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**Gender, Genre and Globalization: Discourses of "Femininity" in the Popular  
Culture of the 1990s**

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**A Thesis in The Humanities Programme**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
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## ABSTRACT

### Gender, Genre and Globalization: Discourses of "Femininity" in the Popular Culture of the 1990s

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The thesis traces the discursive construction of gender and femininity in American popular crime stories, focusing on the years 1989-1994. I argue that popular notions of gender and femininity acquired new significance at this time and that the renegotiation of these concepts can be read in, enabled by and has had an impact on the conventions of *film noir*, detective fiction, and tabloid crime genres. In the 1980's and early 1990's, in conjunction with shifts in social concerns and the emergence of new discourses relating to sexuality, new representational technologies, and the intensification of economic globalization, the prior, popular understanding that there was a correspondence between gender and the body became destabilized in social discourse. Simultaneously the stability of representational practice, *tout court*, was undermined. At this time, a proliferation of narratives about women and crime that challenged the sex-gender relationship, appeared in popular culture. Asserting that gender was a social construction, many of these representations were also self-reflexive of their own constructedness and foregrounded their status as representation. In these instances, the concept of "gender parody" was raised through genre parody. These crime stories revived the styles, forms, genres and narrative preoccupations of post-WW II American popular culture to ironize the gender roles and social relations of these earlier representations. Other crime narratives raised the question of gender stability thematically, as an issue related to shifts in social roles, often bringing about changes in the genre's typical point-of-view structures. In all, the semantic value and symbolic position of "Woman" were contested. An examination of these representations foregrounds the manner in which the concept of gender has shifted over the last ten years, and since the second world war. It also highlights related transformations in popular generic forms. The thesis provides textual analyses of a selection of actual and fictional crime narratives to examine the ways in which femininity is constructed through the interaction of popular, feminist, political, economic, sociological, psychoanalytical and legal discourses, and to what ideological purpose.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, the late Inez Bartels Logan, who took great pleasure in her popular fictions.

to my grandmother

Inez Bartels Logan



**Gender, Genre and Globalization: Discourses of "Femininity" in the  
Popular Culture of the 1990s**

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## Introduction

### *Gender, Genre and the Cold War*

During the 1980s and 1990s the popular understanding of gender as a set of traits linked to sex and the body was destabilized, in conjunction with shifts in social concerns and the emergence of new discourses on sexuality and representation. The dissertation traces the discursive construction of gender and femininity in American popular culture during this period of time. I aim to show how the destabilization of these concepts was reflected in, (and, presumably, enabled by) popular representations of women and crime. I will also demonstrate how these discursive shifts informed the gender-based transformations of these genres.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, this project explores the kinds of genre transformations enacted by crime stories about women that have revived or recalled the styles, forms, genres and narrative preoccupations of post-WW II American popular culture: female hard-boiled detective fiction, *neo-film* noir, the “new woman’s picture,” (or family melodrama), and tabloid journalism. The thesis treats these “revived” materials as a specific, postmodern type of generic revision, which I refer to as the “revival” text. Where the conventional practice of genre revision involves the

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Following the theory of discourse put forward by Michel Foucault, the thesis understands language to have productive effects. Foucault has conceived the subject to be a complex product of what is said in various disciplinary and institutional contexts, of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race and class, among other axes of identity. As such, it is through the reiteration and recontextualization of discourse that social identities are both enacted and transformed. See Foucault, 1971.

intentional and critical revision of specific generic forms in an effort to redress the historically and culturally specific values that individual genres embody, the “revival” mode of generic revision is more ambivalent. It represents a kind of generic transformation that John Cawelti has described as “the affirmation of myth for its own sake” insofar as it celebrates the mythical productions of genre itself, when genre is understood as a set of enduring literary conventions. In the revival text the historical critique and the mythos of genre collide in an awkward, yet poignant, testament to the powers of genre. The extent to which the deconstructive or celebratory energies subvert or advance the standard representations of gender and sexuality in the generic productions of postmodernity, is the central preoccupation of this thesis.

Not nostalgic in any simple way, the nature of the relationship that the revival narrative engenders with its post-war predecessor is very particular. The revival text provides a historical account of changing social and economic relations by juxtaposing the different discursive preoccupations that each moment in generic production displays. Throughout the thesis I observe the various economic, geopolitical, aesthetic, technological and social factors that have contributed to the emergence of the revival phenomenon itself. At this point I would like to consider why the styles, forms and preoccupations of American cultural productions from the *post-WW II* period have been revived in the late 1980s.

Most cultural critics offer a socio-political interpretation for the emergence this cultural recycling project, as Ruby Rich does comparing the *neo-noir* phenomenon with its *noir* precursor:

The paranoia [that characterized the classical *film noir*] was the result of a world suddenly rearranged... Stunned by the end of the war as they knew it, Americans flocked to *noir* to pacify themselves with its equally tangled narratives and unreliable narrators. Flash forward to the 90's, with a scenario not very different, apart from its reversals. In place of Corey's disenfranchised Los Angelenos, there are the angry militiamen of Waco and Oklahoma City. Instead of McCarthy, there's Newt. Instead of xenophobia--well, xenophobia. The end of the Cold War seems to have thrown the US into as much of a dither as its beginnings, old ideological formations are once again destined for the junk heap, and faith has gone missing. Whenever nobody can be trusted, society may disintegrate but *noir* can flourish. Enter *neo-noir* to rewire the genre's circuitry to the currents of the present, flashing across its screen some fascinating messages about fears and dilemmas of our age (Rich 11).

In fact, the changes in political relations underpinning the end of the Cold War relate to changes in international economic relations and these changes began long before 1989. The creation of the Eurodollar market, the internationalization of the banks and of capital markets, the increase in multinational corporations; all these things preceded the dismantling of the Berlin wall, by almost a decade.

More significantly, the end of the Cold War marks a shift in popular discourses about globalization. Hence, the common concerns of post-WW II and post-Cold War periods in cultural production relate to their shared interest in the internationalization of the economy.

These two different historical periods not only mark the beginning and end of the Cold War but the apex of Fordism in the United States and its subsequent dismantlement. Relating a history of industrial decline in the US over the course of the Cold War that details this transition, David Harvey claims that while the years after the second world war brought with them a financial boom in the US, with the massive expansion of world trade and international investment flows initially favouring American exports and corporate trading, the globalization of American industry initiated a gradual process of international industrial de-massification (124-147).

The formation of a European market in the 60's diminished the United States power to regulate international finances. In the 70's this was coupled with the push by multinational industries into offshore manufacturing, the pressure of state entitlement programs, the world-wide crash in property markets, and the oil price increases and forced an inflationary wave that resulted in the recession that sunk the post-war economic boom. From post-war Fordism to post-fordist post-industrialism, the United States gained and lost its industrial base at home, and it is the impact of this phenomenon on gender and class arrangements in the USA that is registered most spectacularly in the revival texts of postmodern popular culture.

In particular, the revival text distinguishes itself by way of its almost hysterical emphasis on the material aspects of changing socio-cultural arrangements. The significance of these economic changes is measured by these texts' discursive preoccupation with the dismantlement of spatial boundaries, with the changing statuses of 'the home' and 'nuclear family' providing the principal signs of symbolic instability. In turn, the character functions of the generic revival are geared towards the reinforcement of the distinctions between public and private life. The *femme fatale* of the *neo-noir* detective text, the female hard-boiled private-eye of the recent feminist inspired manifestation of this detective genre, or the bad 'new woman' of the 'new woman's' melodrama: all recall the earlier character functions parodically, in a critique of the cliched representation of gender in post WWII popular culture. But these figures also offer a measure of the conceptual shifts in notions of gender and social identification that occurred during the course of the Cold War economic regime.

David Savran has argued that the cost of maintaining American economic hegemony at the end of the second world war was the return to conservative social and political values and the strict enforcement of gender roles.

The postwar hegemony exerted some of its greatest power, however, not in the public sphere but precisely on those privatized lives to which so many retreated. The nuclear family, in particular, newly isolated in the suburbs from the extended family, became a crucial site for the consolidation and reproduction of normative subjects... .In conceptualizing

th[e] unmistakably middle-class family as a self-contained unit, Cold War domesticity aimed at enforcing submission to a wide variety of social and cultural norms. Most important in this process was the policing of gender roles, which...were rigorously defined in terms of both their labor power and emotional profile (Savran 46-47).

However, as Lynn Spigel points out, for women "postwar domesticity wasn't simply a return to Victorian notions of True Womanhood... it was an updated version of the family ideal, capable of negotiating traditional ideas about domesticity with the realities of postwar experience" (34). Women's public and economic profiles changed during the war years and a simple reversal of this social positioning was improbable. Instead postwar discourses on gender and domesticity were highly ambivalent, as this statement in Lillian Gilbreth's home manual attests: "We no longer say, 'Woman's place is in the home,' because many women have their places outside the home. But the home belongs to the family, and it is still true that the family is woman's chief interest, it is even more a privilege and a trust, whether she has an outside job or not" (qtd. in Spigel 34).

