25 years of film theory and criticism, especially as it relates to the various categories of oppression listed above, I must necessarily narrow my focus. But in choosing the very broad category

commonly referred to as “feminism,”<sup>4</sup> I will nonetheless be able to address how all of them are implicated in the discursive strategies that the feminist film movement has formulated, debated, and practiced from the mid-1970s to the 1990s.

One such discursive strategy long associated with feminist film theory, which has become an entrenched part of film criticism concerned with issues of politics of all types, is reading “against the grain.” Here, for example, are two references to the phrase in recent writing on film:

Although demystification is part of ideology critique, exposing mystification and domination isn't enough: we need to look behind ideology to see the social and historical forces and struggles and to examine the cinematic apparatus. Furthermore, in this model, ideology criticism is not solely denunciatory and should seek socially critical and oppositional moments within *all* ideological texts--including conservative ones. As feminists and others have argued, one should learn to read texts “against the grain,” yielding progressive insights even from reactionary texts. (Kellner 15)

. . . film reading is a function of certain socio-historical, often behaviorist, patterns whereby the need to understand a movie and the way a movie is understood are primarily the products of learned cultural codes, both intrinsic and extrinsic to the film. . . . Film reading becomes a kind of historical localizing in which to read means to recognize oneself as a part of a place and time or to discover oneself anew in that place and time, either of which actions can be performed through a sort of coded realism. These kinds of reading formations generally are characterized by a more passive, deterministic stance, but the possibility of cultural and historical collisions--often described as historical or cultural “misreadings” or “readings against the grain” of film--indicate this approach can result in less predictable readings that are interpretive readings nonetheless. (Corrigan 53-54)

Without going into too much detail, I would like to gloss the different assumptions implicit in these two statements of definition regarding “against the grain” reading. The context of the Douglas Kellner quotation is an explicitly political (read: leftist) and admittedly broad discussion of the relationship between popular Hollywood film, politics, and ideology. But his stated leftist position allows him to take a morally higher ground with respect to the texts he singles out for attention, so that he is in no way implicated ideologically in his leftist reading--hence the easy plea concerning our “need to look behind ideology” as if it was possible to do so from a non-ideological position. What are the criteria involved in deciding if a film is “conservative” or “reactionary,” and what precisely is a “progressive”

insight? Kellner never says, but he implies that the film critic invested in “ideology critique” just somehow “knows” a “reactionary” text when s/he sees one, and that “against the grain” reading is an entirely (self-)conscious strategy on the part of the critic her/himself, to be used only on films the critic determines *a priori* to be politically suspect. The Timothy Corrigan quotation is from a chapter in his recent book A Cinema Without Walls, which concerns academic and popular film reading in the “postmodern era.” There is little sense of active or conscious agency on the part of the film reader in the Corrigan formulation of reading “against the grain”--one’s available codes of meaning are wholly determined by cultural representations, and when those codes are not recognizable within a specific text, when a film fails to offer a spectator a “realistic” depiction of character and social relations, an accident of sorts occurs. Corrigan, then, asserts that an “against the grain” reading is a product or residue of the “collision” between text and reader, with the text (and, more broadly, culture itself) claiming almost all of the responsibility--the film reader is little more than an innocent bystander. In Kellner’s conception the viewer is simply a motor, not a motor of a certain history or of an historicized critical practice; in Corrigan’s, s/he is simply an effect of power relationships that exceed her/his grasp.

I am not trying to suggest that either of these writers are “wrong” by defining “against the grain” reading as they do, although I would not advocate either of their descriptions as sufficient upon which to base a model of critical reading as a political practice. Rather, I hope to make clear that the very definitions of particular discursive strategies are by no means fixed or stable, that the very terms used to define those strategies are sites as contestatory as the textual or cultural objects of their attention. The problem is that “against the grain” reading is rarely, if ever, considered a conflictual terrain at all. Neither Kellner nor Corrigan, for example, suggests that he is appropriating the concept for his own particular emphasis, nor does either see any need to footnote antecedents/ references of such a practice: its definition and function have become such a critical commonplace that an in-depth investigation into its theoretical underpinnings is simply

unnecessary. (The continued presence of quotation marks around the phrase, though, attests to its status as a technical term.) And it is of no small consequence that both Kellner and Corrigan are male critics who engage issues of visual representations of gender but at no point claim allegiance to feminism, either as a broad category or as it pertains specifically to recent trends in film theory and scholarship. All of this would seem to suggest that the concept has already been the object of rigorous theorization, that it has proven to be a vehicle of “progressive” thought. I on the contrary would argue that strategies of “against the grain” reading have been radically undertheorised and that their current manifestations take far too many things for granted when regarding a film as warranting such a reading. And because it is a strategy commonly allied with a sexual-political agenda, I wish to investigate the assumptions and implications bound up in its theoretical and critical history by focusing on issues of sexual difference and power as they are manifested in film texts themselves and informed through the field and practice of feminist film study.

The goal of such an investigation is not to render null and void the practice of reading “against the grain” on the grounds that its conception is inconsistent: this is not to be taken as an exercise in “disenabling” deconstruction. I believe that a rigorous genealogy of the term is necessary in assessing its current usefulness as a resistant critical practice. And I do believe that there is much to be gained, politically, in both advocating and using the construct of a textual “grain.” But I would also argue that the phrase needs to be first destabilized and then reconceived within a specific historical situation before it can be practically applied in the service of a (broadly) political agenda, an agenda that does not consider the film viewer as completely a residue of culture (Corrigan) nor rest upon *a priori* assumptions regarding a text’s “grain” or the critic’s political positioning (Kellner).

Yet another narrowing of focus is therefore in order. I have chosen to investigate the efficacy of “against the grain” reading strategies in the service of “progressive” sexual politics by performing textual analyses of three contemporary films which have elicited

considerable public interest and controversy in precisely the sexual terrain. The Hollywood blockbuster *Basic Instinct* (1992, co-produced by Carolco/Studio Canal +, distributed by Tri-Star, and directed by Paul Verhoeven), the British-made *The Crying Game* (1992, produced by Palace Pictures, distributed in the US by Miramax, and directed by Neil Jordan), and the European co-production *Orlando* (1992, produced and distributed by Sony Pictures Classics, and directed by Sally Potter) are these three films. In choosing such recent examples I am at both an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage: there is not a vast amount of feminist writing devoted to these films, leaving me with a great deal of critical latitude in constructing my own readings that in no way could be considered more encompassing or definitive than a previous canon of scholarly literature. In other words, my arguments about the films do not derive from a cumulative series of responses--these texts are still quite "open." The disadvantage: I will not be able to build upon an established body of feminist critiques, and in many ways my readings may be construed as purporting to speak for and about specific feminist film critics whose work I address earlier in the thesis. I would like, then, to state as a caveat that I do not propose to speak for feminist film theory and criticism, in all of its various forms. Rather, I will address feminism as both a(n historical) discourse and as a socio-political concern precisely because it is so often allied with a specific reading practice largely considered to be resistant to patriarchal address and domination. And insofar as I share many of feminist film culture's concerns regarding the possibility and the efficacy of critical resistance to the normalizing effects of filmic representation, I am in this thesis staking out what I believe to be a useful position that male film scholars and teachers with similar concerns might take.

In analyzing these three contemporary films in the context of the feminist concern with resisting patriarchal structures of domination, then, I will practice a more contingent and fluid conception of textual reading which I believe can better serve a sexual-political agenda than the current formulation of "against the grain" reading. This contingency applies to both my specific material position and a more inclusive theory of the viewer/the

reader/the (re)writer who is equally a matrix of differing and often contradictory subject positions. I am therefore not positing my particular *readings* of these films as somehow superior to other possible ones; nor am I implying that I am in any way a “better” feminist than “those women” who practice other forms of “against the grain” reading. Rather, I am arguing that my readings derive from a more inclusive set of theoretical and political imperatives which present to the politically engaged critic many more possible routes for analysis and require at the same time a more rigorous “taking of accounts” of issues not generally associated with such a practice. In short, my theory of “with/against the grain” reading will differ in each specific discursive practice of it, depending on the material configuration of the reader in question, the particular text (and the discourses surrounding/constructing it), the historical context, etc.

My thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first I discuss the origins and practices of reading “against the grain” as manifested in the politicization of film theory and criticism immediately following the events of May 1968 in France. Between 1969 and 1973 (and beyond) a number of French journals (Tel Quel, Cahiers du cinéma, Cinéthique) and British journals (Screen, Afterimage) began integrating Marxist and psychoanalytic theories of the social fabric into theories of the cinema and the individual filmic text. Cahiers du cinéma offered the first conception of a textual “grain,” and I spend considerable time disentangling the various problems with this initial formulation, problems which did not go unnoticed by the burgeoning group of film theorists of the period who were invested in a program of social change. I argue that the failure of Cahiers’ neo-Marxist position *vis à vis* the ideological import of the filmic text was misrecognized by its critics in such a way as to lead to a false stability of the (Lacanian) psychoanalytic reconception of the term in the early 1970s. Therefore, I believe it is necessary to provide a history of the genesis of an “against the grain” reading practice as a potential politically progressive act in order to demonstrate how its appropriation by feminism in the mid-1970s assumed the particular shape that it did.

That shape is the subject of my second chapter. In it I trace a genealogy of the allied concepts of reading “against the grain” and the bipartite division between dominant and counter-cinema in order to demonstrate how the concerns of (first) British and (later) American feminist film scholars have assumed a rather problematic form, the residue of which is still evident in today’s strategies of textual resistance. That residue takes the form of an inherited but unrecognized “uneven development” (in the Marxist sense of the term) of the structural binarisms of the initial Cahiers formulation. The result: Hollywood films are almost always read “against” while various types of counter-cinema are read “with the grain” to yield the same type of progressive or subversive feminist reading, the “grain” having become an untheorized given based on a combination of the genre, the *auteur*, and the industrial base of the film in question. It is my contention that the unstated assumptions underpinning current “against the grain” reading practices leave those practices open to the charge of an “intentional fallacy,” and I offer as an alternative a more contingent theory of filmic reading that assesses a wider range of issues--the “popular” discourses surrounding/producing the text, the “cultural competency” of the audience for/of the reading, the reader’s goals when choosing which texts to read in the first place--before determining both what the “grain” of a text is and what form a “resistant” critical practice should assume. In so doing I challenge the binarism subsuming current conceptions of the textual “grain,” a binarism that I believe has become almost hegemonic in its influence over the range of critical reading practices assumed to be politically “progressive.”

My readings of *Basic Instinct*, *The Crying Game*, and *Orlando* in the third chapter will be test cases for this theory. I choose these three films for three reasons: 1) they were all released at a similar historical moment, within one year of each other; 2) they all foreground sexual or gender indeterminacy as explicit features of their narratives, not to mention their publicity campaigns; 3) they form a continuum between the mainstream and the avant-garde, with *Basic Instinct* occupying at one end the position of the “high-concept,” big-budget Hollywood thriller and *Orlando* at the other end that of politically

modernist counter-cinema, with *The Crying Game* falling somewhere in between, in the realm of European art cinema. (Their industrial “range” is not, however, as great as my last sentence may suggest: I consider *Basic Instinct* to be at the “upper” end of Hollywood filmmaking, and *Orlando* at the “lower” end of the political avant-garde.)

I argue that *Basic Instinct* requires no pluralistic arsenal of post-structuralist theory in order to critique its sexual politics, and that such an approach would take the (intertextual) lures which are, in point of fact, precisely the “grain” of the narrative--a feature of more and more Hollywood films. For *Basic Instinct* is “aware” of its status as an exploitative popular text--in fact, it wears this awareness on its sleeve in a variety of ways, all of which are addressed to and alert the academic viewer that the film’s overt homophobia and misogyny are not to be taken seriously, that it “knows” that its characters and its narrative do not invite identification or empathy. I argue that an “against the grain” reading of *Basic Instinct* within the context of the undergraduate classroom would produce a less useful feminist intervention than a “straight” one. As a contrast, I think that *The Crying Game* and *Orlando* are much more deeply problematic films than their immediate “grains” would seem to suggest. I choose these two films because of both their art film crossover appeal and their “personal” mode of address, i.e., their working-through of issues of sexual identity by foregrounding romance narratives against the backdrop of Politics and History. I argue that both of these films may be read as “progressive,” and then only with respect to explicitly sexual politics, if they are read *as romances/ melodramas*, a reading not so much encouraged as demanded by their marketing campaigns and popular reception. An “against the grain” reading of *The Crying Game* demonstrates how firmly invested the film is in normalizing the effects of British colonialism through the personal relationship(s) in the film. In fact, *The Crying Game* falls very neatly into the category of the British-made IRA film, which always uses a personal romantic narrative to mask its larger colonial ideology--Irish male reassesses his commitment to IRA politics through relationship with British female. By foreclosing on the issues of radical political

struggle and colonialism in favor of sexual politics, *The Crying Game* sets the two up as mutually exclusive, with its deployment of the latter as proof of its sexual “progressiveness.” In the case of *Orlando*, the emotional, sexual, and intellectual phases of the lead character are figured against a sweeping backdrop of history; political changes and struggles pertaining to, especially, nationalism and class are thus either elided altogether or represented as problems “solved” by a more polymorphous approach to gender and sexuality. The end result of *Orlando*’s narrative is thus a call to consider European history as not simply something which oppresses women but as an oppressive concept in and of itself, something to be jettisoned entirely.

Both films, I argue, take the feminist credo “the personal is the political” into rather dangerous territory, in that they represent the discourses of history and of national and class politics as essentially masculinist realms which must recede in order for more open sexual identities to emerge; the “grains” of these films function to erase any notion of the political subject as a matrix of positions (nationality, race, class, etc.) in favor of a more humanist individual--hardly a “progressive” trajectory for a politics of resistance, including a feminist one. I will not be spending equal time on *The Crying Game* and *Orlando*, however: I will use a more detailed reading of the former to hint at a *trajectory* of a reading of the latter. In my third chapter, then, I analyze these films by reconfiguring “against the grain” practice within the realm of its more traditional modes of analysis--*auteurism*, genre study--in order to recontextualize the film historically in precisely the way it encourages me *not* too. In so doing I fold back into “against the grain” reading what was jettisoned in its psychoanalytic-feminist appropriation--materialist Politics--as a means to arguing for a more inclusive set of political priorities of “progressivity.” In short, I intend to challenge a number of binarisms (“with/against the grain,” feminism/Marxism, personal/Political, etc.) subtending a current strategy of resistant textual reading.

In a brief conclusion I address how the added complexity of my contingent and heterogeneous model of “against the grain” practice is absolutely necessary if one is

invested in social change. For a reification of the practice into serving a solely feminist politics can lead to an overvaluation of the transgressive potentialities of various types of texts according to a too-narrow conception of political struggle. My theory of textual reading, then, entails a complication of current definitions of identity politics by re-introducing historical materialism into film feminism's strategies of resistance.

I must ask of my reader patience, however. The moment of my particular reformulation of resistant reading will be deferred until I actually begin my analyses of specific texts in chapter three. The reasons for such a deferral are both functional and stylistic. Functional because I believe that a rigorous archaeology of the phrase is absolutely necessary for a variety of reasons: to establish a trajectory of political concerns with which film theory and criticism has become increasingly engaged since the late 1960s; to delineate the various marshallings and abandonments of academic discourses (Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis) and thinkers (Althusser, Freud, and Lacan, primarily) attendant with the formation of the concept of textual resistance; and to undertake a particularly *historical* investigation of a widely embraced theoretical construct. The stylistic reason is functional as well, for my reconception of the practice of reading "against the grain" is predicated precisely on a belief in the importance of long and extensive critical reflection prior to a statement of positionality with respect to *every* filmic text. Such a deferral, then, is in my opinion a requirement of any critic claiming both the benefits and the responsibilities of practicing an activity with the intent to effect socio-political change.<sup>5</sup> My final hope is that the reader will consider these first two chapters (and the thesis in its entirety) as neither a "total description" nor a "general history," but as a material example of a practice which must take the risk of skirting that boundary between "an overall shape" and a "space of dispersion."

## Chapter 1

Criticism is more than discourse in the name of "true" principles. It follows that the capital sin in criticism is not ideology but the silence by which it is masked: this guilty silence has a name: *good conscience*, or again, *bad faith*.

--Roland Barthes (1963)<sup>6</sup>

The French intellectual community in the late 1960s was highly charged due to a number of factors, the most important being the public debate about France's status as a colonial power, especially in terms of Algeria and Vietnam. A radical student movement which coalesced at the University of Nanterre protested the bureaucratic and authoritarian structure of French universities and the alienated and isolated character of student life and called for a wholesale rejection of the 1960s consumer culture. The film community, avowedly non-partisan since World War II, rose in protest when André Malraux, the French Minister of Cultural Affairs, removed Henri Langlois from his position as the head of the Paris Cinémathèque in February 1968; such governmental interference in the internal administration of an independent cultural institution was regarded as quite unacceptable by the vast majority of French cinéastes. The "Langlois Affair" provoked numerous filmmakers and intellectuals to first protest and then petition the government for Langlois' reinstatement. The French film community's defense of Langlois, a liberal rather than radical movement, nevertheless provided a certain organizational infrastructure which would later prove useful to those seeking not to defend individual freedom but to place the apparatus of the cinema in the service of the French working class. The widespread sympathy of artists, journalists, and film/television/radio workers for the student and worker strikes and protests in May 1968 resulted in the Estates Générale du Cinéma, an institutional platform for filmmakers, technicians, and critics to articulate a number of

questions concerning the characteristic ideological operations and mechanisms of mainstream cinema (i.e., the ways in which it affirms the existing social structure) and the possible shape a counter-cinema might take to directly challenge the forms of dominant cinema and transform film from a commodity into an instrument of social change. The failure of the events of May 1968 to effect lasting change in the ruling party's dominance over all aspects of public and private life did not dull the import of these concerns; rather, it produced an intellectual milieu that increasingly called for the need for political intervention on the theoretical as well as the practical/activist front, and it set in motion a movement within film culture which had (and continues to have) an enormous effect on academic film study.<sup>7</sup>

The journal Tel Quel was instrumental in introducing a wide variety of discourses, including semiology, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction, to film critics and theorists invested in social change. The aesthetic practice of the writers associated with the Tel Quel group (Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Phillippe Sollers, and Roland Barthes, most importantly) offered both social analyses of art works and theories of alternative artistic practices, most particularly literary modernism, which promised to change the conditions of subjectivity. It is not my purpose to offer an analysis of the effect Tel Quel's position of theoretical politics and the avant-garde has had on contemporary film theory: such analyses are already available.<sup>8</sup> Tel Quel is nevertheless important to this discussion insofar as it offered a number of compelling discourses to French (and British) film theorists concerned with analyzing the proposition that different aesthetic forms have different relations to ideology. Indeed, the emergence of a critical theory of ideology based on a definition of realist form in the cinema and its links to a countertheory of the epistemological value of modernist forms led to a decisive problem: how could one differentiate among kinds of texts according to the kinds of knowledges they are thought to produce? The shifts in the editorial policy of Cahiers du cinéma in 1969 and Screen in 1971, as well as the inauguration of new journals including Cinéthique and Afterimage, are predicated on

precisely this problem. The answer initially seemed to lie in an appropriation of Althusserian Marxism, the terms of which cannot be overstated in the construction of an “against the grain” reading practice.

Throughout the fifties and sixties, the editorial policy of Cahiers du cinéma was marked by a commitment to *auteur* criticism which manifested itself in an almost unqualified celebration of the French New Wave, Italian neorealism, and American cinema. Concomitant with this policy was a distaste for (and often outright rejection of) explicitly partisan films and filmmakers: cinema was decidedly the realm of “the individual,” “beauty,” “sensitivity,” “morality”--not politics. Any statements of militancy fell well within the boundaries of a liberal humanism tempered with existentialism. Cahiers’ response to the political events of May and June 1968 was unsurprisingly inconsistent at best; nonetheless, *les evenements* left a lasting impression. Nick Browne opens his introduction to Cahiers du Cinéma 1969-72 with these words:

What is dramatized in this collection of texts from the 1969-72 period of Cahiers du Cinéma is the spectacular action of rigorous and politically engaged film criticism. Cahiers’ central project was to elaborate a method of, or a critical perspective on, filmic “writing” considered in its social relations. By means of a form of critical “reading”, Cahiers sought to analyse and to transform the relation between film texts and the ideology of the culture in which they are viewed. (1)

The first strong evidence of this interest in politically engaged film criticism was the announcement of a shift in critical priorities in the August 1968 issue: the focus of the magazine’s attention was to be displaced from the Hollywood cinema of the present day to either those films shown at the Cinémathèque and cine clubs or those at the receiving end of political and economic censorship. In terms of film theory, Cahiers began a project of Eisenstein translations as well as developing an interest in psychoanalytic criticism (cf. Jean-Pierre Oudart’s “Cinema and Suture,” published in the April and May issues of 1969). But it was not until the publication of Jean Narboni and Jean-Louis Comolli’s editorial drafted for the October/November 1969 issue, entitled “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” that Cahiers proposed a critical theory of the cinema to be carried out within a

Marxist framework, an act which sealed their commitment to political criticism and initiated a crisis within the magazine that led to a change in ownership. Cahiers' abandonment of its former evaluative approach in favor of analysis of cinema's role in the perpetuation of the social formation called for a theory of how cinema functioned ideologically, how meaning was produced, and how it involved the spectator. The greatest influence at the outset of the project was Louis Althusser.

Althusser's theoretical intervention from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s appeared at first to have settled what Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake identify as three problem areas that plagued Marxists, especially those interested in culture and aesthetics: Marxism's questionable epistemological status (was it a science or just another ideology?); its base/superstructure model of the social totality (if the economic base determines everything in the socio-political superstructure, why would a Marxist bother being anything but an economist?); and its unstable "dominant ideology" thesis (if the dominant class is so successful in instilling its ideology into all of the other classes, how can people from these other classes even *hope* to effect equitable change, and how do petit-bourgeois intellectuals remain immune to ruling class ideology?).<sup>9</sup> While all three of Althusser's revisions of "vulgar" Marxism are exceedingly important to the direction of post-1968 film theory, what is most striking in the French critical discourse of the fall and winter of 1969 is the centrality of his notion of the "epistemological break" that Marxism makes with other conceptual systems that remained embedded in essentialist notions of political and experiential "reality." Marx's post-1845 writings, according to Althusser, constitute a revolution-in-thought because of their transformation of ideological notions such as alienation and human essence into a conceptual system *not* given in experience (hence the relation between semiotics, psychoanalysis, and Marxism--all of which are "critiques of the visible"--for political aestheticians such as Cahiers and the Tel Quel group). Marxism was therefore a "problematic": it had separated itself from its ideological prehistory in order to constitute the terms for scientific knowledge, what Althusser called "theoretical practice."<sup>10</sup>

Althusserian Marxism saturates Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni's "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," the opening gambit of the political break French film theory was to take following 1968. In this essay Comolli and Narboni reformulate Bazin's initial question, "What is Cinema?", and provide a radically different answer:

In France the majority of films, like the majority of books and magazines, are produced and distributed by the capitalistic economic system and within the dominant ideology. . . . Because every film is part of the economic system it is also part of the ideological system, for 'cinema' and 'art' are branches of ideology. . . . *every film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it (or within which it is produced, which stems from the same thing). (23-25)

What Comolli and Narboni are arguing here is a combination of the "dominant ideology" thesis along with Althusser's re-definition of ideology: although the vast majority of films "are produced . . . within the dominant ideology," not *all* are; at the same time, neither all of the former nor all of the latter need serve the interests of the ideology which produces them, meaning that films are not *a priori* reducible, politically speaking, to the terms of their production. Nevertheless, Comolli and Narboni assert that "the majority of films in all categories *are* the unconscious instruments of the ideology which produces them . . ." [my emphasis] (25), thereby making a rigorous definition of both the various categories and the responsibilities of politically engaged criticism with respect to those categories a necessity.

For the editors of Cahiers, who were primarily interested in questions of critical reading, the important distinction was the following: ". . . which films allow the ideology a free, unhampered passage, transmit it with crystal clarity, serve as its chosen language? And which attempt to make it turn back and reflect itself, intercept it and make it visible by revealing its mechanisms, by blocking them?" (23-24). The investment in Althusserian Marxism as a scientific "theoretical practice" underpins this question insofar as its knowledge is the product of a simple perception or a self-evidence of sight; but this knowledge is not to be suspected as an ideology (which also veils itself as a self-evident

truth) as long as it is determined according to the principles of Marxist analysis, which is *not* ideological because of its status as a “problematic.”

A further assumption is that the possibility of this break in cinematic terms occurs *within* the work of the text itself; it is an intrinsic, formal property of given texts. The authors therefore argue that “the film-maker’s first task is to show up cinema’s so-called ‘depiction of reality’. If *he* can do so there is a chance that *we* will be able to disrupt or possibly even sever the connection between the cinema and its ideological function” [my emphasis] (25). The shift from “he” to “we” in this sentence is symptomatic of the tension within the article between the potential of aesthetic practice for producing a “real” as opposed to an “imaginary” form of knowledge and the absolute need for theoretical practice to effect that all-important break.<sup>11</sup> Comolli and Narboni thus maintain (though, finally, not convincingly) that scientific practice is the preserve of film criticism rather than production, which means that the Marxist critic analyzing films as ideological products can in no way be considered as biased or simply interpretive:

There can be no room in our critical practice either for speculation (commentary, interpretation, de-coding even) or for specious raving (of the film-columnist variety). It must be a rigidly factual analysis of what governs the production of the film (economic circumstances, ideology, demand and response) and the meanings and forms appearing in it, which are equally tangible. (28)

I contend, then, that the categorization of types of films in this essay is underwritten by the following contradiction: the power of altering the existing reproduction of social relations lies entirely within the realm of a scientific criticism whose objects of analysis are nevertheless textual systems which can either facilitate or contravene the dominant ideology, depending on whether they adopt or reject certain formal devices.

Comolli and Narboni’s description of seven critical categories defines a crestline differentiating films dominated by an ideological function from films that stage a reflexive critique of that function. Concomitant with these categories are specific instructions regarding the types of criticism that should be performed. For the largest category of films then, “films which are imbued through and through with the dominant ideology in pure and

unadulterated form, and give no indication that their makers were even aware of the fact,” the critic is encouraged to “look into the way the ideological system and its products merge at all levels: to study the phenomenon whereby a film being shown to an audience becomes a monologue, in which the ideology talks to itself” (25, 26). Opposed to these highly conventional category (a) films, which lack political subject matter and completely accept an ideology of realism at the level of form, are groups (b) and (c), which “attack their ideological assimilation on two fronts”; for Cahiers, these films “constitute the essential in cinema, and should be the chief subject of the magazine” (26). In the case of category (b), the attack is “by direct political action, on the level of the ‘signified’, ie they deal with a directly political subject. . . . this act only becomes politically effective if it is linked with a breaking down of the traditional way of depicting reality” on the part of the “‘signifiers’.” These are for Comolli and Narboni the most important films, the ones which will later be characterized as “counter-cinema” by the British film journals Afterimage and Screen. The films in category (c) operate with the same double action, “but ‘against the grain’. The content is not explicitly political, but in some way becomes so through the criticism practiced on it through its form” (26). Paradoxically, this category includes not only avowedly avant-garde films like Jean-Daniel Pollet and Philippe Sollers’ *Méditerranée* (1963), but also commercial films like Jerry Lewis’ *The Bellboy* (1960) that reflexively address the questions of their own fictiveness as a condition of their narrative.

A fourth category, (d), comprises the genre of filmmaking usually thought of as political and contains those films “which have an explicitly political content . . . but which do not effectively criticise the ideological system in which they are embedded because they unquestioningly adopt its language and its imagery” (27). This category is related to but to be distinguished from category (f), “films of the ‘live cinema’ (*cinéma direct*) variety,” which arise out of political “events or reflections, but which make no clear differentiation between themselves and the nonpolitical cinema because they do not challenge the cinema’s traditional, ideologically conditioned method of ‘depiction’” (27-28). Another kind of “live

cinema," category (g), *does* challenge the so-called "depiction of reality" by "giving an active role to the concrete stuff of [the] film. It then becomes productive of meaning and is not just a passive receptacle for meaning produced outside it (in ideology)" (28). Whereas the critic's function with respect to films from categories (d) and (f) should be to "show how the signified (i.e., political subject matter) is always weakened, rendered harmless, by the absence of technical/theoretical work on the signifiers" (28), his/her response to those of category (g) should be the same as to those films which "constitute the essential in the cinema," (b) and (c): "read them on two levels, showing how the films operate critically on the level of signified and signifiers" (28).

But one category still remains: (e). This is the type of film that has garnered the most attention from film scholars in the wake of this often cited article, and it is the type of film that generated Cahiers' most famous single textual reading--"John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*." Comolli and Narboni's description of "the progressive text" is by far their most careful and lengthy, and it serves as an important locus for analyzing their maneuver between the divide of text and reader. For these reasons I quote almost the entire entry:

"(e) Five: films which seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner. For though they start from the frankly reactionary through the conciliatory to the mildly critical, they have been worked upon, and work, in such a real way that there is a noticeable gap, a dislocation between the starting point and the finished product. We disregard here the inconsistent--and unimportant--sector of films in which the director makes a *conscious* use of the prevailing ideology, but leaves it absolutely straight. The films we are talking about throw up obstacles in the way of ideology, causing it to swerve and get off course. The cinematic framework lets us see it, but also shows it up and denounces it. Looking at the framework one can see two moments in it: one holding it back within certain limits, one transgressing them. An internal criticism is taking place which cracks the film apart at the seams. If one reads the film obliquely, looking for symptoms; if one looks beyond its apparent formal coherence, one can see that it is riddled with cracks: it is splitting under an internal tension which is simply not there in an ideologically innocuous film. The ideology thus becomes subordinate to the text. It no longer has an independent existence: It is *presented* by the film. (27)

One can see here a rather haphazard importation of deconstruction, insofar as an "internal criticism is taking place which cracks the film apart at the seams"--once more, the film's

relation to ideology is an intrinsic, formal property. The critic is therefore encouraged to read these films “obliquely, looking for symptoms . . . . They criticize themselves, even if no such intention is written into the script, and it is irrelevant and impertinent to do so for them. All we want to do is to show the process in action” (27). It is not difficult to see in the critical prescription for this category of films a contradiction between simply showing “the process in action” and reading “the film obliquely, looking for symptoms”, and it is a contradiction which underwrites the entire essay--the Marxist critic just points out what is already there, but in a particular diagnostic way which determines the extent to which the film (and, by extension the director<sup>12</sup>) is ideologically “ill,” consuming itself. Marxism-as-science functions as well to protect the critic from contagion--s/he is immune to ideology.

