Tracing the Heroine in Masculine Spectacle: Gender, Technology, and the Role of the Destroyer in Recent American Film

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Abstract

This thesis explores the changing relationship of power, technology, and gender in recent Hollywood films. Beginning with ideas of gender "truths" in philosophical thought, I posit that the representation of violence is inseparable from the notion of gender, and that ideas of gender are always historically specific.

I examine masculinity and aggression in Vietnam films, arguing that masculinity must struggle to renew its privilege and its illusion of purity.

Finally, I examine combat roles for women where the heroines have accessed "male" technology to become subjects of the social act. I conclude that these representations offer a possible female subjectivity and resistance to patriarchal assimilation only when the ambivalence and fragility of that subjectivity is recognized.

l'Extrait

Cette thèse examine le rapport changeant du pouvoir, de la technologie, et du genre dans les films recents de Hollywood.

En commençent avec les idées de "la vérité du genre" dans la pensée philosophique, je propose que la représentation de la violence est inséparable de l'idée du genre, et que les idées du genre sont toujours specifique a l'histoire.

J'examine la masculinité et l'aggression dans les films du Vietnam, en soutenant que la masculinité doit lutter pour prolonger son privilège et l'illusion de la pureté.

Enfin, j'examine les rôles de combatantes pour les femmes où les héroines ont accedé a la technologie mâle et sont ainsi devenues sujets actifs.

En conclusion, ces représentations offrent une possibilité pour un sujet femelle et s'opposent a la patriarchie seulement quand elles reconnaissent la nature contradictoire et la fragilité du sujet.

Contents

Contents

Introduction

Beginning with Teresa de Lauretis's claim that "the representation of violence is inseparable from the notion of gender,"[1] my thesis explores the changing relationship of power, technology and gender in specified Hollywood films since 1980. I examine representations of violence perpetrated against women in the masculine spectacle, as well as by them in recent "gender-bending" films.

Further, I posit that the equality and liberation of the heroine in the latter group of films does not depend on a recourse to masculinity or a glorification of "feminine" values; instead, it is contingent on the renouncement of the binary concepts of masculinity and femininity and the construction of a completely different set of socially desirable values.

Three corresponding chapters are structured as follows: the first examines the history of dualistic gender metaphors in philosophical and literary thought, drawing on discourses of science and popular culture (fashion, sports) to show that ideas of gender are always linked to specific historical moments; the second focuses on hypermasculinity, specifically in American Vietnam films; the third explores the potential for changing power and gender configurations in recent films in which the heroines have accessed "male"

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[1] Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) 33.

technology to become subjects of culture and of the social act.

1. **Developments in Gender Theory**

In this chapter, I explore the relations of superiority and subordination used by thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle to justify a hierarchical world of unchanging reality. Freud challenges the adequacy of such essentialist claims, calling the essentialism of genders an "error of superimposition."[2] These relations have been simply reversed by some feminist thinkers today (of essentialist and cultural feminism in particular), and rejected by others (feminist postmodernism and deconstructionism).

Further, I examine tendency in our culture to emphasize universalized feminine and masculine traits in such fields as science, architecture, fashion and sports. I argue that these concepts of gender are contradictory, having particular identities and structures.

2. **Masculinity in the Cinema**

In this chapter, I scrutinise the claims of the previously mentioned cultural and ecofeminists such as Andrea Dworkin, Mary Daly, and Susan Griffin, for a discussion of aggression in the Vietnam film. The ecofeminist claim that male violence and dominance is

[2] Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works, vol.22, ed. and trans. Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1932-36) 115.

timeless and inevitable would seem to justify criticism of Rambo [1985] and Platoon [1986] as simple celebrations of aggressive masculinity.

Far from being a simple battle between good and evil and between the sexes, I argue that these films indicate that masculinity is diverse, multiple and vulnerable, and that it must struggle in order to produce itself anew and to renew its privilege.

Rambo was selected for analysis from a group of films (including Missing in Action [1984], Uncommon Valor [1985], Invasion USA [1985], and Commando [1985]) in which the hero is presented as a "pure fighting machine," or as the incarnation of a homogeneous masculinity. These films are often (and rightly) criticized as right-wing fantasies of American triumph and suffering, but any contradictory evidence which suggests that the hero's ultimate struggle is to maintain the illusion of potency, is ignored.

Platoon, often viewed as the social realist's answer to Rambo, represents a shift to a somewhat anti-war perspective. Films such as The Deer Hunter [1979], Platoon, and Gardens of Stone [1987], reject muscular masculinity in the hero, but affirm in him, instead, a gender compromise (which involves the incorporation and subjugation of the feminine).

The result is less a film about the politics of the war, than an exploration of the relationships men form to

establish a position for a new, tempered patriarch so that he may "teach meaning to society as a whole."[3] In fact, all of these films end with the revived hero's final tribute to comradeship and duty; the hero is not motivated by any political or social ethic but by his respect already earned and by a promise he makes "to restore the manhood lost in Vietnam."[4]

3. Women and Power: The Heroine with the Gun

While Hollywood has responded to real changes in women's status by featuring strong, independent women in successful positions, Elayne Rapping argues, it has remained their style to "keep up with the times while framing and limiting whatever apparently progressive messages it sends out in ways which manage to undercut the real demands and rights of women."[5] In fact, in the vast majority of Hollywood's narratives, the characters who are mobile and who enjoy freedom are men, while the obstacle is morphologically female.

I examine the "feminization of Hollywood" and the changing nature of violence in The Terminator [1984], Terminator 2: Judgment Day [1991], and Thelma and Louise

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[3] Susan Jeffords, The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 142.

[4] Jeffords, 143.

[5] Elayne Rapping, "Hollywood's New 'Feminist' Heroines," Cineaste 14.4 (1986): 5.

[1991]. By this examination, I show that the heroine who finds herself in the dangerous and exhilarating fringes of law, order and society will not necessarily save the world from social, ecological and nuclear disaster, but she may destroy the claim of neutrality and truth of technology and gender.

While there have been many films which feature heroines who are positive feminist role models (from Bette Davis and Lauren Bacall to Meryl Streep and Jodie Foster)--as problematic as their characters are--few films have allowed their heroines to access male technology and the role of the combat warrior.

The Terminator and Terminator 2: Judgment Day best represent the hypothesis of recent gender and postmodern theory which holds that the position of woman is the necessary first stage in the dismantling of patriarchal structures of knowledge and narrative. The heroine, Sarah Connor, is a composite of contradictory images: the warrior, the mother, the paranoid schizophrenic, and the prophet.

Not only does the film reject a specific femininity for the heroine, but the linearity and closure of traditional narratives is abandoned for an affirmation of the intensity of the present (also familiar to postmodern theory).

Thelma and Louise was selected for examination, as it is the only recent American film, to my knowledge, which

subverts the genre of the road movie. The road movie is the perfect metaphor for the changing relationship of women, nature and technology, as it depicts women in nature (as opposed to woman as nature), who in true postmodern fashion, embrace a will to pleasure instead of a will to power.

In my research, I have encountered repeatedly the argument that films which support the relationship of women and what is commonly regarded as "male" technology, provide the same unsophisticated enjoyment of violence that occurs in the viewing of "male" action films.

The problem with this position is that it implies that there are only two types of films which can be made about women: those which are objectionable because they reinforce dominant power relations, images and narratives of our society, and those which offer alternate images of women in support of peace and sisterhood.

It is my position, however, that all of these contradictions occur within a single film, and that this ambiguity indicates a resistance to assimilation (to the dominant representations) which is concurrent with the present social climate.

As well as inciting the analyist to resistance, the scrutiny of dominant representations produces understanding and pleasure in him or her. As Annette Kuhn has stated in her introduction to The Power of the Image, politics and knowledge are interdependent: "At one level, analyzing and

deconstructing dominant representations may be regarded as a strategic practice. It produces understanding, and understanding is necessary to action."[6]

It is clear that in the analysis of dominant representations of masculinity and femininity, there is a double pleasure; the first is undoubtedly in the blind acceptance of familiar images and stories, but the second is the pleasure of resistance. Kuhn argues, this second pleasure does not object to the enjoyment of the images, "but to the structures of power which ask us to consume them uncritically and in highly circumscribed ways."[7]

4. Contributions to Original Knowledge

While representations of women and the question of "what women want" has long been the preoccupation of psychoanalysts, cultural theorists, filmmakers and critics, few writers have examined the precariousness of masculinity in films which overtly glorify the masculine hero.

Recent cultural theory has pointed to a crisis in legitimization and in the male ego, from the destruction of the master narratives to the recognition of the "hysterical male"[8] in a contested patriarchy.

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[6] Annette Kuhn, The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality (London: Routledge, 1987) 8.

[7] Kuhn, 8.

[8] Kroker, Arthur and Marilouise, eds., The Hysterical Male: New Feminist Theory (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1991).

It is my belief that an examination of popular films which on the one hand appear as a backlash against feminism, and on the other offer multiple identities for the hero/ine, will only enhance an understanding of the position and formation of the subject in relation to these representations.

I. Developments in Gender Theory

Do we truly need a true sex? With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, Western societies have answered in the affirmative. They have obstinately brought into play this question of a 'true sex' in an order of things where one might have imagined that all that counted was the reality of the body and the intensity of its pleasures. -- Michel Foucault[1]

There is no truth in itself of sexual difference in itself, of either man or woman in itself. --Jacques Derrida[2]

i. Sexual Essences and Responsibility

As Helene Cixous observes in The Newly Born Woman, it is a "common place gesture of History" that there be two races: the masters and the slaves. The world itself has been organized (by philosophers since Plato) on the basis of dialectical couples to emphasize the universality of inequality between opposites and the inevitability of analogy. Formerly, the male Greek citizen was defined in contrast to women and barbarians. Plato's system of masters and slaves did not posit horizontal polarities; instead, it emphasized the superiority of one item in the couple. For

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[1] Rosalind Coward, Female Desires: How They Are Sought, Bought and Packaged (New York: Grove, 1985) 248.

[2] Jacques Derrida, Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979) 103.

example, his system recognized the following dichotomies:

Man/Woman

Head/Heart

Culture/Nature

Sun/Moon

Activity/Passivity

Presence/Absence[5]

Here, "Man" is opposed to "Woman" but is also superior to "Woman"; and he is allied with superiority in each instance--presence, activity, mind, et cetera.

Of course, history is typically written by the victors, and it would be rare for the victor to consciously believe himself unworthy of his privilege. It is no accident, then, that the person who rules, also names and defines his other (reducing him first from "a 'person' to a 'nobody' to the position of 'other'") in terms which would secure his advantage and prosperity.

Perhaps one of the most banal and frightening terms appealed to by the "Empire of the Self-same" is "nature." In Patriarchal Precedents, and later in Female Desires, Rosalind Coward asserts that attempts in anthropology to "discover universal truths about the human species" establish their findings "on racist and imperialist

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[5] Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement, The Newly Born Woman, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 63.

presumptions rather than on scientific study."[4]

In the nineteenth century, she explains, social scientists examining non-European societies concluded that the patriarchal family ("the family recognizing male dominance and succession through the father's line")[5] was universal in those societies which were 'civilized.' Societies which varied from the patriarchal structure, were deemed "perverse" or "primitive."

Whereas the patent aim of nineteenth century anthropologists was to establish marriage, family and property rights as 'natural' in the evolution of any civilization (equating difference with aberrance), a corresponding more reticent aim was to prove the inevitability of sexual difference.

Coward explains that regardless of the family formation, the "nature" of sexuality, according to Western thought, is always clear: "sex (understood as mating) is necessary to the process of life, ...[and] is premised on one sex being radically different (and perhaps by implication superior) to the other."[6] It is the inference here that men and women have different relations to reproduction that produce separate sexual behaviours for the sexes.

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[4] Coward, 215.

[5] Coward, 214.

[6] Coward, 215.

Coward argues that scientists turn to the animal kingdom and anthropomorphize it in order to confirm conventional forms of behaviour in humans. The belief in "instinct" neatly justifies "possessiveness, dominance and [male] aggression" occurring in nature as a natural evolutionary process:

> Men would do it with whomever and whatever...This makes men naturally promiscuous and naturally aggressive, competing as they do with other men. Women, however, are more fussy; women select their partners either as good providers or as good genetic stock, and then set about securing these partners.[7]

Once the myth of sexual essence is accepted, nature becomes a defense for injustice; it would be much less gratifying, says Coward, "if nature made us question how we treat each other, and challenge what humans do to each other in the name of profit and power."[8] If the male is destined to be a predator, and the female the "lure" in response to the male's probing sexuality, then the next assumption is not too far away--"male aggression is inevitable, female passivity and weakness is eternal."[9]

Yet, as Freud notes in "Femininity," this conclusion is

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[7] Coward, 23.

[8] Coward, 215.

[9] Coward, 236.

based on an "error of superimposition" (mistaking two different things for a single one.)[10] It is inadequate, he argues, "to make masculine behaviour coincide with activity and feminine with passivity"[11] in human sexual life. Society enforces the suppression of aggressive tendencies in women; as for the animal kingdom, "in some classes of animals the females are the stronger and more aggressive and the male is active only in the single act of sexual union."[12]

Coward points to the dangers inherent in this error of superimposition, arguing that the acceptance of a natural link between the male species and aggression is often used to justify rape as an inevitable consequence of the rapacious male's sexuality. She quotes Mr. Nicholas Fairburn, Solicitor General for Scotland in 1977, who says, "MPs would do well to remember that rape involves an activity which is normal. It is part of the business of men and women that they hunt and be hunted and say "yes" and "no" and mean the opposite."[13] In a twisted reversal of justice, the rapist becomes the personification of excessive

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[10] Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works, ed. and trans. [Mrs.] Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1932-36) 115, vol. 22 of The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 23 vols.

[11] Freud, 115.

[12] Freud, 115.

[13] Coward, 236.

masculinity, while the victim's refusal is merely modesty. This will be discussed again in connection with the representation of rape in the cinema, but suffice it to say here that so long as female sexuality is imagined as a lure, real injustices ensue as women are held socially responsible for their misrepresented identities.

Western societies extrapolate from the assumption that women are the reproductive sex, for example, to explain "why we stay at home, why we don't get promoted, why we don't get well paid, why we cook and clean."[14] Similarly, women's ability to reproduce is equated with women's sexual behaviour and with women's responsibility for child care--another equation, Coward argues, which "has emerged through the history of society and has been projected on to nature."[15]

ii. "Natural Privilege" in the Philosophical Tradition

The metaphor of slavery was central to the thought of Plato; in fact, he generalized it to include all relationships. The generalization resulted in a "great chain of being"--a justification of the relative superiority and subordination of all living things. For Plato, "Difference does not make the others equal; subordination is

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[14] Coward, 241.

[15] Coward, 242.

relative and elaborately marked."[16]

In Centaurs and Amazons, Page duBois locates a shift from literary to philosophical discourse (in the fourth century B.C.) that has had devastating consequences for the history of Western culture. Plato's "descending ladder of creation," according to duBois, organizes difference vertically in descending order of relative value and estrangement from the good.[17]

Plato's project of division and categorization (called "diaeresis"), rejects earlier analogical models (ie. Greek/barbarian), which position the subject against the alien, for divisions within the city (ie. male/female) which posit an eternal hierarchy between citizens.

In Timaes, and The Symposium, he appeals to "Hesiod's devolutionary myth"[18] to secure the dominance of the philosopher--it is he who is closest to the heavens. If the citizen (man--one rung below the philosopher) has been cowardly, he is reincarnated as woman; if "he still refraineth not from wickedness [kakias] he shall be changed every time, according to his wickedness, into some bestial form..."[19]

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[16] Page duBois, Centaurs and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1982) 140.