Despite the very apparent contradictions of the narrative productions of gender in the forties, women's roles were largely defined in relation to the domestic sphere, while men's were constructed to accommodate public and corporate economies. In this regard, Savran argues that the legacy of Fordism and the rise of corporatism after the second world war had its greatest impact on the construction of white male subjectivity. Following Herbert Marcuse's theory of capitalist surplus-repression, Savran claims that the social engineering of the



post-war years resulted in the 'feminization' of male subjectivity. He submits that it was against this feminization that the first Cold War counter cultural movements emerged and aligned themselves—more or less plausibly—with the American "Negro". Thus Norman Mailer coined the term 'The White Negro' to describe the experience of white male victimization through which "the hipsters' and 'the beats' defined themselves (Savran 4). That this discourse would evolve over the course of the Cold War to provide the rhetorical basis for the terrorist actions of the reactionary 'angry white male' Patriots in the 1990s, was anticipated by Mailer at the outset (Savran). Predicting the revolutionary role this figure would play in 20<sup>th</sup> century American political and social movements, Mailer noted that this hipster was "equally a candidate for the most reactionary and most radical of movements" (Mailer qtd. in Savran 4).

The turning point in this revolutionary project coincided with the ascendancy of identity politics at the end of the sixties. Once tyrannized by the forces of conservative social and economic prerogatives, the oppressed white male was now a victim of the various cultural nationalisms his rebellion had initially enabled: most notably the women's movement, the civil rights movement and gay and lesbian liberation (Savran 5).

This study is interested in a coincidental phenomenon: The de-naturalization of gender in the cultural productions of Cold War American popular culture. Specifically I'm interested in how the representations of gender and sexuality in post-Cold War cultural production distinguished gender from sex, for such a conceptual shift is necessary in order to feminize men. Furthermore, women's

containment is only necessary if the conceptual relationship between sex and gender has been severed.

*Symbolic Shifts and the Oedipal Myth: Critical Themes and Research Aims*

The presence of feminist rhetoric on gender and sexuality distinguishes the revival text from its historical precursors. In fact, these texts represent the active engagement and contestation of feminist ideas in the social discourse of the 1990s. While not necessarily masculinized, the women of the revival text are more liberated than were their predecessors in forties popular culture, and both feminist and misogynist representations assign an outlaw status to women who reject or resist their positioning within what the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan has called the 'symbolic order' to describe the cultural arena wherein social relations are defined and maintained.<sup>2</sup>

For Lacan, like Freud before him, the Oedipal complex provides the foundational narrative for the symbolic order, positioning subjects in relations of social and sexual difference through the prohibition against incest.<sup>3</sup>

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Informed by the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan's theory of subjectivity holds that a system of cultural rules and regulations—which he designates as 'the symbolic order' of language—precedes the subject to shape his or her experience of the world, specifically his or her experience of the social relation. The term 'the symbolic order' borrows its meaning from linguistics insofar as it describes the social relationship in representational terms: as one which depends upon the exercise and interpretation of cultural conventions. However, the term also, and much more definitively, functions as a psychoanalytical concept. In this instance, the symbolic is a function of language in the unconscious. "Isn't it striking," Lacan writes "that Lévi-Strauss in suggesting that part of the social laws which regulate marriage ties and kinship, is already conquering the very terrain in which Freud situates the unconscious" (1977, *Écrits* 61).

3

Modeled on the myth of Oedipus Rex—the tragic hero who unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother—the Oedipal complex provided Freud with the basic 'nucleus' for his psychoanalytical theory

This is precisely where the Oedipus complex—in so far as we continue to recognize it as covering the whole field of our experience with its signification—may be said, in this connection, to mark the limits that our discipline assigns to subjectivity: namely, what the subject can know of his unconscious participation in a movement of the complex structures of marriage ties, by verifying the symbolic effects in his individual existence of the tangential movement towards incest that has manifested itself ever since the coming of a universal community... The primordial Law is therefore that which in regulating marriage ties superimposes the kingdom of culture on that of nature abandoned to the law of mating (Lacan 1977, Écrits, 66).

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of socio-sexual relations. Having different resolutions for girls and for boys, the Oedipal crisis is initiated through the child's appreciation of social difference as sexual difference. For the boy, the sight of his beloved mother's genitals inspires 'castration anxiety' which in turn induces a process of identification with the father that guarantees the boy's subjectivity and cultural power. This turning towards paternal authority also involves the repudiation of the maternal figure as a sexual object. This identification and subordination to paternal law in the prohibition on incestuous desire forms the basis of the male child's superego. "The [superego's] relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: 'You ought to be like this (like your father),' it also comprises the prohibition: 'You may not be like this (like your father)—that is, you may not do all that he does: some things are his prerogative'" (Freud, XIX, 34-35).

On the other hand, the female child's sighting of the boy's genitals is said to induce shame and jealousy and thus marks the beginning of a process of subordination to paternal authority and the separation of the girl from her mother. Furthermore, since she is encouraged to maintain a measure of her incestuous desire by maintaining her desire for the father in the form of a father surrogate, the female subject is said to have failed to acquire a superego, which for all intents and purposes, is an ethical perspective.

I cannot evade the notion...that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men. Character traits which critics of every epoch have brought up against women—that they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection or hostility—all these would be amply accounted for by the modification in the formation of their super-ego... (Freud XIX 357-258).

Lacan revisits the Oedipal complex with the objective to reframe Freud's observations regarding subjectivity in the more historical terms of structural linguistics: historical, both insofar as the engendering of the subject is culturally determined—which also allows for its historical specificity, even if Lacan does not make those claims himself—and because Lacan's theory conceives of subjectivity itself as a historical production. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subject is formed through a series of social experiences that alienate the child from its being in nature: the territorialization of the body, the imaginary or 'mirror' stage and, finally, the symbolic stage which is structured by the Oedipal social arrangement. It is the intervention of the cultural law of the father into the dyadic relationship the child enjoys with the mother that instantiates the desire that finally constitutes subjectivity. "The moment when desire becomes human", Lacan states, is that moment when "the child is born into language"(1977, Écrits, 103).<sup>4</sup> A subject of language, the child becomes subject to the rules of discourse and assumes his or her identity in signification; more specifically, in relation to a primary, 'phallic' signifier.

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As an unconscious psycho-sexual structure, the pre-oedipal 'imaginary' phase plays a crucial role in early processes of cultural subjection. Involving fantasies of fragmentation, pre-oedipal longing is necessarily a retroactive structure that is inspired by the child's Oedipal experience. As a mode of fantasy identification it also functions in maintaining and reinforcing cultural identifications. For Lacan the relationship between the pre-oedipal phases and the Oedipal/symbolic phase is productive of the ego itself. It is the mode through which the subject understands their relationship to the world as one of difference—of self-consciousness and differentiation. The mirror or imaginary register is also highly ambivalent and thus, highly charged. The self-recognition the subject enjoys is always a fictional construct insofar as it involves an identification with an 'other'. Thus, Lacan insists the imaginary identification involves both recognition and misrecognition. It is only within the symbolic register where the subject identifies him or herself in a linguistic relationship—as 'I' to an 'other'—that these emotional extremes can be resolved.

This is our starting point: through his relationship to the signifier, the subject is deprived of something[:] of himself, of his life, which has assumed the value of that which binds him to the signifier. The phallus is our term for the signifier of his alienation in signification. When the subject is deprived of this signifier, a particular object becomes for him an object of desire... (Lacan 1977 "Desire..." 28).

While desire is fed by the subject's sense of "lack" <sup>5</sup> in relation to cultural power, this lack is not experienced in the same way by men and women. Rather, women are thought to "lack lack" insofar as they enjoy a closer relationship to their bodies, not having the "pound of flesh" Lacan suggests the subject "mortgaged in [obtaining] his relationship to the signifier" (Lacan 1977 "Desire..."28). Because women signify the threat of castration they retain a place within the symbolic order representing this lost value as a fullness of being. In this regard "Woman" is the phallus, and ironically, representative of male desire. The character of the female symbolic position is thus, also, highly ambivalent. Insofar as "Woman" represents the fullness of being, femininity is overvalued. On the other hand, the closer relationship to nature that women are

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The term that Lacan uses to describe the state of loss experienced by the child assuming language is *manque à être*, which, as John P. Muller and William J. Richardson point out, is suggestively ambiguous:

In itself *manque* in French means 'lack,' 'deficiency,' or 'want.' Hence *manque à être* would mean 'lack of being' or 'deficiency in regard to being,' or 'the state of being in 'want of being'... It is precisely this 'want-to-be' that we take to be the key to Lacan's understanding of desire: the radical and humanly unsatisfiable yearning of the infant for the lost paradise of complete fusion with its All—a wanting born of want (22).

thought to enjoy promotes associations with animality and diminishes women's status in social and cultural life.