What should be clear from this rather dense summary is that Comolli and Narboni maintain a number of conventional structuralist assumptions in their categorical determinations: a subsumed version of the “dominant ideology” thesis; a metaphoric of vision that establishes a text’s self-evidence; a form/content binarism, which they formulate as a question of the film’s particular negotiation between its “signified” and “signifiers”; and an underlying contradiction between the intrinsic qualities of the text itself and the need for “theoretical practice” to effect the break from an imaginary to a real form of knowledge. Nowhere is this final contradiction more evident than in the essay’s formulation of the term “against the grain,” which is not a reading practice as such but an immanence within film texts, especially those of categories (c) and (e). The reasons for this contradiction are twofold and interrelated: the collapse of a distinction (which had yet to be articulated in explicitly “political,” but not in semiotic, film study) between “cinema” and “film”; and the inappropriateness of Althusserian criticism to support a critical reading practice of the latter. For Althusser and the literary critics associated with him, “art” was a general, formal structure independent of specific texts. Even though this conception was evaluative in certain respects, Althusserian criticism had up to this point never exhibited the desire to

establish a formal typology adjudicating the degree of ideological implication of various kinds of texts or formal strategies. Primarily a theory of critical reading, it had little to say about the development of a potentially revolutionary artistic practice, nor did it wish to differentiate between reactionary and progressive texts.

I am not suggesting that Comolli and Narboni should be criticized for not remaining “true” to Althusser; rather, I am arguing that the formulation of a politically engaged *textual* practice proposed by this essay could not rest upon Althusserian criticism for its support. The rapid abandonment of Althusser for Lacan which was to follow in the seventies may thus have more to do with its deployment as a theory of *film* rather than *cinema* in “Cinema/ Ideology/Criticism,” the initial and most influential example of the merger between Althusserian Marxism and film study, than with the insufficiency of Althusser’s theory of the construction of the subject. I would argue as well that Lacanian psychoanalysis is just as deficient a discourse for reading individual texts, insofar as its precepts are likewise transhistorical and point to large structures (*langue*; or, in the case of cinema, *langage*) rather than specific articulations (*parole*), and that the switch to Lacan did not solve this problem as it was thought to do but instead simply swerved the focus of interest in ideological analysis away from issues of class towards sexual politics. I contend, therefore, that the usefulness of Althusser and Lacan for film study need not be an either/or proposition--they *both* may serve as models for analysis of the cinematic apparatus and not of individual films--but that their counter position as such (and the “triumph” of the latter) effected a fading of interest in Politics (capital “P”) and an increasing engagement with politics (small “p”).<sup>13</sup> My symptomatic reading of this essay, then, is in no way intended as a discounting of its principles. Rather, I am attempting to delineate some its more ingrained structural problems in order to demonstrate their appearance as an “uneven development” in later reconceptions, particularly in terms of the psychoanalytic-feminist practice of reading “against the grain.”

Over the next three years the writers for Cahiers nevertheless attempted to fulfill the prerogatives of “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” although they did streamline their categories into three general modes of actual filmic practice--the modernist, the militant, and the classical--and employed Freud equally as much as Marx (both being critical discourses of overdetermination) in their “active readings.”<sup>14</sup> Through such critical work, Cahiers defined the conditions and limits on writing to effect a new route to the “real.” In the case of the “modernist” or “contemporary cinema” (which has no precise analog in the Comolli and Narboni typology), Cahiers argued that it “inherits the classic Hollywood tradition, and stands in a critical relation to it. As such, it both summarizes and renegotiates the problems of the relation of writing to ideology” (Browne 17). But the modernist cinema is a “deficient discourse” because it is caught within and has a problematic relation to the norms of the classical model.<sup>15</sup> Not so with the second category, “militant cinema” (roughly analogous to categories [b], [c], and [g]), for it calls into question and seeks to transform the dominant norm of classical realism and to bring into existence works of ideological/aesthetic transformation. “Cahiers’ central requirement for the ‘militant cinema’ is that it rigorously and clearly place itself within the context of production and reception and that it provide an account of its own process of meaning” (Browne 15). There are for Cahiers both true and false models of this type of film, the former being Renoir’s *La Vie est à nous*, and the latter being films by Miklós Jancsó, Constantin Costa-Gavras, and Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg.<sup>16</sup>

Cahiers’ nomenclature did not retain its currency, although many of the magazine’s divisions, especially those delineating “militant cinema,” remained as fundamental markers for contemporary film theorists. Dubbed “counter-cinema” in 1972 by Peter Wollen in an essay on Godard’s *Vent d’Est*, and more recently referred to as “political modernism,” this militant category has been mobilized to describe the work of a variety of independent filmmakers in Europe and America, including Straub and Huillet, Yvonne Rainer, Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey, Ulrike Ottinger, Peter Gidal, Sally Potter, Chantal Akerman,

and, more recently, Derek Jarman and Julie Dash, among many others. The shifts in terminology parallel a shift away from Marxist politics (and structuralism) towards “new politics” (and post-structuralism), especially issues of sexual difference and gendered representation. What *has* been retained (but not acknowledged) is a structuralist belief in the intrinsic militancy of this type of film and a preferred reading practice which is in complete accord with Comolli and Narboni’s initial prescription, a practice decidedly *not* “against the grain” (for the film and its always “active” spectator ostensibly practice such an action themselves, a double action on the level of form and content). A more stereotypically *critical* reading practice has become associated with dominant cinema, particularly for those films within the classical model which were initially categorized as (e) films and later re-named “progressive texts.” And it was the famous collective essay on *Young Mr. Lincoln*, published by Cahiers in the fall of 1970, that sparked a re-evaluation of classical Hollywood film in the form of critical reading now considered to be “against the grain.”<sup>17</sup>

In “John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*” the editors of Cahiers are careful to reiterate that their essay is not to be taken as a commentary, an interpretation, a mechanistic structural reading, or a demystification, but as the first example of a *rescanning* of classical films in order to determine “the historicity of their inscription” (494). The particular object of that reading is to reveal not what the film “says” but what it does not (cannot, refuses to “say”; in this sense the essay can be considered as a progenitor of “against the grain” reading as it practiced today, the “grain” being the terms by which the film asks to be read. What was encouraged in “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” as a practice of reading “the film obliquely, looking for symptoms” is transformed in the *Young Mr. Lincoln* essay from a simple exercise in deconstruction into an active re-writing of the text:

It is . . . absurd to demand that a film account for what it doesn’t say about the positions and the knowledge which form the basis from which it is being questioned; and it is too easy (but of what use?) to “deconstruct” it in the name of this same knowledge . . . . What will be attempted here through a re-scansion of these films in a process of active reading, is to make them

say what they have to say *within* what they leave unsaid, to reveal their constituent lacks; these are neither faults in the work . . . nor a deception on the part of the author . . . ; they are *structuring absences*, always displaced--an overdetermination which is the only possible basis from which these discourses could be realised, the unsaid included in the said and necessary to its constitution. (496)

Caveats against reductionism aside, the essay simply does not deliver what it promises, the reason being a failure to resolve the tension between determinism and overdeterminism, i.e., the identification of both the “grain” of the text and of what runs counter to it. In the Cahiers essay this failure is connected to two related trajectories: a recourse to *auteurism*; and a contradictory distinction between “cinema” and “film,” which replicates the tension in “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” between the traditional Marxist base/superstructure model and Althusser’s decentered, mediated model of the socio-economic formation. Both of these problems led to an abandonment of Althusserian Marxism in favor of other paradigms in the early seventies (most notably semiotics and psychoanalysis), paradigms which did no more to solve the problems but certainly swerved critical interest away from historical materialism.

“John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*” opens with a three-section exposition of the historical and institutional contexts circumscribing the film by moving from the general to the particular, from “The USA in 1938-39” to “Fox and Zanuck.” In so doing the Cahiers editors argue that *Young Mr. Lincoln* was intended by the Republican studio boss as his contribution to the 1939 presidential election campaign. Because the film takes as its subject America’s most famous Republican president, situates the film within the genre of “the early life of the great man,” and empties out “the truly political dimension from the career of the future President” (504), the editors conclude that the ideological project of the film is “the concealment of politics . . . under the idealist mask of Morality,” a project which

has the effect of regilding the cause of Capital with the gold of myth, by manifesting the “spirituality” in which American Capitalism believes it finds its origins and sees its eternal justification. The seeds of Lincoln’s future

were already sown in his youth--the future of America (its eternal values) is already written into Lincoln's moral virtues, which include the Republican Party and Capitalism. (505)

Such an assertion is not, in and of itself, untenable; indeed, the essay goes on to demonstrate quite convincingly how such a project is embedded within the narrative of the film. But the attribution of the economic and ideological "grain" of the text to Darryl F. Zanuck smacks of precisely the kind of mechanistic determinism that the proposed Althusserian approach ostensibly avoids. By allowing such ample room for a "conspiracy theory" critique, the essay provides the skeptical reader the opportunity to dismiss its claims entirely--not a practice I endorse, but certainly a common one of the period.

The editors' explanation regarding the failure of the text to fulfill its institutionally-determined agenda is similarly paradoxical. They argue that the repression of Lincoln's explicitly political dimension (along with his sexuality) in favor of his moral status is the film's "structuring absence"; it is what *overdetermines* the idealist project, what cracks the film apart at its seams.<sup>18</sup> The figure of Lincoln as the restorer of Truth and Law is concomitant with a process in the film which makes him at first awkward and cold, then by degrees excessively violent. This violence "shows an imbalance with the idealised figure of Lincoln . . . it makes visible--by its own scriptural excesses--the truly repressive dimension of the figure which this writing dictates, and deroutes what could have been edifying or hagiographic in the ideological project of the film" (523). Again, this is a strong and astute argument, bolstered up by a detailed analysis of the film's configuration of nature/law/woman and the Oedipal investment of the Lincoln figure during the trial, in which Lincoln first intimidates and then at the climax viciously interrogates J. Palmer Cass in order to reveal him as the murderer. But the authors again rely upon a reductive explanation of the locus of that overdetermination, of that scriptural excess, of what rubs "against the grain" of the film. In reference to the final scene of the film they state:

Here again, it is the excesses of Ford's writing (accumulation of signs of the tragic, of ascent: hill--mythical reference--storm, lightning, rain, wind, thunder, etc.) which by overlaying all the clichés, underlines the monstrous character of the figure of Lincoln: he leaves the frame and the film (like

*Nosferatu* ) as if it had become impossible for him to be filmed any longer: *he is an intolerable figure*, not because he has become too big for any film on account of the ideological project but rather because the constraints and violences of Ford's writing, have exploited this figure for their own ends and manifested its excessive and monstrous dimensions, have no further use for it and so return it to the museum. (524)

Why is it necessary to attribute to authorial intent the sabotaging of the film's ostensible aim? The recourse to a rather traditional *auteurism* is necessary in order to establish Ford as the link between the text and the conjuncture of its production. The evident tension within the essay between reconciling the historical materialist concern with determination (and overdetermination) with the post-structuralist concern with the productivity of discourse resolves itself in a parallel tension between the reliance upon *auteurist* (over)determination and the assertion that "active" reading is nonetheless necessary to rewrite the text and produce the "epistemological break" from illusory and real knowledge.

Equally important is the way in which this contradiction underscores the insufficiency of Cahiers' Althusserian position as a model for textual analysis. For the authors simultaneously affirm and deny the economic determinism of Marx's base/superstructure model by aligning it with "cinema" but not with "film":

In Hollywood, more than anywhere else the cinema is not "innocent". Creditor of the capitalist system, subject to its constraints, its crises, its contradictions, the American cinema, the main instrument of the ideological super-structure, is heavily determined at every level of its existence. As a product of the capitalist system and of its ideology, its role is in turn to reproduce the one and thereby to help the survival of the other. Each film, however, is inserted into this circuit according to its specificity, and there has been no analysis if one is content to say that each Hollywood film confirms and spreads the ideology of American capitalism: it is the precise articulations (rarely the same from one film to the next) of the film and of the ideology which must be studied. (499)

I fully agree that the "precise articulations" which are film texts do not always conform to the ideological interests of their bases of production. But I would also argue that it is *precisely* the capitalist nature of the Hollywood system which produces ideological contradictions of *all* types in *every* film, not that it is only certain texts (by certain *auteurs* ) which fulfill this function. In other words, Hollywood is not the deterministic monolith Cahiers makes it out to be in terms of its ideological interests; rather, Hollywood's

ideologies are quite indeterminate because of the profit motive underpinning the production of each of its films, *none* of which are mechanistic reproductions.<sup>19</sup> By aligning the structural binarism determination/overdetermination with producer/director and cinema/film, and by using Althusserian Marxism as a(n inadequate) post-structuralist discourse of ideological transgression, this collective essay served the simultaneous function of sounding the death-knell for Marxism as a “scientific” textual approach in its first ambitious articulation and of setting the terms for subsequent practices of reading “against the grain” with other political concerns. It is my contention that the moves in film theory in the early seventies away from Marxism towards semiotics and Lacanian psychoanalysis enabled the emergence of feminist film study, a branch whose famous “against the grain” practices replicated the structural binarisms underpinning “John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*” in just as problematic a manner, albeit with differing usefulnesses and degrees of approval from the academic community.

I would like to reiterate at this point a statement of intention. My deconstruction of Cahiers’ post-1968 writings is not meant as an elaborate exercise in disempowering criticism. I am not, in other words, employing a negative dialectics in the service of demonstrating the absolute insufficiency of the Althusserian problematic; such an activity can be done with *any* text, and without an explicit political agenda underpinning it leads to a mere exercise in deconstruction, a postmodern quietism. Rather, I am tracing a trajectory of a failed structural logic in order to elaborate just how much was kept from the initial Cahiers formulation of “against the grain” textuality in the shift from Marxism to psychoanalytic feminism which occurred in the mid-1970s. My purpose in doing so is not to arrive at a point of complete negation, but quite the opposite--to delineate just how important such rigorous analysis must be to anyone invested in an (ultimately) affirming political criticism. I take as my starting point the assumption that no system of logic is flawless, meaning that one must first explore the legacy and the weaknesses of certain systems prior to deciding what should be discarded and what should be kept. What this will mean for my particular

project is a long period of criticism and reflection before arriving at a contingent theoretical position which will, ultimately, prove to be less totalizing and therefore more politically useful. Such a deferment of positivity is inextricable from what I consider to be an exciting and constructive practice of textual reading.

I wish to conclude this chapter with a brief summary of the intersection between semiotics and psychoanalysis. Such a summary is in order because both of these discourses played integral and explicit structuring roles for feminist film theory, which I will analyze in much greater detail in my second chapter. There are many different ways of narrativizing the conjuncture between the variety of academic discourses and film theory of the early-1970s. I will organize my discussion of semiotics and psychoanalysis around their particular relations to textual analysis and to theories of the cinematic apparatus in order to point out further how this structural opposition served as the basis for distinguishing between determination and overdetermination, ideological and otherwise.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, semiotics or, as it was called then, semiology, based its analytical method on a belief in the truth of science just as equally as did Althusserian Marxism. In fact, the comfort zone provided by the myth of scientific rigor was assumed by both Marxism and semiotics to serve a similarly political impulse--to challenge naturalism in all of its forms. The work of linguists Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Emile Benveniste, and of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (and, to a lesser extent, Vladimir Propp<sup>20</sup>) were seen by film theorists as providing useful examples for effecting such a project. Christian Metz, colleague of Roland Barthes and professor at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* with doctorates in linguistics and film study, was the first to provide extremely precise and finely-wrought analyses of cinematic specificity. Although his impetus for study was philosophical and not political, his work had a tremendous effect on political film theorists and critics.

The goal of semiotics was to analyze the ways in which various languages “signify”--to understand not *what* films “mean” but *how* they are understood to mean in

the first place. Insofar as language is a collective social phenomenon, semiotics was inherently concerned with understanding ideological belief and its effects. Of particular interest to semiologists were creative, aesthetic, ambiguous languages; they were content to leave the study of verbal language to the linguists. Metz undertook the study of cinematic language initially in terms of phenomenology à la Bazin; his ontology of the photographic image, developed in his essay "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," was an attempt to recast certain phenomenological problems in semiological terms, an attempt which he quickly acknowledged as a misdirection. More important to my argument is his work in cinematic language, especially his seminal essay "The Cinema: Language or Language System?"<sup>21</sup> In it Metz argued that the cinema is a language (*langage*) without a language system (*langue*) primarily because there are no filmic signs. The filmic image, the best candidate for such a role, is indivisible. The film shot, unlike a phoneme, possesses a meaning, a meaning which is further non-equivalent to a word. In concluding that the shot is more like a statement than a word, Metz opened the door to a much wider variety of semiotic approaches.<sup>22</sup> He pursued almost unerringly the path of cinema, especially in his elaboration of an exhaustive classification of the segmentation of cinematic narratives, aptly titled his *grande syntagmatique*, in "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film." The other path led in the direction of textual narrative analysis. For Metz's conclusion that cinema was a *langage* without a *langue* was considered by the post-1968 group an advantage as opposed to a failure; what it leaves is films as narratives, as texts, as cultural products.

Herein lies what I perceive to be the importance of semiotics for political film criticism as a whole and for the direction feminist film theory and criticism was to take in the early 1970s. Once you acknowledge that films are not divisible into units of meaning but that they signify through narrative, the logical mode of analysis is to be concerned not with images but with their *sequence*, the linear groupings of images and the ways in which they construct meaning relationally.<sup>23</sup> Such a conclusion was reached at an exceptionally

early stage in the history of film feminism: after initial forays into criticism of the positive/negative “images of women”-type, feminists began to interrogate the relationship between filmic signification and sexual difference long before equivalent analyses in other aesthetic disciplines. What is interesting is the way in which feminist film scholars divided their definitions of “against the grain” and “with the grain” reading in terms of the ever-present division between dominant cinema and counter-cinema. In other words, textual analysis was predetermined by an irreducible signifying mechanism: the only way to recuperate films which proceed from dominant cinema is to characterize them as “progressive,” resist them on the level of narrative causality, and assert the primacy of the image, of spectacle. Counter-cinema does these things in and of itself--all that is necessary is to demonstrate the process in action.

Such demonstrations on the side of *Hollywood* film narratives were done by a number of film scholars, the most diligent of whom was Raymond Bellour, a student of Metz. Although he shares with Metz a tendency towards totalizing, his micro-analyses of a twelve-shot segment in *The Big Sleep* and of an 84-shot sequence in *The Birds*, along with his segmentation of the entire musical *Gigi*, illustrate how Hollywood films strike a balance between repetition and variation, how the precise terms of that balance are highly unstable in each specific text.<sup>24</sup> The impression of unity given by separate scenes, sequences, or films as a whole is achieved through a series of complex articulations of sameness and difference, all of which are designed not to be perceived by the spectator. The importance of his work for post-1968 film theory has been extensive insofar as the question of the subject and the place of the spectator were centrally on his agenda, although his analyses did not receive a particularly polemical edge until he began to undertake an extensive study of Hitchcock’s films in the mid-1970s. While Bellour was criticized by Jean Narboni in an afterword to the *Cahiers* publication of his essay on *The Birds* in October of 1969 for retaining an *auteurist* emphasis and for not addressing the ideological implications of the logic of signification underwriting the classical sequence in Hollywood

cinema, he was later to be praised by psychoanalytic feminists for analyzing the incessant Oedipal trajectory of Western narrative and the ways in which overdetermination/ redundancy across different levels of meaning make sure that certain meanings are clear in classical Hollywood films, even if they are not fully conscious.<sup>25</sup> In this respect Bellour's more totalizing implications proved indispensable to feminist film theorists, in that his analyses served to demonstrate both the supposed uniformity of the Hollywood narrative machine and the inherent instability of each of its products.<sup>26</sup>

"If 'the study of a singular filmic system is never the study of cinematic specificity,'" wrote Stephen Heath in 1975, "it is indeed that the film is on the side of the heterogeneous, that its work cannot be grasped by a simple listing of codes, that it poses for analysis new tasks, a new object . . ." ("Film, System, Narrative" 131). Heath's proposition points out both the value and the shortcomings of semiotics as a mode of *textual* analysis. In order to avoid a "simple listing of codes" when analyzing a particular film, one had to be sensitive to the "unsettling movement" between coherence and ultimate undecidability in every narrative moment of every particular film. The result is an essay like "Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Parts 1 and 2," a magisterial yet almost completely dispersive 100-page foray into the balancing act that is *Touch of Evil*. Strangely enough, a more manageable object of study seemed to be cinema and the cinematic apparatus as a larger set of structurations rather than specific texts. It is possible to trace in the French and Anglo film theory of the early-to-mid-1970s a decided shift in not so much the discourses placed in the service of the study of film but the particular configurations that those discourses assumed as "new" politics began to replace "old" ones. It is without question that psychoanalysis, particularly of the Lacanian variety, was seen to extend the value of semiotics beyond the merely systematic into the realm of the psychic; the result was that it was heralded as the solution to the "problem of the subject" as a potential agent in an otherwise ideologically overdetermined society. Concomitant with the rise in importance of Lacan and the rather quick demise of Althusser was an initial

swerving away from textual analysis in favor of cinema *tout court*, “cinema” here meaning precisely *dominant* cinema. One way of narrativizing how all of this served to underpin feminism and to lead to a rather monolithic conception of resistant *textual* analysis is to proceed through two interrelated sub-fields which combined semiotics and psychoanalysis --theories of “the apparatus” and of “suture.”

The term “the cinematic apparatus” is most closely connected with the work of Jean-Louis Baudry, who wrote two extremely influential and oft-cited articles on the implications of the particular configuration between vision in the cinema and the construction of the subject by cinema. The importance of semiotics is clear here: the dictum “we do not speak language, language speaks us” takes on a particular meaning in the study of cinema and the specific way it constructs a way of seeing “reality” and the world. What has not been analyzed in Baudry is the shift which occurs in these two essays from Althusserian Marxism to Lacanian psychoanalysis as both the underpinning discourses of (over)determination and the end-point of analysis. Baudry’s “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus” was first published in 1970 in Cinéthique, and it represents an early attempt to think through the implications of perspective in cinema for explicitly Marxist ends.<sup>27</sup> In this essay Baudry argues that the camera lens is modeled on the same optical principles that underlie the perspectival system of Renaissance painting. In so doing the cinema ensures that the spectator is established as a fixed point, an active center, and a producer of meaning. By being visually positioned in this way, the spectator is blind to the work of the film, which places the viewer in a position of illusory dominance and knowledge. The point of such an analysis is to articulate in a much more rigorous fashion what Cahiers simply stated as a given: “The cinema can thus appear as a sort of psychic apparatus of substitution, corresponding to the model defined by the dominant ideology. The system of repression (primarily economic) has as its goal the prevention of deviations and of the active exposure of this ‘model’” (296).

By the time Baudry published his second article in 1975, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," the waning of Marxism and the triumph of psychoanalysis is more than evident. What is interesting is that Baudry moved from a reliance on Lacan in the earlier article to a more classically Freudian dream model in order to analyze the simulation of reality that the cinematic apparatus effects for the spectator. And it was his first essay that was determined to be the more important one--not for its Marxist ideological import but for its psychoanalytic ideological implications. Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier," published in the same issue of Communications in which Baudry's "The Apparatus" appeared, functions as a fulcrum in shifting the potential for psychoanalysis to serve a Marxist agenda towards the direction of a more hermetic concern with Lacanian psychoanalysis in and of itself. By focusing on the questions of psychological desire and the cinema's simultaneous construction of and ostensible fulfillment of a desiring subject, Metz's work on the cinematic apparatus proved much more amenable to the feminist concerns with gendered representation and sexual difference than it did to an already waning Marxist British film community. What should be clear by now is the extent to which not only materialist politics but also the importance of analyzing in a "scientific" fashion the specificity of dominant film texts has almost completely dropped out of the picture for theorists concerned with the issues of "new" politics. (Lacanian psychoanalysis nevertheless fulfilled for feminist film theorists the function of "scientific" objectivity, although it was never characterized as such). My point is that filmic signification has become considerably less important for Lacanian film theorists than the representational apparatus of the cinema *tout court*. The importance of this point cannot be overstated for my later argument about the "blind spot" in the feminist film project's subsequent recuperation of textual analysis and strategies of resistant reading practices, which center not on notions of critical distance but on the masculine subject "implied" by dominant cinema--a subject which was to be resisted, in an "against the grain" fashion, at all costs.

The final theoretical move I wish to summarize are the Lacanian theories of "suture" which appeared in the wake of Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier" and served to drive the final nail into Althusser's coffin. Stephen Heath's essay "Narrative Space," published in Screen in 1976, functions for my purposes as a useful bridge from class-based ideological analysis towards the feminist demystification of gender roles and the stability of the patriarchal subject. In this essay Heath condenses Baudry's ideas regarding the Quattrocento system of cinematic perspective in the service of arguing for not a totalizing bourgeoisification of the spectator but the potential to expose the ways in which narrative cinema never fully contains its terms of production. Embedded in his argument regarding Hollywood's attempt to contain the disunity which is the very basis for its illusion of unity is a similar argument regarding the Lacanian divided subject which cinema not simply addresses but directly constructs. The series of articles published in Screen's "Dossier on Suture" in the winter of 1977-78 collectively argued that the subject is divided but defends itself against this division by a pseudo-identification in which it imagines itself a unity.<sup>28</sup> When taken up by film theory the concept of suture was understood as an instance of misrecognition, the implications of which received a much more polemical edge in its feminist articulations.

I will have more to say about this in the next chapter. For now, suffice it to say that the historical narrative I have constructed of film theory from the late 1960s until the mid-1970s has served to disperse any stability the term "against the grain" may have had as a vehicle for political change. Such a dispersion is, I believe, necessary in order to delineate the multiplicity of discourses--especially Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis--circulating among politically invested French and British film theorists of the period. What hopefully *is* clear is that the structural assumptions underpinning the first Marxist articulation of "against the grain" reading can be extended through semiotics and psychoanalysis to feminism as well; the abandonment of Althusser for Lacan did not "solve" this problem so much as it made it a non-issue. I would argue that it is indeed an

issue of vast importance insofar as it was fundamental to the feminist appropriation of “against the grain” textual strategies which assume (but do not explicitly acknowledge) a claim of the scientific truth-value of their criticism equally as much as did Althusserian Marxism. More precisely, this structuring model assumed a binary division between the overwhelmingly repressive hegemony of dominant cinema (with “progressive” texts, genres, and *auteurs* as the exceptions proving the rule) and the revolutionary qualities implicit in counter-cinema. The way in which “against/with the grain” reading was plugged into this problematic binarism is the subject of my next chapter.

## Chapter 2

“Reading against the grain” of classical film (and its theory) is a necessary complement to the attention given more experimental or “independent” work that attempts not only to thwart the conventional representation of women in film but to convey the interests and concerns of women.

--Constance Penley (1988)<sup>29</sup>

Over the course of the past decade, there has been a dearth of work by filmmakers who are both committed to the woman’s community as an audience and yet equally influenced by the developing theory of feminist critics. By daring to enter into this seeming limbo, Michelle Citron has succeeded in opening up a major new direction for feminist filmmaking. . . . because *Daughter Rite* is self-explanatory in its critiques and priorities, it represents a significant alternative to films that base their forms of subversion upon extra-filmic texts, thereby creating a protective shield beyond which inexplicability most women will not venture.

--Linda Williams and B. Ruby Rich (1981)<sup>30</sup>

“There have been two types of feminist film criticism, motivated by different geographical and ideological contexts, each speaking in a very different voice.” So writes B. Ruby Rich in her article “In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism,” published in Jump Cut in 1978. Rich characterizes these two types as American and British. The American approach is sociological, subjective, phenomenological, and optimistic; the British approach is theoretical, objective, analytical, and pessimistic. While Rich’s statement may have made a great deal of sense of 1978, the last 15 years of feminist film study and practice have, I would argue, altered the terms of that distinction. Indeed, the importation of French Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis by British feminists in the early 1970s had, even as Rich wrote her article, made its way to America with surprising swiftness. The formation of Camera Obscura in 1976 by a collective of American feminists dissatisfied with the sociological approach of the journal Women & Film marked the beginning of an alliance between continental theory (primarily psychoanalysis) and feminist film criticism in America. And the reception by the British feminist film community of a number of

women-authored experimental films (especially ones directed by Chantal Akerman, Laura Mulvey, Yvonne Rainer, Sally Potter, Helke Sander, Marguerite Duras, and Michelle Citron) can only be described as optimistic, even if the Screen group devoted most of their time to analyzing cinematic signification and not the films themselves.<sup>31</sup>

There were, of course, differences between feminist film study in Britain and America in the early 1970s. At the same time that Screen writers such as Claire Johnston, Pam Cook, Laura Mulvey, and Jacqueline Rose were synthesizing continental semiotics and psychoanalysis with a critique of how patriarchal ideology inscribed uneven relations between the sexes in/by the enunciative apparatus of the cinema, American film critics largely concerned themselves with exposing how Hollywood film images were “stereotyped,” how they failed to represent the “reality” of women’s actual lives. Books like Marjorie Rosen’s Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream (1973) and Molly Haskell’s From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies (1974) set out to demystify the “negative” images of women in Hollywood films. At the same time, new feminist documentaries like Julia Reichert and James Klein’s *Growing up Female* (1971) and Geri Ashur’s *Janie’s Jane* (1971) were praised by these American critics for presenting feminist issues in a direct, accessible way as a form of political consciousness-raising. It is now a critical commonplace to consider the American type as “first stage feminism” and the British as a considerable theoretical advance.<sup>32</sup> But the subsequent “triumph” of the British feminist approach in academic film studies in the mid-1970s should not be taken as a signifier of the complete silencing of American “positivity.”<sup>33</sup> For the residue of that positivity appears, I believe, in much of the theoretical evaluation of women’s counter-cinema (as opposed to “naive” documentaries) undertaken by both British and American feminists alike.