[17] duBois, 136.

[18] duBois, 135.

[19] duBois, 135.

Slavery ensures that the hierarchy remain in tact so one can see his place in the "kosmos."[20] The concern for the justification of inevitable and natural superiority was in response to the Peloponnesian War, at the end of which "difference had invaded and disrupted the city."[21] The Greek male reordered his world putting himself closest to Good, whereas the position of women was rationalized in a different way: "Women were associated with the body, which was inferior to the mind; thus they, like the body, served the soul, the head, the philosopher, the male." Women were thus put in the position of being inside and outside the city. Women were fundamental to reproduction (and therefore to the propagation of the city), but to separate them from men they were defined (and confined within the city) as men's property, and as such, they lack the capacity for reason (which is why women cannot be philosophers, according to Plato.)

The predicament of women in the Greek city is one that Cixous recognizes as "the paradox of the other" in a system of slavery in general. The master needs the slave, says Cixous, in order to keep his privilege: "If there were no other, one would invent it. Besides, that is what masters

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[20] duBois, 139.

[21] duBois, 140.

[22] duBois, 141.

do: they have their slaves made for order."[23] It is the plot of racism that ensures that the other preserve its otherness while settling down in the "dialectical circle"; "the body of what is strange must not disappear, but its force must be conquered and returned to the master."[24] The paradox of the other is that exclusion is not an exclusion. She adds that there can be "no economico-political power without exploitation, ...no 'Frenchmen' without wogs, no Nazis without Jews...."[25]

Aristotle furthered the justification of exploitation in his Generation of Animals. DuBois explains, "Aristotle constructs even more explicitly than Plato, a ladder of kinds of beings based on a theory of natural difference, or relative lack, which sets all creatures in a vertical hierarchy."[26] Here, the female is but a deformed male, just as slaves and animals are naturally deficient. Because anatomy is destiny (natural) in Aristotle's view, then the master is not to be held responsible for any abhorrent conduct in his dealings with the slave, since his will is the closest to the divine "Good."

Considering that the philosophical tradition has been steeped in assumptions of natural privilege, it is not

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[23] Cixous, 71.

[24] Cixous, 70.

[25] Cixous, 71.

[26] duBois, 143.

surprising that a precondition of social change is an attempt to understand and make visible the particular, constructed identities of what is commonly deemed "natural" or "universal." If the masters truly have attained their privilege in a natural fashion, and if every creature is, as Aristotle says, "marked out from the moment of birth to rule or to be ruled,"[47] then, there would be no reason for the master to feel threatened by a lesser species.

Yet the comedies of Aristophenes and Euripides' Medea confirm just the opposite: in both, there is the portrayal of a woman with power who threatens the traditional order of family and state. The plays equate the potential disruption of order with a "femaleness, barbarism and animality..rooted within culture,"[48]; according to DuBois, this equation reveals an anxiety about sexual difference.

iii. The Construction of Gender Dualities in Contemporary Culture

Whereas the master/slave scenario covered all opposition for the pioneers of the Great Chain, twentieth century thought (especially in the fields of psychoanalysis and feminism) is more concerned with sexual difference. In our society, discourses of/on the fashion industry, sports, architecture and science, to name some, often hinge on

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[47] duBois, 143.

[48] duBois, 120.

dualistic gender metaphors.

Kaja Silverman points out in "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse" that the concern about sexual difference manifested itself at the end of the eighteenth century with the rise of the middle class and the uniformity among workers. She notes that "class distinctions have 'softened' and gender distinctions have 'hardened'..."[29] in terms of dress. If we agree with Freud that "the ego is first and foremost a body-ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but it is itself the projection of a surface,"[30] and with Silverman that "that surface is largely defined through dress,"[31] then we begin to understand the naturalization of gender metaphors.

If it can be said that the fashion system has a 'nature', it is its constant denial of its own historical construction. The fashion system constructs a strict division between "this year's look" and "last year's look". Roland Barthes posits that "every new Fashion is a refusal to inherit...Fashion experiences itself as a Right."[32] For the past two centuries, little has changed in the definition

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[29] Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 147.

[30] Silverman, 152.

[31] Silverman, 147.

[32] Roland Barthes, The Fashion System, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (New York: Hill, 1983) 273.

of men's fashion, whereas women have assumed the characteristics of the fashion industry--inconstant, sensuous, superficial, and narcissistic. Self-display had always been a male endeavour, extravagant clothing being a sign of "aristocratic power and privilege."[33] Silverman borrows a term from J.C. Flugal who describes the shift in the late eighteenth century as "The Great Masculine Renunciation." With the rise of the middle class and industrialization, the richness of male dress subsides:

> the voluminous clothing and elaborate wigs of the nobleman slowly dwindled into what would eventually become the respectable suit and 'coiffure a la naturelle' of the gentleman, while female dress and headpieces reached epic proportions.[34]

Clothing designed for men to accommodate the needs of the industrial revolution has played an integral part in defining the male 'nature' as stable and unified (orderly, and at the same time, suggesting phallic rigidity.) It became the job of women to dress flamboyantly in order to assert the wealth and importance of her husband.

The qualities of narcissism and exhibitionism are usually attributed to women; the view that woman exists "to watch themselves be looked at," to feed an appetite and not

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[33] Silverman, 139.

[34] Silverman, 139.

to have any of her own is one that has become a solidified metaphor (Nietzsche's definition of truth) in our society. Nietzsche, in fact, criticizes woman for her superficiality and narcissism: "I do think adorning herself is part of the Eternal-Feminine...Her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty. Let us men confess it: we honor and love precisely this art and this instinct in woman."[35] But, as John Berger notes, this 'love' of the woman's form reveals a male hypocrisy:

> You paint a naked woman because you enjoy looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you call the painting Vanity thus morally condemning the woman for this nakedness you have depicted for your own pleasure.[36]

It is important to note here that a seductive image or ideal of woman is not a solely man-made creation. Looking and being looked at are not necessarily active and passive, respectively; rather, these experiences shift between activity and passivity. Because the message of visual impact is so prevalent and influential in our society, women (as well as men) form their identities either within

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[35] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Woman De-Feminized," Masculine/Feminine: Readings in Sexual Mythology and the Liberation of Woman, ed. Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak (New York: Harper, 1969) 4.

[36] "Ways of Seeing", video recording, narr. and writ. John Berger, prod. Michael Dibb, Time-Life Multi-Media, BBC-TV, London, 1974 (2 videocassettes).

cultural values or against them.

Coward posits that self-image in our society is inseparable from notions of desirability. In other words, the perception of being desired is rarely disassociated from the act of desiring. "[B]ecause desirability has been elevated to being the crucial reason for sexual relations, it sometimes appears to women that the whole possibility of being loved and comforted hangs on how their appearance will be received."[37]

What the voyeuristic desire in men reveals is that narcissistic and exhibitionistic desires have not disappeared or been annulled, but they have found alternative modes of expression. Silverman contends that sublimation of the desire to be visible is evident in professional "showing off" as well as in spectator sports where "expertise is virtually synonymous with corporeal display."[38] The identification with woman-as-spectacle also indicates male narcissism, occurring as it does at a culturally acceptable level, whether it involves a fetish or the mere association with a beautiful woman; or, it can surface in more "deviant" forms such as transvestism; or it may reverse into scopophilia.

Though appearance and beauty have been long established in our society as synonymous with the "feminine," upon

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[37] Coward, 78.

[38] Silverman, 141.

closer investigation, this myth reveals itself as a historical amnesiac; we may conclude with Jacques Lacan that exhibitionism is as vital to the construction of the male subject as it is to the female subject, (voyeurism being a secondary formation of exhibitionism).[39]

In photographic images of men, exhibitionism is qualified to accommodate dominant ideas of "masculinity-as-activity." In an article on male pin-ups, Richard Dyer concludes that images of men usually show them engaged in an activity. If the model is not "doing" he is not simply "being" either. Even the posed or "exhibited" body of the male model promises activity, according to Dyer: "Even in an apparently relaxed, supine pose, the model tightens and tautens his body so that the muscles are emphasized, hence drawing attention to the body's potential for action."[40] Often they are looking up as though their minds were actively thinking of higher or at least other things; the look is a familiar one of disinterest, not the coy knowing look (or averted look) so often seen in the female model.

The bulk of popular photographic images of men are not only images of active men but of sportsmen or film stars who boast a phallic muscularity. Dyer posits that the pin-ups suggest a naturalness to muscles which "legitimates male

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[39] Silverman, 142.

[40] Richard Dyer, "Don't Look Now." Screen 23.3-4 (1982) 67.

power and domination."[41] There is an almost hysterical quality to much of the male imagery, argues Dyer, "the clenched fists, the bulging muscles, the hardened jaws," they all attest to the impossibility of the penis to achieve the mystique of phallus.[42] The most notable aspect of these masculine images is the disavowal of vulnerability and threat of aggression toward others. The perfectly executed movement of the athlete and glistening hyper-masculine physique in popular images today are reminiscent of those in Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia--emphasizing skill, dynamic action and mastery of the body. Anthony Easthope confirms this tendency to represent the male athlete as in-phallible in his comparison of man and machine:

> The hardness and tension of the body strives to present it as wholly masculine, to exclude all curves and hollows and be only straight lines and flat planes...not soft and feminine; hairy if need be, but not smooth; bone and muscle, not flesh and blood.[43]

The image of the hyper-male is strengthened further by the implication that the model is always expanding in size and power (from relaxation to tension). Not only is the body

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[41] Dyer, 71.

[42] Dyer, 71.

[43] Anthony Easthope, What a Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture (Boston: Unwin, 1990) 54.

"invariably portrayed erect..but it seems to be able to inflate itself,"[44] says Easthope, just as the ordinary man has the capacity to turn into the superman in superhero comic books.

The duality of gender metaphors (suggesting the invincibility and preference of the masculine) in sports has been acknowledged by The Amateur Athletic Association of Los Angeles (and has surfaced as a topic of interest in recent popular fashion magazines). In a study of the descriptive vocabulary used for male and female basketball and tennis players, the Athletic Association concluded that women were three to four times less likely than men to be described in terms connoting strength, power, or aggression. In women's games, "the word 'nice' was used ad nauseam."[45] Even when female athletes exercised the same moves as male athletes, sportscasters used "feebler" language for the actions of the women. The vocabulary for male activity also suggests powerful intent and singular direction while female activity is characterized as aimless, often invoking the presence of a more threatening opponent:

A male athlete	/	A female athlete
yells		screams
is aggressive		is active
misfires		misses

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[44] Easthope, 54.

[45] "Women Right Now," Glamour March 1992: 11.

crashes through.....moves against (the defense)

Also according to the study, women were six times more likely than men to be referred to by commentators by first name only; "and all the men who were called by their first name were either black or Hispanic."[46] The impersonal treatment of the white male indicates the commentator's (implicit observer's) respect (and fear?) of the athlete, and confirms the seriousness of the male's business. Whereas the female player is designated as a specific and familiar woman, the male player is endowed with the transcendental status of the unfamiliar, yet universally respected hero. In other words, the female athlete is identified as a person who is also a player, while the male is more than a player--he is the embodiment of pure play.

Ideas of universalized gender traits in science and medicine are exposed in the same dominant metaphors of the virility and infallibility of the male body (and particularly of the male reproductive system). Emily Martin concludes from a study of medical writings that metaphors for the male body suggest an immunity to defect and thereby fictionalize the male body "into a masculinist image, the ideal, of transcendental oneness."[47] It is not surprising that her study would find that metaphors for the female body

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[46] "Women Right Now," 116.

[47] Judy Wajcman, Feminism Confronts Technology (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991) 67-8.

are demeaning and negative; the practice of gynaecology is a science that presumes a fragility and potential for disease solely in the female reproductive/sexual apparatus. Comparatively, "those describing the male system suggest power and positive qualities."[48] Just as in the sports example, in science too, there is a refusal to see a particular or fragile identity and structure to "masculinity." The male body is suspiciously absent from scientific scrutiny and is rendered immortal by this invisibility.

The language of science is steeped in such metaphors--nature is designated as a woman to be discovered and penetrated by the male scientist. Coward locates precisely this theme in the scientific programme 'The Miracle of Life' which attributes masculine and feminine (human) traits to sperms and ova. The investigation of sex in this programme, she argues, is loaded with assumptions about sexual difference. There is little doubt which sex features as most active and vital in the adventure of conception: "We were treated to a sight of the 'sperm armada' going to battle, and a display of male bonding as the lads helped the 'successful' sperm make its conquest."[49] A similar programme exploring patriarchy at conception showed how all foetuses are originally female; the show, entitled, "The

[48] Wajcman, 68.

[49] Coward, 214.

Fight to be Male" proceeded to reveal the spectacular metamorphosis that climaxes in the generation of the male foetus.

The insistence on gender dualities will be examined in one last area of our culture before turning the emphasis to popular film--that of architecture. Much modern architecture, built by male architects, has been criticized by feminists as incongruent with the principles, visions and needs of women. The multi-storey residential block, for example, is criticized by A. Coleman and J. Jacobs among others as "the epitome of the masculinist approach."[50] The building was envisioned as "a vertical garden city with 'streets in the air,'"[51] but has been discredited because of a "disregard for the quality of women's lives." Wajcman recounts the complaint about "the fact that housework and childcare might be made more onerous and isolating for women stranded at dizzy heights, without safe and accessible outdoor space..."[52]

German architect Margrit Kennedy suggests that male and female architects build according to opposing principles. These include (male/female): designer oriented/user oriented; formal/functional; fixed/flexible; abstractly systematized/organically ordered; specialized and one-

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[50] Wajcman, 121.

[51] Wajcman, 121.

[52] Wajcman, 121.

dimensional/holistic and complex; profit-oriented/social; quickly constructed/slowly growing. These gender-specific principles would attest to the inevitability of the expression of masculinity in modern phallic towers as well as the inherent femininity in buildings which are "round, enclosing, curving and low-rise."[53]

Wajcman points out that this strict division between male and female subjectivities as expressed in architecture ignores the contrasting cases where men build "feminine" buildings and women build "masculine" ones. In the first case, one need only look to "Gaudi's rippling architecture or the spiral shaped Guggenheim museum of Frank Lloyd Wright"[54] to witness round and curving structures built by men.

In the second case, the "female principles" of architecture cannot account for women's involvement in the creation of high-rise buildings.

Wajcman adds that female architects who do build low-rise "feminine" buildings are acting under the constraints of their position in the profession, rather than simply realizing natural female instincts in their creations. Furthermore, there is a "high art/low art" distinction in architecture that anticipates a "masculine/feminine" distinction:

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[53] Wajcman, 121.

[54] Wajcman, 123.

> That women architects have traditionally been assumed to be best suited for the design of domestic architecture and interiors reflects their low status in the profession rather than a specifically female attribute. It is to do with the hierarchical relationship between what is considered to be great "architecture" of the public realm as opposed to the mere "building" of houses.[55]

iv. The Metaphysics of "The Feminine" in Feminist Discourse

Thus far, I have examined the subjugation of women via a socially constructed and historically specific homology of women and femininity as reflected in the social practices of our culture. Where the "masculine" was exalted over the "feminine," the masculine was aligned with stability, universality, and immortality. 'Man' becomes the invisible source of human identity, and 'women' are seen as relatively deviant or derivative of 'men': "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."[56]

Eco-feminists of the eighties, including Susan Griffin and Adrienne Rich among others, adopt the tripartite hierarchy but replace 'Man' with 'Woman' at the apex of

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[55] Wajcman, 124.