Popular cultural production tends to exploit the ambivalence of the female subject position, often casting the female characters in a contest of opposing roles that determine the narrative crisis/resolution. The female characters of the *film noir* text are exemplary in this regard. When both poles of femininity are represented in these popular narrative productions, the dangerous, phallic sexuality of the *femme fatale* typically functions to threaten the pure virginal femininity of the good wife/daughter/mother--and the stable social order and family life she stands for.

In many of the popular cultural narratives of the 1980s and 1990s, the woman's status as representative of the phallus has been dramatically contested. Rather, the female characters of the revival culture that has emerged during this period of time--the female hard-boiled detective, female criminal and new *femme fatale*-- attempt to wrest control of cultural power: to 'have' the phallus, not to 'be it'. This thesis proceeds from the premise that the stability of the symbolic order informing social relations is dependent upon the relational harmony of all of its terms, and queries the status and conceptual coherence of the female position in postmodernity. Insofar as the female position is otherwise a representative one, this study also, more generally, addresses the status of the symbolic function in postmodernity.

The primary thematic interest of this study is the status of symbolic organization in play in the texts studied. To the extent that the Oedipal myth provides the symbolic order with its foundational narrative, the psychoanalytic paradigm provides the thesis with a means of measuring the corresponding changes in the status of women's position and the symbolic function *as they are represented* in the narratives under study. By this I mean that both the changing status of women's social roles and signification more generally are expressed within contemporary cultural practice and do not necessarily exist within current social experience. Nonetheless, because our experience of the world is constituted within and through discourse it is assumed that cultural representations have productive effects.

The second critical thematic regards the spatio-temporal relations of postmodernity. Following Julia Kristeva's theorization and periodization of postmodernity, the thesis asserts that the post-WWII restructuring of political and economic relations affected modern forms of socio-cultural organization, specifically the structural organization of social identification. Each chapter examines different representations of women and crime insofar as they reflect the different functioning of space in the identity productions of postmodern globalization.

The third critical axis takes up these concerns with space-time in relation to the narrative thematics and structures of the texts under study. Here, my interests relate to the impact of discourses of globalization on changing concepts

of space and time. In some instances I address the role of setting as a structuring device in narrative productions of gender identity. In others, I examine the themes of space and time taken up in the texts.

The fourth critical pole structuring this study is concerned with the relations of gender and genre. The thesis considers how the thematic or structural preoccupation with gender affects generic stability. Following this critical thematic, this study has been guided by three questions relating to the relationship between gender and genre in the revival text: What is the status of genre in postmodern popular culture? What are the status and nature of the relationships between gender and generic form in contemporary narrative productions? And, insofar as the situation of representation in postmodernity is foregrounded in this study, the final question directing this research considers what common concerns are expressed in the discourses about rhetorical, symbolic and monetary economies that ground the revival text.

#### *The Revival Text: Genre in Postmodernity*

The first question concerns the stability of genre specificity in postmodernity and requires a working definition of both genre and postmodernity, which will be the project of this introduction. In current, popular usage, the term Genre refers to popular literature and other popular cultural forms "where it frequently implies 'not literature', but rather some low-level formulaic production" (Carr 6). The debasement of generic forms has a historical explanation, as Tzvetan Todorov



has noted. Historically, the notion of genre enjoyed higher standing than it does today. Until the 18th century the idea of genre described such established literary forms as the epic, tragedy and comedy, and the rules for writing within these generic contexts were strict. As Todorov explains, "a work was judged poor if it did not sufficiently obey the rules of the genre. Hence such criticism sought not only to describe genres but also to prescribe them; the grid of genre preceded literary creation instead of following it" (42). Reaction to this classical mode of literature and literary criticism involved breaking the rules of genre, thus the idea of "the novel" is born (Lukacs, Heath). Unlike the classical concept of literary form, the novel is an unfinished genre, as Mikhail Bakhtin noted when he called the novel 'the genre of becoming' (8). Indeed, as Tony Bennett has explained, "the novel exists only as a loosely coordinated set of processes through which the 'novelisation' of the field of writing is effected, renewing, extending and enriching its possibilities" (1980, 96). Its appearance corresponds with the discursive production of the concept of 'individuality' in the 18th century and inaugurates a modernist cultural orientation that privileges the concept of originality over the repetitions of generic form.

Since the 1960s, there has been renewed critical and popular interest in genre. The critical attentions follow from the developments of Formalist, structuralist, semiotic, and poststructuralist literary theories, and the cultural studies theories of the 1980's. Coinciding with Claude Levi-Strauss's pioneering anthropological study of the function of myth in primitive culture, literary structuralism represented an attempt to apply the methods of structural linguistics

to the study of literature (Eagleton 91-126). Semiotics involved the application of structuralist linguistic theory to the study of other modalities of communication: objects and phenomena such as wrestling matches, celebrity, fashion and cuisine. Informed by the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), structuralism was a synchronic approach to the study of phenomena that was based on the concept of opposite terms and hierarchical structures. Applied to the study of myth and literary form, structuralist analyses looked to the basic units of the story, and their combinations, in order to understand the ways in which the culture under study organized and classified its social relations. In the study of folktales, or what we would now call popular genres, the Formalist/structuralist account breaks the story into 'spheres of action' (Propp), 'functions' (Lotman), or 'actants' (Greimas), in order to abstract the cultural values reproduced in the narrative structure.<sup>6</sup>

In structuralist analysis meaning is derived differentially, within a closed system of language. Poststructuralism recognized the hierarchy of the terms in opposition, arguing that certain meanings are elevated by social ideologies to privileged positions or made the centers around which other meanings are forced to turn (Eagleton 127-150). A poststructuralist analysis of mythical language appreciates that the relationship between spheres of action, narrative functions or

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Works such as those by Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folk Tale (1928), A.J. Greimas's Semantique structurale (1966), Juri Lotman's The Structure of the Artistic Text (1970), Tzvetan Todorov's The Analysis of the Poetic Text (1972), Gerard Genette's Narrative Discourse (1980), and Roland Barthes' Mythologies (1972), define the structuralist moment in literary theory.

'actants' is not symmetrical or limited by a singular universe of signs. Rather, these relationships are historically and culturally changing. In this sense "meaning is the spin-off of a potentially endless play of signifiers" (Eagleton 127).

Roland Barthes published S/Z in 1974. An influential theory of textual analysis, it was concerned with how a narrative text orders meaning and addresses its readers. Generally thought to have initiated the post-structuralist turn in literary studies, the theory placed the authority over the written work with the reader rather than the author. In S/Z Barthes engaged a series of five codes to organize his reading of the novella Sarrasine. These included: the hermeneutic code, the semic code, the proairetic code, the referential and symbolic codes, and no one code was privileged in the critical reading of textual materials. Rather they worked in concert, multivalently, to attend to the complex interplay of discourses in the text. Here, Barthes asserted the difference between the 'readerly' and the 'writerly' work as a difference in the degree of self-reflexivity evident in the text. The former presents the reader with a coherent orderly world that is already meaningful. In the latter instance, coherence is derived through the active 'writerly' engagement of the reader. Meaning is not inherent to a work, but to a subject reading. Thus, both the authority of the work and the notion of authorship are undercut.

After Barthes, Stephen Neale has developed a post-structuralist view of genre. In this account, genre is defined as an ordering mode of the narrative process, which itself involves the organization of historically specific discursive arrangements (Neale). For example, the principal discursive preoccupation of the

detective genre relates to the symbolic order, justice and signification. At different moments, these interests are articulated in relation to culturally and historically specific discourses. Thus, the detective fiction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century considers crime in relation to the social upheaval that resulted from the growth of the middle-classes. Likewise the hard-boiled detective fiction of the Depression and war-years addressed a growing disenchantment with the idea of the nation as a socio-cultural ordering principle. And, of course, more recently female, hard-boiled detective fiction has introduced feminist discourse to the genre.

Difficult but not impossible to define, the coherence of a genre from this perspective is a function of distinct discursive emphases, which are themselves historically and culturally determined, not a condition derived from fixed iconography, stable points-of-view or positions of enunciation in the stories themselves. In fact, the transmutations in the position of enunciation and point-of-view—the subject of speech, and the subject for whom the narrative unravels and makes sense—within the texts under discussion in this thesis are the most crucial barometers of social change that genre affords. In this regard, I distinguish between the regular functioning of historical specificity in recent generic productions and what I've called a revivalist mode of generic revision. However, before I develop a definition of the revivalist text, I will consider the issue of cultural reception, and the relationship of genre to the postmodern condition.