Nevertheless, Rich’s assertion that there “have been two types of feminist film criticism” does seem to me as apt today as it did in 1978. If the distinction can no longer be considered geographically, then in what area does that division lie? For me, the two

approaches are ones which have become a commonplace of feminist critics on both sides of the Atlantic; the distinction now concerns the type of film under scrutiny, with (feminist) counter-cinema receiving Rich's "American" approach, and classical (Hollywood) cinema the "British" one. I would complicate this assertion further by stating that film feminism's embracing of counter-cinema proceeded without any analysis of that group of films *as* a distinct cinema, and that resistant textual analyses of Hollywood films are not really about the films themselves but the mechanisms of dominant cinema. That this division between dominant cinema/counter-cinema, between cinema/film, between reading "against/with the grain" was never explicitly articulated as such by psychoanalytic feminists is evident in the nontransferability of these terms: references to reading "against the grain" of Hollywood films abound in feminist film criticism of the last 15 years, but analyses of progressive alternative forms of visual signification are never called reading "*with* the grain" of counter-*films*.

I have stated earlier that this oversight "takes the form of an inherited but unrecognized 'uneven development' . . . of the structural binarisms of the initial Cahiers formulation" of "against the grain." I would locate this "uneven development" quite specifically in the Screen appropriation of Comolli and Narboni's terms of analysis. Again, to quote myself:

The rapid abandonment of Althusser for Lacan which was to follow in the seventies may thus have more to do with its deployment as a theory of *film* rather than *cinema* in "Cinema/ Ideology/Criticism," the initial and most influential example of the merger between Althusserian Marxism and film study, than with the insufficiency of Althusser's theory of the construction of the subject. I would argue as well that Lacanian psychoanalysis is just as deficient a discourse for reading individual texts, insofar as its precepts are likewise transhistorical and point to large structures (*langue*; or, in the case of cinema, *langage*) rather than specific articulations (*parole*), and that the switch to Lacan did not solve this problem as it was thought to do but instead simply swerved the focus of interest in ideological analysis away from issues of class towards sexual politics.

In other words, the move from class to sexual politics in the mid-1970s was thought to leave behind science because it left behind French Marxist positivism, which is wedded to

class analysis. In order to support this claim I move now to an analysis of the Althusser-to-Lacan shift that occurred in the pages of Screen in the mid-1970s.

In 1985 Judith Mayne wrote that “it is only a slight exaggeration to say that most feminist film theory and criticism of the last decade has been a response, implicit or explicit, to the issues raised” by Laura Mulvey’s 1975 article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”<sup>34</sup> While I agree that Mulvey’s article has proven to be the single most influential and anthologized piece in the history of film feminist scholarship, I would like to spend some time analyzing the work of another important member of the Screen group: Claire Johnston. For it is in Johnston’s writings that the shift from the theories of Althusser to Lacan occurs most markedly, albeit largely unrecognized. And while I would never locate the source of an “uneven development” in the work of a single author, Johnston’s work seems to me more representative than Mulvey’s watershed article of both the tenor of the Screen feminists and the general trend towards psychoanalysis as the basis for a theory of cinematic enunciation. It is in her work as well that the contradictions of this shift appear most symptomatically.

Claire Johnston wrote a series of essays and/or pamphlets in the 1970s, five of which, published year by year since 1973, are considered by feminist film scholars to be of major importance. Janet Bergstrom, in “Rereading the Work of Claire Johnston,” indicates “how little the basic argument” concerning the relationship of the “progressive classical film” and a potential feminist counter-cinema “has changed, both as it outlines the goals and methods of feminist film criticism and the parameters of a feminist film practice” (80). Bergstrom provides a detailed and thorough analysis of both the strengths and the weaknesses of Johnston’s work, as well as the “advances” made over Johnston’s “rupture thesis” of textual resistance in the narrative analyses of classical films such as *Marnie*, *The Birds*, *Touch of Evil*, and *The Most Dangerous Game* (by Bellour, Heath, and Kuntzel). While I would agree that there is indeed continuity in Johnston’s writings, I would argue *contra* Bergstrom that a profound change is evident as well, a change that not only affected

the shape of what political “resistance” as a practice of reading would entail but also retained many of the structural contradictions of the Cahiers essays I have discussed in the previous chapter. In order to chart this change I will analyze in some detail two seminal Johnston articles of the mid-1970s, separated by only a span of three years: “Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema,” published in 1973 in the British Film Institute pamphlet Notes on Women’s Cinema; and “Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses,” published in 1976 in the first Edinburgh Film Festival Magazine.

Johnston’s model for feminist film criticism put forward in “Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema” draws explicitly upon a number of popular theoretical positions often cited in the pages of Screen in the early 1970s: Barthes’ writings on myth, Cahiers’ articles on *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *Morocco*, Comolli and Narboni’s version of the Althusserian “break,” and Peter Wollen’s essay on *auteurism* in his revised version of Signs and Meaning in the Cinema. Johnston begins by dismissing the *cinema verité* approach to feminist filmmaking and the sociological approach to feminist film criticism on the grounds that they restrict their interest to women as subject matter and assume the possibility of a non-ideological, authentic, “real” depiction of women’s lives (cf. Comolli and Narboni’s description of category [f]). “In rejecting a sociological analysis of woman in the cinema we reject any view in terms of realism, for this would involve an acceptance of the apparent natural denotation of the sign and would involve a denial of the reality of myth in operation” (211). Johnston then: proceeds through a paraphrase of “Josef von Sternberg’s *Morocco*”; cites the significance of *auteur* theory for “challenging the entrenched view of Hollywood as monolithic”; mentions Wollen’s revision of the *auteur* as an organized network of unconscious preoccupations as an important step towards disengaging “from the notion of creativity which dominates the notion of ‘art,’ and from the idea of intentionality”; and briefly contrasts the depiction of women in Hawks’ and Ford’s films, with Ford’s use of women emerging as more “complicated” and “progressive.”

All of these moves are logical and necessary in order to set up Johnston's real focus of interest, which is to posit the relationship between the "progressive" classical film and feminist counter-cinema:

Any revolutionary strategy must challenge the depiction of reality; it is not enough to discuss the oppression of women within the text of the film; the language of the cinema/the depiction of reality must also be interrogated, so that a break between ideology and text is effected. In this respect, it is instructive to look at films made by women within the Hollywood system which attempted by formal means to bring about a dislocation between sexist ideology and the text of the film; such insights could provide useful guidelines for the emerging women's cinema to draw on. (215)

It is not only the language of the Althusserian "break" which has been imported from "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," but the same structural contradiction as well--between simply showing "the process in action" and reading "the film obliquely, looking for symptoms", or in this case between simply looking "at films made by women within the Hollywood system which attempted by formal means to bring about a dislocation between sexist ideology and the text of the film" and effecting through "interrogation" a "break between ideology and text." But Johnston's concern is not with ideology *per se* but with *sexist* ideology, and her subsequent analyses of the films of Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino demonstrate how the Cahiers' formulation of the "progressive" classical film was marshalled for a feminist agenda. I contend further that the Cahiers contradiction dovetailed in Johnston's analyses of these two women's films, with Lupino's remaining firmly within the category of the "progressive" Hollywood film and Arzner's skirting the boundary between classical and counter-cinema.

The brief critiques of Arzner's *Dance, Girl, Dance* and Lupino's *Not Wanted* that fulfill Johnston's agenda replicate many of the same problems as "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*" (which I have outlined in some detail in the previous chapter), namely a recourse to *auteurism* and a contradictory distinction between "cinema" and "film" as the source of determination/overdetermination. The difference is that now, with Johnston's emphasis upon sexist rather than capitalist ideology, the *auteur's* transgression has to do with her status as a woman director within the sexist Hollywood cinematic institution. Both Arzner

and Lupino, as female directors, are granted transgressive *auteur* status. But Lupino's *oeuvre*, unlike Arzner's, fails to make the leap from the merely "progressive" to the counter-cinematic. Why not? For Arzner is not simply a woman director within sexist Hollywood, but a lesbian one as well--a fact that Johnston's essay never explicitly acknowledges, and as such absolutely depends *upon* to establish the truth-value of feminist criticism. I think that the repression of Arzner's lesbianism in Johnston's text does more than provide a homogeneous, heterosexist conception of women's shared oppression under patriarchy; it also functions, albeit as a structuring absence, as the means by which Arzner (and not the heterosexual Lupino) is conferred feminist counter-cinematic validity even though she is working within the confines of dominant Hollywood cinema. In short, the repression of Arzner's lesbianism allows Johnston to overdetermine the status of the woman director within sexist Hollywood and maintain a heterosexual definition of female oppression.<sup>35</sup>

The effect of Arzner's (lesbian) female authorship in Johnston's essay is a radical deconstruction of Hollywood stereotypes of women. Arzner "succeeds in generating within the text of" *Dance, Girl, Dance* a critique centering

round the notion of woman as spectacle, as performer within the male universe. The central figures appear in a parody form of the performance, representing opposing poles of the myths of femininity--sexuality vs. grace & [sic] innocence. . . . As the film progresses, a one-way process of the performance is firmly established, involving the humiliation of Judy as the stooge. Towards the end of the film Arzner brings about her tour de force, cracking open the entire fabric of the film and exposing the workings of ideology in the construction of the stereotype of woman. Judy, in a fit of anger, turns on her audience and tells them *how she sees them*. This return of scrutiny in what within the film is assumed as a one-way process constitutes a direct assault on the audience within the film and the audience of the film, and has the effect of directly challenging the entire notion of woman as spectacle. (215)

Is Johnston here reading *Dance, Girl, Dance* "against the grain" or "with" it? I would argue the latter, in that the mechanism she cites as subversive--Judy's challenge to the spectatorial look of the audience--is an intrinsic property of not only the film's narrative but also a formal technique of cinematic distancing, bucking one of the prime directives of

Hollywood cinema: never look at the camera/the audience. In this sense, Johnston is practicing a mode of textual reading more in accord with Comolli and Narboni's prescription for counter-cinema than along the lines of their "against the grain" reading of "progressive" films.<sup>36</sup> What occurs in this essay is not simply, then, an importation of Cahiers' language and contradictions, but an alignment of a woman's *film* with women's counter-cinema. Arzner's film is at the same time a "progressive" classical film that subverts Hollywood sexism and an example of feminist counter-cinema. Indeed, Johnston closes her essay "Dorothy Arzner: Critical Strategies," the lead article of the extremely influential pamphlet The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema (1975), with these words:

How, then, is it possible to produce feminist art which is not based on [the structure of the Oedipus myth] and the repression of the feminine which underpins it? In posing the question in the way she does, and through the working out of her own solution as a process of re-writing, Dorothy Arzner has made one of the most important contributions to the development of a feminist counter-cinema. (8)<sup>37</sup>

"Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," then, exhibits almost all of the features of Cahiers' Althusserianism, with one notable exception: it makes no claim regarding the "scientific" truth-value of the critic. Given Johnston's critique of sociological feminism, such a claim would be quite specious. But I would argue that Lacanian psychoanalysis, which ostensibly destabilized any notion of a fully self-present subject, fulfilled the need for establishing the critical objectivity of the female viewer/critic in no less problematic a fashion. The almost complete evacuation of Althusser's theory of ideology in favor of the Lacanian model that took place in the mid-1970s was due largely to the appearance of a number of psychoanalytic texts, feminist and otherwise, in and around 1975: Baudry's "Le dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de l'impression de réalité," Bellour's "Le blocage symbolique" [on *North by Northwest*], Kristeva's "Ellipse sur la frayeur et la seduction spéculaire," Kuntzel's "Le travail du film, 2," and Metz's "Le signifiant imaginaire," all published in the Communications special issue on psychoanalysis and the

cinema; the Ben Brewster translation of Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier" in Screen; Daniel Dayan's "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema" in Film Quarterly; the Alan Williams translation of Baudry's "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" in Film Quarterly; Kristeva's La révolution du langage poétique; Juliet Mitchell's Psychoanalysis and Feminism; Jacqueline Rose's "The Imaginary," presented as a BFI educational paper; and of course Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." I mention all of these texts in order to demonstrate a saturation of influence of psychoanalysis on the British film community, particularly the Screen feminists.<sup>38</sup> The opening words of Johnston's "Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses," published three years after "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," show how much the ideological emphasis had shifted by 1976: "The central question which psychoanalysis has raised for film theory in general and for feminist theory in particular is what kind of reader the film text constructs, the positioning of the subject in relation to patriarchal ideology" (316). The appearance of the prefix "patriarchal" in front of ideology is indebted to Juliet Mitchell's Psychoanalysis and Feminism; as such it sets the terms for the "universal" psychoanalytic laws of patriarchy which govern society, and it functions as the bedrock truth upon which psychoanalytic feminism was to base itself.

Janet Bergstrom calls "Towards a Feminist Film Practice" "an extremely condensed essay on suture" (83), which it indeed is. But such a summation does not indicate the dense intertextuality of the essay, which proceeds from Mulvey to Metz to Oudart (through Dayan) to Mitchell to Kristeva to Barthes in order to arrive at its point of focus, which is to argue that Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* poses the "problem of absence in relation to woman in a fundamental sense" (325). What underpins the entire argument is the importance of Lacan's theory of suture as a model for the manner in which dominant cinema functions to position the spectator in a false position of coherence and unity. As with "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," the impetus for Johnston's essay is to posit a model both for feminist criticism of dominant cinema and for women's counter-cinema:

Feminist cinema must include a challenge to the fetishistic and sadistic aspects of the scopic drive which Laura Mulvey demonstrates so convincingly, but it will also have to challenge in a very fundamental sense the entire notion of the specular text itself, which involves going beyond the question of the inscription of the look as discourse to the more general question of the way the specular text places the spectator in a certain way. (317)

A dizzying array of Lacanian theory is marshalled to fulfill the prerogatives of Johnston's project. Rather than summarize all of the moves the essay takes through psychoanalysis, I will instead state simply that Lacan functions as the irreducible truth-support for all of the essay's claims about spectatorial placement. In this sense Johnston's essay is not exceptional: much psychoanalytic feminist theory of the period (and well beyond) drew upon Lacan without first engaging in a genealogical critique of his work. Numerous sentences begin with phrases like "Lacan discusses," "He states," "Lacan describes," "Lacan states." The key to Johnston's argument is Lacan's theory of subject construction:

The subject is always elsewhere: only the marks of the subject can be located. The suturing process addresses itself precisely to the process of 'fading' by retroactively closing up the distance opened up between the subject and its mark, introducing 'stand-ins' to fill the gap opened up, establishing an imaginary unity. This imaginary unity is available as support for ideology and accountable for much of its force. . . . It is the experience of loss which sets the metonymic process of desire in motion, the gap forever to be filled. . . . The pleasure of the classic text, then, is intimately linked with the tracing of desire in image flow and narrative, the metonymic play of desire aiming at abolishing the gap forever opened up by the fact that desire must pass through the 'defiles' of the signifier. (318, 319)

The importance of this model for feminism lies not so much in the theory in and of itself as it does for its implications in constructing uneven relations between the sexes in society. A significant shift occurs in the essay when Johnston states, *pace* Mitchell, that the "structuring of the subject through language leads to a radically different relationship to language for men and women under patriarchy deriving from women's negative entry into the Symbolic" (320-21). The basis for that shift lies in Lacan's privileging of the phallus as the signifier *par excellence* of the child's entry into the Symbolic, meaning that the female, who lacks a penis, enters the phallogentrism of patriarchal culture as a negative. Woman's place in society is one which bears the mark of not only her lack (signified by her

lack of a penis) but of the male's as well.<sup>39</sup> The process of suture in the classic film text, then, establishes "through the constant filling up of gaps set up in the mode of representation an imaginary unity necessary as a support for patriarchal ideology" (323). The feminist film critic thus must demonstrate how the suturing process in dominant films constitutes a false sense of omnipotence for the (implied male) viewing subject whose look at the screen is welded to that of the camera and the point of view of the privileged protagonist in the film. And the task for feminist filmmakers is to challenge "this imaginary unity, the sutured coherence, the imaginary sense of unity set up by" dominant cinema, to practice different forms of cinematic enunciation "to achieve a different constitution of the subject in relation to ideology" (323).

Again, this sounds very much like the prerogatives laid out by Comolli and Narboni in "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," but with a profound difference: Althusser's theory of ideology is replaced by Lacan's in what is considered a theoretical advance.

Ultimately, Althusser's definition of ideology derives from a notion of 'representation' rather than 'signification'. But the products of signifying practices such as film do not represent anything outside themselves. They cannot serve as a simple means of expression because they are constituted through the very practices of signification themselves. As an operation, suture cannot simply be seen as support for patriarchal ideology, which somehow precedes it. As we have seen, through a process of transformation of symbolic relations suture articulates a system of subjectivity in relation to sexual difference in the film text, which is then supported by an imaginary unity. As a process, a practice of signification, suture is an ideological operation with a particular function in relation to patriarchal ideology in that out of a system of differences it establishes a position in relation to the phallus. (323)

The importation of Lacan does indeed provide a solution to the pre-existing "dominant ideology" problem (or capital "S" Subject) of Althusser's theory of the formation of the subject in/by ideology, but it offers a different type of scientificity in its place as well, grounded in the "truth" of phallogocentric patriarchal society.<sup>40</sup> By proposing that women have a *fundamentally* different relationship to language, artistic practice, and spectatorship, the Lacanian suture model offers to both the feminist film critic and the female filmmaker a distance from the cinematic apparatus, opening up not merely the possibility but practically

the inevitability of both of their activities to be profoundly outside of the patriarchal circuit of reproducing its own conditions of existence. It also (re)produces a monolithic conception of what *the* (Hollywood) cinematic apparatus does, placing all film texts produced within that system in (unconscious) complicity with it, at least at the most basic level of signification: “progressive” films can only become so through the “theoretical practice” of now Lacanian rather than Althusserian criticism. *Direct* challenges to the system are possible only from the avant-garde, where each text is its own counter-cinema because to call it a counter-film would be to acknowledge the presence of a larger system of suture underwriting (and, hence, dominating) it, a *langage* of which it is merely a *parole*. The shift from Althusser to Lacan which occurred in this period, then, should not be seen necessarily as a theoretical advance but as a change in emphasis from the Subject of Ideology to the subject in/of patriarchal ideology, from Marxist Politics to sexual politics.<sup>41</sup>

*Jeanne Dielman* fulfills for Johnston in “Towards a Feminist Film Practice” the prerogatives of a women’s counter-cinema laid out in “Women’s Cinema and Counter-Cinema” (and accords to the Cahiers formulation of “true” militant cinema as well) because it short-circuits the imaginary unity of the system of suture in dominant cinema:

Chantal Akerman’s film is important for feminism because it resolutely refuses to present us with the security of the reverse shot of classic representation and instead foregrounds the ‘thetic’ aspect of the field of vision, the Symbolic Order, in all its harshness on the body of the woman as other, woman as non-male. In so doing it reveals the fragility of such a Symbolic Order by the over-inscription of absence and by the inscription of the drives as ‘elsewhere’. The film’s inscription of this asymmetry opens up the possibility of a different Symbolic Order, a different mode of articulation between the Imaginary and the Symbolic beyond the frame, the diegesis and our field of vision--but nevertheless present. (326)

The challenge to patriarchy is thus immanent within counter-cinema’s formal strategies of signification, and the job of the feminist critic is to “show the process in action,” to read “with the grain” of the film. Herein lies what I perceive as the Cahiers legacy of an *a priori*, bipartite division separating dominant from counter-cinema in the psychoanalytic feminism of the mid-1970s that has set the terms for the last 15 years of film theory and

criticism. (It also perpetuates the idea that an “open” aesthetic practice necessarily and self-evidently subtends open ideological practices--the scientific causal logic is at work here with a vengeance.) And although the phrase “reading against the grain” appears nowhere in this particular essay, the psychoanalytic feminist film criticism of classical Hollywood cinema, “progressive” and otherwise, which was at this time becoming more and more prevalent in the form of Screen and Camera Obscura essays and pamphlets, quickly adopted the term to describe its “resistant” reading activity.

In analyzing these two Johnston essays I have tried to emphasize how they are examples of an “uneven development” of the structural binarisms underpinning the initial theories of politicized textual criticism posited by Cahiers du cinéma. I would now like to turn to the vast field of writing on film which grew out of the feminist appropriation of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the mid-1970s. I have divided the following brief summary of the feminist tradition of “against the grain” reading of Hollywood cinema into two categories: *auteur* and genre. This division is largely for the sake of convenience--there is a great deal of intersection between the two.

The *auteurism* underpinning Cahiers’ formulation of the “progressive” classical film became almost a given in its feminist appropriation, although different *auteurs* have differing statuses at the level of their resistance to dominant modes of sexual inscription. Claire Johnston’s (and Pam Cook’s) work on Arzner and other directors, such as Jacques Tourneur and Raoul Walsh, form a continuum regarding the emphasis placed on subversiveness as a combination of an ingrained feature of the text and a result of critical interrogation. As I have mentioned in the case of Arzner (this applies to directors like Douglas Sirk and Michael Powell as well), “against the grain” is more on the side of the filmic texts themselves than it is produced by reading them--hence Arzner’s importance as both a “progressive” *auteur* and a progenitor of feminist counter-cinema.

Johnston’s essay on Tourneur’s *Anne of the Indies* tips the scales more on the side of critical reading, although Johnston does make concessions to authorial intentionality

when she characterizes the film as “a key film in his *oeuvre* in that the problem of sexual difference forms the central articulation point of the film, and as Paul Willemen demonstrates in his essay difference and absence are the pivotal questions raised by Tourneur’s texts” (37). Johnston’s analysis of *Anne of the Indies* draws heavily upon the Cahiers’ essays on *Morocco* and *Sylvia Scarlett* regarding the female as fetish and upon Joan Riviere’s theory of femininity as masquerade, which was to become a concept of major importance to feminist film theories of female representation and spectatorship.<sup>42</sup> But Riviere’s theory does not simply elucidate *Anne of the Indies*: it is absolutely integral to demonstrating the “progressivity” of the film, and as such places subversiveness firmly on the side of psychoanalytic feminism as an act of reading. Although Johnston grants Tourneur some of the credit, the essay concludes with a long comment on the need to keep the sexual political importance of psychoanalysis in the critical use of the discourse:<sup>43</sup>

From Riviere’s study we can see that *Anne of the Indies* is concerned essentially with the problematic nature of the fundamental fact of bi-sexuality, the working through at the Symbolic level involving a flight from the full implications of a bi-sexuality, despite the masquerade. . . . Tourneur’s depiction of the masquerade itself constitutes a radical attempt to situate this dilemma afresh for us, to open our eyes to the mechanism of the fetish, to explore new venues of desire and phantasy. The film perhaps marks one of the most radical attempts to explore the fact of sexual heterogeneity in the classic Hollywood cinema, foregrounding the repression of the feminine. . . . Behind the mask of the enigma lies nothing but man’s dread of the Otherness of woman, his disavowal of sexual difference itself. . . . It therefore poses the possibility of a genuinely bi-sexual disposition while remaining a male myth. (41-42)

Whereas Tourneur occupies a position in the feminist canon akin to that of John Ford as a semi-“progressive” *auteur*, Walsh is definitely considered more along the lines of Howard Hawks.<sup>44</sup> Resistance with respect to the latter type of *auteur* is almost entirely the feature of a particular practice of reading rather than what the films “say” explicitly. In fact, it is what the film does *not* say which provides the critic with the material to read it “against the grain.” Here for example is Cook and Johnston from their oft-cited “The Place of Woman in the Cinema of Raoul Walsh”:

It has often been argued that there are a number of films directed by Walsh which appear to present women as strong and independent characters. The authors of the following essay take issue with this type of reading and attempt to demonstrate that women (e.g., Mamie Stover) in fact function in a circuit of exchange where the values exchanged have been fixed by/in patriarchal culture. . . . In this way, the authors are attempting to help lay the foundations of a feminist film criticism as well as producing an analysis of a number of films directed by Walsh. (26)

It is this type of textual resistance--what Cook and Johnston later call "a process of de-naturalization: a questioning of the unity of the text; of seeing it as a contradictory interplay of different codes; of tracing its 'structuring absences' and its relationship to the universal problem of symbolic castration" (34)--which has come to characterize a large portion of feminist "against the grain" readings of Hollywood films that, at first glance, seem to present "positive" representations of women. Equally significant, however, are the films of those *auteurs* who foreground the sadism and/or voyeurism of the male characters (and, thus, of the cinematic apparatus as a whole) in particularly excessive ways, in the process laying bare the sexual asymmetry of cultural power. Analyzing the films of directors like these (as examples of patriarchal "excess") is as important in the feminist tradition of "against the grain" reading as studying films more conventionally understood to be "progressive" (i.e., "positive") in their depiction of women. Interestingly enough, the two directors that Laura Mulvey chose in "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema" as primary examples of fetishistic scopophilia and voyeurism--Josef von Sternberg and Alfred Hitchcock--were to become the subjects of considerable psychoanalytic feminist interest, insofar as they yielded up particular types of patriarchal obsessions that "resistant" readings could elucidate in "progressive" ways. It is to the feminist re-readings of the latter director to which I now turn.<sup>45</sup>

Hitchcock's *oeuvre* has been a mainstay of academic film criticism and university film courses and libraries for the past 25 years. The fascination that he, both as a figure and as a director, has held in film studies is not likely to disappear soon. But the combined mechanism of Lacanian psychoanalysis and British film feminism has altered dramatically the way in which his films have been read, by female and male critics alike. I have already

mentioned the particularly high place psychoanalytic feminism (especially the Camera Obscura collective) has accorded Bellour's narrative analyses of Hitchcock's films. To take another example: Robin Wood's 1989 revised and expanded edition of his 1965 Hitchcock's Films. Despite his long introductory statements regarding both his Marxist and humanist intentions and his misgivings about Lacanian psychoanalysis, Wood's eight new chapters are simply unthinkable without the feminist-cum-Cahiers concept of reading the "progressive" *auteur* "against the grain," insofar as they opened up the field to other types of "new" political agendas--in Wood's case, homosexuality and homophobia. Marxist analyses of Hitchcock's films are difficult to find in Wood's new chapters. The more recent sensational work by the Hungarian Slavoj Zizek combines Hitchcock and Lacan in a manner which reverses the usual paradigm between theory and aesthetic text: Hitchcock's films are used to demonstrate, even "prove," the principles of Lacanian psychoanalysis.<sup>46</sup> And although Zizek clearly comes to the field of film study through a different tradition than the France-Britain-America circuit, the connection between Lacan and Hitchcock is more than fortuitous.

A more explicit and characteristic example of a psychoanalytic feminist "against the grain" reading of Hitchcock's films is Tania Modleski's The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory.<sup>47</sup> The intent of the volume is not to "save" Hitchcock "for feminism" (a question Robin Wood asks in his book) but to "elucidate issues and problems relevant to women in patriarchy," to "use Hitchcock's work as the expression of cultural attitudes and practices existing to some extent outside the artist's control" in order to demonstrate the ways in which "the strong fascination and identification with femininity revealed in [his films] subverts the claims to mastery and authority not only of the male characters but of the director himself" (3). Hitchcock's films emerge as "progressive," then, *in spite of* his attempts at mastery; "despite the often considerable violence with which women are treated in Hitchcock's films, they remain resistant to patriarchal assimilation" (3).

Such an “against the grain” approach, which locates resistance more at the site of intervention than within the text itself, underwrites the voluminous work undertaken by psychoanalytic feminists in the field of the “progressive” Hollywood genre. Barbara Klinger’s essay “‘Cinema/Ideology/Criticism’ Revisited: The Progressive Genre” provides a valuable summary of this approach, although she de-emphasizes the feminist appropriation of “against the grain” reading in favor of the Cahiers paradigm, which locates “progressivity” more within the film itself: “. . . this work on the signification practices of dominant cinema has involved the critical identification of a series of ‘rebel’ texts within the Hollywood empire. These texts, while firmly entrenched within the system, display certain features that are critically deemed as combative to the conventions governing the ‘typical’ classic text” (74). The genres that Klinger lists as having “been of interest to ideological criticism are film noir, the woman’s film, the forties and fifties melodrama, the seventies horror film, and the exploitation and B film” (75). All of these have been interrogated by feminist film critics; I would add the eighties slasher film, science fiction, and film pornography as well.<sup>48</sup>

I think that Klinger’s re-tracing of the “progressive” genre to Comolli and Narboni’s essay is indeed correct. However, I think she mischaracterizes the critical interest in these films by calling that interest “ideological,” implying that the initial Althusserian formulation of this group of films has continued unabated. Nevertheless, Klinger does summarize the feminist position with respect to this field when she states:

The identification of the progressive genre film depends heavily on the critical leverage imparted to the intrinsic inventional characteristics . . . which serve to distinguish these films from the dominant classic cinema and, often, from within their own generic categories as well. . . . texts can be labeled “reactionary” or “progressive” according to their internal subscription to or rejection of the classic paradigm and its imputed ideology. The ideological effects of a text come to be identified and ratified through the espoused critical reading. (85-86)

I would argue that, for the majority of work on the “progressive genre,” that “espoused critical reading” has been Lacanian psychoanalytic feminism, especially in terms of *film noir*, the woman’s film, and melodrama, genres which overlap considerably.