[56] 1 Gen 27.

origin and elevation. This brand of feminism celebrates women's superior virtue and denunciates male violence and man-made culture.

The assumption of women's superior virtue allies them with instinct, life, and nature in the same way that men's supposed instinctual violence is associated with culture and death. At the same time, it suggests that men are closer to nature (forceful, violent, animal-like, instinctive) while women are the products of culture, tamed, domestic and civilized.[53] What can be deduced from these contradictory metaphors is that "neither 'woman' nor 'man'..is consistently connected with 'nature'."[54]

What is also evident is that, in both cases, women are associated with life (instinct/biology or domesticity/family). The idea that women are the only guarantors of the future of life on earth is one that has also been vocalized by Ronald Reagan and anti-feminist conservatives. Lynne Segal argues that Adrienne Rich's idea of the "comic essence of womanhood," that keeps women in touch with the creative, nurturing, and benign aspects of nature, just happens "to express precisely what has been most central to traditional conceptions of womanhood within

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[53] Lynne Segal, Is the Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism (London: Virago, 1988) 9.

[54] Segal, 7.

male-dominated culture over the last two hundred years."[59] The celebration of "biological instincts" or "thinking through the body" is suspiciously similar to the sexist view that women exist for the primary function of sex and reproduction.

Another danger in the privileging of the body for women, is the narcissism and retreat from the world that results from a preoccupation with appearance. Segal observes that while feminists will encourage women to be autonomous and aggressive in the public sphere, the message to keep slim and fit (and therefore to feel liberated and in control), is a message that is "remarkably similar to the one Western women have so often heard about their bodies: that we should be thin and beautiful."[60] The emphasis on attention to the body and self is detached, argues Segal, from real encouragement to construct and change their working and social lives, since the same expectations are made of the "dependent" woman.

Katherine Gilday makes the same point in her film The Famine Within. The paradox of eating disorders is that though we are theoretically freer than ever before, we are also "obsessing about our looks more than ever before."[61]

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[59] Segal, 9.

[60] Segal, 9.

[61] Cynthia Lucia, "The Famine Within: An Interview with Katherine Gilday," Cineaste 18.4 (1992) 39.

One is "a kind of reassuring current against the other," she says, "There's a fear in women of this new role, so you have the lacy bra under the suit and all the modes of reassurance that we're still performing the same old function even while we're moving into new terrain."[62]

One final example of the problem with associating women with "the body" in essentialist feminism can even be located in Silverman's aforementioned essay on fashion. Silverman points out that female dress has undergone frequent "libidinal displacements" (an emphasis on legs one season, on breasts in another, for example,) which make the female body "less stable and localized than its male counterpart."[63] She argues that this tendency in fashion "creates the free-floating quality of female sexuality," radically questioning the continuity and coherence of the masculine identity.[64]

Women's bodies have been represented in the fashion industry, and in society in general, as fragmentary. In the fashion industry, for instance, "the body is talked about in terms of different parts, 'problem areas', which are referred to in the third person."[65] Women are urged to view their bodies as having many separate identities; and

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[62] Lucia, 40.

[63] Silverman, 147.

[64] Silverman, 147.

[65] Coward, 43.

the language used to describe a part which does not conform to the ideal frame indicates an even pathological disgust for the body. (Men also entrust a separate identity to body parts; most notibly, is the naming of the penis. This objectification of the penis, however, is rarely an indication of disgust, but may reveal men's fear of loss of control.)

Coward warns that this fragmented sense of the body "is likely to be the foundation for an entirely masochistic or punitive relationship with one's own body."[66]

One must also recognize that the association of femininity with the body or with nature, does not situate women within culture or history. What is considered feminine in some societies is considered masculine or gender-neutral in others, and there is no guarantee that "culture", "femininity" et cetera, carry fixed meanings across the boundaries of culture. Wajcman points out that there is no single meaning or consistent dichotomy of meanings, but "only a matrix of contrasts":

> If we look at other cultures such as those of African and Aboriginal peoples, we find concepts of nature quite different from dominant European ones. Their world views posit a more harmonious relationship between mankind and the living

[66] Coward, 44.

> universe of nature which strikingly parallels what is claimed to be a distinctly feminine world view. And what the African and Aboriginal world views designate as European is similar to what feminists designate as masculine.[67]

In contrast to feminist essentialism which elevates "woman" above men and women because of her superior "instincts" and "nature", feminist standpoint theorists such as Evelyn Keller and Hilary Rose urge society's institutions to incorporate women's values. It is their view that "men's dominating position in social life results in partial and perverse understandings, whereas women's subjugated position provides the possibility of more complete and less perverse understandings."[68] In other words, only the marginal people of society are equipped to potentially see through and dismantle what is at the centre of society.

Though this view does not appeal to biologism, it is still a form of essentialism as it assumes a common experience for women in the margins, at the same time as it ignores the women who are key figures in the institutions at society's centre, who share with men the "masculine tendency" for partial and perverse understandings. Some feminists would reject these women (in dominating positions) as deficient. In her SCUM Manifesto which seeks the

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[67] Wajcman, 10.

[68] Wajcman, 10.

destruction of the male sex and paternal power, Valerie Solanas calls the female supporters of "the gangrene male spirit" accomplices in the ruin of humanity. These women are "the 'mamas,' the compliant mothers and the daddy's girls or female pimps."[69] According to Solanas, there are two types of defective females to be destroyed: men and "women who discover in men a reason for being and who as a result have become atrophied, dependent, [and] submissive."[70]

The privileged place from which one could stand to evaluate and condemn the "dominating position" (of women or men) is a fictitious one, of course, since even people "in the margins" hold fluctuating positions of domination and subordination in relation to the "centre"--so there can never be pure observation, nor pure submission. Segal argues, with other critics of the feminist standpoint epistemology, that there is no pure subjectivity or harmony between women, but that there are only "fractured identities...differences between and within individuals..[since] women's experience is divided by class, race, and culture."[71]

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[69] Micheline Enriquez, "Paranoiac Fantasies: Sexual Difference, Homosexuality, Law of the Father," Psychosis and Sexual Identity: Toward a Post-Analytic View of the Schreber Case, ed. David B. Allison, et al. (Albany: State U of New York, 1988) 121.

[70] Enriquez, 120-1.

[71] Segal, 26.

v. Deconstruction and the Predicament of Female Subjectivity

The notion of the "fractured identity" is a problematic one for feminist postmodernism and deconstructionism, since this brand of feminism has a contradictory aim: to provide a space for women to speak and unite in their experiences, and to deconstruct the "truth" of presence and of identity.

Teresa de Lauretis calls for counter-practices to break up hegemonic discourses, yet this is a metaphysical aim; writing as a positive, productive and generative force is at the base of phallogocentrism. "Logocentrism," as coined by Jacques Derrida, is the assumption that the spoken word is he purest representation of thought and of the truth of thought.

The phonocentric assumption contends that the significance of one's speech is in the speaker's intention, and that the speaker is fully conscious of this intention and fully capable of communicating it. The belief in the "logos" is inconceivable without the simultaneous belief in "presence."

The question of how women may achieve subjecthood or equal rights, or how they may sustain a "women's writing" or a women's signature simply by writing as women--these questions are also grounded in a belief in presence. These questions do not attempt to denaturalize the word and the world but only reinforce the dialectics. The privileging of

the female voice (as we will see in The Terminator) begins by asserting that the female speaker is a subject and is equal before the Law.

But as Derrida observes, once one has begun to deconstruct the notion of subjectivity, woman cannot be a subject either. There must not be male and female sexualities, argues Derrida, but "one sex for each time...more configurations, more difference, and more identity."[72]

Derridean deconstruction, in an attempt to demystify the individual as subject of knowledge, is not interested in replacing the male universal with a female one so that "woman" becomes the third term in the man/woman dialectic. This substitution would only suggest that the higher position of power is a stable site regardless of who occupies it, and that, in effect, there is "no difference" who does. Derrida warns, "When you say there's 'no difference,' we all know that in this case the subject will be man."[73]

The assumption of a "true sex" and belief in a natural inequality between opposites is being challenged today more than ever before, yet it is still true that qualities associated with manliness are privileged over qualities

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[72] "Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida," Men in Feminism, ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1987) 199.

[73] "Women in the Beehive," 194.

considered to be womanly. This will become evident in the following examination of Hollywood films. What also becomes evident is that there is one thing that women have in common: "that they have been marginalized from every powerful institution of our society (though there are specific and variable forms of this subordination.")[74]

Finally, there have been a few recent films which suggest that "the phallus (or at least the penis) is under seige." These films reveal disturbances in the privileging of signs under patriarchy. As Berkeley Kaite observes, men may be panicking over this disturbance: "the way we think about sexual difference is changing: strategies of the representation, negotiation, and containment of sexual difference are, in the late eighties/early nineties, undergoing a radical renunciation."[75]

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[74] Segal, 26.

[75] Berkeley Kaite, "The Fetish in Sex, Lies and Videotape: Whither the Phallus?" The Hysterical Male: New Feminist Theory, ed. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1991) 171-2.

II. Masculinity in the Cinema

i. Telling Sexualities in Motion Pictures

In the previous chapter, gender stereotypes were examined in various areas of our culture, as expressed in discourses as diverse as those on science to those on sports and fashion. The desire to prove the truth of sexual difference can be located in philosophical thought as early as Plato, and it has only flourished since.

In The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault argues that the assertion of the truth of sexuality is an continual labour that relies on discourses to produce its truth; "therapeutic or normalizing interventions" develop what is then deemed natural sexuality.[1] From obligatory confession to pedagogy, medicine and psychiatry, "Western man has been drawn for three centuries to the task of telling everything concerning his sex...Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered."[2]

It is not surprising that the cinema would emerge as another discourse on sexuality, since its prime objective is to create a "true" representation of the body on screen. The cinema appeared as a new medium at or around the time philosophical thought was shaking confidence in long-held assumptions about man's natural authority and autonomy:

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[1] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random, 1978) 68.

[2] Foucault, 23-4.

Charles Darwin offers an alternative to the Bible's story of creation thereby questioning divine providence; Karl Marx (though he essentializes the class struggle and dialectical materialism) suggests that the individual is mediated by economic and social forces; Friedrich Nietzsche disparages metaphysics; Martin Heidegger deconstructs being as presence; Albert Einstein decentres man from his illusory position of importance in the universe with his theory of relativity; and Sigmund Freud introduces the theory of the "unconscious" which dismisses the notion of self-presence, suggesting instead, that we are not the masters of our minds and bodies. Jacques Derrida suggests in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" that the traditional structures which had always assumed a centre, a presence and an origin were beginning to collapse; at some historical moment there was a disruption and "one began to suspect that there was no centre; the centre was decentred."[3]

The reconstitution of the unified subject informed the very formation of the cinematic apparatus which, according to Jean Beaudry and Linda Williams, "responds to a desire to figure a unity and coherence of the spectator."[4] Thus the

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[3] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1978) 278.

[4] Linda Williams, "Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions," Explorations in Film Theory, ed. Ron Burnett (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991) 47.

cinema attempted to document the reality of its subject where, ironically, reality was the product of extensive illusionism; the proof of its art is, as Roland Barthes says of photography, "[to] annihilate itself as medium, to no longer be a sign, but the thing itself."[5]

But when "scientia sexualis" (Michel Foucault's term for the practice of telling the truth of sex)[6] comes to the screen, the coherence and unity of the subject is immediately thrown into question. The spectator's lost unity is tentatively restored, but as Williams observes, "what began as a scientific impulse to measure and record the 'truth' of the human body quickly became a powerful fantasy of the body of the woman aimed at mastering the threat posed by her body."[7] The flickering appearances and disappearances of the body on screen, more effectively than in any other medium, allow the viewer "to accede to an infra-knowledge" of the body and of sexual difference. In Barthes's terms, these are images which immediately reveal the "details which constitute the very material of..knowledge."[8]

Yet these are but "shadowgraphs" which supply "partial

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[5] Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, 1981) 45.

[6] Foucault, 58.

[7] Williams, 69.

[8] Barthes, 28-9.

objects and can flatter a certain fetishism."[9] The female body in motion pictures is fetishistic, argues Williams, overdetermined in its difference from its male counterpart. Eadweard Muybridge anticipated the cinema with his "zoopraxiscope" ("a circular glass plate that could mount up to 200 transparencies which, when revolved, could project a short sequence of movement").[10] In The Human Figure in Motion, different movements are assigned to separate sexual spheres as men are depicted in a "throwing and catching" vein (running, kicking, boxing, hog carrying) while women parallel the male movements with less intensity of action--"picking up and putting down" (serving coffee, sitting).

Williams adds that there is a self-consciousness in the female subjects that is not evident in the males; the women play a game of peek-a-boo as they cover their bodies with extra props (clothing, blankets, et cetera). Thus the sequences disclose "the truth of the woman's body" while they simultaneously try to hide it.[11] Williams concludes that "even in the prehistory of cinema, at a time when the cinema was much more a document of reality than a narrative art, women were already fictionalized, already playing assumed roles, already not there as themselves."[12]

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[9] Barthes, 30.

[10] Williams, 49.

[11] Williams, 59.

[12] Williams, 58.

Consequently, we may recognize in the cinema that which Foucault generally attributes to discourses on sexuality in our century--modern societies have "consigned sex to a shadow existence...[by] speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret."[13]

The male body has been fictionalized on the screen as well; though it denies its enigma, the male body exhibits itself at the same time as it denies the viewer pleasure in the look. Particularly in recent American films (produced during the height of the cold war and massive paranoia), the male body has come to symbolize a clenched fist, commanded by reason. While the aspiration of the hero of many of the Vietnam films seems to be to prove his superior physical performance, indeed, his invincibility, and to test the will that supposedly controls it, the male body rejects the eye of desire and seeks only "the eye of the father and..his approval."[14]

It is clear in Rambo and Platoon that the veteran, right or wrong, seeks approval and is finally valorized not only for his invincibility but for his vulnerability. This indicates that masculinity in these war films sustains itself by simultaneously offering a split identity consisting of a singular ego-ideal (which asserts pure

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[13] Foucault, 35.

[14] Anthony Easthope, What A Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture (Boston: Unwin, 1990) 54.

sexual opposition) alongside multiple and contradictory masculinities (which imply an indefinite number of sexes). In other words, it posits a male subject who is both centred and decentred. While this would indicate a double if not multiple identity and bisexual potential for men, these films operate under a principle which refuses to see difference equally.

In a closer examination of the Vietnam films mentioned above, it will become clear that, in the cinema at least, the fantasy of the complete body becomes an exercise in mastery over its visible presence which threatens its disunity. The ego-ideal incorporates and masters what is deemed the "ordinary self" (the vulnerable self), thereby reproducing "the alternating slavery of both 'masters' and 'slaves.'"[15]

ii. Masculinity Reborn in Vietnam

A prominent concern in cultural studies today is the question of the relationship of affect between a society and its cultural representations. If it is assumed that the two are interconnected and mutually dependent, then it is conceivable that a society would try to pass itself off as its ideal by imitating its representation. In the process, society fictionalizes itself. Similarly, popular

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[15] Alice A. Jardine, Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 124.

representation dependent on elements of "the real" (historical "truths") become stereotypes which in turn pass themselves off as truths.

This assertion is pertinent to a study of the depictions of masculinity in popular American (action/war) films. It is interesting that the Vietnam war, an unpopular and unsuccessful war for the United States, is the most represented of recent popular war films. As we will see, these films are less concerned with the war, and most concerned with exonerating the hero and romanticizing him as a warrior and as a victim. Further, the mythical hero's greatest victory is in developing a "stable masculinity," one which incorporates but suppresses the feminine. The variance in depictions of masculinity (-ies) in these films point to a crisis in gender relations and to anxieties surrounding the maintenance of structures of dominance.