Cultural studies shares many of the methods and theories of poststructuralist literary analysis, particularly the insight that meaning is open to negotiation, and

contingent upon historically and culturally specific contexts of production and reception. Following from this central observation, a new generation of mass culture analysts have redressed the elitist claims made by early mass culture critics that mass or popular culture only “‘manipulates’ its consumers, imposing on them ‘false needs’ and ‘false desires’ and preventing them from coming to understand their own best interests” (Modleski, 1986, x). As Stuart Hall has argued, “alongside the false appeals, the foreshortenings, the trivialization and short circuits, there are also elements of recognition and identification, something approaching a recreation of recognizable experience and attitudes, to which people are responding” (1981, 233). Thus, cultural studies presumes popular cultural materials to be objects of negotiation between opposing communities.

Antonio Gramsci’s political theory has been influential in this regard. Rather than conceiving of the relations between ruling and subordinate classes as relations of domination, Gramsci’s premise imagines this relationship to be conditioned by the struggle for hegemony: “the moral, cultural, intellectual and thereby political leadership over the whole of society” (Bennett, 1986, xxiii). As struggle, the relations between classes cannot be thought of as separate and divided: wholly dominant or subordinated. Rather class relations and class values are always negotiated. More than just the means with which to chart the dynamics of such hegemonizing processes, this theorization allows political possibilities as regards the imagining of the circulation of different values *and identities* within the sphere of cultural representations. Thus, as Hall has argued,

Popular culture is neither, in a pure 'sense' the popular traditions of resistance to [the imposed processes of cultural transformation]; nor is it the forms which are superimposed on and over them. It is the ground on which the transformations are worked... .Popular culture is one of the sites where [the] struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture--already fully formed--might be simply 'expressed'. But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it (1981, 228, 239).

Dick Hebdige's book Subculture: The Meaning of Style (1979) represents an early work in cultural studies to take up this question of resistance directly, in relation to the spectacular representations of British youth sub-cultures in the 1960s and 1970s. The study looked to these communities for the active expression of a politics of signification. Focusing on the energy and oppositional meanings generated by the fashions that such groups as the British skinheads, teddy boys, mods and punks had adapted from mainstream contexts, Hebdige plotted the race and class relations that were enacted through the operations of style.

The appropriative exercises of the revival text represent the same kind of processes of cultural negotiation discussed by Hebdige. By and for whom these

appropriations are enacted, and who they benefit is another matter altogether. The recent rise in the generic productions that refer to other, earlier generic manifestations can be seen as part of the more intentional engagement with cultural materials that is said to characterize the postmodern moment in cultural production. There are two principal positions on the issue of the referentiality of postmodern cultural materials. On one hand, as Fredric Jameson has argued, the appropriation of the generic styles and forms from earlier eras represents a "libidinal historicism" or a kind of "nostalgia" that has come to pervade contemporary culture subsequent to the recent intensification of technological mediation--the advent of the society of the spectacle, if you will. On the other hand, as feminist critics such as Angela McRobbie have argued, such aesthetic practices represent the proper mode of politics in postmodernity.

In Jameson's view, postmodernism "is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good" (x). Thus the 'nostalgic', simulated cultural forms of postmodernity are themselves representative of the breakdown in the relationship between representations and the reality that they should otherwise record.

Guy Debord's powerful slogan is now even more apt for the "prehistory" of a society bereft of all historicity, one whose own putative past is little more than a set of dusty spectacles. In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as "referent" finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts... .Faced with these ultimate objects--our social, historical, and existential present, and

the past as “referent”--the incompatibility of a postmodernist “nostalgia” art language with genuine historicity becomes dramatically apparent (Jameson 18-19).

In a similar vein, John Cawelti has written that generic transformation in postmodern film is an expression of disillusionment:

...I would point to the tendency of genres to exhaust themselves, to our growing historical awareness of modern popular culture, and finally to the decline of the underlying mythology on which traditional genres have been based since the nineteenth century...In our time, the awareness of the persistence of genres has been intensified by an increasing historical awareness of film...Similarly audiences have a kind of sophistication about the history of genres different from earlier film publics... The present significance of generic transformation as a creative mode reflects the feeling that not only the traditional genres, but the cultural myths they once embodied, are no longer fully adequate to the imaginative needs of our time (1978, 510-511).

Following Hebdige’s lead, many critics have argued that not all “second-hand” style is about nostalgia and not all nostalgia is without historical depth. Some style, as McRobbie notes in discussing the phenomena of the youth-oriented, second-hand clothing market, “is marked out rather by a knowingness, a willful anarchy and an irrepressible optimism, as indicated by colour, exaggeration, humour, and disavowal of the conventions...” (153). The exchange of signs has similar implications. As McRobbie has also observed, “the frenzied expansion of



the mass media has political consequences which are not so wholly negative" (16). Representation is a two way street: images can be consumed and understood 'against the grain' of their intentions. Thus, "a disenchanted black, inner city population in Britain, can watch in an 'ecstasy of communication' as black South Africans use every available resource at hand to put apartheid into crisis" (McRobbie 16). On the same theme, Dick Hebdige noted that it was the TV images of Soweto that taught black British youth 'the Soweto dash' and not first hand experience (Hebdige, 1979). "The image is the trigger and the mechanism for this new identification," McRobbie argues (16).

I too am unconvinced that nostalgia is without historical depth or transformative political value, or that genre has exhausted itself. More than this, I'm not convinced that the 'modernization process is complete' (or that nature is gone for good, for that matter). As Stuart Hall has noted, "If you are within the same epoch--the one which opens with the age of imperialism, mass democracy, mass consumption and mass culture from about 1880 [to] 1920--you have to expect that there will be continuities and transformations as well as ruptures and breaks" (1986, 46). Hence, the modernist components that we find particularly intensified in postmodernity include: the globalization of society, culture and the economy (especially as it favours the north/western axis of the globe); mass mediation and the spectacularization of the social bond; and increased self-reflexivity in social, cultural and economic relations.

The intensification of globalizing processes necessarily affects the other ingredients of the modern/postmodern paradigm. According to Roland

Robertson, late twentieth century, or postmodern, globalization not only involves the intensification of both mass migration and mass communications, but changing ideas of individuality and humankind itself (57). The processes of massification expose social organizations based on the concept of national identification to problems of heterogeneity and diversity. They put both internal and external pressures on the national society "to reconstruct their collective identities along pluralistic lines" (57). Simultaneously, questions related to identity are foregrounded in social discourse. Ethnic, cultural, religious, racial, sexual and gender identities are now self-consciously asserted, and national identifications are self-reflexively maintained.

Postmodernism is typically characterized as a period of intense time-space compression. The concept primarily refers to the speeded up pace at which information moves within Western socio-economic contexts and the breakdown of spatial barriers in communications and cultural experience that intensified mass mediation effects (Harvey). But it also refers to economic phenomena which have broader social and political implications. As Doreen Massey has pointed out, arguing the need to import social content into the terms of this discussion, the phenomenon of time-space compression is not specific to postmodernity but is more longstanding and has serious social and cultural consequences. Time/space compression also promotes a form of cultural homogenization that favours Western cultural values over those of the rest of the world.

The sense of dislocation which so many writers on the subject apparently feel at the sight of a once well-known local street now lined with a succession of cultural imports--the pizzeria, the kebab house, the branch of the middle-eastern bank-- must have been felt for centuries, though from a very different point-of-view, by colonized peoples all over the world as they watched the importation of, maybe even used, the products of, first European colonization, maybe British (from new forms of transport to liver salts and custard powder); later US products as they learned to eat wheat instead of rice or corn, to drink Coca-Cola, just as today we try out enchiladas (1993, 56-59).

Postmodernist globalization has also involved the 'disorganization of capital': the shift from an international economy based on the economic exchange between nation states, to the phenomenon of the multi-national corporation trading without benefit to the national organization. Although, as Massey infers and Jameson more explicitly states, American culture and the American economy are still distinct and dominant:

this is the point where I must remind the reader of the obvious; namely, that this whole global, yet American postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and terror (Jameson 5).

Related to this economic and cultural phenomenon, a shift from Fordist to post-fordist labour processes has affected both the production, circulation and disposability of objects, as well as, and more dramatically, of subjects themselves. Where Henry Ford's vision of a rationalized system of production and division of labour was characterized by rigidity—in its capital investments in mass production systems, labour markets and labour contracts, and equally, rigidity in state commitments to coordinated social entitlement programs (unemployment, welfare, pension rights)—post-fordism is characterized by flexibility (Harvey 147). Also known as an economy of “flexible accumulation”, post-fordism rests on the idea of flexibility regarding the size and length of production cycles and thus capital investment, but most importantly, flexibility with respect to labour markets, labour contracts and social commitments (Harvey 147). Massey notes that the recent intensification of globalization is primarily linked to this last, production consideration: “the stimulus behind the push to multinationalization is the ability to take advantage of specificities of conditions of production...whether these be cheap labour, lack of unionization, or the availability of particular skills and cultural traditions,” and hence, the disposability of the subject of capital (1994, 158).