“Against the grain” readings of these films tend to emphasize the primacy of spectacle over narrative and closure, often drawing attention to the films’ misogynistic excesses, masochistic female (and male) characterizations, dysfunctional familial situations, paste-on “happy” endings, foregroundings of visual style, and cross-gender identifications in order to demonstrate how they disrupt dominant cinematic modes of suture and signification. Films of these genres are “progressive” because they undermine the conventions of Hollywood cinema and, by association, the patriarchal Law of the Symbolic Order. In the case of *Gilda*, for example,

the logic slips--the appearance is too strong and the ending lacks credibility. The end of the film undermines everything that has gone before, the elaborate and prolonged construction of a threatening, explosive image of female sexuality and the devastating effect of that image upon Johnny. Gilda performs too well; and even though it may be “just an act,” she becomes inseparable from that act. The ending does not “work” precisely because the image of volatile sexuality attached to Gilda is too convincing . . . . The incoherency of the narrative, the dissatisfying quality of its closure, are demonstrations of the power that the cinematic institution invests in the look. (Doane, “*Gilda*” 108)

Is the narrative incoherent, the closure dissatisfying? The apparent self-evidence of statements such as these are the basis for claiming the intrinsic nature of these films’ ideological transgressiveness (other notable examples include *Mildred Pierce*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, and *Suspicion* --all, like *Gilda*, women’s film/*noir* hybrids). But such statements assume a unitary model of spectatorship, defined by the Lacanian model of signification which is taken to not simply *explain* the process of signification in classical cinema but to *be* it.<sup>49</sup> Here is Laura Mulvey in an essay on Sirk and melodrama:

Melodrama can be seen as having an ideological function in working certain contradictions through to the surface and re-presenting them in an aesthetic form. A simple difference, however can be made between the way that irreconcilable social and sexual dilemmas are finally resolved in, for instance, *Home from the Hill*, and are not in, for instance, *All that Heaven Allows*. It is as though the fact of having a female point of view dominating the narrative produces an excess which precludes satisfaction. If the melodrama offers a fantasy escape for the identifying women in the audience, the illusion is so strongly marked by recognisable, real and familiar traps that the escape is closer to a daydream than a fairy story. The few Hollywood films made with a female audience in mind evoke contradictions rather than reconciliation, with the alternative to mute

surrender to society's overt pressures lying in defeat by its unconscious laws. (Gledhill, Home is Where the Heart Is 79)

Could one not make claims like these for *all* films? The homogeneousness of the Lacanian spectatorial model simply does not address the manifold reactions different viewers have when watching the "same" film, not to mention the differing identifications a single viewer may have in the process of watching a feature-length film. By privileging certain genres as "progressive" and others as not, this approach to textual resistance re-establishes the ideological dominance of the rest of Hollywood cinema, reinstating the oppressiveness it intends to subvert. And the primacy of psychoanalytic models of textual reading forecloses other categories of difference other than sexual, most notably of class and historical context, that are of major importance as well.

I have spent some time elaborating what I perceive to be a definite strand of feminist critique with respect to Hollywood cinema. But what of feminist counter-cinema? At least as much critical work has been done on this branch of films as on classical cinema, "progressive" and otherwise. The urgency with which Screen feminists like Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey called for different modes of film practice to challenge the patriarchal apparatus of dominant cinema was met with a real burst of alternative filmmaking and distribution networks in the mid- to late-1970s. At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned a number of experimental women filmmakers whose films have been considered as offering a major alternative and challenge to mainstream modes of cinematic signification. But I have also suggested that the absolute immanence accorded to these films at the level of their "progressive resistance" to the Lacanian system of cinematic suture precludes the possibility of resistance as an act of critical reading. In other words, because counter-cinema irreducibly resists patriarchal modes of signification in its formal organization, the responsibility of the feminist critic is to read "with the grain" of the text, to describe how filmic examples of counter-cinema go beyond the merely "progressive" classical text by constructing a different type of subject, a different type of viewer.<sup>50</sup>

The writings produced on women's counter-cinema have never characterized their critical activities in these terms.<sup>51</sup> And insofar as I am concerned in this thesis with a tradition of "resistant" reading, I do not intend to trace a genealogy of what I understand to be an extremely important branch of feminist film study. I will suggest, though, that many of the same predeterminations concerning the elisions of other important political concerns are as evident in this "with the grain" line of feminist investigation as they are in the "against the grain" versions I have discussed in this chapter. My argument regarding the evacuation of class and historical materialism as matters of political urgency in favor of sexual politics in the mid-1970s holds true for counter-cinema evaluations, at least until the late 1980s when other forms of marginalized difference became tabled as important as well.

To be fair, many of these other categories of difference, particularly race, have been addressed more recently in what I have called the "against the grain" feminist tradition. Jacqueline Bobo's "*The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers*," for example, examines many of the contradictions involved in producing a "progressive" reading of a popular text. Whereas most of the types of "against the grain" feminist reading I have discussed in this chapter accord quite explicitly with the Douglas Kellner quotation I reproduced on the third page of my Introduction--basing themselves upon an *a priori* judgment concerning a text's potential "progressivity," whether in terms of the *auteur*, the genre, or the mechanisms of the cinematic apparatus as a whole--Bobo's description of spectatorial resistance is more in line with the Timothy Corrigan quotation, which places the locus of resistance quite outside the viewer's control:

A viewer of film (reader of a text) comes to the moment of engagement with the work with a knowledge of the world and a knowledge of other texts, media products. What this means is that when a person comes to view a film, she/he does not leave her/his histories, whether social, cultural, economic, racial, or sexual at the door. An audience member from a marginalized group (people of colour, women, the poor, and so on) has an oppositional stance as they participate in mainstream media. . . . From this wary viewing standpoint, a subversive reading of a text can occur. This alternative reading comes from something in the work that strikes the viewer as amiss, that appears 'strange'. Behind the idea of subversion lies a reader-oriented notion of 'making strange'. When things appear strange to the viewer, she/he may then bring other viewpoints to bear on the watching

of the film and may see things other than what the film-makers intended. The viewer, that is, will read 'against the grain' of the film. (96)

Such a viewer may indeed be "wary," but the subversive reading still comes "from something inside the work," meaning that resistance is less a result of a conscious effort to interpret a film than it is a general condition of the marginalized viewer's subject position. This is not a model for "against the grain" reading that I would endorse, then, because it reifies the power of dominant media and turns political resistance into a collision between two oppositional forces, with the viewer at the receiving end.

Nevertheless, Bobo's essay raises some very important issues regarding the contingency by which one must always gauge the potential for a particular interpretation to be "progressive." In the case of *The Color Purple*, the positive response many Black women had to the film runs counter to a number of more obvious criticisms leveled at it, most particularly: "a) that the film does not examine class, b) that Black men are portrayed unnecessarily as harsh and brutal, the consequence of which is to further the split between the Black female and the Black male, and c) that Black people as a whole are depicted as perverse, sexually wanton, and irresponsible" (90).<sup>52</sup> Bobo's analysis centers on the ways in which many Black women viewers "constructed meaning from this text" in order to demonstrate what she sees as a growing "cultural competency" among Black women who were able to find "something useful from the work" by negotiating their responses (103). Although she is proceeding from a popular cultural studies tradition rather than a film theory one, and although she never theorizes her argument as such (her intent is to prove that "consumers are producers," not "cultural dupes"), I think that Bobo's essay has much to say about how a critical and popular *context* establishes the "grain" of a text at least as much as any "intrinsic" qualities of its formal organization.<sup>53</sup> Resistance is here not so much to the film's mode of address as it is to a prevailing critical response, in this case, an overarchingly negative response on the part of many Black intellectuals, male and female. What I'm suggesting is not resistance for its own sake--I believe that an agenda must underpin such an activity--but a more fluid conception of what a "progressive"

reading of a film might be, one which would take into account the (often) contradictory identifications of a single viewer when watching a film, the “cultural competency” of the audience of address for the reading, and the variety of contexts which do not simply *surround* a film text but largely *define* what is “appropriate” to address in talking about it and what is not. It is in the following chapter that I undertake the theorization of such a concept in my textual analyses of three films of “sexual indeterminacy”: *Basic Instinct*, *The Crying Game*, and *Orlando*.

## Chapter 3

The line I am suggesting I have called, in a feminist context, "scrupulous and plausible misreadings." Since all readings, including the original text, are constituted by, or effects of, the necessary possibility of misreadings, in my argument the question becomes one of interpretations for use, built on the old grounds of coherence, without the cant of theoretical adequacy. And the emphasis falls on alert pedagogy.

--Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1979)<sup>54</sup>

The deadly traps of demystification--and any form of prophetic criticism--are those of reductionism, be it of the sociological, psychological, or historical sort. By reductionism I mean either one-factor analyses (i.e., crude Marxisms, feminisms, racialisms, etc.) that yield a one-dimensional functionalism, or a hyper-subtle analytical perspective that loses touch with the specificity of an art work's form and the context of its reception.

--Cornel West (1990)<sup>55</sup>

I have up to this point concentrated on what I have perceived to be structural contradictions subtending the discursive history of resistant filmic reading practices. What, then, is the validity of such an activity, riven as it is with so many problems? I hope that I have made clear my commitment to both the idea and the usefulness of reading films critically from a political viewpoint; without such an investment, I would never have undertaken the project of an historiographic genealogy of reading "against the grain." My intent has not been to deconstruct the paradigm to a point of complete aporia, but instead to demonstrate that the current model of textual resistance needs to be revised, reconfigured, if it is to take account of the manifold political meanings possible in any one film. But what are the terms of such a reconfiguration?

In "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia," Gayatri Spivak provides a powerful and moving summary of her experiences of marginality at a symposium to which she was invited as a participant. At an early point in the article Spivak expresses her misgivings about the academic institutional moves towards diversity and plurality when they are made

in a merely gestural manner, covering over the political urgencies which gave rise to the need to address these issues in the first place. At the heart of her misgivings is a recognition of the responsibilities attendant with critical practice, responsibilities which must not simply take account of but are determined by the particular discursive situations giving them voice. In particular, she is dissatisfied with a practice of hermeneutics, even if prefixed by a word like “suspicious,” when it offers a theory of “interpretation rather than explanation” without confronting the problem of the critic’s practice in a radical way. But a simple return to “explanation” is unsuitable as well:

I thought the desire to explain might be a symptom of the desire to have a self that can control knowledge and a world that can be known; I thought to give oneself the right to correct self-analysis and thus to avoid all thought of symptomacity was foolish; I thought therefore that, willy-nilly, there was no way out but to develop a provisional theory of the practical politics of cultural explanations. (104)

A “provisional theory of the practical politics of cultural explanations” or, as in the epigram that opens this chapter, “interpretations for use, built on the old ground of coherence, without the cant of theoretical adequacy.” What I understand this to mean is a theory of political criticism that explains not only the larger structures of domination which produce marginality, but one that also grounds its interpretations in the particularities of any given discursive situation. Neither totalizing explanation, then, nor interpretation as in and of itself bespeaking an equitable society. “And the emphasis falls on alert pedagogy.”

My interest in this project grew out of a sense of frustration that stemmed from a common source but presented itself in two different contexts: watching and talking about films with colleagues with whom I shared a similar political agenda; and teaching critical reading skills to my students. I often felt dissatisfied in the first context because of the almost prescribed manner in which we would produce readings of films, depending on their particular “place” on the Hollywood-art-counter- cinema continuum. It wasn’t that we didn’t disagree, but rather that we almost always disagreed according to the same economy. That is, there was an assumed “resistance” on our parts when watching and arguing about the various formal transgressions of avant-garde films, a resistance which depended almost

entirely upon a background in feminist apparatus theory of dominant cinema. We were indeed critical, but our criticisms tended to be about the quantitative nature of these films' "progressiveness," the specific political areas in which their transgressions would apply. In terms of Hollywood films, the arguments were qualitative. To put it in Comolli and Narboni's terms: ". . . which films allow the ideology a free, unhampered passage, transmit it with crystal clarity, serve as its chosen language? And which attempt to make it turn back and reflect itself, intercept it and make it visible by revealing its mechanisms, by blocking them?" I cannot attribute this bipartite reaction to theoretical nascency: one cannot supersede preconceptions by conscious will. But such a notion of ideological (self-) consciousness nevertheless underscored what I understood to be my pedagogical purpose in teaching films, especially popular ones, in introductory film courses. I had confidence in the use-value of my readings of certain films according to my particular political agenda and in the importance of emphasizing those readings in the classroom. I discovered, though, that students had more problems with my interpretations of Hollywood films than they did with those of counter-cinema. What seemed clear to me and my colleagues was often mystifying to them, even though I understood my practice to be one of *demystification*. In other words, I consistently ran up against students' resistance to my "resistant" practice, and I could not comfortably or easily attribute their position to one of reactionary unself-consciousness. But neither was I willing to abandon *my* position, to accede the political importance of my reading in the face of their disagreement and assume a classroom model of happy "democratic" pluralism, with no interpretation taking precedence over others. So what to do?

One can acknowledge the polysemous quality of all fictional (and non-fictional) texts without having to relinquish the sense of a "preferred" reading. The question is: on what basis is one to argue for such a reading with respect to a given text? Here is where I think that the concept of a textual "grain" is a useful one and something which should be kept but reconfigured. For it acknowledges some kind of ground, however contingent,

from which one can proceed (which is not the same thing as ascribing to that ground a claim for its "truth"). In the feminist tradition of reading "against the grain" I see two major problems: a) the potential for "progressivity" is tied to a too-narrow conception of the textual "grain," which is determined to be a function of a combination of the formal characteristics, the genre, and the *auteur* of certain films; and b) the prioritization of sexual politics over or at the exclusion of other kinds of politics, all of which are addressable in any given film. With respect to the latter problem, I realize that one cannot address everything, that certain choices of inclusion and exclusion are inevitable and necessary. Nevertheless, I think it is important to consider a wide range of political possibilities when assessing the usefulness of characterizing any text as "progressive." And I think that *any* text can be considered "progressive" according to a resistant political agenda--not by simply its formal mechanisms of enunciation, or its genre, or its author, but through a practice of critical reading that theorizes its "grain" according to the specific social context or sphere in which the reading will be heard or read.

I think that contemporary film theory and criticism can learn much about the need for and importance of a more contingent theoretical practice of critical reading from the allied field of cultural studies, which has recently produced some compelling work that merges continental post-structuralism with an historically-materialist-based practice of political intervention. Cultural workers like Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, and Cornel West have written some extremely provocative essays which have been absolutely instrumental to my analysis of the shortcomings of the current model of filmic "resistance." In "The New Cultural Politics of Difference" Cornel West states that distinctive

features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize, and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing. Needless to say, these gestures are not new in the history of criticism or art, yet what makes them novel--along with the cultural politics they produce--is how and what constitutes difference, the weight and gravity it is given in

representation and the way in which highlighting issues like exterminism, empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, nature, and region at this historical moment acknowledges some discontinuity and disruption from previous forms of cultural critique. (19)

At a later point in the essay West outlines these “previous forms of cultural critique” as “Heideggerian *destruction* of the western metaphysical tradition, Derridean *deconstruction* of the western philosophical tradition, Rortian *demythologization* of the western intellectual tradition and Marxist, Foucaultian, feminist, anti-racist or anti-homophobic *demythification* of western cultural and artistic conventions” (30). All of these forms have their varying usefulnesses and weaknesses. Heidegger “forces one to understand philosophy’s representational discourses as thoroughly historical phenomena,” but he also “views history in terms of fate, heritage, and destiny” (30). Derridean deconstruction “focuses on the political power of rhetorical [binary] operations . . . showing how these operations sustain hierarchical world views by devaluing the second terms as something subsumed by the first.” But the major shortcoming of this deconstructive project (which I would extend to include the work of other post-structuralists like Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard) “is that it puts a premium on sophisticated ironic consciousness that tends to preclude and foreclose analyses that guide action with purpose” (30). So too with Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatism, which “provides descriptive mappings of the transient metaphors . . . that regulate some of the fundamental dynamics in the construction of self-descriptions dominant in highbrow European and American philosophy” but offers “no explanatory accounts for change and conflict” (30-31). And while I do not advocate the precise terms West uses to characterize his last mode of theoretical inquiry--“demythification” or “prophetic criticism”<sup>56</sup>--I do agree with him that it is by far the most politically useful in that it

tries to keep track of the complex dynamics of institutional and other related power structures in order to disclose options and alternatives for transformative praxis; it also attempts to grasp the way in which representational strategies are creative responses to novel circumstances and conditions. In this way, the central role of human agency (always enacted under circumstances not of one’s choosing)--be it in the critic, artist or constituency and audience--is accented. . . . It is partisan, partial, engaged and crisis-

centered, yet always keeps open a skeptical eye to avoid dogmatic traps, premature closures, formulaic formulations or rigid conclusions. (31)

This passage describes a cultural criticism that makes no qualms about its political agenda but at the same time resists following a rigid, predetermined model of reading. I would now like to put this fluid model of “Marxist, Foucaultian, feminist, anti-racist or anti-homophobic” critique into practice by offering a number of possible readings of three popular contemporary films that foreground notions of sexual or gender indeterminacy. I choose *Basic Instinct*, *The Crying Game*, and *Orlando* because they represent a range (from “high concept” Hollywood to feminist counter-cinema) of gender “crossover” films, currently very much in vogue, which take on the issue of identity politics as an explicit feature of their narratives. Insofar as these three films occupy a space between the mainstream and the avant-garde and represent a trend in sexual indeterminacy as both their narrative and selling points, I think they are useful to group together. I hope to demonstrate that different readings have different usefulnesses for a political criticism, and that the decisions one makes about how to read a film must be based on both a broad range of political concerns (beyond those of sexual politics) and the context for the reading. The analyses which follow are therefore tentative, partial, contestatory; it is my hope that they will be taken not as “true” or “correct” examples of a more encompassing politics of resistance, but as fragments, as notes towards a practice of contingent textual reading.

*“The director is European . . . He is one of the great filmmakers of the world. He has his own particular views on sensuality.”*

*--unnamed source* 57

*Basic Instinct* was a “controversial” film long before it was released in March of 1992. At least a year before that, articles were appearing in most of the country’s major newspapers and magazines reporting the film’s production “difficulties.” These problems all circulated around the film’s (initial) scripting and (later) depiction of female sexuality.

In late April of 1991, representatives for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) met with screenwriter Joe Eszterhas, director Paul Verhoeven, and producer Alan Marshall (along with other assorted Tri-Star and Carolco executives) to suggest script changes that they felt were necessary in order to make the film less homophobic (Fox, "S.F. Gays" A28). The activists were concerned about the script's representation of the homosexual community; two lesbian characters and one bisexual character were villains and murderers. One article reported that the groups wanted the character of the police detective "changed to a woman, and a scene which they describe[d] as 'date rape,' eliminated" (Fox and Rosenthal, "Gays Bashing" 12). Of course, these demands were rejected. In response, members of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation joined with GLAAD in San Francisco to march in protest on the movie shoot. The protesters chanted slogans and encouraged drivers-by to honk their horns in order to disrupt shooting; several activists were arrested for defying a court restraining order and getting too close to the shoot. Unsurprisingly, newspaper articles reported the events from the perspective of a beleaguered Carolco Pictures, losing thousands of dollars by the minute because of production delays; the activists were characterized as over-sensitive troublemakers. The homophobic tone of many of the articles written about the protests (the title of one, "Gays Bashing 'Basic Instinct,'" reversed the violence enacted on gays and lesbians for decades and made the activists into the bashers) reveals that GLAAD, ACT UP, and Queer Nation were more than justified in their criticisms.

Another strand of the film's "difficulties" concerned the much-publicized script battles between Eszterhas and Verhoeven and the latter's "problems" with film censors. Apparently, Eszterhas "understood" the import of the GLAAD members' protests over the script's characterizations of lesbians and rewrote much of the dialog and some whole scenes to accommodate their criticisms. Verhoeven rejected Eszterhas' revisions and continued shooting with the original script. The third much-publicized "problem" with the film, which occurred just before its release in March of 1992, was another battle of sorts,

this one regarding the film's rating. The ratings board initially rated the film X, then after further (grudging) cuts were made by Verhoeven changed it to NC-17, and, finally, to Restricted. The board was concerned more with the film's explicit nudity and lurid depictions of various (heterosexual) sex acts than it was by the violence enacted by/on lesbians or bisexuals in the film; Verhoeven was willing to make changes to accommodate *them*. After Los Angeles GLAAD members were "disinvited" to a press screening of the film in early March, GLAAD New York executive director Ellen Carton, who had seen a cut of the film, told the press that she felt the film reinforces stereotypes of lesbians-- "the thinking that women who love women want to kill men" (Fox, "Activists" F3). Upon the film's release the popular reviewers all seized on the "killer lesbian" angle and offered their opinions, many of which didn't really come out in the film's favor (most critics felt it was loud and overblown) but none of which agreed with GLB activists. Los Angeles Times critic Kenneth Turan's comments are representative: "But even though bisexual and lesbian characters do appear only in non-role models, 'Basic Instinct' feels more contemptuous of women in general than specifically anti-gay" ("Blood and Lust" 1). The film went on to considerable financial success and made its female lead, Sharon Stone, a star.

I offer this brief mainstream media history of the film to demonstrate how contentious the issue of sexual representation in this particular Hollywood blockbuster was. At first glance, the film would seem to be, according to the now outdated Cahiers formulation of the type (a) film, a rather seamless transmitter of (patriarchal/heterosexist) ideology--hence all of the protests by various gay, lesbian, and bisexual activist groups. But these groups' criticisms of the film are based on a fairly simplistic notion of representation: lesbian + murderer/villain = homophobia. A feminist film theory tradition would argue that a much more probing analysis of the film's (sexual) characterizations must be combined with analysis of their narrative positioning, the conventions of the genre, the (reputation of the) *auteur*, and the particularly formal enunciative properties of the film in order to determine the extent to which *Basic Instinct* is complicit with or resistant to

patriarchal ideology. And according to these academic film prerogatives, there is much to warrant calling this film a “progressive” text.

First, *genre/auteur*. *Basic Instinct* belongs to that group of films arising in the mid-1980s referred to by mainstream and academic critics alike as the neo-*noir*, neo-Hitchcockian sexual thriller. *Body Heat* (1981), a rather explicit remake of *Double Indemnity* (1948), is often considered to be the first filmic example of this nostalgic return to the sexual *noir* thrillers of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Others, such as *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Sea of Love* (1989), *Pacific Heights* (1990), *Internal Affairs* (1990), and *Unlawful Entry* (1992), as well as more recent examples of the merger between *noir* and melodrama much-analyzed by feminist film critics (i.e., *Gilda*, *Mildred Pierce*) like *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991), *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992), and *Poison Ivy* (1992), have enjoyed considerable popularity with the movie-going public. That these films by now constitute a distinct genre is evident in the recent Carl Reiner parody *Fatal Instinct* (1993): the film’s humor depends upon an awareness of the tropes of this particular type of sexual thriller. The casting of Michael Douglas as the male lead in *Basic Instinct* indicates a certain amount of assumed intertextual knowledge on the part of the public as well, his character “type” (impulsive; slightly unstable; sexy; masculine-but-preyed-upon by excessively unstable, sexually voracious women) having been established in the extremely popular *Fatal Attraction*.

The connections to forties and fifties *noir* and melodrama place these films quite firmly within the feminist film tradition of the “progressive” genre. Thus, the excessive misogyny, the extreme punishment accorded to the transgressive, (sexually) active, non-domesticated female, and the characterization of the male lead as an insufficient figure for audience sympathy are all indicators that the film is purportedly working “against the grain” of dominant cinema in a way that equally disturbing but less overtly patriarchal films of the period--paternity comedies like *Mr. Mom* (1983) and *Three Men and a Baby* (1987), romantic adventures like the Indiana Jones series and *Romancing the Stone* (1984), or

jingoistic, militaristic action films like *Rambo* (1985) and *Top Gun* (1986)--do not. The neo-Hitchcockian aspect of many of these "yuppie thrillers"<sup>58</sup> has been oft-cited by mainstream critics and reviewers as well, and would add to these films' "progressive" capital by dint of their connection to an *auteur* much-covered in feminist "against the grain" scholarship. The L.A. Times' Kenneth Turan, in his review of *Basic Instinct* entitled "Blood and Lust," drops a couple of off-handed references ("puny Hitchcock knockoff," Sharon Stone is Grace Kelly-like) that indicate a certain consensus among the mainstream reviewing press and their assumed audience, "the public," regarding the immediate recognizability of the comparison.

A case could be made for Paul Verhoeven as a "progressive" *auteur* as well. His European origin confers upon him a certain sophistication that not only mainstream audiences and critics but also many film scholars are quite eager to confirm. Indeed, almost all of the directors considered to be exemplary in their "against the grain" depiction of male-female relations were European expatriates working in Hollywood: Hitchcock, Tourneur, Sirk, Ophüls. An *auteurist* reading of Verhoeven's films would most likely delineate a continuity of male characters "haunted" by some past or by fantasies of the present centering on violence enacted either by or on them. The male leads in films like the Dutch *Soldier of Orange* (1979) and *The Fourth Man* (1979) and the Hollywood *Robocop* (1987), *Total Recall* (1990), and *Basic Instinct* all act from a sense of inadequacy that proceeds from a realm clearly demarcated as that of phantasy. The women in these films function either as the (redeemable) source of threat/desire for the male protagonist (*The Fourth Man*, *Total Recall*, *Basic Instinct*) or as props to support him on his quest for "justice" or "truth" (*Soldier of Orange*, *Robocop*, *Total Recall*). A "progressive" *auteurist* analysis, then, would delineate the particular ways Verhoeven's *oeuvre* foregrounds tensions between masculine desire for psychic "wholeness" and the psycho-sexual lack the male characters experience explicitly on their bodies or work through in the process of their epic quests to solve the "mystery" of active female desire.

Given my pedagogical interest in teaching, through popular film, critical reading skills to undergraduates, I do not intend to undertake such an *auteurist* analysis, even of Verhoeven's American films, which many students have seen. A strategy I *have* used in the past in teaching *Basic Instinct*, though, does involve *auteurism* at the intertextual level. I wish to backtrack to the Hitchcock comparison I pointed out earlier, for it seems to me that *Basic Instinct* (and *Total Recall*) align(s) with Hitchcock not only at a generic level but also at a more explicit "homage," even "remake," level. If a case could be made for *North by Northwest* as the source text for *Total Recall*, an even stronger one could be made for *Vertigo* and *Basic Instinct*. The latter pair of films shares several similarities in setting, narrative, scenes, characterization, and filmic style and form. Both *Vertigo* and *Basic Instinct* are set in San Francisco and the forested areas to the north. Both are investigative fictions into the nature of obsessive male desire. Both involve extensive male voyeuristic driving/tailing sequences and a "rescue" scene (failed in *Basic Instinct*) in which the male protagonist dives into the ocean/scrambles down a waterway to save a woman, followed by a fireside love scene. Both films offer split male and female characters: in terms of the male (Scotty/Nicky), "haunted" by (a) past death(s) and psychic instability; in terms of the females, literally divided as two different "types" (middle-class, stable-but-boring vs. upper-class, exciting and aloof--Midge/Madeleine, Beth/Catherine) and as one woman split by desire (Judy/Madeleine; Catherine and her mirror image Roxy; and in the case of all three of the *Basic Instinct* women, a psychotic bisexuality). In visual terms Verhoeven's film quotes a plethora of distinctive Hitchcock shots, including tell-tale views of the Golden Gate Bridge, high-angle shots down stairwells (in *Basic Instinct* these shots are clear quotations of a central motif in *Vertigo*), and the famous (male) optical POV tracking shot. Even the soundtrack of *Basic Instinct* bears a striking resemblance to Bernard Herrmann's famous soundtrack music for *Vertigo*.

I sketch this brief compendium of intertextuality to suggest how readily *Basic Instinct* offers itself up for a "progressive" Hitchcockian reading. As a film proceeding

from a Hollywood base of production/distribution, an “against the grain” analysis of the film is an entirely appropriate strategy for a politically invested film critic/instructor to take, given the particularities of the film’s narrative and character concerns and the weight of such a feminist tradition in film studies. And it is precisely the approach I *have* taken to teaching the film in the past. One strategy is to screen *Vertigo* and *Basic Instinct* back-to-back, assign (or crib in a lecture) some general and specific psychoanalytic feminist essays (Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure,” Modleski’s chapter on *Vertigo* in The Women Who Knew Too Much, etc.), and center discussion on the ways in which *Basic Instinct* reworks *Vertigo* as a narrative about male lack and its violent projection onto women, how it overarchingly attempts (and ultimately fails) to consolidate wayward female desire (bisexual, in the case of *Basic Instinct*) into normative, domesticated heterosexuality. Another strategy is to screen only *Basic Instinct*, assign (or crib) the general feminist readings, and proceed from there. In both cases, my understanding of the films’ “progressiveness” depends less upon a shared belief in conscious authorial intent than it does upon a practice of critical reading that resists the film’s normative narrative by refusing to identify with the obsessive male protagonist’s point of view and by emphasizing the violence enacted upon the women, literally and figuratively (i.e., in the male lead’s simultaneous partaking of the pleasures of “dangerous” femininity--“the fuck of the century”--and fulfillment of the prescriptions of patriarchal law to bring such femininity into domestic accord--“fuck like minks, raise rug rats, and live happily after”).