It was during the conservative years of the Reagan era that films about Vietnam flourished, and critics neatly divided them into two camps: violent revenge fantasy and social realism. While Rambo was met with headlines like, "Rambo Bloodbath Strictly to Formula,"[16] Platoon was praised with "Platoon Marches to Heart of Real Vietnam Story."[17] While both films were extremely successful at

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[16] Christopher Harris, "Rambo Bloodbath Strictly to Formula," Citizen [Ottawa] 24 May 1985.

[17] Vincent Canby, "Platoon Marches to Heart of Real Vietnam Story," Chronicle-Herald 17 Jan. 1987: 37.

the box office, Platoon was held in higher esteem for its "worm's eye view" of Vietnam, and its focus on the vulnerability of the soldier: the tremendous pressure, torture, and depletion of his mind and body.

In fact, this is the common preoccupation of these films: rather than addressing the question of the validity of American involvement in Vietnam, they focus on the "average man" (the soldier) as indispensable, his performance as exemplary, his violence as necessary, and his aggression as legitimate. Implicit in Rambo and Platoon is a theme that Colonel Trautman (Rambo) expresses best: "The war, everything that happened here may have been wrong but dammit, don't hate your country for it."[18] Further, the surviving soldier of both these films (Rambo and Chris) is exonerated from the consequences of his actions simply because, in Rambo's words, "he gave it everything he had."

Neither Rambo nor Chris (Platoon), however, is pure masculinity incarnate--they are more dangerous than that. These films present a hero who is reborn in Vietnam and who emerges with a stable identity as the product of social learning.

This "new man" is even more complete that the macho figure, because, as Donna Haraway observes, "while enjoying the position of unbelievable privilege, he also has the

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[18] Rambo: First Blood, Part Two, dir. George Cosmatos, writ. Sylvester Stallone and James Cameron, Tri-Star, USA-Mexico, 1985.

privilege of gentleness."[19] The inflated hero presents himself as diverse and multiple in gender, but it is clear that the feminine is merely an ornament on a masculine body. Whether the hero is a lower class man who exceeds his social status to become "superman" (Rambo), or the "average man"--Chris, of the educated middle class (Platoon)--he is still universal. That is, the average man is presented to the viewer as an ideal, suggesting that the viewer himself has access to the hero's attributes, and could be recognized and rewarded for them in similar circumstances. More importantly, attaining the status of the hero as depicted in these films requires an acceptance of femininity--but as a form of denial: femininity tempers, and thereby legitimizes the hero's aggression.

Viewing these films as simple celebrations of aggressive masculinity which can be mobilized in the pursuit of violence only enhances the essentialist claim that male aggression is animalistic and that for men, the right to abuse is fundamental.

Andrea Dworkin, Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich and Susan Griffin, among others, make such claims. Susan Griffin's claim that women's bodies can arouse in men the helpless rage and impotence of childhood in relation to the all-powerful mother, helps explain men's need to portray women

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[19] Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, "Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway," Technoculture, Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, eds. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) 19.

as utterly possessed, controlled, submissive and humiliated, but it leaves many other questions unanswered. For instance, if men's values, nature, aggression et cetera is biological, and men and women exist in different spheres in this respect, then the solution to male violence would be quite simple: to isolate and destroy or control the Y chromosome. An essentialist claim such as Griffin's ultimately leads to political fascism and authoritarianism (See, for example, Valerie Solanas's S.C.U.M. Manifesto described in the first chapter.)

The acceptance of these war films as aggressively masculine also leaves unanswered the question of female aggression. If cruelty and aggression are also components of women's fantasies, then where do they find their substitute gratifications? (In the third chapter, aggression is examined in films where females are the perpetrators instead of the recipients of violence.) A useful investigation of aggression with respect to gender would point to a crisis in gender relations where there are only impure masculinities and femininities and where anxieties surround the maintenance and continuation of dominance structures.

Even though these films support a pitched battle of "all-American boys" against vicious "Gooks", the struggle of good versus evil is secondary to the struggle of the hero to gain approval from his country. They indicate that

masculinity must change and must struggle in order to produce itself anew and in order to renew its privilege. The masculine principle seeks to prove that dominance is natural and that masculinity is universal, and it does so by presenting itself to the world as gendered, diverse, and even vulnerable.

Anthony Easthope locates in The Deer Hunter (and his observation is relevant for Rambo and Platoon, as well) four crucial images of war which pervade representations in dominant culture (in novels, films or elsewhere): defeat, combat, victory and comradeship.[20] He points out that in a psychoanalytic interpretation, these four elements correspond to "fear of castration, the triumph of the masculine ego, fathers and sons, and the sublimated intimacies of the male bond."[21] The apparent tendency in these films to celebrate aggressive hyper-masculinity and the elemental male right to abuse must be seen as a struggle rather than a celebration. Contrary to the dominant myth of the unity (singularity and coherence) of masculinity, these films indicate that masculinity is diverse and vulnerable and must strive to produce itself anew and to renew its privilege--all in face of the fears of mortality, of loss of power and control, and of the inability to conform to an ego-ideal.

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[20] Easthope, 63.

[21] Easthope, 63.

iii. Rambo: Paranoia and the Impenetrable Self

At the beginning of Rambo: First Blood, Part 2, we see Rambo confined in a prison labour camp for his destruction of property in First Blood. Colonel Trautman arrives and offers Rambo a possible presidential pardon to participate in a Special Operations mission to find alleged prisoners of war in the prison camps of Vietnam. It is clear here that Trautman feels paternally toward Rambo and that he also considers him to be the prodigal son: he says he did what he could to keep Rambo out of "such a hell-hole" and attempts to free him now because he is "one in three most able to complete the mission." Rambo asks, "Sir, do we get to win this time?", to which Trautman replies, "This time, it's up to you."

Rambo meets with U.S. bureaucrat Marshall Murdock, who explains that the mission requires him to remain an observer. "Under no circumstances," stresses Murdock, "are you to engage the enemy." Rambo reluctantly accepts highly advanced weapons, but insists that "the mind is the best weapon."

In preparation for his mission, we see Rambo for the first time without his T-shirt, as an extreme close-up makes us lose our perspective on an unidentifiable glistening muscle. The camera lingers for the awe-struck admirer, but the look which would objectify the male form with a lustful gaze is immediately reproached with a quick cut to Rambo's

unique blade (which he later calls his "good luck charm"), then to a gun which Rambo aims at the viewer. As Rambo boards the chopper, he and Trautman express their care for each other (where "care" takes on masculine connotations of alertness and providence--Trautman tells Rambo what to do in case of trouble and says "Good luck, son" as Rambo parts; Rambo confides in Trautman and assures him, "You're the only one I trust").

In the chopper, Rambo softly strokes his gun in anticipation of the dangers in Vietnam; interestingly, these shots alternate with one of a concerned Colonel Trautman whose thoughts are obviously with Rambo. Again Rambo symbolically reveals where his affections lie when he cuts himself free of all of his equipment after jumping from the chopper, but manages to keep his knife and gun.

Rambo finds his Vietnamese contact, Co Bao, and together they proceed to the camp where Rambo informs Co that he is now following his own orders. After discovering a rat-infested room in which maltreated American soldiers are imprisoned, Rambo silently, and efficiently kills the Vietnamese guards with arrows and knives. Rambo is portrayed as an efficient killer (and there is little time for sympathizing with the Vietnamese) as there seems to be little effort involved in each kill and no resistance or threat to Rambo as he perpetrates these killings. The viewer's expectations are pleasantly disappointed in one

scene where a Vietnamese soldier suspecting trouble opens his door just as Rambo recoils behind it; the door closes, but Rambo is no longer in a position to be discovered--he has magically reappeared in a safe place of observation, behind a tree. Rambo seems to be omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent as he quickly, precisely and consistently hits his mark: he destroys the enemy with a single throw of a knife or shot of an arrow. Rambo is also the absent protector of Co. An arrow pierces the forehead of an enemy soldier who had taken aim at Co; it is only after the threat has been overcome that Rambo is exposed as the anticipated source of her deliverance.

Rambo's merits are confirmed by the bureaucrats' doubt of them. After Ericson says just prior to the extraction time, "I hope for his sake we're not just wasting fuel," Rambo jumps from an exploding boat and reemerges from the water with an energy that confirms Trautman's earlier comment about Rambo, "What you choose to call hell, he calls home." This image of the reborn hero overtly claims an immortality for a hero whom the viewer should have never doubted. But at the same time as it calms fears of an impotent (incapable, powerless, weakened) man, this repeated and celebratory moment must be recognized for its transience since the taut, erect Rambo jetting out of water is asserted in response to doubt, and is sustained after the moment has passed with broken declarations of faith such as Co's,

"Rambo, you not expendable."

Rambo reaches the extraction point with an American prisoner he has rescued, but upon sight of a P.O.W. that would complicate government policy statements, the pilot is ordered by Murdock to abort the mission before pick-up, leaving Rambo and the soldier to the approaching enemy.

Rambo is tortured and questioned by Lieutenant-Colonel Podovsky, a Russian advisor to the Vietnamese army. Podovsky insists that Rambo contact his government to deter them from planning future rescue missions. Rambo is defiant, and is given severe electrical shocks (which drain power from the outside lights of the camp). Podovsky is impressed, and observes that Rambo is "strong. Very strong. The strongest so far." Rambo uses the radio but delivers a personal threat to Murdock, who Rambo holds responsible for his present pain: "I'm coming to get you."

With Co's help, they both escape. In a moment of rest, Co asks Rambo to take her with him to America. He agrees and they kiss, but almost immediately, Co is killed by a Vietnamese soldier. Rambo buries Co beneath the mud, then begins his one-man crusade against the Vietnamese and Russian soldiers. We only catch glimpses of him as he strikes them down one by one; his whereabouts is not revealed until the moment of his strike on the enemy. Once again, Rambo transcends the logic of editing by appearing beneath a rock at one moment, inexplicably behind bushes in

the next, assumably having had time in between to plant intricate traps. Rambo's most brilliant use of the earth for camouflage establishes him as the unknown, powerful threat in the film. In a scene one would expect of a horror film, an unaware Russian soldier stands in front of a bank of mud and looks about nervously; suddenly an eye appears from beneath the mud, then Rambo emerges completely, grabbing the soldier from behind. Moments later we see a clean Rambo preparing for his next kill. He stands in front of a waterfall and casually loads a weapon as enemy bullets shoot past him but never hit their mark; when Rambo's gun is ready, he fires a single shot to kill the Vietnamese soldier. A Russian chopper drops explosives which destroy the bank of the waterfall, then repeatedly fires a machine gun at the water, but an unscathed Rambo emerges, then captures the chopper to destroy the entire camp.

Rambo returns to the base in Thailand with five POWs. He destroys an entire room of advanced equipment, then threatens a trembling Murdock that he will kill him if more prisoners of war are not sought.

Finally, Trautman assures Rambo that he will receive a second medal of honour; but Rambo reveals that what he really wants is "what every other guy who came over here who has spilt his guts and gave everything he had wants--for our country to love us, as much as we love it." Trautman watches Rambo walk into the Thai sunset, with a gaze of

admiration and concern. The title song "Peace in Our Life" begins, and assures us that, in Trautman's words, "everything that happened here may have been wrong but..do not hate your country for it."

The movie has come full circle; Rambo has proven in the true Republican spirit that freedom begins with killing communists. He has also passed the test of masculinity which stipulates a kind of purity of being--he has remained an individual who works alone and plays by his own rules (he has thereby earned his "manly" freedom), and has paid his debt to the father (Trautman). But this test has been a mythical one, since it uses a second Vietnam war for its backdrop. Rambo has only gained what has already been established (in the real war) as lost, and his dream of a purity of being also remains a fiction since it must consistently be renewed.

Both Rambo and Platoon appeal to a will to myth by rewriting the unpleasant truths of the Vietnam war, albeit differently in kind and extent. The sheer amount of films about Vietnam points to a problem which needs to be exorcised but instead is perpetuated more than worked out by films which console the viewer more than they threaten him.

In other words, the problem of Vietnam has not really been touched on by these films which substitute one question for another: instead of asking, "Were we right to fight in Vietnam?" (a question of the validity of participation in

the conflict), these films ask, "What is our obligation to the veterans of the war?" (a question of the validity of the veterans). Rambo asks this latter question quite forcefully at the end of the film; the film, however, takes no overt political position on America's role in the war, only reaffirming heroism (without irony) as well as the love for community and country.

Platoon constructs archetypes of good and evil (but here the enemy is within), and focuses on the relationships between men under pressure. The hero, Chris Taylor, is reborn in Vietnam as a child of the two archetypal fathers, but he has gained a toughness that was necessary to survive. Platoon confirms that regardless of the mistakes made by the common veteran, he did his best in hellish conditions. In each of these scenarios, guilt has been transformed into celebration--a celebration of identity--masculine, American, member of a community, common man even if this identity is scathed and impure (the common man is prone to error but remains Good).

Both films portray the ceaseless struggle to master every threat and to prevent treason within. Easthope calls this the "purpose of the masculine ego" which he compares to Leonardo Da Vinci's design for the Piombino castle. The castle was "the most brilliant and modern of his many plans for a fortified citadel,"[24] and was to be equipped with a

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[24] Easthope, 37.

watchtower and destructible bridge so that the inside would always be aware of the outside. Easthope argues that this fortress from the Renaissance marks a fantasy of the male ego as "impregnable defense" in dominant culture which is prevalent today in boys' comics as well as in Ronald Reagan's 'Star Wars' system.

The denial of male mortality, or "the God trick", as Donna Haraway calls it,[23] implicit in gender-biased science and technologies, and witnessed in these films, is an affirmation of an unbelievable male privilege: that nothing can happen to him. Donna Haraway argues that this is prevalent in the popular philosophy of holism (approaches of New Age movements) and that such a phobic naturalism is a dangerous continuation of the belief in an evil other and in an impenetrable self.

We are at the historical point now that embraces a crisis of belief: "We really may be able to shake the hold of these monotheisms...we do wound each other..the earth really is finite,..there aren't any other planets out there that we know of that we can live on. [There is] a crisis of historical consciousness where the master narratives will no longer soothe as they have for a couple thousand years, in Christian culture at any rate."[24]

While paranoia became the model for collective feeling

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[23] Penley and Ross, 16.

[24] Penley and Ross, 17.

in the years that Ronald Reagan was in office, Rambo emerged to protect the nation from its many Cold-War induced phobias (technophobia, xenophobia and feelings of powerlessness engendered by issues of minority rights and feminism). These would pervade all divisions of cultural practices.

Feminism in the 1980s, for example, furnished the threat of an impoverished or overthrown structure of dominance in the United States and internationally. Some feminist critics, such as Michelle Stanworth, fear that technologies (reproductive, for example) which expand opportunities for women, also exploit their personal expertise.[25] Judy Wajcman notes that sterilization and drugs such as Depo-Provera have been particularly targeted at coloured women; and in India, amniocentesis detects female fetuses so that they may be aborted.[26]

The collective phobias and feelings of powerlessness in the United States was countered when, drawing from popular culture for his strategic defence initiative ("Star Wars"), Reagan promised protection from the "evil empire", the Soviet Union. The belief in the indestructibility of the U.S. reinforces the masculine narcissistic wish that "nothing can happen to me" while it simultaneously evokes the image of the U.S. as victim of a Soviet first-strike.