Seeking alternative and potentially resistant enactments of postmodern space-time relations, sociologists Scott Lash and John Urry, argue that “the post-organized capitalist social order is much more than just a matter of time-space compression in which the increased velocities and distances of mobility deplete and flatten economic, social and political life as well as culture and the personal

sphere" (54). Instead they compare the economic reflexivity of post-industrial processes to the growing self-reflexivity of post-modern social experience. Lash and Urry claim that "the modernization and postmodernization of contemporary political economies produce, not just a flattening, but a deepening of the self" (31).

Alongside and against these asymmetrical networks of flows there is increasing evidence of a radically other set of developments. There is evidence that the same individuals, the same human beings who are increasingly subject to, and the subjects of, such space economies are simultaneously becoming increasingly *reflexive* with respect to them.

Alongside the silent majorities, the small-screen addicts, the 'black hole' of Baudrillard's semio-scape, there are large numbers of men and women who are taking on an increasingly critical and reflexive distance with reference to these institutions of the new information society.... This growing reflexivity is in the first instance part and parcel of a radical enhancement in late modernity of individualization. That is, there is an ongoing process of de-traditionalization in which social agents are increasingly 'set free' from the heteronomous control or monitoring of social structures in order to be self-monitoring or self-reflexive... such a growing reflexivity of subjects that accompanies the end of organized capitalism opens up many possibilities for social relations--for intimate relations, for friendship, for work relations, for leisure and for consumption" (Lash & Urry 5, 31).

After Charles Taylor, Scott and Lash argue that "modernity comprises two main secular sources of the self," one growing out of the other: a self derived from aesthetic, romantic and hermeneutic reflexivity "grew out of a reaction to the [prior] Enlightenment tradition of the cognitive-moral dimension" (48). The later, aesthetically reflexive subjectivity represented a response to "the increasing abstraction," and rationalization of the Enlightenment tradition (Lash & Urry 48). From Kant's aesthetics of perception, through Romanticism and the critical thought of Simmel and Lukacs, Durkheim, Heidegger, Baudelaire and Benjamin "the task of this hermeneutic tradition in the human sciences was not to legislate and explain, but to understand and interpret these most fundamental and unmediated universals (Lash & Urry 49).

What was involved was "a search for the 'original' uncorrupted symbols before the 'fall' into excess mediation, commodification and the like" (Lash & Urry 48). This same hermeneutic tradition not only provides the foundation and moral authority for oppositional politics in postmodernity, but the aesthetic orientation, as well. From modernity to postmodernity, allegory and symbol function more and more as sources of self identification. In this sense, it is not surprising that the terms Craig Owens has used to describe the character of postmodern art also describe the constitution of the postmodern self: "Appropriation, site-specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity [and] hybridization characterize much of the art of the present" (209).

Given the predilection of the postmodern text towards pastiche and intertextuality, are genres still coherent categories of production, and stable

orders of representation? Or, as Fredric Jameson asks, have “the older languages of genres and forms” been displaced by the concept of media “which now conjoins three relatively distinct signals: that of an artistic mode or specific form of aesthetic production; that of a specific technology, generally organized around a central apparatus or machine; and that, finally, of a social institution with its own specific technologies of representation?” (67).

Julia Kristeva’s theory of postmodernity as “Women’s Time,” offers the thesis a working definition that is inclusive of the question of gender. Her position also shares many of the conclusions reached in those aforementioned analyses of postmodernity that subscribe to the idea of an intensification rather than a break with modernism. Kristeva understands postmodernity to be chiefly characterized by the confrontation between two temporal modes and socio-cultural ordering principals, and this encounter reflects the same tensions as those enacted between genre and media specificity (Kristeva, 1979).

Kristeva asserts that the restructuring of international political and economic relations after the second world war resulted in a simultaneous reformulation of concepts of time and identity. The two temporal modes in conflict are the linear, progressive form of modern “History”, and a repetitive, englobing temporal form that she claims is more pre-modern in its dedication to monumental commemorative forms than post-modern in its sensibility, but is nonetheless present at this moment in time. The modern temporal form is defined by the shared teleological principles of nation states, nuclear families and narrative forms, alike. This model of historical process presumes identities to emerge

whole, and somewhat paradoxically, through a process of accumulation and logical progression. Thus, it reproduces a value system based on the notion of a continuum of significance and, subsequently, a hierarchy in the social relations that it affects.

The other concept of temporal process that Kristeva argues has returned to predominate subsequent to intensification of the global economy, post-WWII, is more spatial. No longer structured by the hierarchical and teleological terms of national or Oedipal narratives, Kristeva contends that post-war social organizations have favoured a more horizontal social relationship, one based on common symbolic associations: those of gender, age, class, ethnic, racial and sexual affiliation. Because this social form endorses spatialized symbolic alliances over the hierarchical relationship produced by the national or Oedipal identification, she defines this latter mode of historical process as “extrasubjective,” and after Nietzsche, “monumental” in its expression and consequence.

Conditioned by processes of repetition and concepts of eternity and shaped by cyclical rather than linear movement, monumental time “englobes [the] supranational, socio-cultural ensemble” (Kristeva 473). This temporal mode is mythic in its representations insofar as it exhibits the same interests in classification and stereotyping as such diverse contemporary preoccupations as genetics and the current media revolution. Because it is both measured by “the eternal occurrence of a biological rhythm,” and “rhythmed by the accidents and catastrophes of space science,” it is shaped by natural and biological



occurrences as much as it is by cultural mediation. Thus, its cycles are not only, or necessarily, based on any “naturally” occurring phenomena but represent history ‘at large’ and subject to the exercise of politics.

[M]anifest in the storage and reproduction of information (it) implies an idea of time as frozen or exploding according to the vagaries of demand, returning to its source but uncontrollable, utterly bypassing its subject and leaving only two preoccupations to those who approve of it: Who is to have power over the origin (the programming) and over the end (the use)? (Kristeva 473).

Monumental time may be “extrasubjective” in both form and substance, but it has dramatic consequences for subjects and subjectivity, nonetheless. Since it is based upon the principles of repetition and recurrence, it is antagonistic to linear movements and singular or static identifications, but because of this it also works to unseat the specificities of cultural identifications. Nonetheless, the confrontation between the two temporal constructs forces the primary mechanisms of identification that distinguish each, to the fore—the teleological thrust of the modern historical form struggles against the mythic transcendence of monumental temporality. The question of identification and the struggle over naming thus becomes central to the era that Kristeva has called ‘Women’s Time’.

Kristeva’s concept of ‘Women’s Time’, draws a very purposeful correspondence between the kind of “fragmented” subjectivity said to define the complex identifications required of the shifting temporal parameters of postmodernity, and those qualities which designate the subaltern experience, as

both relate to women's symbolic positioning and social experience. To the extent that women's position within the symbolic order is relational, her subjectivity is "always, already" off-centered. Her Oedipal narrative comes to a close once she assumes her place in representation as representation, simultaneously the sign of masculinity and his other. In a similar vein, Teresa de Lauretis has argued that women's social experience and cultural participation reflects this fragmented positioning. She claims that,

the discrepancy, the tension and the constant slippage between Woman as representation, as the object and the very condition of representation, and on the other hand, women as historical beings, subjects of 'real relations,' are motivated and sustained by a logical contradiction in our culture and an irreconcilable one: women are both inside and outside gender, at once within and without representation (de Lauretis, 1989, 10).<sup>7</sup>

Kristeva adopts the term "Women's Time" to define postmodernity not only because the encounter between linear and repetitive temporal forms reflects, and presses most dramatically on, the "Woman's" subject position in postmodern socio-symbolic organization, but because such an encounter holds forth the potential for women to reveal and exploit this doubled status of representation—this plasticity of identification. It is, in fact, along the creative axes of literary and aesthetic practices that Kristeva advocates women's political actions in postmodernity should proceed.

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<sup>7</sup> See, Luce Irigaray, The Sex Which Is Not One ; Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa".

It seems to me that the role of what is usually called aesthetic practices must increase not only to counterbalance the storage and uniformity of information by present-day mass media, data bank systems and, in particular, modern communications technology but also to demystify the identity of the symbolic bond itself, to demystify, therefore, the community of language as a universal and unifying tool, one which totalizes and equalizes. In order to bring out—along with the singularity of each person and even more, along with the multiplicity of every person's possible identifications—the relativity of his/her symbolic as well as biological existence, according to the variation in his/her specific symbolic capacities. And in order to emphasize the responsibility which all will immediately face of putting this fluidity into play against the threats of death which are unavoidable whenever an inside and an outside, a self and another, one group and another, are constituted (Kristeva 484).