An “against the grain” reading of *Basic Instinct* could follow many possible routes of inquiry. A classic “resistant” approach would be to destabilize any notion of consistent male point of view as it is embodied in Nick Curran’s (lack of) vision. I have, for example, begun with the opening credit sequence (for *Vertigo* as well) and offered a reading of the constant play of light and shadow over a crystalline, translucent, multi-faceted surface as a metaphor for the inability of the film to maintain a consistent point of view that provides a stable meaning for its object of investigation--in the case of the

narrative, the ice-pick murderer. The frequent optical POV shots through mediating technologies of some sort (the infra-red goggles that allow us to see the cum stains all over Johnny Boz's bed, Catherine's lie-detector test on a video monitor, the mainframe computer investigatory procedures, etc.) can be analyzed to demonstrate how our vision is aligned with Nick's, but it is a limited and contradictory one. By concentrating on key scenes in class, I have examined how certain shot structures imply a whole host of possible scenarios that the film forecloses on insufficiently by the end of the film in order to resolve them into a patriarchal master narrative. Take, for one, the round-table scene near the beginning of the film in which the professional male psychiatrist (who teaches "the pathology of psychopathic behavior" at Stanford) expounds his theory regarding the two possible murderers: Catherine Tramell, who wrote the novel and acted out the ice-pick murder in ritual fashion; or a deranged fan/enemy who committed the murder in order to incriminate Tramell. A shot-by-shot analysis of this scene reveals a series of looks between Nick, Beth, and Lamont which, through silent extreme close-ups following certain pieces of dialog, suggest either Beth or Nick could be the murderer, with the scales tipping toward to Nick.

Nick [*CU, camera outside of frame left*]: "So what if it's not the writer, what if it's someone who read the book?" [*He looks out of frame left*]

[*Cut to: XCU of Beth, looking out of the corner of her eye screen right (at Nick), a blank expression on her face*]

[*Cut to: CU of*] Dr. Lamont: "You're dealing with someone so obsessed, that he, or she, is willing to kill an irrelevant and innocent victim in order to place the blame on the person who wrote that book. I'm talking about a deep-seated obsessional hatred, and an utter lack of respect for human life."

[*Cut to: CU of Nick who nods, looks down at his notepad, jots something down*]

[*Cut to: Medium 2-shot of Gus on screen left foreground, Lamont on screen right mid-ground, camera over Gus's shoulder*]

Gus: "So we got a once-in-a-lifetime, top-of-the-line loony tune either way you cut it, right Doc?"

[*Cut to: MCU of Gus, straight on, as he finishes the question*]

[*Cut to: XCU of*] Lamont: "You're dealing with someone very dangerous. . . and very ill."

[*He looks from screen left (Gus) to screen right as he pointedly says the last three words*]

[*Cut to: XCU of Nick, who looks up from his notepad and looks in Lamont's direction, almost into the camera*]

From a purely formal perspective there is much in this scene and the film as a whole to suggest that Nick is the "real" murderer (not only of the tourists a few years back but even of Johnny Boz), that he is a cop because he loves to kill and it provides him with the perfect alibi--accidental shooting in the line of duty. Indeed, Tramell says as much at several points throughout the film, Nick hints that he lied to pass a lie-detector test, etc.

It is not a stretch in an "against the grain" analysis to read the film as an elaborate playing out of Nick's deep-seated lack regarding his separation from his mother/wife, who called him the boyish "Nicky" and committed suicide because of his killer pathology. Nick's obsession with Tramell is really an obsession with himself, insofar as her interest in him is based on his psychological "depth" as the psychopath for her next book. Beth Garner, then, becomes the scapegoat, the figure on whom Nick displaces his guilt by "proving" hers and then killing her. His increasing moves towards stability and resolution, "solving" the murder, entail the projection of his split subjectivity onto Beth, so that she is revealed to have two names (with her other name being further split, between Lisa Oberman/ Hoberman), a lesbian past, a dead husband, a propensity to change her hair color, etc. In a contrapuntal fashion Catherine becomes *less* duplicitous: she too has two names, but her first name, unlike Beth/Lisa, remains consistent for both of her surnames (Tramell/Woolf); her lesbian lover/double Roxy is killed off; she shows less and less sexual interest in women and more and more in Nick. By the end, then, with Beth killed, the murders solved, and Nick and Catherine happily frolicking in bed, Nick has worked through his sense of lack by displacing it onto the seemingly "good" woman--a perfect alibi for his own psychotic behavior, insofar as there is no secret to it, therefore he simply is not a suspect because he's so transparent. The final scene, then--in which Catherine leans over the side of the bed and leaps into Nick's arms, followed by a short fade out/fade in, then a tilt down to under the bed (mirroring the opening of the film) to reveal an ice-pick--may be read not as an indication that Catherine was the murderer all along (the dominant reading) but that *Nick* was: after all, *he* has an ice-pick too, and they *are* in his bed.

In short, *Basic Instinct* may be read quite easily along “against the grain” guidelines. The benefits of such a reading are many. In arguing that the film’s investigative fiction is a wish-fulfillment on the part of an insufficient and unappealing masculine subject as the basis for knowledge and vision, one can demonstrate how *all* Hollywood films assume the same trope without, perhaps, providing as many “rupture” opportunities to deconstruct a model of stable male vision. One could, too, emphasize that what “stays” with the viewer is not Nick triumphing over Catherine, who is reduced to little more than a heterosexual girlfriend by the end of the film, but the scenes in which Catherine is powerful, in control, and lesbian or bisexual--thus overturning a monolithic reading of the film as simply homophobic or anti-feminist in favor of a more complex analysis which deconstructs the stabilities upon which such fixative statements of “truth” base themselves. In short, *Basic Instinct* may be read as a “progressive” text in that it takes to a point of ironic and, ultimately, unbelievable excess the economy of patriarchal heterosexuality which underpins *all* Hollywood films, albeit in differing ways.

For a film scholar aware of many of the claims made by feminist film critics and theorists over the last fifteen years, the terms of such an argument are quite recognizable. And I think that the argument “works” very well with a text like *Basic Instinct* or others of its genre. But what happens in an undergraduate classroom situation when an “against the grain” reading like this is proffered in reference to a popular film? By and large, I have found “resistant” analyses of popular films to be often counter-productive for my particular political agenda. It is not that students are unable to grasp the concepts or understand the various ways in which intertextuality may be read. On the contrary, I have found that they pick up on the latter point especially well, but in a way which swerves interest away from demonstrating iconic and enunciative continuity among a range of Hollywood texts across a tradition/genre, towards a more celebratory *auteurism* which re-inscribes the director of the film within a pantheon of exemplary artists. The similarities between *Basic Instinct* and *Vertigo*, then, are understood as evidence of Verhoeven’s cinematic knowledge of classical

Hollywood films, and his ability to work Hitchcockian tropes into a “contemporary” narrative demonstrates both his versatility and creativity--a true “postmodern.” What happens, then, is that *Basic Instinct* is not taken as “symptom” of a larger structure, more “readable” because more excessive, but simply as an “exceptional” film along what most politically invested film theorists would consider a conservative, archaic, Romantic trajectory of value. Any “progressivity” I tried to draw out of reading the film “against the grain” was read back into the film’s immanent structure and Verhoeven’s individual intentions (“he had to fight to make the film the way he wanted--and he was right to!”) in a manner I found disheartening and upsetting. “The director is European . . . He is one of the great filmmakers of the world. He has his own particular views on sensuality.”

A further problem with an “against the grain” reading of *Basic Instinct* is that it ignores (and even belittles) the criticisms leveled at the film by gay, lesbian, and bisexual groups during the film’s production and distribution history that I outlined at the beginning of this section. Among this particular group of activists and concerns, the consensus was that the film was irredeemably heterosexist and homophobic. Are these groups simply unsophisticated, naive, or even wrong in their evaluation? Admittedly, their opinion is based on, by academic film standards, a rather simplistic notion of representation that grounds characterization in narrative context in the most rudimentary of ways. But in arguing for a more sophisticated analytical method, a film scholar creates a hierarchy of value that reduces “with the grain” readings of films like *Basic Instinct*, which is so “obviously” aware of the conventions of the genre it is taking to an extreme point of logic, to the realm of “popular opinion.” A divide between political theory in the academy and practice “in the trenches” thus opens up, widening the gulf between the role of the intellectual and that of the activist, with the former remaining above it all because s/he is able to “explain” the place of both positions.

I would argue that a reconsideration of the use-value of “against the grain” readings of popular texts labeled as “progressive” in general is necessary. The effects of such a

reading on a classroom of eager students untrained in the intricacies of post-structuralist theory (especially semiotics and psychoanalysis) are either complete mystification or, more annoyingly, deification. According to my “reconfiguration” of critical reading strategies, a “progressive” reading would be one that takes account of not only the specific discursive context but also the popular/critical one as important in establishing the film’s “grain.” In the case of *Basic Instinct*, I am convinced that a “with the grain” reading of the film is a more useful political strategy than an “against the grain” one, no matter how much the film seems to warrant the latter. In fact, it seems to me that the film *too* easily falls into the “progressive” film/genre category, that the points of rupture and excess so central to an “against the grain” reading are in point of fact a feature of not only this film and others in its genre, but a growing number of Hollywood films on the whole. The intertextual “awareness” of a film like *Basic Instinct*, I think, lures a “sophisticated” academic film viewer into its own “irony,” saying: “We all know that this is, on the surface, exploitative, misogynistic, homophobic. But the characters are so repulsive, and the Hitchcock intertext so overt, that you needn’t take the film’s representations of women, lesbians, etc. too seriously. Take pleasure in that knowledge, and read me as ‘progressively’ as you do yourself.”

To sum up, I think a film like *Basic Instinct* “nudges” its audience about its own assumed sophistication. A progressive political strategy, then, would be to resist such a lure and read the film “naively,” to simply point at certain characterizations, scenes, and dialog as oppressive, and leave it at that. Or to table the protests of groups like GLAAD, ACT UP, and Queer Nation as valid critical responses and open up a general dialog with students regarding gay and lesbian representation in popular Hollywood film. Such a strategy may seem monolithic and heavy-handed, a return to the misrepresentation/“true” representation binarism of essentialist feminism. But I think in certain discursive situations that’s a risk a politically invested film teacher must take. In the case of *Basic Instinct*, I have come to the conclusion that such a strategy is in fact more useful, more resistant, than

a deconstructive, “against the grain” reading, not only because of the students’ tendency to consider such an analysis as proof of the film’s depth of meaning and profundity but also because of the teacher’s (my) tendency to respond to a text like this in an almost prescribed manner--to avoid, in other words, what Cornel West calls “dogmatic traps, premature closures, formulaic formulations and rigid conclusions.”

“[The Crying Game is] a love story in the broadest possible sense. . . It’s about the extremes of love, and how two characters find a way to love each other who are divided by so many things.”

--Neil Jordan 59

If my comments about *Basic Instinct* proceed from what I think is the “dogmatic trap” of reading a certain type of Hollywood film, in a classroom situation, “against the grain,” my discussion of *The Crying Game* which follows is driven by a different (but not opposite) concern: the critical penchant of academic film critics to read a filmic example of (feminist) counter-cinema “with the grain” in order to reveal its politically progressive deconstruction of essentialist precepts, especially those regarding sexual difference. I have yet to teach *The Crying Game* in a classroom situation, but I have talked and argued about the film *ad infinitum* with numerous friends and colleagues who all consider themselves politically left of center, who (like me) feel they are “progressive,” “reconstructed,” or whatever. What quickly disturbed me about almost all of our discussions about the film was how concentrated the focus of attention seemed to be, how willing we were to take the film’s marketing campaign (“don’t give away the secret!”) to heart--how, basically, we turned the film into precisely what it asked us to: “a spectacle of the appendage.”<sup>60</sup>

The danger here, a danger I would argue is indissoluble from the text’s grain, is that the film was at the same time heralded as “important” or “ground-breaking” and excessively *not* talked about. What was constituted as the center of the film, its *raison d’être*--the “revelation” scene in which Fergus/Jimmy (and, as the promotional/critical

campaign would have it, the viewer) finds out that Dil is “really a man”--became that which could not be discussed until everyone present in any given conversation had seen the film.<sup>61</sup> That point of uniform viewership, of course, rarely occurred, which left only the “peripheral” issues of the film as suitable conversational material to “set the film up” for those who had yet to see it. Rarely have I encountered a film with wide distribution that so completely defined its “grain” for both the mainstream liberal *and* the more “radical” academic crowd, the latter group seeing its concerns about deconstructing binaries of sexual/political identity ostensibly mirrored by the film. Although *The Crying Game* could hardly be characterized as counter-cinema (formally, the film is very conservative), it succeeded in achieving something approximating that status among many feminist-oriented film academicians. It was, in short, read “with the grain.”

I am basing this assessment of the academic reaction to *The Crying Game* largely on what I have perceived to be the critical “buzz” surrounding the film--I cannot prove it with material examples, i.e., essays. But considering how closely that academic reaction accorded with more mainstream criticism, a brief evaluation of contemporary newspaper reviews may suffice to set the terms of the film’s “grain” more clearly. One of the most interesting aspects of *The Crying Game* is how quickly it was picked up by American audiences: while not exactly ignored in the UK, the film has enjoyed nowhere near the popularity in Britain that it has in the U.S.<sup>62</sup> In fact, the first article I have been able to find on the film comes from a Vincent Canby review of its premiere at the New York Film Festival. The title of Canby’s review, “An Irish Terrorist in Human Terms,” pretty much defines the “grain” of *The Crying Game*, insofar as the political and the humanist appear as opposed terms, with the latter superseding the former. (The assumption that an Irish terrorist is somehow *not* human in the first place is integral to an understanding of my reading-to-come). “Politics” forms the backdrop upon which the “real” romantic narrative is based. The most salient words in all of the reviews are therefore ones I would consider prototypically humanist: love, emotion, romance, human.

When the film's subplots, all of which are germane, are stripped away, "The Crying Game" becomes a tale of love that couldn't be but proudly is, although even this love could be a substitute for another love that never was. . . . The film's penultimate sequence is as bloody and brutal as the extended opening sequences set in Northern Ireland, as Fergus, assigned to guard an I.R.A. hostage, first begins to understand "the war" in human terms. (Canby, 26 Sept. 1992)

The least said about "The Crying Game" the better. Not that it has any serious problems. . . . Suspenseful and emotionally complex, skillfully mixing politics with affairs of the heart. (Turan, 25 Nov. 1992)

What makes the film startling, according to numerous critics, is not only its unexpected twists of plot--including one total surprise, which audiences have generally kept to themselves--but its exploration of the blurred nature of love, trust and compassion and the unpredictability of human emotion. (Weinraub, 19 Jan. 1993)

In the first part of the film, an Irish Republican Army member named Fergus (Stephen Rea) guards and befriends a kidnapped prisoner named Jody (Forest Whitaker). In the second part, Fergus goes to London and looks up Jody's lover Dil (Jaye Davidson). Inevitably, Fergus and Dil fall for each other. The secret is Dil's, and it changes "The Crying Game" from a story of politics, friendship and love into a study of language, sexual attraction and romantic illusion, not to mention the power of suggestion. (James, 31 Jan. 1993)

The first forty minutes of the film, which are set in Ireland and introduce major characters as embedded in divisive political positions, are thus quite consistently characterized as expository, as "extended opening sequences." Irish Republican and British colonial politics are "subplots," "germane" but thankfully "stripped away" (like Dil's robe) to reveal through a central "twist" of the plot a tale of impossible love.

There is, of course, great richness in the "love story" of *The Crying Game*, although I would argue for taking the "could" out of Canby's statement and claiming that the main romance of the film *is* between Fergus and Jody, not Fergus/Jimmy and Dil. What is interesting about the critics' universal agreement concerning the centrality of the Dil character as a medium for Fergus/Jimmy's realization of his true human (as opposed to political) nature is how closely it accords with director Neil Jordan's ideas about the film. In interview after interview Jordan downplays the political in favor of the personal, turns conflict into "understanding" and "love." What I find amazing is how the most vague,

banal, cliché-ridden phrases take on, when used to describe a film marketed as having an exciting sexual/textual “secret,” all the earmarks of incisive commentary and confer upon Jordan cutting-edge, politically challenging status--a status he has not enjoyed in film culture since 1986, when he released a film often compared to *The Crying Game*.

*Mona Lisa* bears a number of striking resemblances to *The Crying Game*, resemblances that many critics of the later film (and Jordan himself) have mentioned. The London Times reviewer Geoff Brown calls *The Crying Game* Jordan’s “best film since *Mona Lisa*”; The New York Times’ Caryn James argues that *Mona Lisa* is a much stronger film than Jordan’s latest effort, which relies too much on the “clever gimmickry” of its “secret”; Cineaste contributor David Lugowski argues at length that *The Crying Game* is not as “unconventional” as it purports to be, that like *Mona Lisa* “it is a neo-film noir named after a popular song from several decades back, dealing in a fairly conventional visual and narrative style with sexual obsession” (31). Although they may disagree about which film is “better,” all of these writers take *Mona Lisa* as a locus for talking about Jordan’s career. I think a comparison between the two films is warranted, but I would shift the terms of debate away from comparisons of value or continuities about “love” towards the (gendered, racial) character economies which underpin both films. Here is Jordan in the introduction to the publication of the *Mona Lisa* screenplay:

The attraction of it was that it could become a love story, a contemporary moral tale with two characters so far apart, but so inherently likable that an audience might empathize, understand each point of view, feel the depth of their misplaced passion, and yet know from the start how impossible it was. . . . The script floated . . . until the central character, George, was cast. George had to be the emblem, the utterly ordinary contemporary hero, the mug who is lost in a maze of guile, the big heart with the slow brain, the one with the child’s eyes, the one who believes too much. (v)

Could this not be a description of *The Crying Game*, with Fergus/Jimmy taking the place of George? The continuity between the two films, I would argue, lies in the intended centrality of the “everyman” character as the focus for viewer identification--hence *The Crying Game*’s marketing campaign, which assumes we are to be as shocked (and

subsequently sensitive) as Fergus/Jimmy when he/we discovers Dil is a "man." What this means in terms of the film's racial and sexual "progressiveness," its overturning of "conventional" stereotypes and expectations, is an assumed straight white male viewer as the audience.

Such a conclusion would challenge the dominant view of the film (and Jordan) as a breakthrough in popular filmic representations of sexuality and desire. Not only is *The Crying Game*, in my opinion, based on a racist and heterosexist economy, but it also veils that economy by using explicitly "progressive" material signifiers of race, class, and gender (and nationality) as the means to an ultimately humanist project which erases the very importance of those signifiers. In other words, I think that an "against the grain" reading of *The Crying Game* reveals that its foregrounding of particular identity politics is nowhere near as "progressive" as the enthusiastic reception of the film by all sorts of critical viewers would seem to imply. What I propose is a resistant reading of the film that would use not only the paradigms of the feminist "against the grain" tradition (*auteur*, *genre*) in such a way as to reveal the film as ultimately *conservative* in terms of "new" politics (sexual difference, gender, sexual orientation,<sup>63</sup> race) but also a reincorporation of the "old" politics (critiques of class, bourgeois ideology, nationalism, colonialism) evacuated by psychoanalytic film feminism in the shift from Althusser to Lacan in the mid-1970s. Insofar as I see *The Crying Game* as representative of a new type of "crossover" art film that takes as its narrative impetus the issues of the last fifteen years of feminist film theory--the deconstruction of stable notions of sexual identity--I think that an "against the grain" reading of the film will be ultimately productive: it will demonstrate the importance of a broader base of political intervention necessary for those wishing to employ strategies of critical reading in the service of progressive social change.

Under Jordan's bio in the Miramax press kit for *The Crying Game*, reviewers are told that the film "is part love story, part confrontation of one's own destiny. 'It deals with real life or death issues, with people at the most extreme edges of a political situation,' says

Jordan. 'Like *Mona Lisa*, it deals with race and sexuality and love. But it goes much deeper.'" Just how much "deeper" it goes, and what "depth" is supposed to mean in the first place, is certainly open to question. Because Jordan's humanist ideas about *The Crying Game* are so integral to what I would consider the film's "grain," I would like to spend a little time examining his particular directorial status and the shifts his career has undergone narratively and nationally. In this sense, my brief analysis of Jordan is in many ways standard *auteurist* criticism; but it is of a type and focus that I think rubs "against the grain" of the discourses surrounding and defining both him and *The Crying Game*.

Neil Jordan was born in Sligo, northwest Ireland, in 1951. He first made his name through a collection of short stories entitled Night in Tunisia. He had aspirations to attend the National Film School in London but could not afford it. However, after proving he could write good dialog, Jordan was commissioned to write television scripts. He began his career in film in 1981 as a creative consultant on John Boorman's *Excalibur* (shot at Ardmore), during which time he made a documentary about the production of the film. Jordan wrote and directed his feature film debut, *Angel* (U.S. title: *Danny Boy*) the following year, with twenty percent financing from the Irish Film Board and eighty percent from Britain's Channel Four Television (McIlroy, World Cinema 4: Ireland 65). After *Danny Boy*, Jordan moved to London and began making films in the British film industry; for all intents and purposes, he has had very little to do with the Irish film industry since, although he is currently its most famous contemporary director.<sup>64</sup> His next film, *The Company of Wolves* (1984), was adapted from a story by British feminist Angela Carter and shot at the Shepperton Studios. *Mona Lisa* followed in 1986. His third feature film won a Golden Globe, an LA Critics' Award, and a Best Screenplay nomination from the Writer's Guild of America; Bob Hoskins received Best Actor awards from Cannes and the National Society of Film Critics, as well as an Academy Award nomination. Jordan's next two films were comedies poorly received by both the critics and the mainstream viewing public: *High Spirits* (1987), a British/American co-production set in a stereotypical Irish

castle; and *We're No Angels* (1989), Jordan's first (and, so far, last) completely American production. His next-to-most-recent film was *The Miracle* (1991), another "impossible romance" between a naive young man and a worldly woman; it was shot in Bray, Dublin, and Ardmore studios by the British Promenade productions. *The Crying Game* was shot in South Armagh, East London, and Belgravia, and was produced by the London-based Palace pictures.

I do not intend to go through this list of films in order to establish an *auteurist* reading of Jordan's particular filmic concerns or obsessions. I do wish, though, to emphasize the financing and production support underpinning his output as a director. Although four of Jordan's seven feature films were (at least partially) shot in Ireland, none of them could be considered a wholly indigenous Irish film. One can see in the production history of Jordan's career a prominent "exile" trajectory, with movements away from Ireland to first Britain and then America, interspersed with brief forays back. The consistent oscillation is between Ireland and London, precisely the movement of the Fergus/Jimmy character in *The Crying Game*.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, in the press kit for that film Jordan speaks of his strong identification with that character and his sense of national displacement:

The London of *The Crying Game* is entirely based on my memories of it as a working Paddy's city when I first came here, 17 or 18 years ago. . . . The building site, the hostel, the stiff, country-lads suits that Fergus wears . . . it was a pleasure for me to do those scenes, because they were real for me. At least, they were the reality for Irish people back in those days.

The trip "across the water" is a common one for the Irish to make--especially for those out of work in their own country because of British colonialism. (Dublin, for example, was the poorest city in the western world at the turn of the century.) Given the paucity of funding available in Ireland to Irish filmmakers and the lack of a strong filmic tradition, such a move to Britain should not necessarily be understood as a betrayal of Irish roots, etc. One need only look at the number of British directors who vacated Great Britain for the technical expertise, larger budgets, and stronger world presence of the Hollywood

feature film business in order to see how Britain's filmic resources are by no means mainlined into the feature film market: Alfred Hitchcock, Alexander Korda, Michael Apted, Ronald Neame, Carol Reed, John Schlesinger, Peter Yates, Michael Winner, Ken Russell, John Boorman; and, roughly contemporary with Jordan, Alan Parker, Ridley Scott, Hugh Hudson, Stephen Frears, Tony Scott. And the films that Jordan did make in Britain or with British money--*Angel*, *The Company of Wolves*, *Mona Lisa*, *The Miracle*, *The Crying Game*--can hardly be considered big-budget "sellouts." Given the polarization between what Thomas Elsaesser has delineated as the "official" and the "unofficial" cinema around which British cinema has frequently functioned, Jordan's films definitely fall in the latter category. If the "official" cinema rests upon every mythic or clichéd image of Britain, the "unofficial" cinema offers often unsettling counter clichés.

On one side: home counties, country house, public school, sports, white flannel, rules, and games; Edwardian England, Decline of the Empire, Privilege, and Treason; male bonding, female hysteria. On the side of the countermyth: Scotland, Liverpool, London; dockland, clubland, disco, football, punk, race riots, National Front; working-class males, violent and articulate; working-class women, sexy and confident. (Elsaesser 65, 67)

There is much to suggest, then, that Jordan retained a critical edge to his host country when he moved there, insofar as he did not seamlessly channel himself into the "official" stream of British filmmaking that enjoyed considerable popularity among American audiences during the 1980s: *Chariots of Fire* (1981), *Gandhi* (1982), and the countless Merchant-Ivory adaptations of E. M. Forster, which continue to draw big box office.

Having stated this, I would still argue that Jordan is more a British filmmaker than an Irish one--his allegiances have always been towards filmmaking on an international rather than a local scale, and his willingness to make some rather controversial (read: politically expedient) career choices for his "art" have entailed his ostracization from the Irish independent filmmaking community. For at precisely the same time that Jordan was beginning his film career, a number of Irish filmmakers were making films that critically engaged both the social and filmic discourses in Ireland. Bob Quinn's *Poitin* (1978), for example, implicitly challenged the highly romanticized, Robert Flaherty image of Ireland as

a place of primal dignity where man does noble battle with the elements and attains magnanimity through his suffering (for a recent filmic example of this “elemental” view of Ireland, see Jim Sheridan’s 1990 film *The Field* ). Other indigenous filmmakers and films that refused the lure of both the British film community and its tradition of romanticizing the “unspoiled beauty” of a country it forcibly kept pre-industrial through centuries of colonialism include: Kieran Hickey’s *Exposure* (1978), Tommy McArdle’s *The Kinkisha* (1978), Joe Comerford’s *Down the Corner* (1978), Neville Presho’s *Desecration* (1981), Pat Murphy and John Davies’ *Maeve* (1981), Robert Wynne-Simmons *The Outcasts* (1982), Bill Miskelly’s *The Schooner* (1983), Cathal Black’s *Pigs* (1984), and Pat Murphy’s *Anne Devlin* (1984). The breakthrough which spurred on this wave of critical indigenous production is often considered to be Bob Quinn’s *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire* (Lament for Art O’Leary, 1975), a film sponsored by the Official Sinn Féin (now The Worker’s Party) and the first independently-produced film in the Irish language (Rockett et al. 137). I do not wish to examine any of these films at length; rather, I list them to demonstrate the presence of a growing community of Irish filmmakers who chose to engage with the dominant international view of Ireland by bringing to the fore alternative versions of Irish history and society and an interaction with contemporary political issues.<sup>66</sup>

If further proof of Jordan’s Britishness is necessary, consider the controversy that arose out of the production of his first feature film, *Angel*. Ardmore studios was built in the 1950s with financial aid from the Department of Industry and Commerce; it remains Ireland’s only permanent film studio. Largely planned and staffed by English personnel from its inception, Ardmore has experienced financial difficulties for its entire history. Of interest to the present discussion was its purchase for a reported \$800,000 by the Irish government in 1973 (Slide 31). In 1975, the Minister for Industry and Commerce Justin Keating renamed Ardmore the National Film Studios of Ireland (NFSI) and appointed a board with the English director John Boorman as president. Boorman’s chairmanship was

heavily criticized by several Irish film commentators, and the Association of Independent Producers of Ireland (AIP) fought Boorman as an outsider who had tried to gain control of the financing of Irish film production (Slide 31). With accumulated losses approaching unacceptable levels, the NFSI was put into receivership in April 1982, at which time Boorman resigned. But during his tenure Boorman was able to finance a film of his own that had nothing whatsoever to do with Ireland--*Excalibur*--and a documentary about the making of his film, directed by Jordan. The Boorman/Jordan connection continued into 1981 when Boorman pushed through the decision to allocate half of the NFSI's £200,000 annual budget to Jordan's *Angel*.

The controversy arose from the fact that Film Board member, John Boorman, was the film's executive producer, a director of the film's production company, the Motion Picture Company of Ireland, and while Neil Jordan was already established as a short story writer and novelist his only previous film was a documentary about the making of Boorman's *Excalibur*. Additional resentment was felt by independent film-makers when it became clear that *Angel* was the only project to be allocated funds in 1981. . . . The issue forcefully entered the public domain at the Third International Festival of Film and Television in the Celtic Countries, which was held in Wexford from 18 March to 2 April 1982, when the attending delegates, press and film-makers were invited to a screening of *Angel*. A meeting of the Association of Independent Producers was called to coincide with the screenings as a means of registering the AIP's disapproval of the manner of its Irish financing. This act, which in retrospect some would concede was politically inappropriate, left deep scars which have resurfaced on numerous occasions since. The matter was fuelled by some injudicious comments at the time and since by both Jordan and Boorman.

(Rockett et al. 119)

In considering the ways in which many of Jordan's films, especially *Mona Lisa* and *The Crying Game*, parallel and romanticize his own "exile" trajectory through the movement to England of its male protagonists, I would read that exiling as self-imposed and financially expeditious for Jordan from the start. In emphasizing the production history subtending the beginning of Jordan's career, I am arguing for considering him as a filmmaker firmly invested in British as opposed to Irish film culture, with all that entails for reading his films that deal with "the troubles." I wish, then, to contextualize *The Crying Game* within the tradition of the British-made IRA film rather than within an indigenous

Irish "sensibility" that many American critics have attributed to it by dint of Jordan's Irish birth, his Catholic background, etc. For I think that *The Crying Game* wholeheartedly supports British colonialism and cultural imperialism, and does so by foregrounding humanist romance as a corrective to radical political struggle, or "terrorist violence."