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[25] Judy Wajcman, Feminism Confronts Technology (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991) 61.

[26] Wajcman, 61.

The appropriation of the Star Wars fantasy, then constitutes the United States as both supremacist warrior (fetishized man of steel upholding a higher morality) and a powerless victim (misunderstood, innocent and pure dupes of Soviet technological aggression). With this contradictory image cf warrior-victim, the Whitehouse creates an image of Fortress America to counter threats of terrorism from the outlaw states--Cuba, Libya, North Korea, Iran and Nicaragua.

Ten years after the fall of Saigon (the Vietnamese have not officially been enemies since 1975), the Western world was swept with "Rambomania". Rambo appeared alongside other blockbuster films with a similar plot (Uncommon Valor, Missing In Action):

> Either one man or a small group of men attempts to rescue American soldiers officially listed as "Missing in Action" during the Vietnam War but actually held captive in prison camps. Our heroes do this despite the active interference of status quo American politicians, who seem to be more on the side of the Vietnamese government. Finally, after the personal loss of a friend/friends and the killing of scores of enemy soldiers, the MIA's are rescued and flown back to heroes' welcome.[27]

This group of films appeals to myth instead of history to win the war of history over how the American involvement

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[27] Ken Burke, "In Rambo We Trust," The Link 13 Sept. 1985: 9.

in Vietnam is perceived. Rambo, for instance, is more like a John Wayne of the "good race" using a Vietnamese ("bad race") backdrop for a story about American suffering, American triumph and American stories. While Rambo offers the story of a man out to rescue his buddies, it also resurrects a Reaganite political belief, according to Ken Burke: "The ideology of battling communism at any cost has full expression in these films without really bothering to touch on the issue."[8] The super-warrior just happens to show along the way "what weakkneed liberals wrought by not letting them "win" the war."[9]

Reconstituting the memory of Vietnam under Reaganism is not likely a form of "psychic healing"; as Gaylan Studlar argues, the flourish of Vietnam films in such a short time indicates "the nation's ambivalent feelings over the war."[10] As Freud tells us, ambivalence is necessary in the creation of guilt feelings.[11] Like an individual's trauma, the cultural trauma must be forgotten, but the guilt must grow. Studlar quotes Adorno: "the psychological damage of a repressed collective past often emerges through dangerous

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[8] Burke, 9.

[9] Burke, 9.

[10] Gaylan Studlar and David Desser, "Never Having to Say You're Sorry: Rambo's Rewriting of the Vietnam War," Film Quarterly 42.1 (1988): 9.

[11] Sigmund Freud, "Repression," General Psychological Theory, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Macmillan-Collier, 1963) 104-115.

political gestures: defensive overreaction to situations that do not really constitute attacks, lack of affect in response to serious issues, and repression of what was known or half-known."[32]

When the unmastered past comes to the present in Rambo, fear is turned into frenzy and fantasy substitutes for historical discourse. The desire to speak of Vietnam in the forum of a right-wing revisionist film becomes a drive to reconstruct the past in light of the present: to prove we were always right and that our similar excursions in Nicaragua, El Salvador and elsewhere are also justified. The desire is not to work through fear to arrive at an acceptance of guilt, but to repress collective guilt and responsibility by denying politics and history: to remember the war differently (to deny its reality), or to turn the political into the personal by imaging the war as a private hell. Both depend on the strategy of victimization.

Guilt becomes symptomatic of the return of the repressed specifically in the Vietnam action/war films. It indicates a crisis in patriarchy because it reveals a weakness manifested in the inability to remember or speak of the past as well as a cultural hysteria in which violence must substitute for understanding.

In Rambo, an alternate history is offered where the repressed (the victimized veteran) returns as a killing

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[32] Studlar and Desser, 10.

machine, an icon of hypermasculinity. The spectacle of the muscle bound half-clad body endures throughout the narrative merely to prove that it can endure, that it is indestructible. Foregrounded is the body's spontaneous skills and strengths. Rambo metaphorically blows away history by returning to Nam, and his strength and survival skills are possible only while Ronald Reagan's picture hangs in Murdock's office. It is clear that Rambo (the U.S.) had time not only to heal his wounds but to become indestructible.

The elimination of history in such films as Rambo and Platoon (and this also occurs in The Deer Hunter), rely on "action" which is hyperrealized. As in schizophrenia, details are intensely illuminated to give an impression of a true account, yet realism turns into transcendentalism as each detail represents an archetype. In Platoon, for example, Vietnam becomes any war, as the focus of the film shifts away from the details of the fighting to a civil war between good and evil sergeants. As Platoon becomes more symbolic (Sgt. Barnes dies in a gesture of crucifixion), the everyday soldier becomes the "new man" reborn in Vietnam.

In Rambo, there is clearly a will to myth as the displacement of the question works through victimization. Here, Vietnam is translated into a whole new battle in the present (Rambo asks, "Do we get to win this time?" and the response is, "It's up to you.") The war is set up as the

same war but this time the veteran is different, he is a superman, a better warrior. The fantasy lies in the denial of guilt for having participated in the conflict to a question directed toward the validity of the veterans: were they good enough (fighters)? The answer is negative, as Rambo's mission is to save those who could not save themselves. Imprisoned for many years, the American soldiers are weak, wounded, emaciated, leftovers from the "first Vietnam." When the question of the validity of American involvement is not addressed, it slips into a secret affirmative. There is no question, a film like Rambo argues, that we were right if we are still right. If there are still American POWs in Vietnam then the Vietnamese are now and therefore have always been evil. Accusations in the present serve as an index of our "essential rightness in fighting the enemy of the past."[33]

But the power of Rambo is not simply in his image of "killing machine." His power, rather, comes from a contradictory image--he is a combination of superman and savage, wise/skilled warrior, duped/powerless victim of governmental authority. Rambo's tearful plea for love at the end of the film, as incongruent with his image of violent superman as it may be, is in fact congruent with the ideology of the supremacist warrior as individual who goes outside the law to get the job done, who upholds a higher

[33] Studler and Desser, 12.

morality. Rambo's "personal mission of victory and vengeance crucially hinges on his status as present and past victim, as misunderstood, neglected, exploited veteran."[34] His lack of past success, then, is no character flaw of his; it rests outside in the inefficiency of others--of other veterans, of the government. Rambo's position as victim is only a flaw of situation (not of character)--he has been used and discarded by the same society that honoured him with a Congressional medal of honour. Much like Ollie North, Rambo is the fall guy who has been forced into extraordinary "moral" action by the ordinary immoral action of bureaucrats.

iv. Platoon: The Prophetic Voice of Man

Platoon[35] (Oliver Stone, 1986) opens on a Vietnam airstrip where new arrivals from the States are being deposited from a giant transport plane. Awkward as ducklings, a gaggle of green recruits is discharged, gaping at the body bags they pass going the other way. Among them is Chris Taylor, the literary mouthpiece of the film, a tormented idealist from a well-off family who left college and enlisted out of an inchoate sense of duty.

The platoon has been effectively split by two sergeants: Sergeant Barnes is a heavily scarred imperious

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[34] Studlar and Desser, 12-3.

[35] Platoon, dir. and writ. Oliver Stone, Orion, Hemdale, 1986 (120 min.).

monster who heads the macho might-is-right tough guys, while Sergeant Elias, the spirit of human decency himself, leads the marginally more intelligent potheads. A war ensues between the two for the soul of the Platoon.

In a tiny village where local farmers are suspected of hiding and aiding the Vietcong, the GIs, led by Barnes, mercilessly murder a young man, terrorize the populace, and gang rape a young girl, among other atrocities. Elias confronts Barnes at the village and halts what was beginning to be a potential My Lai massacre.

Barnes pursues Elias and kills him in the jungle. Although Taylor believes Elias was murdered by Barnes, he cannot prove it and so must leave Barnes alone. But when they meet again at the end of a devastating battle in which most of their platoon is killed and their base is overrun by attacking Vietnamese soldiers, Barnes turns to battle Taylor as well. Barnes is about to kill Taylor when an air hit strikes and both are knocked unconscious.

When they awaken, Taylor finds Barnes crawling in the jungle, wounded but still alive. Barnes orders Taylor to get him a medic; Taylor instead raises his rifle and, in response to Barnes's, "Do it," kills him.

At the film's close, Taylor leaves Vietnam in a helicopter and says of the nature of war: "Elias is in me and so is Barnes...I feel like a child born of these two fathers."

While Platoon is celebrated as an anti-war film that corrects the fantasies of Milius and Stallone, we must remember that it is still a fiction that is governed by an overriding masculine principle. More than a film about the physical discomforts, and fears of the soldiers in the platoon,[36] this film presents a microcosmic civil war that explores the fear and euphoria experienced when men form groups and attempt to kill each other.

This representation is highly symbolic, though it is realized in a "documentary look," a precision of detail that gives the film a deja vu quality. Gary Alexander, a veteran who served in Da Nang, says of the film, "You see yourself, your friends, the guys you served with...the GI vulgarity, the pidgin Vietnamese language--it's all there. It's like stepping back into that time."[37]

Though the film does focus on the immediate experience of fighting, and the life of the infantryman endured at ground level, Platoon is not far from the revisionist comic strips of Rambo and Missing in Action, nor is it completely estranged from Coppola's Apocalypse Now ("which ultimately turns into a romantic meditation on a mythical war"[38]) or Cimino's The Deer Hunter, which is "more about the mind of

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[36] J. Hoberman, "At War With Ourselves," Village Voice [New York] 23 Dec. 1986: 79.

[37] Diane Eicher, "Platoon Reopens Wounds for Vietnam Vets," Citizen [Ottawa] 24 Jan. 1987: C8.

[38] Canby, 37.

the America that fought the war than the Vietnam War itself."[39]

First, we must realize that the film is somewhat of a tragedy, the hero, Chris Taylor, an inept, polite and literary "self-sacrifice" to the war. Chris is idealized as the outgoing and loyal patriot who is at the same time naive, vulnerable and in the end disillusioned by the war. Rather than an explicit political statement, the film acts as a salute to the brave men of Vietnam. Chris is the ideal veteran with whom the audience and the Vietnam vet identifies. The platoon's most important figures are Sergeant Barnes "who has somehow become committed to the war, which is all he has left, and Sergeant Elias, whom the war has made as eerily gentle as Barnes is brutal."[40] The battle between the men becomes an almost mythical overlay of the battle, personalized between a kind of good and a kind of evil.

Yet the film does not address the fact that the representation of the "bad" soldier coincides with the poor, the ill-educated and the hopeless who were trapped into the draft. In fact, the film highlights the difference between the soldiers and officers who volunteered for duty--or at least did not try to evade the draft--and those kids with no way out. The movie doesn't address the class or race

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[39] Canby, 37.

[40] Canby, 37.

bigotry more obvious in Vietnam than any other war. Stone merely leaves us with the resolution that the U.S. lost the war because of divisions within its own ranks.

In this unnaturally enforced all-male society, Stone offers three categories of men (transcending distinctions of class and race): the macho, might-is-right tough-guys led by heavily scarred, unreflective man of action Sergeant Barnes, the marginally more intelligent potheads led by doubting man of conscience Sergeant Elias, and assorted loners.

It becomes clear that Sergeant Barnes represents a masculine principle (action, insensitivity, valuing information more than life) while Sergeant Elias represents a female principle (nurturing, emotional, eroticized, valuing life). Taylor is caught between the two men and the two principles as he sees Barnes and Elias "fighting for the possession of my soul."

As Susan Jeffords notes, the killing of Barnes by Taylor does not represent a victory of the feminine nor does it offer a celebratory androgyny. Though Taylor has absorbed both characters (Barnes and Elias) into his, Taylor murders Barnes in the same way that Barnes murdered Elias. Taylor had to become Barnes in order to kill him. Jeffords observes, "If he had killed Barnes the previous night during the rage of battle and in self-defense, it would have been possible to see Barnes' death differently. But Taylor, like

Barnes, raises his rifle with all deliberation after Barnes indicates as well that he thinks Taylor will not fire."[41] Taylor's motivations have been affected by Elias (the "feminine" father figure), but "it is through the masculine that he survives."[42] Just as Rambo makes the symbolic gesture of adorning himself with Co's necklace, here "Chris Taylor's feminine character is a mere ornament to his masculine body."[43]

Taylor's concluding monologue reiterates the therapeutic, almost messianic role of the veteran in relation to American society: "Those of us who did make it have an obligation to build again, to teach others what we know and try with what's left of our lives to find a goodness and meaning to this life." But the "goodness and meaning" heralded by the final composite Chris, has not been recovered ("built again"), but has been created in accordance with gender constructions.

Thus, the alleged "battle between good and evil" in Platoon is truly a "struggle of masculinity to produce itself anew, now rejecting its simpler, older image--Barnes--and presenting the newer man who has appropriated the

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[41] Susan Jeffords, The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 139.

[42] Jeffords, 140.

[43] Jeffords, 140.

feminine for himself."[44] Accordingly, the "ethics and moral vision" of the conforming hero (ironically, "Tailor") are not universal, as they claim to be, but are motivated by the masculine point of view. It is only through the masculine and through the prophetic voice of man, that the restitution of "goodness and meaning to this life" can be achieved.

Thus, the Vietnam films indicate the contradiction in the viewing process whereby the spectator's unity is simultaneously lost and restored; the body on screen proves that its opposing images of wholeness and fragmentation depend on each other. The aggression the hero releases, and the abuse he takes, serves to reassure the viewer that mastery is inevitable, yet the necessity for reconstitution overturns this certainty. As Easthope observes of the cartoon character, the body that "is continually burned, squashed, smashed, dropped from a great height, and blown up,"[45] demonstrates that what falls to pieces can be reconstituted "in its original form for the next sequence...as though nothing had happened."[46]

The philosophy of the "as-though-nothing-happened" behind films such as Rambo and Platoon does not treat difference (body-as-whole/body-in-pieces) equally. Treason

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[44] Jeffords, 140.

[45] Easthope, 41.

[46] Easthope, 41.

is suppressed within, so that the illusory identity restored has been organized to emphasize the inequality of difference, and by implication the superiority of what is deemed "masculine."

In contrast, the strength of the heroine (in the films examined in the next chapter) is derived from her choice of a multiple identity and a rejection of epistemological certainty.

III. Women and Power: The Heroine with the Gun

1. Hollywood's History of Damsels and Demons

In her recent article on Hollywood's "feminist" heroines, Elayne Rapping suggests that "powerful, autonomous women" have never been strangers to the cinema, but their power has been portrayed prominently in terms of sexuality.[1]

> In these films, we see the way Hollywood, at its commercial best, deals with social change and the demands of the relatively powerless. Popular genre forms, by definition, limit the scope and seriousness of subversive challenges to the status quo. Whether its a star biography [Sweet Dreams], an uplifting morality tale [Marie], or a courtroom thriller [Jagged Edge], most of the complexities of American social and political life are left out.[2]

Rapping argues that the heroines of the three films above, made in the mid-eighties, are successors of the heroines of the 1930s and 1940s, played by women such as Rosalind Russell and Katharine Hepburn. In these latter films (such as Take a Letter, Darling), the lead women are equals to their male counterparts, and are often "socially and

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[1] Elayne Rapping, "Hollywood's New 'Feminist' Heroines," Cineaste 14.4 (1986) 4-9.