Commenting on correspondence between genre and modern historical form, Jacques Derrida has playfully noted that the same kind of paradox in identification that de Lauretis argues characterizes women's cultural participation, and Kristeva suggests should be exploited for political gain, is also fundamental to the functioning of genre: "If a genre is what it is or if it is supposed to be what it is destined to be by virtue of its *telos*, then 'genres are not to be mixed'; one should not mix genres, one owes it to oneself not to get mixed up in the mixing of genres" (57). As the modern, historical, narrative of progress confronts a pre-

modern, mythic order of endless repetition combatively, so too does the concept of media and 'the older languages of genres and forms collide.

The thesis takes the position that like modern historical forms, genres persist. They do, however, perform differently. Against the functioning of genre within a linear mode of historical process—against the idea of generic processes as evolutionary processes—another, more intentional and repetitive mode of generic functioning exists to condition this notion. At best, the linear manner of generic process involves an exercise in historical revisionism: a denaturalization, or historical 'fixing', of the transhistorical values to which genre, as a mode of myth, more typically subscribes. The revivalist mode of generic revision exaggerates the symbolic positions articulated in the myth and celebrates the tyranny of their recurring impositions.

As the term implies, the revival text revives historically specific generic materials. It is not a genre itself, but a mode of generic functioning that distinguishes itself from other generic processes by its dedication to the reproduction of the historical style or 'look' and narrative preoccupation of earlier moments of generic construction. This study focuses on the revival of the popular generic forms of post WWII American popular culture: the hard-boiled and *film noir* versions of detective fiction and the family melodrama of forties cinema, in particular. Thus, female hard-boiled detective fiction revives the bleak style and gritty texture of the hard-boiled detective fiction of the forties. Likewise, the detective mode of *neo-film noir* restages the heightened sexual dynamic of

post-war *film noir*, and the “new women’s picture” form hyperbolizes the intense identificatory conflicts of the forties melodrama.

Reprising and repeating the original text’s narrative concerns and discursively reframing these within the context of a contemporary, historical situation, the revival text accommodates the project of the modern narrative form to fix subjects in a historically specific relationship with the text. Simultaneously, the mythic status and enduring conventions of the appropriated genre traditions are magnified through repetition. The historical abstraction of genre reinforces its symbolic functions and the symbolic positions articulated in myth are satirized.

The encounter between temporal modes also represents a contest between conflicting modes of subject identification, which explains the representational intensification of discourses on gendered social and symbolic relations in the revival texts of postmodern popular culture. Hence, you find the question of gender overstated in the *neo-noir* text, exaggerated to the point of burlesque. The Oedipal narrative that anchors psychoanalytic accounts of symbolic formation and modern, historical and narrative forms thus becomes the generic dominant of the revival text, and it supplies the standard against which the generic transformations that are evident in and effected by these narratives are measured.

### *Gender, Genre and Women's Popular Culture*

The second question this thesis asks considers how genres are gendered. More specifically, it explores how gender-genre-specific identificatory processes are informed and/or expressed by and through historically changing discourses on gender and identification. As noted, post-structuralist and cultural studies scholars have considered the relationship between the reader and the text as productive and negotiable. Nonetheless, a correlation between gender and cultural form persists that reinforces the idea that the female reader assumes a passive position in her relationship with the text.

Critics of popular culture have noted the long history of association between women and mass or popular culture (Huysen, 1986; Modleski, 1986; Silverman, 1983). Flaubert's identification with *Madame Bovary* is exemplary in this regard, although, as Andreas Huysen has suggested, Flaubert's infamous dictum, *Madame Bovary c'est moi*, is really rather disingenuous. For, while it is known that Flaubert read the same romantic literature as Emma Bovary, Flaubert read for fun and escape and Emma read to constitute her social identity.

...Emma Bovary became known, among other things, as the female reader caught between the delusions of the trivial romantic narrative and the realities of French provincial life during the July monarchy, a woman who tried to live the illusions of aristocratic sensual romance and was shipwrecked on the banality of bourgeois everyday life. Flaubert, on the other hand, came to be known as one of the fathers of modernism, one of the

paradigmatic master voices of an aesthetic based on the uncompromising repudiation of what Emma Bovary loved to read (Huysen, 1986, 188-89). These differences in cultural participation are not just defined by class, but by gender as well. Just as Flaubert's more ironic, distanced relationship to these cultural materials guaranteed his position within language as the subject of these representations and the author of these texts, Emma Bovary's more intimate fantasy identifications with these materials secured her role as the object against which Flaubert's subjectivity and authorship were measured. If Flaubert was Madame Bovary, he was only to the extent she mirrored his stature back to him, for it is only if posed against women's 'passion' that men's 'reason' can be affirmed.

The mechanics of nostalgia, or, in this case, romantic longing, consumption and the narrative impulse are similar, if not identical phenomena insofar as their functioning reflects and reproduces women's cultural role as the object of representation, simultaneously casting female identity as a plastic term. Indeed, the ways in which this plasticity is narrativized and valued or contested, by and for whom, represents the overarching subject of this thesis.

Susan Stewart relates the narrative and nostalgic impulse insofar as both represent:

...a structure of desire, a structure that both invents and distances its object and thereby inscribes again and again the gap between signifier and signified that is the place of generation of the symbolic... (T)he realization of re-union imagined by the nostalgic is a narrative utopia that works only

by virtue of its partiality, its lack of fixity and closure: *narrative is a desire for desire* (Stewart ix, 23, my emphasis).

In a similar vein, Slavoj Žižek claims that “our relation to the nostalgic text is always divided, split between fascination and ironic distance: ironic distance toward its diegetic reality, fascination with the gaze” (Žižek 112-113).

Furthermore “the real object is not the displayed scene, but the gaze of the naive ‘other’ absorbed and enchanted by it” (Žižek 112-113). To “see ourselves seeing” is akin to the desire for desire (Žižek 112-113). At heart, nostalgia is a narcissistic disorder, but while Freud defined narcissism as a pathological disorder, a sign of an incomplete ego seeking itself as its own ego-ideal, Lacan has insisted on its primary functioning in processes of identification (Ragland-Sullivan). From a Lacanian perspective, narcissism is the attempt to bridge and hide the gaps between seeing and being: between the symbolic order “whose systems are inadequate to hide the discontinuities that emanate from the Real” and the Imaginary order which is informed by “misrecognitions and the structure of fiction” (Ragland-Sullivan 273). By extension, so too does nostalgia function. In these terms, both nostalgia and narcissism are proper modes of identification and reading.

The desire to desire as the naive other is also the desire to cover over and reduce the distance we otherwise perceive between our visual comprehension of the world and our sense of place in relation to the knowledge gleaned through that perception. Mary Ann Doane calls it “a look that demands a becoming,” and



claims that in both psychoanalytic and popular discourse it is cast as a gendered condition (1991, 22). During that crucial Oedipal moment of becoming, when the child is first confronted with the sight of sexual difference, the little girl, Freud claims, "makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen [the penis] and knows that she is without it and wants to have it" (1963, 187-88). The boy, on the other hand, first shows "irresolution and lack of interest [towards the woman's genitals]; he sees nothing or disowns what he has seen, he softens it down or looks about for expedients for bringing it into line with his expectations" (ibid). In Freud's theories of sexuality, the girl appreciates sexual difference immediately because she lacks the distance from the body that is necessary for the participation of the subject in language. Where the boy is the standard against which normative sexuality is measured, the girl represents sexual difference. The "woman's" place in the socio-symbolic order is as *primaeva* object of representation, against which the boy produces substitutes in order to bring *his* vision into line with *his* desires.

Writing on female spectatorship and 'the woman's film', Doane has further argued that this same state--of "desire for desire"--also represents the psychic drive of the consumer.

Female spectatorship, because it is conceived of temporally as immediacy (in the reading of the image--the result of the very absence of fetishism) and spatially as proximity (the distance between subject and object, spectator and image is collapsed), can only be understood as the

confounding of desire. Similarly, the increasing appeal in the twentieth century to the woman's role as perfect consumer (of commodities as well as images) is indissociable from her positioning as a commodity and results in the perfect blurring of the subject/object dichotomy (Doane, 1987, 13).