"There has never been any shortage of representations of Ireland and the Irish on the cinema screen." So states John Hill at the beginning of "Images of Violence," his chapter contribution to the collaboratively written Cinema and Ireland. Hill goes on to mention what all other writers on the cinema of Ireland have remarked:

The source of these images, however, have rarely been Ireland itself. In the absence of any sustained output from an indigenous Irish film industry, it has been the cinemas of Britain and the United States of America which have been responsible for the vast majority of films to have dealt with Ireland and the Irish. What these cinemas have provided, of course, is not simply a vast quantity of films but also ways of looking at their subject. To take a broad, if schematic, overview, two main sets of images have predominated. On the one hand, Ireland has been conceived as a simple, and generally blissful, rural idyll; on the other, as a primarily dark and strife-torn maelstrom. (147)

The latter category, which frequently characterizes the Irish as unable to accommodate to the standards of reason and order necessary for a modern or "civilized" society, encompasses what I would consider the genre of the British-made IRA film. Given Britain's direct legacy of military and political involvement in Ireland, this darker and more brooding vision of Ireland is one that normalizes, even celebrates, the history of British colonialism through personalized narratives in which Irish nationalists must reconsider their violent terrorist activities, realize their guilt, and become properly submissive colonial subjects. The genre has a long tradition, beginning perhaps with Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* (1947) and continuing through to the present. *Odd Man Out* is the story of Johnny (James Mason), an IRA leader on the run. Johnny is repeatedly figured in the film as a victim of his own environment, enclosed and entrapped by the very Irish people for whom he fights. The tragic structure of the film emphasizes the contrast between a commitment to violent political activity on the one hand, and conventional family life on the other; of course,

investment in the former precludes any notion of stability in the latter. "The individualising logic of both narrative and realism necessarily favours the private and the personal at the expense of the public and the political" (Rockett et al. 155).

This opposition between the personal and the political is embedded in this genre in an opposition between Britain and Ireland, foregrounded usually in a romance between an IRA soldier and a British woman. Films which follow this pattern include: *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959), *A Terrible Beauty* (1960), *The Violent Enemy* (1969), and *Hennessy* (1975). In all of these films the male protagonist, a young Provisional, eventually denounces the futility of national struggle and its attendant violence and gives voice to an alternative set of values: the virtues of domestic security and "decency." Political involvement either stands apart from or outright destroys these humanist values. The key to this genre's normalizing function is to characterize not the entire Irish people as fanatics, only those who are members of the IRA--save one. This "sensitive" Irish male chooses love over "the cause" and, more often than not, ends up in England where he is finally able to find peace. Sometimes, as in *Captain Boycott* (1947), *The Gentle Gunman* (1952), or *Cal* (1983),<sup>67</sup> the unwilling "volunteer" reassesses his involvement in the IRA through his involvement with a long-suffering Irish woman who has lost a husband due to "the troubles." But these cases demonstrate even more clearly how it is the Irish and not the British who must question their propensity for violence and acknowledge their responsibility for the misery it causes.

The humanist romance narrative underpinning the British-made IRA film, then, is one that represses history and politics as violent, even pathological, and offers in its place a more humanist message of "love" and "understanding." The foreclosure of a traditional notion of the political in favor of the personal is by no means limited to this genre of film, or even to film in the first place. Such a shift is one that I have argued in the previous chapter occurred within the field of academic film study in the mid-1970s. Indeed, "the personal is the political" has been a famous dictum of deconstructive academic feminism for

the past twenty years, and I think its progressivity must be assessed when it is taken to heart in a film which seems to follow its directives as closely as does *The Crying Game*. And by using the standardized modes of “against the grain” practice with respect to this film, I hope to have demonstrated how *The Crying Game*’s utterly conventional representation of Irish political struggle must be included in a feminist analysis of its sexual representations as well: to separate the two as mutually exclusive is to buy into a dangerous logic of exclusion. The politics of gender and sexuality need not be considered as somehow more important than those of history or nationalism, nor does Marxist analysis necessarily subsume feminism under its political umbrella. This issue is one that R. Radhakrishnan pursues in “Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity,” an essay in which he poses a number of general but important questions:

Is it inevitable that one of these politics must form the horizon for the other, or is it possible that the very notion of a containing horizon is quite beside the point? Can any horizon be “pregiven” in such an absolute and transcendent way? Isn’t the very notion of the horizon open to perennial political negotiation? Since no one politics is totally representative of or completely coextensive with the horizon, should we not be talking about the ability of any subject-positional politics to inflect itself both regionally and totally? In other words, isn’t the so-called horizon itself the shifting expression of equilibrium among the many forces that constitute and operate the horizon: gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.? If one specific politics is to achieve general significance, it would seem that it has to possess a multiple valence, i.e., enjoy political legitimacy as a specific constituency and simultaneously make a difference in the integrated political or cultural sphere. Without such access to an integrated cultural politics, any single subject-positional politics risks losing its interventionary power within the total field. (78-79)

I am not arguing, then, that *The Crying Game*’s gendered and sexual representations should be ignored in order to emphasize its “larger” Political project--such a strategy simply reverses the terms of the opposition at work in the film’s “grain.” Rather, I am attempting to read this film in a reconfigured “against the grain” fashion that will challenge the purported progressivity of its sexual politics *through* an analysis of its particular matrixes of a host of political categories. The key to such an “integrated cultural politics” lies in the film’s central discourse on human nature.

*The Crying Game* most definitely inflects political categories, and in a way in the first few minutes of the film that disrupts conventional representations. The facts that the IRA kidnap a *black* British soldier (Jody) and that his guard (Fergus) is softhearted immediately suggest that this is no standard IRA film. But our understanding of the kinship that develops between the two men is based on their sharing what we are to consider *analogous* experiences of oppression, of a sense of being caught in structures larger than themselves. Their relationship quickly assumes a transracial and transnational status. The antagonisms of differing racial and national identities give way to a seemingly stable gender and sexual identity, so that they bond over prototypically male discourses: sports, women, drinking, urinating. And the potential erotics of Jody's and Fergus' relationship take on explicit meaning *only* at a later point in the narrative, when the object of their means of exchange--Dil--turns out to be not a woman but a man, disrupting the classical hom(m)osexual economy of their bonding. I would argue, then, that the film is able to swerve in this ostensibly "progressive" way precisely because the larger threat to heterosexual stability is no longer physically present: Jody can only haunt Fergus (and the viewer) in his dreams, and Dil's donning of his cricket uniform emphasizes her cuteness and non-threatening physicality.

But I am getting ahead of myself. The central discursive moment of the Jody/Fergus episode, privileged by the end of the film, is Jody's telling of the parable of the frog and the scorpion. Fergus is visibly upset at the implication that he might be a scorpion, that it is in his "nature" to kill, and the rest of the film plays out his attempts to prove that he is not violent by nature but by the accident of his being a Northern Irish Catholic. Concomittant with Fergus/Jimmy's increasing personalization is the film's presentation of the IRA as increasingly unsympathetic. Cineaste contributor Frann Michel notes that "Fergus moves away from his political commitment and audience sympathies are likely to move with him: public issues yield to private narrative. . . . After questioning the validity of national borders by displaying the brotherhood between IRA guard and British

captive, the film goes on to abandon the anticolonialist critique that would make sense of the IRA" (32). The circular structure of the film is perfectly in keeping with its narrative movement into the erasure of political categories in favor of an essential humanity. Those who hold onto their political identities--Peter and Jude--are presented as inhuman(e) and suffer the appropriately dire consequences. This circularity requires also that Jody's "accidental" and violent death be avenged. It is important that neither the British military nor Fergus is made to answer for Jody's death, but the predatory Jude who lured him into capture in the first place. Jude is figured as the most "unnatural" character in the film; her shifts in appearance vary according to the needs of her politics of violent nationalism and, simultaneously, align her with the misogynist tradition of the *femme fatale*. By simply pulling at the multiple threads of characterization in the film, then, one can see how utterly conventional it is.

Such a deconstructive activity is one which the film cleverly attempts to short-circuit by including a central plot twist that ostensibly de-naturalizes stable character identity for the viewer. But the potential transgressiveness of the revelation of Dil's maleness and homosexuality is, I would argue, debatable in terms of not only *The Crying Game's* one-track marketing campaign but also the film's quick subsumption of a complex notion of character difference. When questioned by Fergus about why she dresses and acts like a woman if he's "really" a man, Dil replies, "I can't help the way I am." The connection between this line and the closing one of the parable of the frog and the scorpion--"I can't help it; it's in my nature"--demonstrates the status of the natural, the human, human nature, in the film's representation of sexual, racial, social, and national differences. The "natural" dispositions of various characters in the film thus determine the extent to which their "surface" differences are to be either ignored ("Details, honey," says Dil to Fergus/Jimmy at one point) or emphasized as their "natures." The deployment of the latter as the predominant feature of Irish nationalist struggle is to me one of the most disturbingly retrograde political features of the film. Fergus/Jimmy is therefore a "good" Irishman (and

straight male) because he sees the error of basing one's interactions with people on their "surface" differences rather than what really matters, what's inside.

That it is Jody who teaches Ferg(us) this lesson overwhelmingly tips the scales in favor of the British empire as a great equalizer as opposed to a colonizer: it is the *Irish* who are racist, who call Jody "nigger" to his face. "Bad" Brits, like Jimmy's racist upper-class foreman, are few and far between (he is far outweighed, representationally speaking, by the avuncular bartender Col, for example); even in his case, his badness is more a feature of his personality than of his particular class/gender/national identity--and, after all, he does give "Pat" a job. The matrix of sexuality/gender/race/nationalism as subtended by an essentialist conception of human nature is, as I have already suggested, most alarmingly condensed in the character of Jude, who is changeable in all the "wrong" ways. The combination of Jude's nasty "human" characteristics (conniving, vicious, unfeeling, predatory, etc.) with her "surface" ones (Irish nationalist, female) mark her characterization as one of the most politically specious in any film of recent memory. In my reading, then, the film uses "progressive," "fluid" representations of race and sexual orientation in order ultimately to reify the natural benevolence of a male British empire and the inhumanity of a female Irish nationalism. As such, an evaluation of the film's sexual politics cannot be separated from its larger Political backdrop; to do so, to read "with the grain" of the film, would be to replicate the inside/outside dichotomy of the personal and the political so necessary to the decidedly *unprogressive* genre of the British-made IRA romantic drama.

I have chosen a rather haphazard approach to reading *The Crying Game* in order to demonstrate how difficult an "integrated cultural politics" is. It would be easier to categorize this matrix of political issues and examine each at a time. But such an approach would, in my opinion, restabilize the very instabilities of these issues in a manner not unlike the film itself. A recent issue of *Cineaste* includes two essays on *The Crying Game* that do just that. I think that this more standard approach does have its usefulnesses. Both David Lugowski and Frann Michel, for example, offer particularly interesting critical

analyses of the film's imbrication of race and sexuality. Lugowski examines the first shot of Fergus after he leaves Ireland, as he watches an all-white cricket match while working on the construction site of his new job:

The white dust foregrounds Fergus's whiteness as he casts off his 'black' Irishness yet, at the same time, recalls his incomplete bonding with the black soldier whose death he indirectly has caused. Fergus is also potentially a tragic clown, unable to follow through on his feelings, the butt of Jody's joke concerning what he didn't tell Fergus about Dil. . . . The dust suggests a feminizing cosmetic as well, as Fergus is on the cusp of both an internal and a political makeover, where his very integrity, his manliness, so to speak, will be questioned. (35)

These are all potential readings of the image of a dust-encrusted Fergus becoming Jimmy, the Irishman-in-exile. But note how Lugowski states that by moving to Britain Fergus somehow "casts off his 'black' Irishness," ceases being a colonial subject, and undergoes a feminizing "makeover." National (colonial) identity becomes something quickly shorn (like Fergus/Jimmy's hair)--in fact, it *needs* to be cut out of the picture in order to get at the "real" shift, which concerns sexuality more than anything else.

Frann Michel is less generous in her reading:

The film twice exploits images of interracial sex, then subsequently relocates the transgressiveness of these images elsewhere, first in the abduction of Jody just as he begins making out with Jude, and later, in the revelation of Dil's secret just as she and Fergus begin making love. So, too, when Jody says that Jude is less his type of woman than his London girlfriend, Dil (Jaye Davidson), we are permitted, only temporarily, to hear this as a comment about the appropriateness of interracial relationships. These conventional responses police the boundaries of race, and putting them in question offers a challenge to racial assumptions. Yet the fact that the film's two black characters are also sexual outlaws leaves unquestioned a conventional equation between racial and sexual otherness. (32)

I fully agree with Michel that *The Crying Game* imbricates race and sexuality in a problematic way that was not commented upon by mainstream critics (and I would extend this critique to include other Jordan films such as *Mona Lisa* and *The Miracle*). But by focusing so exclusively on these two issues, both of these critics mirror the film by abandoning the discourse of colonialism so speciously supported precisely by the film's racial demarcations. For it seems to me that *The Crying Game* loads the deck in terms of

race, shuffling its suits in such a manner as to produce a Royal Flush. The ace up the film's sleeve, of course, is to make the British soldier a colonial himself, and a black one at that, so that the Irish are not seen as a colonized people because of their whiteness--in fact, the Irish are the only nationality to call a black man "nigger" to his face. Britain becomes, then, a land of milk and honey for potentially all of its colonials who "really" want to be British after all but must still pay the price for being born elsewhere. The "good-natured" colonials (Jody, Fergus, Dil) are thus allowed to stay but not without penance: the "bad-natured" (inhuman, unnatural--"political") ones must die. And it is a Better World without them, because *they* are the source of racism, hatred, insensitivity, violence.

I disagree, then, with Lugowski's later statement that "any sort of of violent goings-on around the world would probably have sufficed equally well" to effect the film's collapse of the political into the personal: race is absolutely integral to this film's very specific colonial project. And Michel ends up foreclosing on the issue of nationalism as well, concluding that the film "is not merely preoccupied with erotic quandaries, but demonstrates the way in which sexual politics reflect broader political concerns" (34). It is this conclusion that I have challenged in my schematic "against the grain" reading of *The Crying Game*. The film cracks apart not by the weight of its own political instability but only when read through the lens of a complex combinatory strategy of textual reading.

*"Same person, no difference at all. Just a different sex."*  
--Orlando, in Orlando

Sally Potter's *Orlando* seems to me to replicate the same dichotomizing pattern as *The Crying Game*. Both British films foreground the personal and the romantic against a backdrop of the political and the pathological. The difference is that in *Orlando* the culprit for female oppression is the "burden" of owning land and the weight of History, both of which are figured as essentially masculinist. In order for more free and open sexual/gender

identities to emerge, the past (and, with it, property, class, history, politics) must be jettisoned.<sup>68</sup> It is no small coincidence that the means to Orlando's bodily transformation from a man into a woman is provided by the futile violence of colonial war. In this respect, I think *Orlando* covers over the effects of Empire in no less problematic a fashion than does *The Crying Game*.

These statements may strike the reader as more akin to conclusions than to prefatory comments. Admittedly, I do not intend to examine *Orlando* in great depth, but instead to supply a very brief gloss of its "grain" within academic film culture in such a fashion as simply to suggest the *trajectory* of a resistant reading rather than to practice one. What I wish to emphasize in the comments that follow, then, is the type of preparatory contextual "work" necessary before even considering what readings of any given text might be considered "progressive" in the first place. And I think that films like *Orlando*, which proceed from "higher" aesthetic (because independent or avant-garde) bases, require as much if not more granular contextualizing if its audience--cineliterate intellectuals and the liberal bourgeoisie--is to engage at all critically with the text.

*Orlando* falls within the category of what contemporary film theory tends to characterize as counter-cinema. More specifically, *Orlando* is aligned with a consistent trend in British Film Institute-sponsored films towards what Pat Dowell, in a review of the film, describes as "playfulness with history" and "faith in visual eloquence and the artistic power of fantasy," a formalist stance "of an eccentric strain in British filmmaking" most prominent in the films of directors like Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman (37). Peter Wollen has argued in a recent essay that these two filmmakers can be seen as both modernists and neoromantics,

steeped in a personal vision of the English landscape, endlessly revisiting and rejecting the temptations of Victorianism and antiquarianism, returning much more willingly to their memories of childhood, mediated through home movies and family snapshots for Jarman, and through pored-over children's book illustrations for Greenaway. ("The Last New Wave" 45)

The films of Greenaway and Jarman should be considered as part of a wider and disparate shift in British film, due in part to a shift towards the visual arts as a source for cinema and in part to the theoretical and practical consolidation of the filmic avant-garde; their films are the popular residue the post-Godardian “political modernism” of the 1970s BFI, and as such they occupy a space between mainstream and counter-cinema.

As with Jarman and Greenaway, so too with Sally Potter. She made her name in the late 1970s with a now-famous feminist film entitled *Thriller*, followed by the even more fantastic and utopian *The Gold Diggers* a few years later. Both of these films are canonical examples of feminist counter-cinema, in that they challenge patriarchal modes of filmic representation at the level of their (independent) production base, their (almost non-existent) narratives, their formal play with the classical model of cinematic suture, their explicit indebtedness to post-structuralist theory, etc. The contemporary connection between Potter and Jarman is even more explicit; for Tilda Swinton, the lead in *Orlando*, has appeared in numerous Jarman films, indeed is even something of an icon for them. I think that the most obvious context in which one must place *Orlando*, then, is in both the tradition of feminist counter-cinema and as representative of a more recent trend towards grandiose pictoriality and a “playfulness with history” characteristic of a number of “counter-cinematic/mainstream” films of a group of British filmmakers.

Another strand to pursue is the film’s connection/“faithfulness” to the Virginia Woolf novel upon which it is based. In the little that has been written on the film to date--some reviews, a few interviews--every commentator makes sure to mention that the novel Orlando

was written as a love letter to Vita Sackville-West, who’d been born as an aristocrat of female gender and, as such, was not able to inherit the house which she loved and which she considered to be hers. Virginia Woolf’s poetic biography was written specifically with the intention of giving back Vita her house, which of course never happened in life.

(West and West 18-19)

Because Potter has established her credentials as politically savvy, she of course “has wisely toned down the novel’s blithe upper class hauteur, and in the process made of

Orlando an allegory of class as well as gender” (Dowell, Rev. of *Orlando* 36). The most specific change Potter has made is to change the gender of Orlando’s child from male to female, “meaning that Orlando would lose her property” and emerge “from the shackles of the property-owning classes” (Dowell, “Demystifying” 17). Swinton, whose role was often collaborative with Potter on all aspects of the film, states that it “was very important to us that Orlando be divested of her wealth because it seems to both of us the way to true human liberation is through liberation from occluded wealth” (West and West 19). And, later:

[*Orlando*] takes as its center the idea that we must *all* live not dependent either on the past or on the future, but in the present, and so it tries not to make a projection into the future. What I think we do want to say, and what I hope we have made clear, is that we believe human liberation and the possibility for mortals to truly live a centered and limitless existence depends on the giving up of inherited wealth. (19)

And to whom is this inherited wealth given up? Already I am wary. For to speak of the property-owning classes as “shackled,” to collapse the needs for differing types of liberation into an upper-class British subject who lives through an entire history of colonialism and imperialism without so much as a thought for any lot other than his/her own, who accrues its material benefits for centuries and then is thankfully “stripped” of such encumbrances when he becomes a she--this to me sounds hardly progressive. The issue of “occluded wealth” forms, of course, only the backdrop for the film’s more explicit political “message,” which concerns the politics of gender. Potter has this to say about gender categories:

I feel that we are born innocent babes with a whole gamut of possible lives, possible ways of being, that include the so-called masculine characteristics of courageousness and a positive kind of aggression and intelligence and curiosity, as well as the so-called feminine characteristics of nurturing and empathy and intuition. These are simply *human* characteristics that have been labelled with one gender or the other. (Dowell, “Demystifying” 16)

But as I have argued with respect to *The Crying Game*, so I would argue here: that to foreclose on a broadly based cultural politics of difference in order to arrive at a humanist destination of “love” or “understanding” or “spiritual transcendence” or “a future of gender

equality” is to undercut radical and contingent political struggle in the most damaging of ways because it does so obliquely. The fact that a sympathetic character undergoes a sex change within a narrative does not stand as proof of a film’s gender “progressiveness.”

One need not look very hard at the the current discourses surrounding *Orlando* to find just how essentialist the film is with respect to sexual difference. Over and above the fact that Orlando is never shown in the film naked as a man but is revealed to us as a woman with a full-frontal nude shot (tastefully suffused with morning light and translucent drapes, so as not to be “exploitative”), Potter’s response to the question of why she chose Tilda Swinton rather than a man or two different actors to play Orlando reveals how decidedly *unradical* this film is:

I think if the role has been played by two different people, we would have lost exactly the sense of seamless individuality across the genders. This really is the story of one person who happens to be a man and then happens to be a woman, so it had to be one actor throughout. It could be played by a man, except it makes more sense to end up in *the gender that the actor really is* rather than the other way around, and, of course, our story goes from a man to a woman. [my emphasis] (Dowell, “Demystifying” 17)

Such faithfulness to the “reality” of sexual difference may be admirable in another context; in this one, though, it serves effectively to undercut any radical potential the film might have for deconstructing stable notions of gendered and sexual identity. The political critic cannot let go of other pressing contingencies of difference as easily as do films like *Orlando* or *The Crying Game* that set them up in contradistinction to their “open” sexual representations.

In the case of *Orlando*, I think that a whole series of issues needs to be considered in the main characters’ sleepwalk through life: the condensation of birth with world war, motherhood with female freedom; the status of the sex change in the film and whether it assuages, by some rather rote gender bending, the potential critique of its positing the bourgeois white/European female as representative of all women; the status of History, Class, and Politics as concepts which circumscribe and contain not only women but all humanity. Given my desire to reconfigure “against the grain” reading as a more broadly

political practice of critical resistance, I would begin at the end of this list. For I think that an evaluation of seemingly sexual progressive films like *The Crying Game* and *Orlando* must begin with what they repress.

It is my hope that the readings I have offered in this chapter demonstrate both the shortcomings of current “against the grain” practice as well as the usefulness of retaining the concept of a textual “grain” and the goals attendant with “resistant” strategies of reading. I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter as well both the urgency and the detail involved in establishing what a text’s “grain” is in any specific context: such constant and diligent reflexivity must subtend any practice claiming the responsibilities and benefits of political resistance. In the case of *Basic Instinct*, then, I have argued that an “against the grain” reading of the film in the context of an undergraduate classroom produces more problems than it solves; the very means by which such a reading strategy is accomplished (i.e., genre, *auteur*) swerves interest away from the more pressing matters at hand, namely the film’s extremely misogynistic and homophobic representations of women and men. Given the more “literate” audience assumed by/for *The Crying Game* and *Orlando*, I think that theoretical and critical rigor are an absolute requirement of any political assessment--an “against the grain” reading of films like these, which ostensibly proceed from a non-dominant cinematic production base, challenges any easy notion of their (and their audiences’) “progressive” immanence, and in fact reveals that they are decidedly *unprogressive* on a number of different levels.

With my readings of *The Crying Game* and, to a lesser extent, *Orlando*, I hope to have accomplished something more: to argue for the absolute necessity of (re)considering the more standard notions of political critique within a platform of identity politics. For films like *The Crying Game* and *Orlando*, which foreground in several ways (narrative, marketing, popular and critical assessment, etc.) the primacy of the sexual over other categories of difference, do so *at the expense of* materialist-based politics, and in fact may be quite easily read as politically retrograde, even in terms of sexual politics, when they are

read “against the grain” through a matrix of political discourses, starting with the one that produced the formulation of the concept in the first place--post -World War II French Marxism.

## Conclusion

I began this thesis by invoking Michel Foucault as a widely known and disseminated political and cultural theorist in order to make clear the assumptions that I have held throughout this project: that the social formation is based upon inequities of power, maintained through a variety of discourses that will themselves into “regimes of truth” and marginalize others in the process; that this undemocratic social formation is not seamless and totalizing but unstable and contestatory, and that it opens up through the very process of discursive “(in)validation” the opportunity to challenge the dominant ideology at multiple sites of resistance; that all discursive practices (and the subjects speaking by/through them) take their meaning through a contextual matrix, and as such are contingent upon the particularities of a given matrix at a given moment; that knowledges have histories, and tracing a genealogy of a knowledge can produce exhilarating possibilities for an *enabling* deconstruction, the aim of which is to reconfigure the current conception of a knowledge in a different and potentially more politically useful way.

In tracing a genealogy of the concept and practice of reading films “against the grain” I have attempted to demonstrate how in general the definitions of particular discursive strategies are neither fixed nor stable but sites as contestory as the textual objects of their attention, and how in particular the feminist appropriation of the concept in the mid-1970s did not solve to nearly the extent that has been thought many of the problematic structural binarisms of its initial formulation. I believe that such institutional historiography is absolutely necessary if a politically invested critic is to determine the use-value of a particular discourse in a particular situation: without such constant reflexivity at both the micro and the macro levels, the critic risks following a rigid, predetermined model of

reading which may not be quite as “progressive” as s/he might assume, given that model’s institutional validity as a discourse of “truth.” And the concept of reading films “against the grain” has taken on something approaching that status within a specific field of politically resistant and theoretically sophisticated film studies. In my second and third chapters, then, I have set up a tension between Marxism and (psychoanalytic) feminism, Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan, in order not to reestablish the importance of that distinction but to delineate the continuities within it. As such, one of the underpinning goals of this thesis has been to emphasize the importance of Marxist political theory as not simply the “origin” of the “against the grain” phrase (and its attendant structural binarisms) but as a political concern which need not be considered in contradistinction to other forms of identity politics, particularly feminism.

The most obvious impetus for this project was the recent appearance of a number of films, from varying bases of production and venues of exhibition, that seemed to narrativize at the explicit levels of character and plot many of the concerns regarding (the instabilities of) sexual difference that academic film feminism has been theorizing and debating over the last 20 years. How is the political academic to read these films, both separately and as a body of texts, given their industrial and generic range? Do they represent a significant shift in popular filmmaking and reception from the “regressive” to the “progressive?” In historically analyzing the concept and practices of “resistant” textual reading strategies I discovered that the current model is insufficient to account for the complexity of possible meanings, politically speaking, that any filmic text may have. And I discovered more specifically that those films that have been recently heralded as breakthroughs in popular representations of gender and sexuality--such as *The Crying Game* and *Orlando*, not to mention other films which have been released since I began this project, films like *The Piano*, *The Wedding Banquet*, and *Farewell to my Concubine*--achieve their sexual “progressiveness” through a foreclosure on other types of political issues and categories of identity, especially nationalism, colonialism, and class.

The reformulation of reading “against the grain” that I have demonstrated in my readings of *Basic Instinct*, *The Crying Game*, and, very briefly, *Orlando*, is one which is not “easy.” It requires: a dogged and continual practice of institutional and subjective reflexivity in order to avoid, in Cornel West’s words, “dogmatic traps, premature closures, formulaic formulations or rigid conclusions”; a fair amount of research (over a range of discourses, from the most popular to the most theoretical) in order to theorize the grain of a particular film in a particular discursive context; and a background in a variety of political discourses (and their histories) in order to address as fully as possible the matrixes of representations that any given film offers through character and narrative. If it has not been clear up to now, my audience for this thesis is films scholars, theoreticians, critics, and teachers invested in “progressive” politics of all types and emphases, for to practice such a fluid and contingent strategy of textual reading requires a significant amount of training in the field of film studies. It is my hope that I have demonstrated not only the exciting political possibilities and material effects that reading films might produce in a variety of contexts, from the classroom to the conference room to the barroom; I hope as well to have made clear the importance of the *responsibility* attendant with such a position of power. It is a responsibility I take very seriously.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972) 10.

<sup>2</sup> All of Foucault's writings address this argument in differing ways. See, in particular: The Archaeology of Knowledge; The Order of Things, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1970); and Power/Knowledge, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> My reference here is to Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), a book which reveals some of the more tragic aspects of Foucault's thought regarding the ineluctable shape of power and its complete hold over the subject. Frank Lentricchia, an author with whom I am *not* sympathetic, offers a useful summation of the response in certain academic quarters to Foucault's book when he calls it "the most persuasive, if depressing, statement yet published, from radical quarters, on the apparently endless stamina, the perfect flexibility, and the bottomless cunning of capitalism to sustain itself" (86). For my purposes, Foucault's The History of Sexuality series offers much more possibility for resistance at the level of the subject (see especially pages 85-102 of the first volume).

<sup>4</sup> I put this term in quotation marks to signify my reservation in using it. Various called "women's studies," "feminism," "sexual politics," "gender studies," and now even (notoriously) "post-feminism," this field has existed, in varying degrees, in almost all academic disciplines (as well as non-academic fields) since the early 1970s. But it is arguably within film studies that feminism has articulated itself most compellingly and influentially by marshalling a vast array of theoretical discourses (including philosophy, semiotics, psychoanalysis, sociology, ethnography, history, and more recently ethnography and science) to further its project of exposing and opposing the structures of patriarchal dominance. Feminist film theory and criticism was already demonstrating a sophistication of discourse and analysis in the mid-1970s that few other, if any, academic disciplines with similar issues of concern could lay claim to. I would argue as well that feminism, at least in its film studies manifestation, has been largely responsible for "breaking the ice" for other marginalized groups to address pressing social issues--such as race, ethnicity, colonialism, queer identity, etc.--by focusing so consistently on the relationship between power, representation, and identity.

My reticence in using "feminism" has more to do with its often pejorative connotations in everyday society (especially as it is represented by the mass media) than it does with what I consider to be the movement itself, or more particularly that branch of the movement in which I believe I have a role to play. The "men in feminism" debate rages on, and I feel it necessary to be precise about both the position I as a male wish to occupy within the field and the terms I use to describe that position. I prefer to use the phrase "sexual politics" whenever possible because of its very imprecision--it does not limit discussion to/for/about women; nor does it refer simply to gender difference, but to sexuality in much broader terms (orientation, preference, fantasy, practice, identity). As well, it adds a specifically *political* dimension to the sexual subject which I feel should remain in the foreground as well. The phrase "cultural politics" encompasses even more than "sexual politics," but I will retain the latter in most instances because I am focusing on discourses of sexual rather than broader cultural difference. Obviously, I do not intend my specific choice of nomenclature as a judgment on the others--all have their contingent effectivities--but rather as a necessary statement of position.