[2] Rapping, 7.

professionally above their male suitors."[3]

But Hollywood seems to fear strong sexual women, she adds, so these heroines "were portrayed as deeply flawed and neurotic."[4] Conflicts in the films centred around "love and work" and "femininity and ambition," and those women choosing the latter of the pair would often pay by losing their family, or by turning into "cold-blooded monsters." Bette Davis in Now, Voyager [1942], and Joan Bennett in Scarlet Street [1946], are two examples of women who become cold in their (sexual) success;[5] the list is endless for murderous femmes fatales of the 1940s, featured in films such as Double Indemnity [1944], The Postman Always Rings Twice [1946], and The Lady From Shanghai [1948].

The fear of a woman's success and the consequent condemnation of her sexuality is more subtle in films of the late 1970s and early 1980s such as Kramer vs. Kramer [1979], where the man has become the heroine who "communicates, nurtures and holds the family together."[6] The estranged wife, in contrast, is condemned for her independence and success since these are viewed as products of her selfishness and "her emotional or actual abandonment of the

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[3] Rapping, 4.

[4] Rapping, 4.

[5] Rapping, 4.

[6] Rapping, 5.

family."[7]

The focus turned back to women in films such as Agnes of God, and Plenty, but both are reactionary in their conclusions, estranging the initially stable heroines (played respectively by Jane Fonda and Meryl Streep) from family, tradition, and even sanity. In both films, argues Rapping, "the heroines present real challenges to the legitimacy of powerful institutions and [their] assumptions" but a detailed examination of those institutions only serves to "discredit the heroines' challenges through character assassination."[8]

Jane Fonda as the psychiatrist, Dr. Livingston, (in Agnes of God) challenges the Mother Superior's explanation of Sister Agnes's pregnancy and murder of the child. Livingston believes the nun was raped (and not visited by the Holy Ghost, contrary to the Mother Superior's position), but in the end, "the church [mysticism and blind obedience] wins and Fonda falters in her convictions."[9]

In Plenty, Meryl Streep plays an ex-soldier of the French Resistance who holds the convictions of a modern feminist, only to find them frustrated in her 1950s environment. Streep as Susan Traherne "goes from shaky to

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[7] Rapping, 5.

[8] Rapping, 8.

[9] Rapping, 9.

thoroughly incompetent"[10] as she becomes more hysterical and selfish trying to realize her fantasies of "a better, more meaningful life and world."[11] In the final scene, it is established that Traherne's life has been "wasted" since she uses drugs and is fixated on a better world, while in reality, she is trapped in an unhappy marriage. The strategy of the film, argues Rapping, is to take "a woman easily identifiable with modern day feminism, a woman of power, drive, and social concerns, and put her in a setting in which these traits are only interpretable as 'crazy'."[12]

More recently, there has been a tendency in Hollywood films to revert to the theme of the "femme fatale," depicting strong, sexual women as psychotic and murderous. In Fatal Attraction, Glen Close plays an obsessive and psychotic woman who, after an affair with a married man (Michael Douglas), tries to destroy the sanctity of his family. A similar situation occurs in The Hand That Rocks the Cradle [1992], when a woman, who is bereft of her husband and child, seeks revenge on the woman (and family) she deems responsible for her loss. In both cases, intelligent, powerful women manipulate both men and women using their "female wiles" (sex and "instinct") to infiltrate a "normal" and happy household. The family wins

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[10] Rapping, 9.

[11] Rapping, 10.

[12] Rapping, 9.

in the end and the villainess is murdered in both cases by the wife/mother who represents woman in her "proper" place.

Terminator 2: Judgment Day and Thelma and Louise feature powerless women who learn to take care of themselves in a hostile environment without "femininity" being their weapon. Action-adventure movies have typically showcased women as defenceless damsels to be rescued, as victims to be terrorized and stalked, or as dangerous adversaries to be defeated by the male hero (or anti-hero in the case of the horror film). In Terminator 2 and Thelma and Louise, the stereotype has been upset as women are placed in typically male roles to experience, for the first time, the exhilaration and danger of adventure and the technology (guns, cars) that comes with that territory.

Not surprisingly, these heroines have not escaped the critical eye of reviewers who claim that these films promote the antithesis of feminism. Lorraine Locherty asks, "Is it a victory when females take up arms?"[1] It is disturbing, she argues, that heroic women are emerging only to reinforce "the insulting and idiotically male notion that real power is achieved only through the use of force; that peace can only be achieved through war." Locherty disapproves of the heroine's rejection of "what is normal" (her caring and gentle "femininity") and her espousal of violence, revenge,

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[1] Lorraine Locherty, "Is It a Feminist Victory When Females Take Up Arms?" Calgary Herald 14 July 1991.

and "delight in hurting men."

Locherty's argument is steeped in the kind of essentialism which denies the potential for women to realize their anger, even in the fantasy of cinema. She heralds films which "truly celebrate the female experience" such as The Company of Strangers in which women co-operate (in this case, to survive in the wilderness). Yet, if there is a universal female experience, it is not to be found in the wilderness, but in society and in the home where, as Locherty notes herself, "a woman is raped every six minutes [in the U.S.]...and at least one in every five women are abused in their own homes."

Unlike the male perpetrators of arbitrary violence, the heroines of Terminator 2 and Thelma and Louise find themselves in predicaments precisely because they are female. As Donna Laframboise points out, film is a powerful medium "not only because it comments on reality, but because it has the potential to alter people's view of reality"[14]; it would be unrealistic if a contemporary film did not address the cruelty, violence and destruction of which we are capable. But in a world where "male acquaintances, relatives and partners are frequently assailants, and when the justice system is often unsympathetic to the victims of male violence [Laframboise]," images which suggest that

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[14] Donna Laframboise, "Violent Film Females Can't Be All Bad," Toronto Star 30 Aug. 1991.

violence against women may result in an immediate, violent, and physical response can only reinforce the fact that moral struggles are also physical struggles, and that violence against women is a serious issue.

ii. Combat Roles for Women in the Physical World of Film

Terminator 2 and Thelma and Louise are less censured for the general aggressiveness of their heroines than for their comfortable appropriation of the symbols of male power (such as guns, cars, and in Thelma and Louise, money). According to Locherty (and to many feminists--especially those aligned with the Women's Peace Movement), the technologies acquired by the heroines are reproached for an inherent "maleness"; thus a woman who successfully uses them is "unnatural". Locherty criticizes Ripley (in Ridley Scott's Alien and in James Cameron's Aliens) as a "tough female marine who'd rather fight than do just about anything." An image of Sarah (in James Cameron's Terminator 2) recalls the "butch marine" from Aliens--she flexes her biceps doing several slow chin-ups. Whereas the Sarah Connor of the first Terminator film is "a normal woman" (according to Locherty), in the sequel, she develops into a "snarling, spitting bundle of sinew and muscle who thinks nothing of smashing the noses, arms and legs of anyone foolish enough to get in her way."

Locherty adds that there is a jarring lack of

continuity between images of the "normal" woman and those of the "macho" woman. In Thelma and Louise, she deems realistic (even "natural") the depiction of Thelma as "an oppressed housewife and Louise [as] a bored waitress." The rest of the film, she claims, is "cartoonish" since the women show no remorse for the murder of the rapist and "lose no time merrily committing more crimes."

But what Locherty and pacifist feminists call "normal" desires of women corresponds to a mythology of militarism which is "designed not to protect women but to protect the..morale, motivation, prestige and privileges of the male soldier, to uphold the idea of the inevitable masculinity of combat."[15]

Although military values are "manly" in their defence of the "rational" use of force and of skill and technology to dominate others, wars do not occur because of a male disposition for violence. Lynne Segal insists that "military aggression always requires carefully controlled and systematic propaganda, at a state level, which plays upon public fears, vulnerabilities, pride, and prejudice."[16]

In fact, men's wars have always been supported by a majority of women, even though women are often excluded from

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[15] Lynne Segal, Is the Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism (London: Virago, 1988) 174.

[16] Segal, 179.

the political power to initiate wars. (Lynne Segal points out that when women have attained political power, like Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, they have often proven to be "as bellicose as their male peers".[17])

Women who have been soldiers (novelist May Sinclair, for example) often describe the "wild spirits" ("the contradictory exhilaration, thrills, anguish and despair of the front lines of battle"[18]) unleashed in wartime. Segal suggests that it is a sense of belonging to a "nation" which appeals to both men and women; it is the meaning of life beyond individual existence, she argues, which holds "a key to the future for our children, the purpose of our labour, the promise of a type of immortality."[19]

Nevertheless, the existence of women in the military has always been problematic. As one General put it, "It tramples the male ego. When you get right down to it, you've got to protect the manliness of war."[20] It is precisely this sentiment that kept women in the Second World War from engaging in combat; the opposition mostly came from men. The women soldiers, notes Segal, "were instructed to direct searchlights and guns to locate enemy planes, and so were directly under fire, but were forbidden to pull

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[17] Segal, 176.

[18] Segal, 171.

[19] Segal, 194.

[20] Segal, 189.

triggers of the guns which they were aiming."[21] In the air force, women were trained to fly bombers and to transport them to strategic military locations, but they were forbidden to fly missions in a strategic attack.

The taboo placed on women sustained a mythology of female virtue and male vice. More precisely, it upheld "the idea of the essential femininity of those who must 'be protected', those who give birth, those who cannot kill."[22] The strict division of sex and gender that excluded women from combat was extended to men, as well, when homosexuality (despite its decriminalization in society) remained illegal in the armed forces.

From Sigourney Weaver (Alien(s)), to Linda Hamilton (Terminator 2), to Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon (Thelma and Louise), to Annie Parillaud (La Femme Nikita), these actresses depict women (whether they are dressed in army fatigues, blue jeans, or heels, pearls and a little black dress) who use violence against oppression so familiar to "ordinary" women. As Donna Laframboise observes, these women have been scarred by their experiences, and have often reacted out of proportion to the offence; still, there is something subversive about "film footage which shows the heroine calmly assembling a high-powered rifle or vanquishing a male opponent in hand-to-hand combat--since

[21] Segal, 174.

[22] Segal, 174.

many of us still do not believe that women are capable of such things [Laframboise]."

The recent "combat" heroines in Terminator 2 and Thelma and Louise elucidate some of the difficulties for women in becoming socialized in patriarchy while they also create a fictive space for the communication of anger and ambivalence toward their oppressors. The appropriation (and to some extent, revolution) of images and of plots typically associated with men threatens to destabilize "the gender identity of protagonists and viewers alike."[23] The ambiguous representation of the gender of the heroine not only makes women "competitors for 'the male preserve'[24], but reminds men of their own heterogeneity. As Gertrude Koch has suggested, it is a fear and recognition in man of his own bisexuality which threatens "to subvert his 'proper' [impenetrable, pure] identity, which depends upon his ability to distance woman and make her his proper-ty."[25]

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[23] Tania Modleski, The Woman Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory (New York: Methuen, 1988) 5.

[24] Modleski, 8.

[25] Modleski, 8.

iii. The Death and Resurrection of the Omniscient and Omnipotent Hero in Terminator 2: Judgment Day[26]

"I'll be back." --Arnold Schwarzenegger as Terminator

"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done." --Revelation 22.12

Issues around positive images of women often centre on philosophies of masculinity and femininity to glorify the "feminine", the mythopoeia and celebration of the mother/other dichotomy, or the equation of women with truth. Thinkers like Julia Kristeva have identified women with a "semiotic chora"[27], the attributes of which often appear in a comparison of post-modernity with "the feminine". For example, postmodernism recalls "the irreverent spirit of the avant-garde"--omnipresent, playful, anarchistic, antiformal, antithetic, performative, participatory, ironic, and schizophrenic[28]. Likewise, it is "feminine writing" (according to the proponents of 'feminine ecriture'), or "the position of woman" (according to Jacques Derrida)[29]

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[26] Terminator 2: Judgment Day, dir. James Cameron, with Arnold Schwarzenegger, Linda Hamilton, Robert Patrick, Edward Furlong, Paul Winfield, and Joe Morton, Pacific Western, 1991 (135 min.).

[27] Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, trans.Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1980).

[28] Ihab Hassan, The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture (Ohio: Ohio State UP, 1987) 91-2.

[29] Jacques Derrida, Spurs: Niezsche's Styles, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979).

which possesses the special qualities of indeterminacy and play, allowing "woman" to oscillate between subject and object, presence and absence.

While many of these "feminine" strengths are reminiscent of Rambo's abilities (in his capacity to appear and disappear), they raise questions about femininity when applied to the heroine of Terminator 2. In the first place, one must question whether the source of Sarah Connor's strength is delusionary (paranoid, religious), or whether it connotes the male warrior, the female warrior, or the mother.

Comparing Sarah Connor (in The Terminator and Terminator 2: Judgement Day) to John Rambo we see that both are cast as victims of a large scale "conspiracy". For Rambo, it is the American, Vietnamese and Soviet governments as well as technology that he will avenge; in The Terminator, Sarah attacks the law and the machines. Though both characters have been imprisoned for their anti-establishmentarianism, their strengths seem to be derived from different sources. Rambo is endowed with an almost supernatural privilege--his body is both a weapon and a shield (in this way he is similar to the Terminators). Sarah becomes fit and strong, yet she is penetrable (she has sex, her empathy contaminates her judgment, and she is frequently physically pierced by both Terminators).

Rambo exceeds the narrative, surprising the viewer with

his sudden appearances and disappearances. Sarah's body, too, is visibly threatening (in Terminator 2) but it is always in danger of being tranquillised, stabbed, even invaded by the chameleon-like Terminator which copies its prey, then kills it. Thus, Sarah's success is all the more exceptional since she has not been conditionally released and given the chance to redeem herself in the eyes of the authorities but must always elude her persecutors. It is important to note here, that Sarah is not the focus of persecution in Terminator 2--it is her son, John. As Rambo is the protector of the POWs, and a fighter for the end of their maltreatment, so Sarah assumes the same role for John.

Margaret Goscilo[30] and Constance Penley[31] both argue that (in The Terminator, at least) it is the son's desire that impels and constructs the sexual encounter between Sarah and Kyle Reese.

Kyle Reese, from the post-holocaust future (2029), is sent to Los Angeles of the present (1984) to protect Sarah Connor, the woman who will bear the leader of the future resistance against the machines (John Connor). John has singled out Kyle from the soldiers to send through time and in so doing has orchestrated his own primal scene. Goscilo adds: "If the entire film takes its shape from the filial

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[30] Margaret Goscilo, "Deconstructing The Terminator," Film Criticism 12.2 (Winter 1977/1988) 37-52.

[31] Constance Penley, "Time Travel, Primal Scene and Critical Dystopia," Camera Obscura 15 (1986) 66-84.

primal conflict, then obviously Sarah's identity is mediated through a male subjectivity."[32]

However, Sarah is not the pawn in a man's realization of his Oedipal desires, the passive object of a pre-determined destiny. The events of her life are only determined in that they are revealed to her anachronistically from the viewpoint of one possible future--in fact, the event of the conception of John is revolutionary in that Sarah has initiated the love-making (she has chosen the father); Sarah tells the child John who his father is (the older John will meet Kyle and know that he has already been chosen); Kyle volunteers to travel through time to meet Sarah (Kyle chooses Sarah--this choice is heavily influenced by Sarah's choice of him since in the photograph of Sarah, Kyle seems to sense their past and future union); John knows it is Kyle who must be sent through time (we assume John does not tell Kyle the significance of his travel--when Sarah asks Kyle about John's father, Kyle says: "John never said much about him. I know he dies before the war".)