While women, like commodities, represent the nature and kind of the social bond as well as the value of social exchange, the value placed on signs of sexuality of either gender is always a culturally mediated appraisal, Freud's declarations to the contrary. As Kaja Silverman has argued "the perceptual model that Freud elaborates for the little boy must be extended to the little girl. Both refer back their cultural status to their anatomical status after the former has been consolidated, and they do so at the suggestion of society within which they find themselves" (1983, 140). Similarly, that the sign of "Woman" functions in social exchange in the same way as the commodity functions in the economy, does not preclude the fact that actual women participate in the social arena as subjects in speech and in the economy as both producers and consumers (Doane, 1987). It is this historical fact to which feminist scholars of popular culture repeatedly turn to discern the possibilities for resistance to the dominant ideals perpetuated by the discursive productions of popular culture. How do actual women consume popular cultural materials? What is the correspondence between the ideal reader solicited by the text and the actual reader? How do these productions confirm subjects in social positions and how might they miss their mark and produce subjects in resisting "new" positions?

Over the past two decades feminist studies of popular entertainments for women have addressed the critical importance of understanding the productive pleasures of women's engagement with the formulaic genres of popular culture. The lion's share of this literature is premised on the idea that genres such as the soap opera, romance and gothic novel, as well as the "women's film" are narrative forms of particular interest to women because the narrative lines of these texts describe situations, environments and concerns of common interest to women. (These interests, I might add, and their commonalities are usually assumed to be shared in advance.) Much of this scholarship argues the subversive potential of these texts when read, more or less, 'against the grain' of their narrative intentions. Some critics suggest these texts provide their readers with a 'safe' fantasy situation within which to play out individual, psychic and social conflicts around experiences specific to women's gender roles and their sexual expression (Ang, 1985, 1988; Modleski, 1982; Radway, 1986; Penley, 1993). These genres are also understood to facilitate the development of female communities or a form of women's public sphere grounded by interest in the text itself but effective as a forum of exchange for a variety of issues related to women's social experience (Radway, 1986; Rapping, 1993).

Feminist film scholarship has queried how the female spectator might resist the masochism inspired by the solicitation of a passive female subject by the filmic text. Some advocate viewer transvestitism as the habitual form of women's identification (Mulvey, 1982; Mayne, 1989). Others posit the simultaneity of resistant and compliant identifications--the inside/outside of

representation that Teresa de Lauretis claims defines the female subject position (1989). Others still, the inability of the film's narrative resolution to contain the pleasurable identification on the part of the female viewer with the excesses of femininity that are introduced and heightened as narrative conflicts are staged (Dyer, 1977, Place, 1987; Williams, 1987).

To the extent that all of this scholarship has foregrounded the means by which these narrative productions solicit identification, it has prioritized the textual effects of representational practice over the other, extra-discursive or institutional factors that prevail in the production and reception of popular cultural materials. However, insofar as the relationship between gender and genre remains relatively stable throughout most of these studies, they would seem not to have anticipated the historical changing of the text as a discursive production, and relatedly, the negotiation of values that such popular practices should effect. Rather, much of this feminist literature on women's popular culture has presumed a relatively stable female ideal and equally, a stable constituency of female readers who might glean small subversive, and individual pleasures from the texts of women's popular culture but whose contradictory reading practices have not had any substantial effect on the regulating concept of "Woman" that grounds the structural logic of the social relations in these texts.

At the same time as this feminist project looked towards the popular cultural arena for the productive possibilities of reading 'against the grain' of these formulaic representations of women, a new trend in popular cultural production was emerging that challenged the limits of gender-based genre studies, by

challenging the limits of gender and genre specificities themselves. In the mid 1980's and early 1990's American popular culture witnessed a striking investment in the appropriation and reformulation of the generic traditions of post-WWII American popular culture. While the *film noir*, melodrama and hard-boiled detective fiction forms and tabloid journalistic styles that have come to define post-war American culture have remained steady fixtures since the war's end, at this time their appearances increased and appeared significantly revised insofar as their gender-genre correspondence was concerned. *Film Noir* reappeared as *neo-film noir* but this time its stock issue *femme fatale* was wholly unrecoverable. Instead of the requisite, if partial, reconstitution of social order that the punishment of the *femme fatale* at the story's end provided the *noir* worlds of yesteryear, the bad women of the *neo-noir* universe get away with their crimes, and the story ends with these women on their own, on the town, leaving 'the social order' in disorder behind them. During the same period of time, hard-boiled detective fiction re-emerged as female/gay/black/senior-citizen hard-boiled detective fiction, often with the same difficult narrative ends left unresolved, and the 'cult of personality' that drove 40's fandom came back in a tabloid culture even more sensational and cynical than before.

Simultaneous with this moment in popular cultural production, academic feminists were confronting the question of identity production, and querying the theoretical means by which to dismantle the sex-gender connection in popular and scientific representations of femininity. Following Laura Mulvey's influential

essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," on the psychological solicitation of the masculine viewing position by the classical cinematic apparatus, feminist film scholars looked for alternative ways of conceiving of a female-feminine viewpoint (1975). Mulvey herself later argued that the female spectator's identification with the active agent of the narrative involved a fantasy of transvestism (1981).

Mary Ann Doane related Mulvey's active/passive, male/female binaries to the binary of distance/proximity, asserting that women's closer relationship to representation was the means by which her cultural participation was denied (1991, 17-44). With reference to Joan Riviere's famous 1929 essay on "Womanliness as Masquerade," Doane argued that as a representative term, women's subject position was empty: thus the inherent performativity of femininity. Where in transvestitism, the woman becomes a man in order to attain the necessary distance from the image, "masquerade, on the other hand, involves a realignment of femininity, or more accurately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image," which is also to denaturalize the relationship between the performance of gender and the body's sex (Doane, 1991, 25-26).

Generally considered to have launched academic interest in 'queer theory' Judith Butler's 1990 book, Gender Trouble, popularized the notion of 'gender parody' in gender studies. In this study, Butler first deconstructs the link between gender and sexuality, and then, more radically, the notion there is any physical basis whatsoever to masculine or feminine sexual coherence itself. Following

Foucault, she argues that both are discursively constituted and queries: "What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?" (32). Insofar as gendered identity is created and sustained through social performance, Butler argues that "the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts" (141). Gender transformation could be enacted through 'a stylized repetition', or a parody of the act of gender.

From gender parody to genre parody: in the revival genre we find the switch from a male to a female hero in detective fiction, and a female to a male victim in melodrama, to result from the discursive re-negotiation of gender roles and relations attending the broad circulation of feminist ideas in social discourse. The positivity of these re-arrangements is not always a given result. Rather, we see feminist gender parodies matched by misogynist gender parodies. And paradoxically, where the former enables the productive re-inscription of socially defined roles and relations, the latter enables the retrenchment of conservative values. In both instances, the de-stabilization of gender is related to the de-stabilization of representation across the board.

Gender and genre are both subjects of and subject to the transformations addressed by the revival text, and the critical practices of appropriation and pastiche practice that structure this historical form are inseparable from their nostalgic function in this regard. If, as Žižek contends, the nostalgic relation is structured as a dialectic of fantasy-identification and ironic, historical reflection, the transformative potential of nostalgia can be understood in kind. Checked by

irony, the narcissism of critical nostalgia renders the identifications it seeks in contradictory terms. In its critical mode nostalgia constitutes subjects in a dynamic relationship to representation, in much the same way as women relate to cultural productions, according to Teresa de Lauretis. One with and separate from, inside and outside these representations:

It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins (or "between the lines," or "against the grain") of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions in counter practices and new forms of community. These two kinds of spaces are neither in opposition to each another nor strung along a chain of signification, but they coexist concurrently and in contradiction. The movement between them, therefore, is not that of *différance*, but is the tension of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy (1989, 26)

The position that the revival text negotiates is likewise dynamic. Taken in by the fantasy identification with the subject of the nostalgic text, the reader is 'one with' representation. Ironically distanced from the historical context of the nostalgia narrative, she remains outside the past that is represented, reading critically 'against the grain' of history, in point of fact.



### *The Discursive Economies of Postmodernity*

The final question addressed by this thesis considers the relationship between genre, gender and globalization. The study asks how this relationship might be imagined, reflected, enabled and reproduced by the crime narrative productions of contemporary popular culture. As a post-modern, nostalgic narrative, the principal preoccupation of the revival text revolves around questions of identity, place and community. The revival narratives' conflicts are staged in relation to these concerns as they are voiced in relation to the experience of the globalization of the economy. Because "Woman's" symbolic function is an economic one, she functions as a representation of the status of social and cultural relations. Thus, the revived narratives of women and crime correlate the historical processes of globalization and the economy to sexuality and criminality and blame recent shifts in all of these practices on women's changing gender roles.