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<sup>5</sup> The particularly American version of continental deconstruction, typified by the Yale school, uses deferral in its reading practice as well, but as an exercise and end in itself--which for me is quietest in the worst possible sense. Clearly, I wish to avoid any comparisons with that tradition. But I would further distinguish my use of deferral from the continental tradition by stating that I intend this thesis as neither an elaborate intellectual game revealing the eternal repetitions of Western metaphysics' themes nor as a debilitating example of the logic of recuperation, criticisms often leveled at Derrida and Foucault respectively (see my note 3). I am trying to provide a genealogy that reveals contingency as opposed to necessity in order to formulate a practice of critical reading which attends to historical and cultural determination but is not completely subject to it.

For an excellent critique of the American importation of French deconstruction see Jeffrey T. Nealon's "The Discipline of Deconstruction," PMLA 107.5 (Oct. 1992). For an account of the "recuperative" critique of continental post-structuralism, see John McGowan's Postmodernism and Its Critics (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), especially pages 89-145.

<sup>6</sup> "What Is Criticism?" Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1972) 257.

<sup>7</sup> See Daniel Singer's Prelude to a Revolution: France in May 1968 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971) for a general discussion of French social and intellectual life in the 1960s. For an in-depth survey of French film culture of this period see Sylvia Harvey, May '68 and Film Culture (London: BFI, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> A quick summary may be found in Chapter 7 of Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake's Film Theory: An Introduction (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988). D. N. Rodowick's The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988) offers an impressively thorough analysis of the particular directions that avant-garde filmmakers and film journals such as Cahiers du cinéma and Screen took in their investigation of Tel Quel's propositions regarding the intersection of theory and politics. The intellectual matrixes between the École Normale Supérieure (Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan), the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Roland Barthes, Christian Metz), and Cambridge University (Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe) have, in my opinion, been insufficiently explored; for a brief discussion see Colin MacCabe's "Class of '68: Elements of an Intellectual Autobiography 1967-1981" in his Tracking the Signifier (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1985). Philip Rosen's dissertation, "The Concept of Ideology and Contemporary Film Criticism: A Study of the Position of the Journal Screen in the Context of the Marxist Theoretical Tradition," offers an in-depth analysis but, alas, remains unpublished.

<sup>9</sup> Lapsley and Westlake, Film Theory: An Introduction 2-3.

A further point of contention is the illogic of the term itself: it simply does not effectively suggest what it purports to describe. Roland Barthes (parenthetically) indicated the incongruity of the phrase "dominant ideology" in 1973:

For what is ideology? It is precisely the idea insofar as it dominates: ideology can only be dominant. Correct as it is to speak of an "ideology of the dominant class," because there is certainly a dominated class, it is quite inconsistent to speak of a "dominant ideology," because there is no dominated ideology: where the dominated are concerned, there is nothing, no ideology, unless it is precisely--and this is the last degree of alienation--the ideology they are forced (in order to make symbols, hence to live) to

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borrow from the class that dominates them. The social struggle cannot be reduced to the struggle between two rival ideologies: it is the subversion of all ideology which is in question. (The Pleasure of the Text 32-33)

Although I do not fully agree with this proposition (clearly, "the dominated" have formulated and have [admittedly, often a troubled] access to ideologies of their own which are *not* those of the dominant class--witness the backlash against feminism which occurred in the 1980s, for just one example), Barthes is nevertheless consistent in the way he takes the phrase *à la lettre*, i.e., in terms of a politics of class.

<sup>10</sup> For a deeper discussion of this concept, see the following, all translated by Ben Brewster: Althusser's essays "The '1844 Manuscripts' of Karl Marx," "On the Materialist Dialectic," and "Marxism and Humanism" in For Marx (London: Verso, 1969); and his and Etienne Balibar's Reading Capital (London: Verso, 1968).

As for the other two problems for Marxism, ostensibly solved by Althusser:

i) base/superstructure is replaced by a more fluid and decentered model of the social formation, one with neither a genetic point of origin nor a teleological point of arrival. Althusser's "structure in dominance" consists of three practices--the economic, the political, and the ideological--each of which has its own "relative autonomy." This means that all spheres of the social organism affect one another, although the "reciprocal interaction" of each acknowledges that the instances are hierarchized, with the economic determining which of the three should be dominant in a given mode of production or at a particular historical moment. Such a model nevertheless provides an opportunity for changing the social fabric by interceding at the level of the superstructure--one need not be in a position of economic ruling power, in control of the means of production.

ii) ideology is redefined as "the imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence." Capitalist ideology is not synonymous with lived experience; it only appears to be so because of the function of "ideological state apparatuses" in the private sphere--the church, schools, communications industries, etc.--which present it as reality. Ideology is therefore not "false consciousness," nor does it always necessarily serve the economic interests of the ruling class. Rather, it is indispensable to social cohesion and the constitution of the individual as a subject, the implication being that one could refuse to be "interpellated" by any representations which masquerade as self-evident truths and, in the process, alter the reproduction of existing oppressive social relations. Marxism is not to be considered an ideology in this formulation, for it does not present itself as reality but as a "problematic."

There are, of course, problems with both of these revisions, problems which proved insurmountable and led to an almost complete abandonment in the mid-seventies of Althusserian Marxism in favor of Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is my contention that this knee-jerk response was directly responsible for many of the unacknowledged blind spots in current "against the grain" practice. See my notes 11 and 15.

See as well: Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 1971); his Essays in Self-Criticism, trans. Grahame Locke (Thetford: New Left, 1976) 112-13, 147-48, and 189-90; and the aforementioned works. For critiques of his position, see: Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, Mode of Production and Social Formation (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); Paul Hirst, On Law and Ideology (London: Macmillan, 1979); Stephen B. Smith, Reading Althusser: An Essay on Structural Marxism (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984); William C. Dowling, "The Problem of the Superstructure," Jameson,

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Althusser, Marx: An Introduction to the Political Unconscious (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984); and Gregory Elliot, "The Moment of Althusser," Althusser: The Detour of Theory (London: Verso, 1987).

11 These are precisely the terms of a debate between Cahiers and Cinéthique that came to a head in Nov. 1969. The similarities between the two journals are striking. Both developed similar categorical systems for defining the possibility of a "materialist" cinema allied to revolutionary struggle, as well as that of a "scientific" critical theory through which this cinema could be conceived. Both journals were united in recognizing the necessity of a semiotic modernism that defined the materialist text in terms of "formal work on the signifier." And both supported this proposition by theorizing cinema's production of an "impression of reality" as an ideology-in-general (in Althusser's terms) peculiar to the materiality and technology of cinematic expression. (Rodowick, The Crisis of Political Modernism 71)

To the extent that Cahiers meant the concept of theoretical practice to describe the desire to institute a critical theory, and Cinéthique a theory of production, both were in near accordance with Althusser's thought. But what Cinéthique wanted was to make *both* pronouns in the above sentence a "he," to make the filmmaker the scientist and negate the importance of the reader. Such a proposition was considered quite unacceptable by Comolli and Narboni, who attacked Cinéthique viciously, the means of their attack being the charge that the opposing position was theoretically lazy and imprecise and that it understood nothing of the Althusserian theory it quoted as support, both of which aligned it on the side of the dominant ideological discourse. Comolli and Narboni argue, in sum, that it "is ridiculous to insist that the film ceases to have an ideological existence and require that it gains instead a 'theoretical' or 'scientific' existence . . . but it is not ridiculous to be working on a theory of cinema, or attempting to practice scientific criticism." What Cahiers failed to recognize was that by developing a typology of texts with differing intrinsic relations to dominant ideology according to their differing formal organizations, it too was conceding to an aesthetics (as opposed to a strictly Althusserian problematic) of transgression. The contradiction of the Cahiers position is evident in current "against the grain" reading practices as well (cf. the Kellner and Corrigan quotes on pages 3-4 of this text). Its most extreme articulation lies in the division between theorists concerned with the filmic text and those with the cinematic apparatus, both of whom used Lacanian theory to shore up the weaknesses of Althusser's problematic. Later in the present chapter I will delineate this division and argue that the Lacanian model is equally as insufficient as the Althusserian one for textual analysis. See my note 15.

For a fuller account of the debate, see Gérard Leblanc's "Direction," Jean-Paul Fargier's "Parenthesis or Indirect Route," and Comolli and Narboni's "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism (2)" in Screen Reader 1 (London: SEFT, 1977), all translated by Susan Bennett. See as well Rodowick's The Crisis of Political Modernism 67-110.

12 A lingering *auteurism* permeates not only this essay but practically all of the criticism of Cahiers du cinéma's militant phase. And although post-1968 Cahiers rarely made assumptions about directors based on previous evaluations made by Cahiers critics of the fifties and sixties, the effect of this *auteurist* residue on it and other journals (especially Screen) was large indeed, most evidently in subsequent work on both "revolutionary" and "progressive" cinema. The films of directors such as Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, and Nagisa Oshima were held up as examples of the former, and those of John Ford, Jacques Tourneur, and Douglas Sirk of the latter. A further distinction would be made between simply the progressive *text* (*Young Mr. Lincoln*, *Morocco*, *Sylvia Scarlett*), which deconstructs itself perhaps even against the conscious intentions of the

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director, and the progressive *auteur* (Sirk, Dorothy Arzner), who works within a dominant film industry and consciously subverts its ideologies from within its conventions. Nick Browne states in his introduction to *Cahiers du Cinéma, 1969-1972: The Politics of Representation* that the

central problematic which structures and governs *Cahiers'* critical method . . . is accounting for the forms textuality assumes by reference to its "determinations" of production. The answer, however, is not pursued through an analysis of the studio system or its alternatives, but through delineating the agencies and forces, whether personal ("authors") or "social", that must be invoked to 'explain' the text. (12)

*Cahiers* will argue, then, that no "film-maker can, by his own individual efforts, change the economic relations governing the manufacture and distribution of his films," but that the determination for ascribing a film a particular categorical status nevertheless depends upon the conscious intentions of the director, which are somehow easily identifiable in the way a particular film negotiates the status of its "signified" and "signifiers." Thus the director's name remains above the title of the film in many of *Cahiers'* textual analyses--"John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*," "Josef von Sternberg's *Morocco*,"--and the director could even be considered to have authored the article itself, the critics functioning merely as scientific explicators. The importance of this *auteurist* residue should not be underestimated, as it underscores (albeit without explicit acknowledgment) all subsequent "against the grain" reading practices.

13 The point of this particular argument may not be clear within the present discussion, but it is fundamental to my analyses of *The Crying Game* and *Orlando* in Chapter 3. The reader is therefore encouraged to consider its implications in both my historical genealogy of reading "against the grain" as a specifically feminist-psychoanalytic practice and the danger of Political elision attendant with that appropriation, i.e., not simply the gains but also the losses produced by the eclipse of Marxism and the emergence of "the new politics" in the seventies.

14 I want to make clear that my Althusser-to-Lacan trajectory is not to be taken as a strictly linear development. The two are not completely separable from one another in the first place. Indeed, Althusser acknowledges Lacanian psychoanalysis in his work, retaining for example the mirror-phase and the specularity of the imaginary in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In terms of *Cahiers*, I am stressing the Althusserian over the Lacanian influence in order to emphasize a decided shift which occurred, especially in the British but also in the American intellectual community, from historical materialism to sexual politics and the conditions of subjectivity. A further disenchantment with Althusserian Marxism was expressed by female intellectuals who felt just as oppressed by the male-centered Left as by the bourgeois male. Here is Jacqueline Rose:

. . . I think it is relevant that the most systematic attack we have had on the hierarchies and organisation of the male Left gives to women the privilege of the personal in a way which divests it (*has* to divest it) of complexity at exactly this level of the conflicts and discontinuities of psychic life. Like many feminists, the slogan "the personal is the political" has been central to my own political development; just as I see the question of sexuality, as a political issue which *exceeds* the province of Marxism, ('economic', 'ideological' or whatever), as one of the most important defining characteristics of feminism itself. ("Femininity and Its Discontents" 102-103)

Psychoanalysis is nevertheless present in *Cahiers'* essays of the early 1970s, albeit in a less rigorous application than Marxism. With respect to "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*," much is made of the confluence between Lincoln's absent father and his assumption of the

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Law--a typically Oedipal scenario of a rejection of the Name of the Father in order to accede to its position of castrating power. An almost proto-feminist application of psychoanalysis is articulated rather forcefully in the editors' reading of *Morocco*, although it too is subsumed to their larger Leftist agenda: while *Young Mr. Lincoln* "represented the ethical-political face of the capitalist and theological field of Hollywood cinema," "*Morocco* on the other hand represents its erotic face, as a film that takes its place within the Sternberg oeuvre--an oeuvre produced by Hollywood, for forty years the major site of production of the erotic (fetishist) myths of bourgeois society and, as such, itself fetishized and mythologized" (174). It is of no small significance that the *Morocco* essay has been considered as *less* representative of the Cahiers position than the Ford piece. Interesting as well is the connection between this essay and that most seminal feminist film essay, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema": both take Josef von Sternberg as representative of a particular strain in classical Hollywood cinema.

See Althusser's "Freud and Lacan" in his Lenin and Philosophy for an explicit statement of the confluence between Marxism and Psychoanalysis. For an example of the shift from Althusser to Lacan, see Stephen Heath's "The Turn of the Subject," Ciné-Tracts 2.3-4 (1979).

15 The most notable Cahiers analyses of modernist films are centered around directors like Robert Bresson, Luis Buñuel, and Luchino Visconti. Those essays are, respectively: Jean-Pierre Oudart's "A Lacking Discourse" and "Word Play, Master Play," and Serge Daney and Oudart's "The Name of the Author (on the 'place' of *Death in Venice*)," all translated by Joseph Karmel and all in Browne.

16 The false militant film accords with Comolli and Narboni's category (d). They are explicitly political films "which do not effectively criticize the ideological system in which they are embedded because they unquestioningly adopt its language and imagery." Of Costa-Gavras' *L'Aveu*, for example, Comolli has this to say:

*L'Aveu* contains no productive work at the level of its signifiers and thus--since it is one and the same work --never calls into question the conditions of production/*écriture* /diffusion/reading of the film (i.e., "its place in the relations of production"), with the result that the film's "political message" is blatant, overwhelming, 'accessible to everyone'. Our question: does not this accessibility indicate precisely the limits of the message, does it not reveal the film's true place at the centre of the political fogginess and obfuscation produced by the dominant ideology? (165)

The question is rhetorical. The quotation is from "Film/Politics (2): *L'Aveu*: 15 Propositions," trans. Nancy Kline Piore, in Browne. For other examples of criticism on the false militant film, see Oudart, Narboni, and Comolli's "Readings of Jancsó: Yesterday and Today, trans. Nancy Kline Piore, and Jacques Aumont et al.'s "*The New Babylon: The 'Commune' Metaphor*," trans. Randall Conrad, both in Browne.

17 The third Cahiers category is now commonly called European art cinema, and it ceased to be of interest in the early seventies for most politically engaged film scholars. It did, however, remain of interest to those "old-guard" critics still invested in Bazinian humanism and purely formal concerns. Given the importance of the entire discourse of post-World War II European cinema in legitimating film as an academic discipline, shaping the canon, and setting the paradigms for film history (genre, nation, *auteur*, film as art, the textual "masterpiece"), it is not unreasonable to suggest that a politically motivated re-evaluation, which would combine many of the discursive practices advanced over the last twenty years, is in order. The only such analyses now available are of national film

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movements (New German cinema, the Japanese New Wave) which arose at precisely the same time as film theory's political break: post-1968.

For recent examples of formalist analysis of art cinema, see: Dudley Andrew, Film in the Aura of Art (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984); Kristen Thompson, Breaking the Glass Armor (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988); and, in a more esoteric and philosophical vein, Gilles Deleuze's two cinema books, both published in translation in 1986 and 1989 by the University of Minnesota Press. For examples of post-'68-informed analysis, see Thomas Elsaesser's New German Cinema (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989), David Desser's Eros plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988), and Peter Lev's The Euro-American Cinema (Austin: U of Texas P, 1993).

18 In his "Afterword" to the Screen translation of the essay in 1972, Peter Wollen qualifies Cahiers' argument regarding the "structuring absence" of Lincoln's political affiliations and career. Wollen asserts that "the Civil War is present, but in disguised form, implicit rather than explicit" (152). This implicit presence is in the film's constant concern with posing two alternatives about which Lincoln must make a choice: village or town, two feuding rural homesteaders, two pies, two brothers. Lincoln invariably unifies rather than chooses between them, structurally (though not explicitly) emphasizing his role in American history as the great unifier. Wollen's addition adds to the force of Cahiers' original proposal--what cannot be said *is* always said, but at a symptomatic level.

19 The most encyclopedic analysis of the classical Hollywood cinema is David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson's The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (New York: Columbia UP, 1985). Their argument both challenges and affirms the Cahiers position equally in terms of the base/superstructure reductionism and the retention of individual transgression (which they formulate as a liberalist "choice"). While they take as their basis the conception of classical Hollywood cinema as a "unified mode of film practice," Bordwell et al. state in their preface that it is not reducible to a director's *oeuvre*, a genre, or an economic category, but that it is rather an "integral system" which includes mutual interaction between economic, technological, ideological, institutional, *and* individual factors. The integrity of classical Hollywood cinema lies finally in its *style*, which *is* quite homogeneous:

A mode of film practice, then, consists of a set of widely held stylist norms sustained by and sustaining an integral mode of film production. Those norms constitute a determinate set of assumptions about how a movie should behave, about what stories it properly tells and how it should tell them, about the range and functions of film technique, and about the activities of the spectator. These formal and stylistic norms will be created, shaped, and supported within a mode of film production--a characteristic ensemble of economic aims, a specific division of labor, and particular ways of conceiving and executing the work of filmmaking. . . . Thus to see Hollywood filmmaking from 1917-60 as a unified mode of film practice is to argue for a coherent system whereby aesthetic norms and the mode of film production reinforced one another. (xiv)

Although such a definition clearly eschews any crude base/superstructure model of economic determination, it can hardly be considered historically materialist insofar as Hollywood's aesthetic norms are never integrated into the larger socio-historical formation. Classical Hollywood cinema 1917-60 in this study remains almost entirely autonomous from American social and historical developments of the same period. As well, the Bordwell et al. position *vis à vis* determination/overdetermination does not align itself precisely with Cahiers' producer/director binarism; the authors are decidedly anti-

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structuralist in their contention that the classical style is not formulaic but is rather a paradigm which offers within its rules (bounded) alternatives. But the end result of their formalist argument is political quietism in terms of both Hollywood cinema as a capitalist institution and the relative autonomy of individual filmmakers, who finally appear as the happy beneficiaries of a free market cinematic paradigm. Nowhere is this quietism more evident than in the book's final chapter, in which the authors question the purported militancy of a whole history of alternative modes of practice in order to demonstrate that neither the modes nor their practitioners are subversive: all can be considered as paradigms just as much as the classical Hollywood cinema--the implicit assumption being that all paradigms are "equal" aesthetically, which they consider from their formalist position to be a non-ideological or apolitical "bottom line." Hence, Hollywood is not a repressive institution either on a global scale or in terms of the individual working within its rules, an individual who is not necessarily the director. Bordwell et al.'s study thus affirms Hollywood (and, by association, the USA) as an essentially liberal democratic structure. I would counterpoise their conclusion--"Hollywood films constitute a fairly coherent aesthetic tradition which sustains individual creation"--with a line from Roland Barthes' "Writer, Intellectuals, Teachers" (1971): "Repressive discourse is the discourse of good conscience, liberal discourse."

20 Peter Wollen's "*North by Northwest: A Morphological Analysis*" follows Propp's seven-tiered structure of narrative to the letter. Although certainly applicable, Wollen's morphological analysis demonstrated the limited usefulness of Propp's linear model for studying specific filmic narratives and its almost complete uselessness in accounting for the political functioning of film; for while it explained something of the workings of signification it was silent on the matter of the terms of the text's relations to the subject, to history, and to society.

21 See as well his: "On the Notion of Cinematographic Language," trans. Diane Abramo, *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: U of California P, 1976); and "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film," trans. Michael Taylor, *Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema* (Chicago:U of Chicago P, 1974).

22 One avenue was towards an arid semiotic formalism, most easily traceable in the work of Ben Brewster. Initially a Screen theorist interested in issues of politics and ideology (he was an early translator of Althusser), Brewster had become a hard-core empiricist by the late 1970s, counting shots in films and constructing data tables. It is arguable that semiotics is the lynch pin in this switch of allegiances. Indeed, his "Notes on the Text 'John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*,'" published with the Screen translation of the article in 1970, directs the reader's attention towards what can now be seen as an unpolitical direction. He argues that although film is a polysemic medium with a number of different bands and an indifferent number of codes, there must still be "a reading implicit in the text" (158), a reading which is motivated by at least the doubling (if not the trebling, quadrupling, etc.) of every textual system. While Brewster admits that the "implicit reader is an ideal reader, one who completely conforms to the supposed intentions of the text" (162), it is nevertheless clear in retrospect that such a conclusion has more negative than positive applications for a film critic interested in socio-political change. I mention Brewster only to demonstrate the malleability of every type of discourse; it is not a question of "getting it right," but of emphasis. I would argue that an awareness of one's political responsibilities seriously questions the usefulness of seeking scientific "truth" as an endpoint of analysis.

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23 It is of no small importance to note that the much-disparaged Cahiers Young Mr. Lincoln essay proceeds precisely along a syntagmatic rather than a paradigmatic axis, i.e., it examines the ideological import of the film in terms of its logic of narrative causality. In this sense the essay is both at odds and in accord with the Althusserian revision of the Marxist principle of dialectical materialism: at odds because it follows the linear causality that the text, as an example of dominant ideology, "asks" its viewers to follow; in accord because it challenges that very linearity by emphasizing the points in the film when the increasingly violent image of Lincoln exceeds the ostensible deifying goal of the narrative. What is lost in the shift from Marxism to feminism in the mid-1970s, then, is not a matter of methodology but of emphasis--"new" politics in favor of "old."

24 These essays are, respectively: "The Obvious and the Code" and "Segmenting/Analyzing," both translated by Diana Matias and both in Philip Rosen's anthology Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology (New York: Columbia UP, 1986); and "The Birds: Analysis of a Sequence," trans. Phil Hardy (London: BFI Education Department, 1972).

25 See as well Thierry Kuntzel's "The Film-Work 2" (on Schoedsack and Pichel's The Most Dangerous Game), translated by Nancy Huston and published in Camera Obscura 5 (Spring 1980).

26 Camera Obscura has been particularly supportive of Bellour's Hitchcock work, publishing a number of his essays in translation (cf. Works Cited). For a summary of the Bellour approach, see: Janet Bergstrom's "Enunciation and Sexual Difference" and "Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: Interview with Raymond Bellour," both published in Camera Obscura 3-4 (Summer 1979); and Constance Penley's "'A Certain Refusal of Difference': Feminism and Film Theory" in her The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis. Both Bergstrom and Penley address Jacqueline Rose's critique of Bellour's reading of The Birds in her essay "Paranoia and the Film System," Screen 17.4 (Winter 1976-77).

27 Of interest here is Jean-Louis Comolli's own work on the cinematic apparatus in his four-part essay "Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field." In it he delineates a much more historically specific analysis of the interrelation between the "progress" of cinematic technologies towards a greater and greater impression of reality in order to explore its more explicitly Marxist ideological implications. In this respect Comolli's essay may be considered as a much more direct critique of Bazinian phenomenology than Metz's ontological studies. Of course, it may come as no surprise that this article is rarely taught in either the context of political or apparatus film theory; Baudry's and Metz's psychoanalytic interventions are considered to be much more valid analyses.

28 The three essays in the dossier are Jacques-Alain Miller's "Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)," translated by Jacqueline Rose, Jean-Pierre Oudart's "Cinema and Suture," translated by Kari Hanet, and Stephen Heath's "Notes on Suture." The reader is encouraged as well to read Daniel Dayan's "The Tutor Code of Classical Cinema," in Bill Nichol's Movies and Methods; and Kaja Silverman's chapter entitled "Suture" in her book The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford UP, 1983).

29 "The Lady Doesn't Vanish: Feminism and Film Theory," Feminism and Film Theory (New York: Routledge, 1988) 6.

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30 "The Right of Re-Vision: Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite*," Movies and Methods, Volume II: An Anthology, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985) 368.

31 Seminal articles on these filmmakers include: "Yvonne Rainer: Interview" in Camera Obscura 1 (1976); B. Ruby Rich's "The Films of Yvonne Rainer" in Chrysalis 2 (1977); Jayne Loader's "*Jeanne Dielman: Death in Installments*" in Jump Cut 16 (1977); Jacquelyn Suter and Sandy Flitterman's "Textual Riddles: Woman as Enigma or Site of Social Meanings? An Interview with Laura Mulvey" in Discourse 1 (1979); Jane Weinstock's "She Who Laughs First Laughs Last" (*Thriller* by Sally Potter) in Camera Obscura 5 (1980); Elizabeth Lyon's "The Cinema of Lol. V. Stein" in Camera Obscura 6 (1980); Joan Copjec's "*Thriller: An Intrigue of Identification*" in Ciné-Tracts 11 (1980), and her "*India Song/Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert: The Compulsion to Repeat*" in October 17 (1981); and Linda Williams and B. Ruby Rich's "The Right of Re-Vision: Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite*" in Film Quarterly 35.1 (1981).

The number of American names in this list attests to the quickness with which many of the Screen feminists' call for textual criticism of the avant-garde was taken up by a young group of American film scholars who rejected the sociological approach. Indeed, by 1983 two books with significant portions devoted to women's alternative filmmaking had been published: Annette Kuhn's Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), and E. Ann Kaplan's Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera (New York: Methuen, 1983). These two volumes established a pattern in book-length studies of women's cinema, with the first half of the book deconstructing women's positioning in/by dominant cinema, and the second half evaluating feminist film practice. More recent contributions include Lucy Fischer's Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989) and Judith Mayne's The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990). See as well the 23 essays in Charlotte Brundson's collection Films for Women (London: BFI, 1986), all of which are on women's cinema.

32 For overviews of this position see: Christine Gledhill's "Developments in Feminist Film Criticism" in Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, ed. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (Los Angeles: AFI, 1984); Teresa de Lauretis' "Through the Looking-Glass: Woman, Cinema, and Language" in her book Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984); and Judith Mayne's "Feminist Film Theory and Criticism" in Signs 11.1 (Autumn 1985): 81-100. See as well Claire Johnston's analysis of Rosen's and Haskell's books in her "Feminist Politics and Film History," Screen 16.3 (1975).

33 In her preface to The Future of an Illusion, Constance Penley addresses how current uses of the terms "gender" and "sexual difference" continue to represent a division between two groups of feminism: gender on the side of the social sciences, which defines it exclusively as a set of social effects imposed on a body that is already sexed; sexual difference on the side of psychoanalysis, which concerns itself with the construction of subjectivity but not in a way that is seen as constructive.

The picture of human subjectivity that emerges from psychoanalysis is not easily compatible with that espoused by American feminism in particular, which is grounded in idealism, voluntarism of the will, and a traditional American strain of utopianism (its equal commitment to pragmatism notwithstanding). . . . Because [psychoanalytic feminism] lays emphasis on the conservatism of the psyche and the instability of sexual identity, it

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explains why the psyche can never be made the basis of progressive politics, feminist or otherwise. It is precisely because psychoanalysis does not preach any such positivity that its insights are crucial to any version of feminism that wants to move beyond idealism, utopianism, or a political practice that would have its basis in wish-fulfilling desires. (xiv, xvi-xvii)

For Penley and most of the other feminists who ally themselves with psychoanalysis, then, a progressive politics simply cannot be grounded in an idealist conception of a future world free from sexual oppression--(patriarchal) ideology will never disappear, "humans will never have a nonimaginary relation to the lived world" (xv). Progressivity must be considered as an activity of constant negotiation and resistance. For these reasons, "sexual difference" is a preferable term to "gender," insofar as the former constantly challenges the sexed opposition that the idealism of the latter takes as an essential truth of social organization. For an example of a psychoanalytic feminist who prefers the category of gender, see Teresa de Lauretis' "The Technology of Gender" in Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987).

If it has not been clear up to this point, the Penley position is precisely the type of progressive politics with which I ally myself, although I would argue that psychoanalysis still has to deal with the problem of its "universalizing" function, its ahistoricity. Insofar as psychoanalytic conceptions of sexual politics tend to foreclose the construction of class-based or colonial identities, for example, I wish in this thesis to reconfigure current strategies of resistant filmic reading to include a wider political agenda.

34 "Feminist Film Theory and Criticism," Signs 11.1 (Autumn 1985): 83.

35 For an in-depth critique of the Screen Arzner assessment, see Judith Mayne's "Lesbian Looks: Dorothy Arzner and Female Authorship" in How Do I Look?: Queer Film and Video, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991).

36 Johnston's reading of Lupino's films aligns itself more neatly with the Cahiers "against the grain" reading of *Young Mr. Lincoln*. In the same way that the figure of Lincoln becomes increasingly violent and, by the end of the film, "intolerable," reverberations within the narrative of Lupino's *Not Wanted*,

produced by the convergence of two irreconcilable [sic] strands--Hollywood myths of woman v the female perspective--cause a series of distortions within the very structure of the narrative; the mark of disablement puts the film under the sign of disease and frustration. An example of this process is, for instance, the inverted "happy ending" of the film. (216)

That Lupino's films were considered of less importance as a model for a women's counter-cinema than Arzner's is evident in the dearth of critical attention devoted to them compared to Arzner's. Nevertheless, a significant line of "against the grain" feminist criticism of a number of "progressive" Hollywood *auteurs* (Sirk, Tourneur, Hitchcock, etc.) and genres (*film noir*, melodrama, etc.) descends from Johnston's reading of Lupino's films. I will pay considerable attention to this trend later in this chapter. For now, suffice it to say that this strand of resistant textual criticism retains the contradictions of the Cahiers conception of the "progressive" classical film.