Though Sarah is deemed (by Reese) the "mother of the future" in The Terminator, she quickly renders the title comical, responding to Reese's remark with: "Do I look like the mother of the future? I mean, am I tough? Organized? I can't even balance my own check book!" Clearly, Sarah is

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[32] Goscilo, 47.

frustrated not only because she is expected to live the remainder of her life according to someone else's expectation, but because, in a sense, it has already happened. Not only must she have a son, but she must have a son named "John". This tribute only intensifies the expectations of her and thus denies her sense of control over her own thoughts and actions. She must live up to a legend she once created by identically repeating it. Sarah complains, "You're talking about things I haven't done yet in the past tense. It's driving me crazy. Look I. didn't ask for this honour, and I don't want it. Any of it."

Margaret Goscilo maintains that the strong presence in this scene is Kyle Reese's, even though the glory is Sarah's. Goscilo posits that the message Reese recites from Sarah's son, "Thank you, Sarah, for your courage through the dark years. You must be stronger than you imagine you can be. You must survive or I will never exist", subdues and convinces "by dual male exhortation to do her maternal humanitarian duty." She adds, "Sarah's maternal destiny verges on the stereotype of woman as breeder"[33]; Sarah only has the phallus temporarily, so that she can pass down its powers to her son.

But Sarah's role of "humanitarian" is problematic: her goal is a humanitarian one but her actions are not humane. In other words, Sarah does seek to promote human welfare in

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[33] Goscilo, 45-46.

the basic sense by trying to prevent the accidental deaths of three million people, but the means or practices by which she attains this are not usually compassionate nor do they involve a minimum infliction of pain. Sarah advocates violence in the name of freedom and survival. Much like Rambo, her aggression is legitimated by her cause (the difference here, is that her cause involves the lives of three billion people). While Sarah's violence is directed solely at the Terminator in the first film, she extends it to the institutions and individuals who hinder her in the second film.

In Terminator 2, Sarah is labelled "paranoid schizophrenic" with delusions of persecution; at this point she is beginning to take on the symptoms of a paranoiac--we can already witness personality deterioration and "regressive behaviour such as autism, withdrawal and deterioration of personal hygiene."[34] The viewer is comfortably outside of Sarah's point of view as she displays these symptoms of madness, but once she escapes from the mental hospital, she becomes the narrator and focal character of the story--we are permitted to share in her thoughts, actions and nightmares.

We are warned of Sarah's aggressive disposition by her son, John: he shows a picture of Sarah to his friend and

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[34] David W. Swanson, Philip J. Bohnert, and Jackson A. Smith, The Paranoid (Boston: Little, 1970) 78.

calls her "a complete psycho"; we are told that she is in Pescadero State Hospital for breaking into an army warehouse to steal guns. On three occasions, she assaults her psychologist, Dr. Silberman--and each outbreak is progressively worse. First, we are told that Sarah stabbed his pen into his kneecap; in an interview after he refuses her request to see her son, she physically attacks him and tries to strangle him; during her escape from the mental hospital, she breaks his arm then threatens him with: "there are 215 bones in the human body. That's one." Sarah reiterates the threat when she uses Silberman as a hostage to ensure her escape.

Sarah's most potentially violent act is the murder of Miles Dyson, the man most directly accountable for the technology which dooms the human race, but she cannot bring herself to do it. This scene is a pivotal one, and will be discussed at greater length, but suffice it to say here that Sarah's sparing of Dyson has more to do with the danger of turning into a Terminator herself, judging Dyson as she was once judged, for crimes not yet committed.

Sarah is persecuted in the first film because she is the future mother of a great military leader; not only will she beget John Connor, but, according to Reese, she teaches him about organization, leadership and weaponry. Her role is a complex one, and is best represented in the second film. In a dream sequence, a militant Sarah approaches a

fence which separates her from a children's park. She sees an innocent and powerless Sarah Connor of the past playing with a young child. She grabs and pulls at the fence trying to warn them but the blast wave hits and turns all of them to fire and ash. Here we see a mother with her child, and a mother separated from her child; they are both protectors of life, but are (literally) on opposite sides of the fence in their approach. This suggests that the multiple impulses of one person can exist simultaneously and in contradiction.

The strict dichotomization of mothers and "others" has become an obsession of contemporary French thought. According to Alice Jardine, modernity privileges "the unique Female-Other-As-Mother [to exclude] women-subjects who are not mothers (for they are men)."[35]

Though Sarah is a protector of John, she does not 'nurture' him; she is stern when she tells him it was stupid to risk his life for her and later when he offers her food, she ignores him. Yet, in the mental hospital she begs to see her son and says, "He's naked without me." Later, Sarah appeals to essentialism when she reveals that she thinks of herself as a creator of life and a nurturer when she accuses Miles Dyson of being a destructive creator (see below).

Sarah's epistemological certainty (of her own "nature" and of the destiny of mankind) dissolves as she narrates the

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[35] Alice A. Jardine, Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 115.

story. At the same time, Sarah's voice-over narrative suggests that she has collected and understood her experiences.

The problem is one that Kaja Silverman recognizes in "the female authorial voice."[36] The female voice that speaks with conviction and authoritative reflection is as positive, productive and generative as the masculine voice which lays claims to the truth and purity of thought.

Sarah's rejection of Fate and Truth would seem to be a subversive strategy, yet she does so by asserting her own validity as a subject; in this sense she remains a "guardian of the law" whose success threatens to repress her primary aim. As Derrida observes of the female aim of deconstructing the Law, "We are all...guardians of the Law--people who assure a tradition, who maintain a heritage, who are critics and evaluators, and at the same time who are men from the country, naive...in front of the Law."[37]

However, Terminator 2 clearly endorses the tenet, 'No fate but what you make.' Sarah will not realize the reality of this epigram until the sequel: "The future always so clear to me had become like a black highway at night. We were in uncharted territory now. Making up history as we

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[36] Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988).

[37] Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., "Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida," Men in Feminism (New York: Methuen, 1987) 192.

went along." She succeeds in persuading Miles Dyson, the man most directly responsible for the prosperity of the machines, to destroy his work at Cyberdine Systems.

Until this point, the terminator narratives offer Sarah's apocalyptic dream as a resignation to fate and the inability of people to change their present condition in order to change its outcome. We see the worst possible fate (nuclear holocaust) at the beginning of The Terminator--a glance at the future chaos by means of "mindscreen" through Kyle, by Kyle's description, and by Sarah's dream.

In Terminator 2, the truth of the inevitable is apparent in the opening scene of the burning park; Sarah's description of her recurring dream to Dr. Silberman revokes the image: "The children look like burnt paper, black...and they fly apart like leaves." Her depression culminates in her nihilistic assertion that everyone is dead already; ironically, it is this threatening view which enables her to escape from the hospital, thereby breaking out of dormancy.

After Sarah's escape, she, John and the Terminator take refuge in Mexico; and it is here that we witness Sarah's apocalyptic dream and see that her vision is identical to those previous images in which we were given a privileged look at the "real" future. But immediately after Sarah awakens from her nightmare, eyes widened with fear, she looks at the words she has carved into the bench ("No fate") and accentuates this alternative view by plunging a knife

into them.

Sarah's epistemological certainty reemerges in the next scene of the attack on Miles Dyson's home. Though Sarah is trying to change the fate of mankind, the "history of things to come", she cannot kill Dyson. This suggests that killing Dyson is not the only alternative to letting him live to complete his dangerous course. Perhaps Sarah recognizes in the wounded Dyson the same fear, pain and confusion that Sarah herself had experienced in face of the Terminator whose logic and inability to feel pain or remorse led only to destruction. Just as Sarah is judged as an enemy of the machines and is punished before she commits her "crimes", here Sarah judges Dyson on things to come. Dyson says: "You're judging me on things I haven't even done yet. How are we supposed to know?" As Sarah is judged and held responsible for her son's actions, Dyson's conceptions are blamed for their outgrowth. Sarah's response to Dyson's question echoes eco-feminists' valorization of the feminine and confirmation of stereotypical associations of women with life, nature and virtue and men with death, culture and vice. She sputters:

> How are you supposed to know. Men like you built the hydrogen bomb. Men like you thought it up. You think you're so creative--you don't know what it's really like to create something, to create a life, to feel it growing inside you. All you know

how to create is death and destruction.

Though we are not omniscient with an indisputable right to judge the actions of others, (as John's interjection suggests: "Mom! We need to be a little more constructive here"), it is clear that once made aware of the dangerous implications of ones actions, one must repent and choose a new course or be accountable for them.

The reference here to The Apocalypse (The Revelation to John or Judgement Day) is undeniable, providing yet another identity for Sarah (prophet and mother of all nations) and reinforcing a validity to her story:

> Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested...He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death...Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.[38]

Though as the Terminator observes, it is in our (human) nature to destroy ourselves, the inevitable nuclear war as described and imag(in)ed in both films is not an epistemological certainty in the final analysis. The future that we have believed in through Sarah's conviction (despite claims that she suffers from paranoid delusions, we believe that she is sane in an insane world), is optimistically

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[38] 1 Rev. 10, 22 Rev. 14.

dismissed.

This is remarkable considering the Biblical parallels to Judgement Day: "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. And behold, I am coming soon".[39] The constant play on these words, "I'll be back", suggests the perpetual and unavoidable wrath of the destroyer (Terminator or God). Though Sarah crushes the Terminator in The Terminator, he is able to return from the future unscathed. This recalls the passage from Revelations: "And [the angel] seized the dragon...who is the Devil and Satan...and threw him into the pit [the lake of fire that burns with sulphur] and shut it and sealed it over him...till the thousand years ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while.[40]

At the end of Terminator 2, both Terminators (agents of death and destruction) are cast into a pit of fire (just as Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, "the second death" to end the apocalypse). John adds to the flames the remnant of the first Terminator's arm and the microchip, to ensure the completion of the past. As the Terminator's descent into the fire is complete we see his scanner contract (literally, iris out to black) as his point of view is obliterated.

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[39] 22 Rev. 6-7.

[40] 20 Rev. 2-3.

Our final vision is mediated through Sarah's eyes as she drives through the black night and ponders the promise and reassurance of an open road winding through darkness: she has lost her epistemological advantage, confined herself to the present, and has embraced activity, change, and responsibility by dismissing Fate.

Sarah (as narrator) reflects on her feelings at that moment: "The unknown future rolls toward us. I face it for the first time with a sense of hope. Because if a machine, a Terminator, can learn the value of human life, maybe we can too." (This can be compared to the revelation after the Apocalypse to John the Apostle: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away".[41] But Terminator 2 does not make the claim, as does the Bible, that universal peace is inevitable; it only suggests that universal war is avoidable.

The parallels to The Revelation to John are numerous, but there is one important deviation: in Terminator 2, the apocalyptic ending punishes evil embodied in the hyper-alloy Terminator, rewards righteousness united in Sarah and John, the prophets, and prevents one route toward the destruction of mankind (which is deemed accidental); however, it allows "the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and

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[41] 21 Rev. 1-4.

idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood"[4] to survive, with the faith that they will transform themselves (judge themselves before they are "divinely" judged) by learning the value of human life.

The film affirms a strength of will in and through Sarah to become a "mother of all nations"; Sarah becomes the Alpha and the Omega, the symbol for the beginning of a new world and the end of the old. We can extrapolate from the narrative to see that since this route towards nuclear war has been deserted, John's role, too, of future saviour and leader of the resistance against the machines, has been dramatically altered.

Typically, a heroine like Sarah who chooses a social mission over her passive "femininity", is deprived of love and family. Though Sarah is undoubtedly scarred, perhaps paranoid, her loss of John is only temporary. Because of Sarah's victory, John's death seems to be inevitable, since at the precise moment that he tosses the first terminator's "chip" into the pit of fire, he alters the chain of events that leads to his own birth. Logically, John should disappear at this moment, but he does not mystically disappear nor does the narrative conveniently kill him as a sacrifice to Sarah's mission. The moment remains a celebratory one between mother and child.

This final contradiction supports the message, "No fate

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[4] 22 Rev. 15.

but what you make" ensuring the rift between cause and effect. It also bestows upon Sarah a respect that rejects her status as obstacle of an-other man's adventure, or as receptacle to be acted upon, suggesting that she is the modus operandi in the cultivation of her own identity as well as in the restoration of the history of things to come.

Just as the "mother" has undergone role mutations (she is the creator of life and its protector who is also violent and destructive), so too have the "natural" roles of the father and son been questioned.

The role of the protector, for instance, circulates between characters. Sarah puts John's life first, warning him never to risk himself for her. She constantly tells him to "get down", she hides him under bullet proof vests, and in the end assures his safety before confronting the T 1000 alone. It is evident from the first scene in which Sarah pleads with Dr. Silberman to let her see her son, that John is in danger without his mother. Sarah says, "He's naked without me."

John reciprocates protection for his mother, risking his life for her on several occasions. John insists on rescuing her from the mental institution and orders the Terminator to help even though it is not a "mission priority." John goes to Miles Dyson's home to prevent Sarah from murdering him, even though the T-1000 may anticipate that move; he refuses to leave the Cyberdyne building (which

is about to be detonated) without Sarah; finally, he slows down his own escape by helping her when she is wounded.

The protector is often the outlaw (Terminator, Sarah), the destroyer is sometimes the law (T-1000). The protector/father is also the servant/child/toy. The son is a rebel, defying the foster parents, the real mother, institutions and law (he robs bank machines and has a record with local police). The son is a saviour, leader of the resistance, protector of the mother, ruler of the ideal father

The Terminator is associated with punks in the first film and with bikers in the second. He acquires one biker's clothing--leather jacket, cowboy boots, sunglasses and motor cycle. He is associated with their image of toughness as well as their position in society--against its dominant images of what/who is good. The liquid cyborg, in contrast, takes the identity of a police officer whose car bears the maxim, "To serve and protect' whereas it is in the cyborg's programmed "nature" to defy, intimidate, tyrannize, and destroy. Though the cyborg is able to copy people (to look, sound and behave as they would), and the Terminator is not capable of physical transformation but only audile, the latter is the only one of the two capable of true transformation (transformation of essence). Sarah notes that "if a machine can learn the value of human life, maybe we can too."

The Terminator is the most muscular male whose only mission is to kill but he has been reprogrammed by John to protect him. Thus he is an ideal father, as Sarah notes, he doesn't have any flaws in character that a human/natural father might have, because his sole purpose is to ensure John's survival.

> Watching John with the machine it was suddenly so clear. The Terminator would never stop. It would never leave him and it would never hurt him. Never shout at him or get drunk and hit him. Or say it was too busy to spend time with him. It would always be there and it would die to protect him. Of all the would-be fathers that came and went over the years this machine was the only one who measured up. In an insane world, it was the sanest choice.

The Terminator does not receive the respect from John that such a powerful/threatening (he is only powerful here though since he would never hurt John or Sarah and they both discover they have no need to fear him) father would command. John says, "move it, lugnuts" and teaches him a modern Californian vocabulary to keep him from sounding like "such a dork all the time."

Here, John takes on the role of teacher/master, especially since the Terminator must listen to John's orders. The Terminator is also seen as a toy by John; when

John is first thrilled to learn of his ability to command, he childishly asks the Terminator to stand on one foot and shrieks with joy: "Cool, my own Terminator!"

The Terminator is more muscular but the less advanced of the two cyborgs; bigger is not stronger here. The Terminator looks like is the more threatening father but looks are deceiving here, even voice. The fact that the Terminator is able to defeat the more advanced model (the T-1000) suggests a number of things: that morality, strength of will and collaboration with others of similar purpose are keys to success.

Morality figures in the Terminator's new philosophy of non-violence. This is a kinder, gentler terminator who is also a learning computer; he learns to be more human--to learn not to kill or perpetrate unnecessary violence, to understand the pain of others "I know now why you cry--though I never can".

Strength of will is determined in the unequal battle of the two "cyborgs." Both terminators are Ramboesque in their immunity from destruction. The liquid metal terminator is able to heal himself almost instantly when injured, but the image of pure determination is the final battle scene when the Terminator reaches for his gun and with what seems to be human strain combined with a superhuman capacity, switches to auxiliary power in order to get it. The cyborg that is liquid metal is even less vulnerable/human, yet both have a

single purpose, one is for life and the other for death, though both are preserving their own social orders, so in that sense, they are both trying to preserve their own sense of life.

The computers became self-aware: they became conscious of themselves as having selfhood, having the faculty for self-contemplation, and the awareness of the existence of a ruling other--completely other from the self. The Terminator is less of a purist because he bridges the gap between self and other to incorporate the other in himself, to die for the other. So his "singular" purpose becomes multiple--to protect John (specific), to protect Sarah (he extends protection to a person who John values) to understand human feelings. His purpose moves from concrete to abstract as his logical thoughts and resulting appropriate actions are modified in his collaboration with human beings.

Thus, in the final analysis, the hero/ine of Terminator 2 is neither omniscient nor omnipotent. The philosophy of the film (especially between the original and the sequel) promotes a move from singularity to multiplicity, purpose to chance, paranoia to schizophrenia, transcendence to immanence, and determinacy to indeterminacy, even if this "move" is not a straightforward or entirely successful one.

The accomplishment of the Terminator is his understanding of the pain of the other and the value of

human life; it is only through the multiple roles played by each individual that he comes to understand it. The Terminator's inability to feel, however, indicates that transformation is rarely complete; he is lowered into the lake of fire for those who cannot repent.

The mother and child remaining truly represent a successful union of the sexes: they have created each other and have charted their own territory. This is a moment which captures the Alpha and Omega (the beginning and the end of the world). It is that second stage of [Derrida's] "feminine operation" (which began from the position of woman) which opens up an entire heterogeneous realm of sexual differences and renders strange any pre-ordained relationship between them.

From this story we do not sustain an empire of male supremacy nor do we attain the utopia of the SCUM Manifesto, female supremacy (a world without men), nor the promise of life the Bible offers after the Apocalypse (a place without sin). Instead, the judged become the judges, the child becomes the master, the destroyer becomes the man of the law, the patriarch becomes the slave, and the mother becomes the warrior. This is not simply a reversal of roles, but a collapse, if only at moments, of hierarchies of sex, gender and power.

iv. A First Encounter with Mortality and Solipsism in the Secular World of Thelma and Louise.[43]

Thelma and Louise marks a turning-point in what has been a predominantly "male" cinema (that is, a cinema made by men, about men, for men) in the United States. The road trip, observes filmmaker Wim Wenders, often features "long empty roads, empty filling-stations, Monument Valley, suburbs where the bill boards on the roofs are twice as tall as the houses below"[44] and has been typically the domain for the male traveller. In fact, when women have made cameos along the roadside, they have commonly afflicted the journey with their female sexuality so that the trip breeds "danger and violence instead of pleasure."[45]

The quintessential film of this genre is Easy Rider, the story of a motorcycle journey from Los Angeles to New Orleans. Easy Rider flaunts the American landscape: the images of the country reveal a certain beauty and serenity. Despite the initial image of freedom that Peter Fonda's character "Captain America" creates by "riding motorcycles

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[43] Thelma and Louise, dir. Ridley Scott, script writ. Callie Khouri, with Geena Davis, Susan Sarandon, Christopher McDonald, Michael Madsen, Harvey Keitel, Pathe, Percy Main Production, 1991 (129 min.).

[44] Wim Wenders, Emotion Pictures: Reflections on the Cinema, trans. Sean Whiteside (London: Faber, 1986) 27.

[45] Manohla Dargis, "Roads to Freedom," Sight and Sound 1.3 (July 1991) 16.

through the air or smoking grass,"[46] this film, like Thelma and Louise is about lack of freedom. According to Fonda, the characters are not right, they are wrong. He says, "I end up committing suicide; that's what I'm saying America is doing."[47]

Freedom, for Thelma and Louise, is "just another word for nothing left to lose."[48] The film expresses women's anger, "their sense of being persecuted, chased, monitored and stalked by violent men."[49] The film is not primarily about rape, however, but about the improbability of freedom and "wholeness" for women in our society.

Hollywood has rarely portrayed women as "whole"; instead, women are denoted by the "hole" or the "part". According to Helen Knode, the "hole" of woman has many forms--it may represent: the bottomless hole of sin, moral anarchy, or death (Glen Close in Fatal Attraction); a vagina (Annette Bening in Grifters [1990]); a mouth (Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman [1989]); or a tear duct (Demi Moore in Ghost [1990]).[50]

Thelma and Louise transcend the cliches of sex and

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[46] Wenders, 27.

[47] Wenders, 28.

[48] Helen Knode, "Against All Odds," Movieline 2.11 (July 1991): 54.

[49] Knode, 54.

[50] Knode, 50.

emotion typically ascribed to women, proving that they can propel their own action-adventure through the making of their own decisions. It is a situation, says scriptwriter Callie Khouri, in which "two women are pushed too far and react the way any intelligent person [read: man] would: desperately, cunningly, with humor and with hope."[51]

The story begins in Arkansas, where a bored and cynical waitress, Louise Sawyer [Susan Sarandon], and friend Thelma Dickinson [Geena Davis], a frustrated housewife ("who is almost pathologically bimbo")[52], steal a week-end away from the restaurant and home. In a powder blue vintage T-bird, they make their way toward a friend's cabin in the country, but, at Thelma's request, they sojourn at a roadside dance bar. Thelma flirts and dances with a man named Harlan, who later tries to rape her in the parking lot. Louise intervenes, pointing a gun at the assailant, and advises him for future reference that when a "woman's cryin' like that, she isn't havin' any fun." Harlan scoffs at Louise's warning, and she reacts by shooting him in the heart.

From this point onward, the two women are outlaws, delving deeper into crime in order to survive: Thelma commits armed robbery, abducts a state trooper, and both participate in blowing up a leering truck driver's rig. The

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[51] Knode, 53.

[52] Alice Cross, "The Bimbo and the Mystery Woman," Cineaste 18.4 (1991) 33.

vacation ends as Thelma and Louise are surrounded by the police force in back and the Grand Canyon in front. They make one final decision of their own free will, to drive into the Canyon instead of compromising with or surrendering to the law.

Drawing from the infamous road movie, Thelma and Louise begins as a quest to build individual autonomy, but since the two women are also retreating from men, oppression and the limitations on their freedom of expression, their adventure soon transforms itself into something quite different.

Thelma and Louise seek a will to pleasure rather than a will to power. But the film does not present a pure fantasy of the pleasure principle on wheels. In fact, each pleasurable experience leads to abuse (by men). Thelma's flirtation leads to an attempted rape, her affair with J.D. results in robbery. The simple joy of speeding down the highway is suspended by an imperious "nazi" cop, then by a crude, lascivious truck driver.

Thelma and Louise, contrary to popular criticism (from Lorraine Locherty to The National Review), is not simply a "tidal wave of violence" in the male tradition. That is to say, the violence perpetrated by the women may be necessary, even remorseless, but unlike Rambo, Thelma and Louise does not exonerate the hero(es) from the consequences of their actions.

Thelma and Louise exposes and contests assumptions of the Hollywood genres which reinforce gender inequalities; that a woman could enjoy being a perpetrator of violence threatens those who wield privilege and power in society under its present gender power configurations.

In fact, the main objection to women and violence within the film and in its criticism, is the implication that Thelma and Louise have a "knack" for aggression (and self-preservation)--that it comes naturally for them to take care of themselves. Thelma picks up her shooting technique from the television, Louise evades an army of police cars with her driving skills.

But violence is a secondary reaction for them--they are not completely irrational, irascible "reactors". In each situation, violence is perpetrated after reasoning fails. Thelma does not even attempt to reason with her abusive husband, Darryl, for permission to have a vacation, because in her experience, he has only derided her in her efforts. Louise tries to explain the immorality of rape to Harlan, but his response ("Suck my cock") reinforces his disdain for her and her sex. Both Thelma and Louise stop the truck driver to question him about his motives and behaviour (Thelma says, "And what's that thing you do with your tongue? That's disgusting."), but his reaction is one of confusion and defensiveness (he calls them crazy bitches).

As the women realize that there can be no compromise

until there is respect and understanding (which, unfortunately, will not come in their lifetime), their crimes become less serious but more enjoyable. Beginning with murder, Thelma and Louise revert to armed robbery, restraint of a police officer, and destruction of property.

Though the crimes lessen in degree, Thelma and Louise become more dangerous as their crimes snowball. This is because not only do they show a "knack" for or "natural" aggression, but once their alibi of self-defense is not applicable, one must discard the truth of gender which keeps women in their position of guilt and innocence in the eyes of the law. As Louise argues from the beginning, a woman who "gets drunk in sleazy truckstops, and flirts to the point of sexual foreplay, essentially gives up her right to a voice."[11] Yet the guilty woman is also innocent, a victim of circumstance, when the law isolates the case (of rape, in this instance) to exonerate society from the systematic oppression of women.

The paternalistic cop [Harvey Keitel] goes to great lengths to prove that Thelma and Louise are victims of circumstance (and that they are not, as the waitress at the bar observes, "the killing type"). The cop looks for a motive, and thinks he has found it when he sympathizes with Louise: "I know what happened in Texas." He is adamant in

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[11] Elayne Rapping, "Feminism Gets the Hollywood Treatment," Cineaste 18.4 (1991) 31.

getting the truth from Thelma's lover, J.D., physically and verbally assaulting him as he asks, "Would they have stolen if you didn't take their money?"

The cop, though he professes to be on the side of the women, is still fundamentally responsible for the effort to hunt them down. As Sarah Schulman has noted, Thelma and Louise, like A Question of Silence and The Accused [1988] before it, suggests that the coming together of raped (humiliated, abused) women requires a strength of conviction that effectively disposes of men so that the women may be able "to fully confront each other as equals."[54]

The abandonment is not even of men but of the reasoning and controlling power of men. Thelma and Louise prove that the long-buried vein of anger that runs just below the surface of women's facade of resignation and compliance can challenge and humiliate the phallus, showing it up for its weakness. Thelma's husband Darryl's empty threats, the "Nazi" cop who weeps, the arrogant, inarticulate truck driver, the silenced paternal cop who is reduced to slow motion and the gesture of a wave: these threatening men, in retrospect, are reduced to signposts in a female experience.

In a society which punishes women for their sexuality, Thelma and Louise have become outlaws the moment they seize control of their bodies, "their bandit identities forced on

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[54] Sarah Schulman, "The Movie Management of Rape," Cineaste 18.4 (1991) 35.

them by a gendered lack of freedom, their journey grounded in the politics of the body."[55]

Though their freedom cannot be bought (they lose the money which supplies the gasoline to keep them moving), and though the film is pessimistic about the possibility of women being whole and free in this society, there are pulsional incidents or moments in this film in which the women enjoy pure freedom. A night in the silence of the New Mexican landscape, Thelma's gaze at the ripples of J.D.'s belly, singing golden oldies in the T-Bird--these all suggest, a re-vision (to use Adrienne Rich's word), a look with fresh eyes to understand "the assumptions in which we are drenched,"[56] and in order to know ourselves. Thelma says, "I feel really awake...I can't go back."

So narrative closure is left by the wayside. "Thelma and Louise carry on their journey. It's a metaphorical continuation."[57] Their final choice is death, but it is not life but immortality that they are rejecting. By refusing to compromise after wisdom, resourcefulness and luck runs out (as the cop predicts), Thelma and Louise proclaim the importance of the life in a singular moment--in

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[55] Dargis, 16.

[56] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," Criticism: The Major Statements, ed. Charles Kaplan, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1986) 518.

[57] Amy Taubin, "Ridley Scott's Road Work," Sight and Sound 1.3 (July 1991) 19.

all its spontaneity, transience, and nonconformity.

Conclusion

The history of cinema (and of philosophy) has been steeped in imperialist, racist and sexist assumptions. The foundations of philosophical thought are built on an assumption of natural privilege.

The belief in a "nature" of sexuality (and of the universality of inequality between opposites) has pervaded all discourses in Western society as diverse as those on fashion, medicine, architecture and the cinema. The discourses around these cultural practices often have a similar agenda: to prove that men and women have different relations to reproduction that in turn produce separate sexual behaviours for the sexes.

When Foucault asks, "Do we truly need a true sex?", he is asking a question popular among other recent historians, philosophers, and cultural theorists. While some feminists would argue that with the triumph of feminism, sexuality disappears, theorists who support notions of "bisexuality" (Cixous) and multiple sexualities (Derrida) envision a world of absolutely heterogeneous sexual differences.

In "Women in the Beehive," Derrida recalls Heidegger's notion of Dasein, "neither man, nor spirit, nor subject, consciousness nor ego, but sexually neuter; that is, it has no sex"[1] to suggest a kind of neutralization of sexuality

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[1] "Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida," Men in Feminism, ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1987) 199.

which avoids reconstructing phallocentrism. This is a neutralization of sexual opposition which results in a multiple sexuality, "one sex for each time" which produces the identity of the giver and receiver only after the exchange.

The myth of sexual essences, despite the extent of recent criticism of it, still permeates the narratives of Hollywood. Particularly at a time when Americans felt humiliated about their defeat in Vietnam, fantasies about the restoration of manhood and community fluorished on the screen. Though the heros of these films (Rambo, The Deer Hunter, Platoon, Uncommon Valour, and Missing in Action) were deified for their hypermasculinity, upon closer analysis, it is evident that the analogy is a forced one. Rambo's body, at one moment passive and sexual, is quickly effaced in the next cut to an aggressive action by him. Even in Platoon, where an enforced all-male society would seem to promise comradry and expressions of "true" masculinity, the hero finds himself in a microcosmic family wherein each member of the platoon acts out one of various sexualities.

Films which reveal their awareness of the ambiguities of gender, knowledge and truth have (coincidentally?) begun from the "position of woman." In The Terminator and its sequel, the masculine Terminator has the godlike qualities of omnipotence, omniscience and immortality but he scif-

terminates once he has understood human pain. In addition, the heroine, Sarah Connor, has multiple personalities: she is a Ramboesque warrior, the mother of the future, a paranoid schizophrenic, and a prophet. She accepts the partial, human knowledge of the present over complete knowledge, and delivers a message with distinct feminist overtones: the future is not set, there is no fate but what you make.

Thelma and Louise proves that films are not made in a void; at a time when the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill debate was at the height of public debate, this film questions the myths of sexual essence that often serve as a defense for injustice. Thelma and Louise are held responsible for their socially misrepresented identities--they are guilty of being the lure for the male predators. Thelma and Louise questions what "normal" means for women. The film asks the rhetorical question: is a low wage, low prestige job, an abusive husband, and rape, normal? The response to the limitations on freedom is a "pleasure" trip, but as the heroines find, pleasure is never divoriced from the power relations at work in our society which limit freedom.

Several questions within the scope of these issues could not be fully examined here. For example: Can there only be new ideas in films and not new images? Do representations address the viewer as masculine or feminine? Can there be a gendered film text and/or a female authorial

voice in a medium which has been, historically, patriarchal in content and in form?

Even though progressive messages are often framed and limited in the final analysis, it is clear that Hollywood has responded to real changes in women's status and in critical thought. Thus, a deconstruction of dominant representations begins with the recognition that these representations inform and represent our collective and often contradictory fantasies, pleasures and fears, and is productive only because the representations are "rarely in harmony, and there is always some space for 'aberrant' reception."[2]

[2] Annette Kuhn, The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality (London: Routledge, 1985) 7.

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