37 I will not be analyzing in any detail the history of Arzner scholarship, which has been long and varied since the publication of "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema." For further reading see: the entire BFI pamphlet edited by Johnston and published in 1975, especially Pam Cook's essay "Approaching the Work of Dorothy Arzner"; Jacquelyn

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Suter's "Feminine Discourse in *Christopher Strong*" in *Camera Obscura* 3-4 (Summer 1979); Julia Lesage's "The Hegemonic Female Fantasy in *An Unmarried Woman* and *Craig's Wife*" in *Film Reader* 5 (1982); and Lucy Fischer on *Dance, Girl, Dance* in her book *Shot/Countershot* 148-54. Suter's essay is particularly interesting in the context of my discussion of Arzner's *auteur* status: she argues that *Christopher Strong* generates certain formal transgressions that are nonetheless "isolated interruptions [that] do not necessarily deconstruct the narrative discourse in any way." Suter argues further that the classic text is bound up with a narrative logic that allows only isolated interventions, while a film like *Jeanne Dielman* offers "a systematic reordering of certain crucial elements upon which the classic text depends, and a recognition of other elements which the classic text chooses invariably to ignore." In other words, Arzner is merely a progressive *auteur*, and Akerman a counter-cinematic one.

38 The intensity and rigor with which Lacanian theory was embraced by politically-invested feminists constitutes an analysis in and of itself. I believe that the assumed scientificity of Lacanian theory established both the intellectual credentials (of rigor, obscurantism, etc.) and the means for tabling sexual difference as a political issue for feminist film critics hemmed in by the male-centered Left of mid-seventies Britain. And although I would argue that the effect of the feminist appropriation of psychoanalytic theory has been enormous, especially in terms of shaping the direction of film theory within the discipline, I do not want to imply that this appropriation was entirely smooth, that there were no ripples of dissent. An early critique of the merger between psychoanalysis and feminism, for example, was put forward by Julia Lesage in late 1974 in *Jump Cut*. *Screen*'s reprinting of Lesage's essay, entitled "The Human Subject--You, He, or Me? (Or, the Case of the Missing Penis)," in the summer of 1975 was accompanied by a nasty four-page "comment" by Brewster, Heath, and MacCabe that roundly scolded her for misrecognizing the value of Freudian psychoanalysis for feminist intervention at the site of film criticism. The publication of Mulvey's famous "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in the very next issue of *Screen*, then, may be more than a coincidence: it served as another (implicit) response to Lesage, and the fact that it was written by a woman "proved" Brewster, Heath, and MacCabe's points and freed them from the charge of sexism, of being "better" feminists than Lesage.

Mulvey's implicit response was followed in the *next* issue by another explicit one, authored by *Screen* editorial board members Edward Buscombe, Christine Gledhill, Alan Lovell, and Christopher Williams. In this article, entitled "Psychoanalysis and Film," the authors voiced their criticism of the journal's growing involvement in a psychoanalytic approach to film, setting out a number of reservations that included the dubiousness of psychoanalysis' status as a science and its arcane inaccessibility as a discourse. Overall, though, Buscombe et al. were not opposed to the use of psychoanalytic theory altogether; rather, they urged that it be approached more critically.

39 A critique of the implications stemming from the alliance between Lacanian psychoanalysis and feminism was leveled by Stephen Heath in his essay "Difference," *Screen* 19.3 (Autumn 1978). Heath is critical of what he sees as a tendency towards essentialism in Lacan's theory of sexual difference--especially as attached to his use of the terms "penis" and "phallus"--and argues that the "difference" Lacanian psychoanalysis purports to *explain* under the sign of the phallus grounds itself in an anatomical inequality that *perpetuates* male power. Many of Heath's concerns became central issues in feminist writings of the 1980s. I mention this to emphasize that Lacanian psychoanalysis has not been used uncritically by feminist film theorists. But the conundrums it has produced have nevertheless all been in the area of sexual politics. What needs to be historically examined,

then, is not simply what Lacanian psychoanalysis enabled--feminist theory and criticism as not simply a viable but an integral part of film study--but also what it disenabled--critiques of class politics and their relation to filmic representation.

40 Stephen Heath's writings in the late 1970s are particularly symptomatic of this profound shift in emphasis, especially his "The Turn of the Subject" in Ciné-Tracts 2.3-4 (1979). Heath oversaw as well the publication of Screen's "Dossier on Suture" in the winter of 1977-78, a dossier which included translations of Jacques-Alain Miller's "La Suture (éléments de la logique du signifiant)" and Oudart's "La Suture."

Other extremely influential psychoanalytic readings of the cinema include a collection of four Christian Metz essays translated as The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982), Colin MacCabe's collection The Talking Cure: Essays in Psychoanalysis and Language (New York: St. Martin's, 1981), and two collections of essays on the apparatus: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Cinematographic Apparatus: Selected Writings (New York: Tanam, 1980); and Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath's The Cinematic Apparatus (New York: St. Martin's 1980). In the latter volume see especially Jacqueline Rose's "The Cinematic Apparatus: Problems in Current Theory."

Although I will not be analyzing any of Lacan's texts themselves in this thesis, a number of his essays that were all but required reading for feminist film critics and theorists over the last decade and a half have been translated and collected in the following volumes, all published by Norton: Écrits: A Selection (1977); The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (1978); Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne (1982); and The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Books I and II (1988). For crucial definitions of psychoanalytic terms see: J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis' The Language of Psycho-Analysis, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973); and Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary, ed. Elizabeth Wright (London: Blackwell, 1992). Particularly important feminist readings and appropriations of Lacanian theory include: Kaja Silverman's The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford UP, 1983); Jane Gallop's The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis and her Reading Lacan, both published by Cornell University Press in 1982 and 1985, respectively; Shoshana Felman's Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987); and the numerous essays written for the British journal m/f.

41 Clearly, much more work needs to be done on the institutional issues involved in the post-1968 France-Britain-America film theory circuit in general, not to mention the particularities of various influential journals like Tel Quel, Cahiers du cinéma, Cinéthique, Positif, Movie, Afterimage, Screen, m/f, Framework, Ciné-Tracts, Camera Obscura, and Wide Angle. And while some analyses are available regarding these journals' interest in the French Marxist tradition (see my note 8), historical analyses of the move towards Lacanian psychoanalysis in the early 1970s remains radically underexplored. D. N. Rodowick's The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference, and Film Theory (New York: Routledge, 1991) makes some moves towards such an analysis; but his project is less to chart the effects of the Althusser-to-Lacan shift than to locate the problem of the theory of the (monolithic) spectator produced by classical cinema more specifically in Lacanian theory itself:

... the current attempts to define the self-identity of female spectators through psychoanalytic theory are ... based on ontological arguments. The singularity and self-identity of this concept--emphatically *the* female spectator--can only be preserved by a binary logic that opposes it to what it

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is not, or what it must negate: the definition of phallogocentric subjectivity as "male." (ix)

Rodowick's argument proceeds through an analysis of Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in order to demonstrate that the binary logic underpinning feminist theories of identification are due to Mulvey's choice of Lacanian rather than Freudian psychoanalysis: "My own view is that the most productive area for a turn to Freud in film theory is to derive a theory of signification from the Freudian theory of phantasy" (11). Because my reconception of "resistant" reading in my third chapter relies on many of Rodowick's arguments, I will not enter into an elaborate discussion of their particularities here. I will say, though, that his formulation of a "politics of critical reading" over accepted theories of cinematic identification is nevertheless firmly based within the feminist psychoanalytic parameters of *sexual politics*.

42 See especially: Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as a Masquerade" and Heath's "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," both in Formations of Fantasy, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (Routledge: New York, 1986); Laura Mulvey's "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun*," Framework 6.15-17 (Summer 1981); and Mary Ann Doane's "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," Screen 23.3-4 (Sept.-Oct. 1982) and her "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator," Discourse 11.1 (1988-89).

43 Johnston refers specifically here to the Lesage-Brewster/Heath/MacCabe debate and acknowledges that the use of psychoanalysis

poses serious political problems. There is a very distinct danger that psychoanalysis can be used to blurr [sic] any serious engagement with political-cultural issues. There are elements of such a tendency in the statement made by Ben Brewster, Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe . . . . What is completely lacking in the Brewster/Heath/MacCabe formulation is a sense of the asymmetry of patriarchal culture: Freud himself demonstrated clearly that there is no symmetry in the cultural formation of men and women. The point is not simply to assert a fundamental bi-sexuality, blurring the effects in culture of sexual difference, because under patriarchy we are condemned to live by our sexed identities, the ideological definitions of the "masculine" and "feminine." (42, 43)

I think Johnston's statements are important, and the entire Lesage-Brewster/Heath/MacCabe incident required feminist response. But I would note as well how the "serious political problems" psychoanalysis can be used to blur are *sexual politics*, not Marxist-- further evidence of the quick exit of Althusserian film criticism in Britain in the mid-1970s.

44 For a detailed feminist analysis of a Hawks film, see Maureen Turim's "Gentlemen Consume Blondes" Wide Angle 1.1 (1976). Although Turim warns in an addendum against overly generalized accounts of narrative or spectacle--"I want to make it clear that, in evoking these basic operations of fascination and pleasure, it is the specific ideological functions of their inscription in the film which is to be examined critically"--such explicit statements regarding the limitations of (Lacanian) psychoanalysis in feminist film criticism seem to me to be not only few and far between but critiques on the wrong side of the cinema/film divide. For it is my contention that totalizing models such as Althusser's theory of ideology or Lacan's theory of suture function well but *only* to elucidate the mechanisms of cinema and not of specific texts, insofar as they are theories of "the subject" in a general sense.

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45 For important readings of Von Sternberg's work see: E. Ann Kaplan's Women and Film 49-59; Gaylyn Studlar's "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," Quarterly Review of Film Studies 9.4 (Fall 1984); and her In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988).

46 See Zizek's Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture (Cambridge: MIT P, 1991) and his edited collection Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock) (London: Verso, 1992). I do not want to imply that Zizek's "text proves theory" approach is his individual invention--such a tradition is strong in continental post-structuralism, beginning with Derrida's three-book onslaught of 1967--L'écriture et la différence, La voix et le phénomène, and De la Grammatologie. (Barthes' S/Z, published in 1970, is perhaps a more important marker for film theory.) But the approach has proven less amenable to British and American psychoanalytic film feminists, at least for those who concentrate on Hollywood cinema. Those who work in counter-cinema either as filmmakers or theorists/critics, however, take it as more or less a given that the aesthetic text is not simply an example of but a producer of psychoanalytic theory. And Johnston's initial stress upon the relation between feminist critical interrogation of dominant cinema and women's counter-cinema demonstrates that the strategies of both "against" and "with the grain" reading are part and parcel of the same thing. The writings and films of Laura Mulvey are instructive here. See as well Kaja Silverman's The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988) and her Male Subjectivity at the Margins (New York: Routledge, 1992) for examples of "text proves theory," "with the grain" psychoanalytic readings of counter-cinema.

47 See as well: Deborah Linderman's "The Screen in Hitchcock's *Blackmail*," Wide Angle 4.1 (1980); Michael Renov's "From Identification to Ideology: The Male System of Hitchcock's *Notorious*," Wide Angle 4.1 (1980); Modleski's "'Never to be thirty-six years old': *Rebecca* as Female Oedipal Drama," Wide Angle 5.1 (1982); Robert Stam and Roberta Pearson's "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*: Reflexivity and the Critique of Voyeurism," Enclitic 7.1 (Spring 1983); Jeanne Thomas Allen's "The Representation of Violence to Women: Hitchcock's *Frenzy*," Film Quarterly 38.3 (Spring 1985); Ruth Perlmutter's "*Rear Window*: A Construction Story," Journal of Film and Video 37 (Spring 1985); Patrice Petro's "Rematerializing the Vanishing 'Lady': Feminism, Hitchcock, and Interpretation," Marian E. Keane's "A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock, and *Vertigo*," and Barbara Klinger's "*Psycho*: The Institutionalization of Female Sexuality," all in A Hitchcock Reader, ed. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1986); and chapters 5 and 6 of Mary Ann Doane's The Desire to Desire.

48 The following is a list of some of the feminist work done on all of these genres:  
*Film noir*: all eight of the essays collected in E. Ann Kaplan's Women in Film Noir (London: BFI, 1980); Mary Ann Doane's "*Gilda*: Epistemology as Striptease" Camera Obscura 11 (Fall 1983).  
The woman's film, melodrama: The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema; all of the essays in Sue Aspinall and Robert Murphy's BFI dossier on Gainsborough Melodrama (London: BFI, 1983); all eighteen essays collected in Christine Gledhill's Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film (London: BFI, 1987); Mary Ann Doane's The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s

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(Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987). Also of interest is Screen's "Dossier on Melodrama," 18.2 (Summer 1977), which includes Griselda Pollock's "Report on the Weekend School" and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's "Minnelli and Melodrama."

The seventies and eighties horror film: Carol J. Clover's Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992); Barbara Creed's The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 1993).

The B film: Pam Cook's "Exploitation Films and Feminism," Screen 17.2 (1976); Tania Modleski's "Film Theory's Detour," Screen 23.5 (Nov.-Dec. 1982).

Science fiction: all of the essays collected in Annette Kuhn's Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema (New York: Verso, 1990); all of the essays collected in Constance Penley et al.'s Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991).

Pornography: Linda Williams' Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible" (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989); all of the essays collected in Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson's Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power (London: BFI, 1993).

49 Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis have revised this account somewhat by considering identification as "oscillation," but still only specific to *female* spectatorship. See Mulvey's "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*" and De Lauretis' "Desire in Narrative" in her book Alice Doesn't. See also D. N. Rodowick's The Difficulty of Difference for a more recent critique of this model of spectatorship.

50 See especially: Mary Ann Doane's "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body," her "The Retreat of Signs and the Failure of Words: Leslie Thornton's *Adynata*," and her "'When the direction of the force acting on the body is changed': The Moving Image," all in Femmes Fatales; Constance Penley's "The Avant-Garde and Its Imaginary" and her "The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories," both in The Future of an Illusion; all 23 essays in Charlotte Brundson's Films for Women; Judith Mayne's The Woman at the Keyhole; and Kaja Silverman's The Acoustic Mirror.

51 Nevertheless, Patrice Petro in "Feminism and Film History" comes to a similar conclusion, albeit in an evaluation of the question of feminist film authorship. Following an analysis of the place of Dorothy Arzner in feminist film study, Petro states:

... what began as an attempt to *revise* the concept of film authorship by rethinking the place of the female director in the history of Hollywood cinema ended up in debates about the concept of the subversive text, and in arguments ... for a "(new) monolith of anonymous textuality" that inhibited further discussion of female authorship in the development of the classical film. To be sure, feminists continued to consider the possibility of locating female enunciation in the Hollywood cinema, and studies of female authorship in the independent and avant-garde cinema proceeded as if the relationship between biography and textual analysis were simpler, or at least less problematic, than in Arzner's case. (17-18)

I agree completely with the latter portion of this quotation; but I would argue that "debates about the concept of the subversive text" were not the result of an initial investigation into "the place of the female director in the history of Hollywood cinema," but vice versa.

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52 See for example Michele Wallace's "Blues for Mr. Spielberg" in her Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory (London: Verso, 1990).

53 Elizabeth Cowie's influential "The Popular Film as Progressive Text--a Discussion of *Coma*" (Parts 1 and 2), m/f 3 (1979) and 4 (1980), reprinted in Constance Penley's Feminism and Film Theory, is similarly concerned with providing a reception history of a popular film whose director nor genre has not been predetermined to be "progressive." Such study of popular film is for me a prerequisite of any film critic and teacher invested in socio-political change, for it opens up the possibility for a much wider set of spaces where one might offer an interventional reading, spaces beyond the university classroom or the hotel conference room. Part of the problem I see with concentrating resistant reading practice on classical Hollywood cinema or the feminist avant-garde is the sheer inaccessibility (literally for both categories, figuratively as well for the avant-garde) of many of these films--they are still, in the age of video, hard to obtain except for those who have access privileges to archives or universities or who live in New York City or Los Angeles or London. What is interesting about Bobo's and Cowie's essays is that they take care to address how important a critical and popular context is in establishing the "grain" of a popular film.

What I consider a weakness of Cowie's piece, though, is the way she switches back into a quite traditional psychoanalytic feminist "against the grain" practice after making some moves towards a more contingent theory of the "progressive" text. After stating that "a film is not 'progressive' as a given effect of its content but as a result of its insertion within particular institutions and discourses," Cowie goes on to say that the terms of judgment of "progressiveness" are nevertheless "constituted outside the film, within political discourse, and hence themselves are not simply given" (112). After establishing the tenability of this "outside" (i.e., feminism, her) perspective, however, the outside looks "in" at the film's aesthetic practices. I think, then, that Cowie forecloses analyzing the particular ways a popular or critical context affects the "grain" of a film in favor of a more traditional "against the grain" practice of criticism that concentrates on the film's narrativity, aesthetic forms, etc. Her analysis is detailed and convincing, but its failure to address other ideological issues beyond the patriarchal nonetheless marks it as precisely the type of "against the grain" reading that I take to be insufficient as a model for textual political resistance.

54 "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia," In Other Worlds: Essays on Cultural Politics (New York: Routledge, 1988) 116.

55 "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990) 31-32.

56 Both of these terms I find to be inadequate--not for West's particular political agenda, but for my own. "Demystification" carries with it too much baggage from the two types of feminist criticism I outlined at the beginning of my second chapter. On the one hand, it calls forth the sociological tradition which assumes a notion of "authentic" femininity or womanhood that is *misrepresented* by dominant, patriarchal media but which can be *presented* in a real, documentary approach to women's lives. On the other hand, it is a term often used by deconstructivist feminists to describe their dismantling of the dominant codes of huge structures of representation--the cinematic apparatus, western narrative in general, etc.--which aligns with a particularly complex combination of continental critical theory that "mystifies" all but those with the institutional (read:

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academic) support to study it in depth. "Prophetic criticism" has a religious/spiritualist ring to it that I have great difficulty with; it evokes (in the same way as does the word "moral," which West also uses) a kind of mystical truth-value that reinscribes mystification as political prescription.

I would offer in place of "demystification" or "prophetic criticism" a term like "contingent strategies of politicized reading"--not exactly eye-catching, but descriptive enough. It proceeds from a partisan base of political resistance to all structures of power which devalue and oppress whole groups of people due to their "difference" from an assumed norm of value. It understands each reading situation as a particular configuration of power, requiring critical attention in different, often contradictory, directions. It places an emphasis on transformative agency, on reading as an activity which takes a text and changes it, transforms it, translates it, intervenes at the site of meaning production and alters the terms of what "production" means. In this way, then, I see my critical activity as productive and progressive--the former because it is a creative act, the latter because it proceeds from an explicit political agenda that aims at uncovering and altering the present imbalances of power.

57 Quoted in Robert W. Welkos, "Director Trims 'Basic Instinct' to Get R Rating," Los Angeles Times 11 Feb. 1992: F4.

58 I use this term to suggest the particular class dimension of this genre of late-eighties film. For the alignment of active/professional/working/woman/sexuality as a threat to family, home, and (proper) domesticated, spousal, reproductive femininity makes these films of interest in terms of their normative functioning with respect to both feminine sexual desire and their place in the public/private sphere. The upper-class status of the single woman in films like *Fatal Attraction* and *Basic Instinct* signifies and "explains" her deviance: she is marked as dangerous by her mere presence in the public sphere as a professional woman. In the case of the "house" thrillers (*Pacific Heights*, *Internal Affairs*, *Unlawful Entry*), the violent threats to materialist "yuppie" values are figured as violations of the husband's private property, home and wife by a psychotic man-child who envies the traditional family's economic "success." I do not wish to pursue this issue at length, even in my reading of *Basic Instinct*. I will suggest, though, that a conservative ethic of private property and capitalist competition is welded to a "battle of the sexes" in these films in such a way as to moralize the threats to/by women who venture outside of the haven of the domestic space.

59 Quoted in Bernard Weinraub, "'The Crying Game': The Healing Powers of a Successful Movie," New York Times 19 Jan. 1993: C13.

60 "Editorial," Cineaste 20.1 (1993): 3.

61 Although I have not come across any specific request to reviewers in the Miramax presskit to keep a vow of silence about this revelation scene, enough critics have mentioned such a request to make it real enough. Certainly, the dominant "grain" of the film's American marketing campaign was to not reveal Dil's "real" gender. In Vincent Canby's first review of *The Crying Game* he writes, "If I sound vague, it's partly because the film's producers have pleaded with reviewers not to reveal important plot twists. . ." An interesting aspect of the presskit is how careful it is not to use pronouns when discussing Jaye Davidson/Dil. Davidson's brief bio, the last of five in the kit (he is preceded by Stephen Rea/Fergus, Miranda Richardson/Jude, Forest Whitaker/Jody, and

Jim Broadbent/Col), awkwardly and repetitively refers to him as Jaye, the "unisexual" of which effectively keeps "the secret."

I base my conclusion that the film was not (initially at least) "a spectacle of the appendage" outside of North America on both the conversations I have had with two friends who saw the film in London and various British newspaper reviews, neither of which reveals Dil's "true" gender nor mentions it as an issue of great importance (i.e., they do not symptomatically state that they are hiding anything from the reader). Here is Geoff Brown, reviewer for The London Times:

Politically, the film sits on the fence, which might aggravate some. No judgement is offered about the Irish troubles; Jordan's concern is to strip characters of beliefs and other protective clothing, leaving them vulnerable to the heart's crazy urgings. . . . This is that genuine rarity: a bold British film, bound to get people talking.

For both my British friends and the bulk of the reviewers, the film does not "really begin" (as it does for American critics) when Fergus goes to London and meets Dil. And although their emphasis was not the reverse of the American response, they did pay slightly more attention to the film's foreclosure of the political in favor of the personal. The bottom line, though, was remarkably similar--*The Crying Game* is a must-see.

62 See Leonard Quart's "Letter from London" in Cineaste 20.1 (1993): 22.

63 I use the phrase "sexual orientation" rather than "sexual preference" to underline the essentialism I see running throughout the film's discourse on difference. For the former phrase naturalizes what in the latter could be read as a choice. I will later argue that Dil's (and Jody's) homosexuality is tolerable in this heterosexist film both because "they can't help it" and because they are essentially "good" people (i.e., non-partisan liberal humanists) who accept their lot and stoically bear the prejudices of "bad" people.

64 The only real competition Jordan has in this respect is Jim Sheridan. Sheridan's debut film, *My Left Foot* (1988) was extremely popular with mainstream audiences, and it garnered an Academy Award for its male lead, Daniel Day-Lewis. *The Field*, which followed two years later, continued in the same vein as *My Left Foot*--an Irish male protagonist finds peace and spiritual transcendence through suffering--and it too was well-received by American popular audiences and critics. And I think that the soon-to-be-released *In the Name of the Father* promises to be a massive hit (with its "powerhouse" cast which includes Day-Lewis and Emma Thompson) according to a narrative economy similar to that of *The Crying Game*: "topical," humanist, paternalistic.

65 The choice of Fergus as the name for the alienated Irish subject is one loaded with meaning. W. B. Yeats wrote a series of poems on the Irish character, the most famous of which, "Who Goes with Fergus?" (quoted by Joyce, another self-exiled Irishman, in Ulysses), exhibits the same humanist/mystical tone of tragic masculinity as *The Crying Game*:

Who will go drive with Fergus now,  
And pierce the deep woods' woven shade,  
And dance upon the level shore?  
Young man, lift up your russet brow,  
And lift your tender eyelids,  
Maid, and brood on hopes and fear no more.

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And no more turn aside and brood  
Upon love's bitter mystery;  
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,  
And rules the shadows of the wood,  
And the white breast of the dim sea  
And all dishevelled wandering stars. (The Rose, 1893)

Although I will not unravel the potential imagistic continuities between this poem and *The Crying Game*--an activity which I consider a recourse to non-materialist aestheticism--I will mention that the two bear comparison in terms of offering an "empowered" masculinized solution to colonial servitude through a romanticization of exile.

For an interesting and largely sympathetic reading of Yeats' rejection of politics and shift into mysticism as an example of a poetics of decolonization, see Edward Said's "Yeats and Decolonization" in Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani's collection Remaking History (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989).

<sup>66</sup> For a more detailed summary of these films and filmmakers, see: Kevin Rockett et al.'s Cinema and Ireland (London: Routledge, 1987) 129-44; and Brian McIlroy's World Cinema 4: Ireland (London: Flicks, 1989) 59-83. At risk of romanticizing these filmmakers for their courage, I will nevertheless state that they have sacrificed international distribution and recognition in order to make films about Ireland for Irish audiences. Part of the reason that I am not discussing any of these films at length is because I have only seen two of them, and both in the context of a film course on Irish cinema.

<sup>67</sup> I include *Cal* in this list because it fits so neatly into the fatalistic strand of "doomed romance" in the British representation of Northern Ireland, even though it was Ireland's official entry at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival and was directed by an Irishman, Pat O'Connor. Like Jordan's *Angel*, O'Connor's *Cal* was produced by a British independent, and as such has deeper ties both financially and thematically to Britain than it does to Ireland. As with *Odd Man Out* and *Angel*, *Cal* adopts a vocabulary of fatalism that works against a political explanation for "the troubles." All of these films lay great stress on the corrosive effects of Republican struggle on individual lives and are largely unilluminating on the political causes and relations which produced and sustain this struggle in the first place. I am in accord with John Hill, then, when he argues that the "representations of the Irish characteristically associated with sources outside of Ireland have now, apparently, become so 'natural' and 'normal' that they are providing the framework for certain sections of Irish film-making as well" (Rockett et al. 178).

Brian McIlroy, a Protestant Irish film scholar, reads the recent spate of films dealing with "the troubles" in Northern Ireland in a slightly different light. In his essay "The Repression of Communities" Visual Representations of Northern Ireland during the Thatcher Years," McIlroy argues that the most unsympathetic portrayals in these films are not of Irish Catholics but of Protestants. States McIlroy: "No filmmaker in Britain and Ireland has thoroughly investigated a visual representation of the Protestant community, one that reaches beyond the easiest of stereotypes. If anything, filmmakers fetishize what they conceive as minority opinions" (107). While this may indeed be the case, I would argue that the matter is not as simple as "sympathetic visual representations" of Catholics or Protestants: the narrative trajectories of films like *Angel* and *Cal* clearly favor British rule over Irish independence, in that the "sympathetic" Irish Catholic male realizes the "futility of violence." The pursuit of a "message" about violence in these films thus propels them into the realm of the universal, beyond the specific context of Northern Ireland. In this respect McIlroy and I are in agreement. "In many ways, [the] tendency to use generic

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conventions and formulas betrays a conservative choice: it emphasizes the universal quality of a film's narrative and, in so doing, avoids a concerted attempt to demythologize the Northern Ireland 'problem'" (McIlroy 94).

68 That it makes sense that these two crossover art films "belong" together is becoming increasingly evident in the articles beginning to appear on them. A recent issue of *Cineaste* includes essays on *The Crying Game*, a review of *Orlando*, and interviews with both Sally Potter and Tilda Swinton, the director and lead actor in the latter film. A more "poetic" consideration of the two films was written by Molly Nesbit in the summer 1993 issue of *Artforum*. In "Apart without a Face: *Orlando* and *The Crying Game*," Nesbit is critical of *Orlando*, and although she doesn't really develop an argument out of her misgivings about the film, the tone of her assessment is (with the exception of her complaint regarding the film's mockery of love) resistant in precisely what I would consider the "right" way:

Time's substance, just like love's, is evacuated by the film. Time, like love, is butchered. . . . Time appears only as a one word intertitle--1650 is POETRY, 1700 is POLITICS, 1850 gets called SEX--history gets to be a teenage abstraction. This is not useful. It is childish. For history is not a new dress or a zeitgeist; dear sisters please be careful here. Perhaps Sally Potter is trying to make fun of the schoolbook, of oversimplification generally, making fun, even, of Orlando's surface and swing between male and female. But she has reduced not only the plot but also the the character so considerably that her Orlando is not even potentially farce. The film leaves Orlando at the end of a time line, female, happy, at one with the angels, an integral Self. (94)

One finds that *The Crying Game* fulfils for Nesbit the shortcomings she finds in *Orlando*--but only with respect to love and not to history, the latter of which *The Crying Game* rather forcefully represses. The very lack of political materiality that Nesbit finds so dangerous in *Orlando* becomes, it seems, in *The Crying Game* a virtue.

. . . faces organize nothing in *The Crying Game*. Bodies organize nothing. Clichés, stereotypes, psychoanalysis, traditional identities organize nothing. And history enters as the wordless pressure of events on lives. This requires us to understand character very differently. It requires us to try to understand ourselves. We are obliged to leave the surface for somewhere else. (94)

That "somewhere else" is for Nesbit Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the Body without Organs, which

is a beyond. A friendly, forthcoming beyond that can help explain how an Irishman who loves women can continue to love a man who appears with a woman's surface. There will be no story necessary here: love overtakes the preconceptions, the identities, the prescriptions for success. Dil makes any discussions of surface irrelevant. Dil shakes free of all that, turns inside out, transcends form. (95)

Why is humanist transcendence, non-materiality, progressive in *The Crying Game* but not in *Orlando*? Nesbit never says. This type of willful deconstructive mystification and ungrounded political positioning I find more than simply trendy or theoretically lazy (which it also is). I find it politically retrograde, insofar as it claims positionality within current discourses of identity politics at the same time that it valorizes the erasure of surface signifiers of identity. By opting for the individual in favor of the subject when talking, after all, about a film character, Nesbit reads *The Crying Game* "with the grain." I would opt for reading the film with the same wariness as Nesbit does *Orlando*.

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