Coincidental with the recent intensification of nostalgic discourses in discourses on globalization, the narrative contents of these revived forms have privileged the question of identity formation and the conceptualization of community relations has become a primary focus of production and debate in the narrative lines of these texts. Since shifts in socio-symbolic relationship have influenced public and economic life, the representation of women's experiences of these spaces and practices in popular narrative has shifted to accommodate these changed situations. With the demise of a sense of organic community that discourse on globalization portends, changing social and/or labour relations are

always secondary thematics. Through this discursive coupling "Woman's place" is articulated in relation to the local, domestic relations and the broader global economy of labour markets and economic forces, at one and the same time. Expanding the thematic parameters of women's popular culture, issues of gender, economy, social relations, globalization and signification combine to constitute the central thematic preoccupation of women's genres in postmodernity.

Finally, these are post-modern, post-industrial, 'post-feminist' texts. They reflect, represent and give shape to the historical moment after the wide diffusion of feminist discourse in public debate and, of course, after the demise of a feminist community conceived in singular terms. These texts chart the discursive renegotiation of women's social roles and relations within the context of shifting feminist alliances, and between different feminist communities and their mainstream opponents. As Cora Kaplan has suggested discussing the feminist appropriation of the cop-film genre, these narratives speak to,

the ambiguous legacies of a postwar feminism in the nineties, of uncompleted affirmative actions read by the dominant culture as too aggressively successful, but perceived by many feminists as token or compromised gains at best. The discontents on both sides of this debate may breed the kinds of fantasies of female omnipotence that "dirty Harriet" films share with those that textualize violent women outside the law, fantasies that can feed a sharpened misogyny or alternatively displace the

stress and fear of a struggle with few easy victories and no end in sight (Kaplan 51).

Kaplan's analysis of the ambiguous register of the "Dirty Harriet" film offers a succinct encapsulation of the route through which the representations of female criminality circulating in the popular culture of the nineties have emerged. The problems she points to--a certain ambiguity of purposes and effects--are those with which this study is chiefly concerned.

### *Method*

First and foremost, this study involves the historical and textual analysis of genre. It examines the different historical manifestations of the genre of detective fiction in its female hard-boiled, *film noir* and *neo-film noir* modes, and the genre of the family melodrama in forties cinema and in nineties cinema and television. In particular the dissertation addresses the phenomenon of the revival text: a recent critical mode of genre production that quotes the styles and narrative preoccupations of earlier moments in the genre and frames them within the context of contemporary discourses on sexuality, representation and the economy. The study considers the relationship between changes in discourses on gender and sexuality and shifts in the genre/gender specific positions of enunciation and point-of-view in these texts.

The methodology employed by this thesis can best be described as conjunctural. It combines psychoanalytical readings of the revival texts with a

genre and text-based discourse analysis. I treat the model of social relations constituted in the Oedipal narrative that forms the basis of the psychoanalytical model of subjectivity as a historically specific discourse against which to measure the historical specificity of the revival text. The Oedipal story in Freudian psychoanalysis is considered *the* primary discourse of modernity.

Significantly, psychoanalysis and discourse analysis share the common ground of 'women's time'—this is where the imaginary and symbolic orders mix and mingle. While procedurally distinct, both theories share a common understanding of the identificatory mechanism of subject formation. Where psychoanalysis argues that the ascension to the symbolic order and language is inaugurated by a singular event—the incest prohibition—and produces subjects in relatively stable identifications, discourse theory contends that subjectivity is constituted through 'ensembles of discursive events' which "disperse the subject in a multiplicity of possible positions and function" (Foucault, 1971, 159). Both, however, imagine identification to take place through a mechanism of comparison and contrast, recognition and misrecognition. Foucault's discourse theory derives its logic of identification from Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation, itself wholly dependent upon Lacan's theory of the 'mirror stage'.

Althusser defines ideology as a system of representations which promotes an 'imaginary' relation to the 'real'. Following Lacan's insights on the ambivalence of the imaginary relationship, Althusser posited that ideology also involves the conjunction of imaginary and symbolic transactions that results in the subject's insertion into a linguistic field. "Ideology" Althusser claims, "imposes itself without

Finally, it is a relationship of historical difference that this thesis hopes to understand. The study proceeds by tracing out what Marc Angenot has called the "regulated and co-intelligible antagonisms" that might be found at work within those social discourses whose concerns correspond to the principal discursive preoccupation of the detective and crime stories reinvented through the revival text—identity, symbolic relations, signification, place, and community (Angenot 7). Assuming, after Angenot, that diversity of opinion is made possible by implicit, commonly shared axioms, this study will attempt to identify a set of basic propositions concerning the current status of the feminine upon which both feminists and misogynists might agree.

### *Overview of Chapters*

Chapter One, "Narrative, Nostalgia & 'Women's Time'" discusses the function of 'the logic of identity' in modern representation, tracing the emergence of the revival text in relation to the nostalgic discourses underpinning modern concepts of historical form, narrative, identity, political economy, and globalization. The chapter then situates the gender transformations enacted by the revival text, in the generic productions under study, in relation to the confrontation between two temporal forms articulated by Julia Kristeva in her essay "Women's Time": a modern, subjective linear, narrative form of representation; and a mode of temporality that is more mythic and repetitive, often constituting subjectivity in contradictory social positions. The purpose of this discussion is to position the

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Chapter Two, "Deregulation and the Domestic Sphere: Representations of Female Criminality and Space in the Popular Culture of the 1990's" presents a text analysis of the media representation of Aileen Wuornos--the "lesbian female serial killer". I argue that this case inaugurates a discursive orientation in the women's crime story that is preoccupied with the instability of gender roles. Concerned with the relationship between symbolic and social representation, the chapter considers how definitions of gender and sex are engaged and reproduced by representations of women and crime, how they are articulated in

relation to discourses on the economy and domesticity, and, finally how and the extent to which these representations affect "real" women's lives. This chapter also sketches the common ground for comparison of forty's and ninety's generic productions and narrative preoccupations. Issues of gender and spatial assignment serve as the principal discursive preoccupation for both. Relating current social discourse on conflicted gender and sex roles and relations to conflicts over space understood literally as a measurement of physical territory, I argue that the Wuornos case tests the limits of the feminist discourse on domestic dysfunction that was circulating in social discourse at that time, specifically as it has supported the "battered women defense". The Wuornos story marked a moment in recent social discourse when concerns for space and the economy were articulated in relation to a broad range of issues related to domestic concerns: sex and sexuality: the family, deviancy, homosexuality, prostitution. The symbolic resonance of Wuornos' crime as one of vengeance born of perversion, simultaneously incorporated and displaced the victimized woman represented in popularized feminist discourses of the previous decade.

Studying the popular female detective series of Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky, Chapter Three, "Revisiting the Scene of the Crime: Hard-boiled Femininity, Space and Identity" addresses the identificatory functions of space and femininity in female hard-boiled detective fiction, and traces this space/time dynamic through the generic conventions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European "city mystery" genre, to American frontier literature and mid-twentieth century hard-boiled detective fiction. The feminist revival of this genre uses parody to

denaturalize the generic conventions of the earlier genres. At the same time, the revival text relies on irony to achieve its critical effects and thus presumes a commonality in the relationship of readers to the parodied text. In both form and content, these ironic texts are productive of community. In appropriating the role of the male detective, the female private eye embodies both paternal and maternal social functions. Hence, the female detective represents the intensification of the symbolic mode of association in the identificatory processes of postmodernity.

Examining the *neo-noir* or "nostalgia" film, Chapter Four, "*Noir, Nostalgia and the Virtual Imaginary*" explores the discursive limits and transformative possibilities represented in and by the *film noir renaissance*. Generally dismissed as decorative modes of historical reflection, critics such as Fredric Jameson posit that these productions are principally and problematically informed by a particular form of nostalgic sentiment (Jameson 21). Jameson argues that these recycled materials represent a mere pastiche of stereotypes of history and are more symptomatic of the "waning of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way" than productive of any significant historical analysis or critique. I approach these materials as historically significant insofar as they appropriate generic conventions as a measure of historical change. The narrative preoccupation and forms refer to past histories against which the present circumstances figure.



Addressing the discursive bearing of women's crime stories in the mid-nineties, Chapter Five, "Women, Class & Tabloid Trash: Gender, Genre and the Made-For-TV-Movie" explores the television coverage of the Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan story. The chapter focuses its study on the made-for-tv-movie Tonya and Nancy: The Inside Story, which highlights the radical potential of women's identificatory processes when femininity is conceived of as a cultural construct. The chapter addresses the thematic reorientation and generic shifts in television journalism and the made-for-tv-movie format and demonstrates how the representational shifting alters generic form. By 1994, the idea of gender as a social construction had become meshed in the discursive organization underpinning popular narrative accounts of women and crime, but it had also become the subject of cynicism.

Finally, the thesis traces the discursive construction of gender and femininity in the narrative productions of women and crime in the popular culture of the 1990s in order to consider the possible critical footholds that just such cynical representation affords the female viewer.

## Chapter One

### Narrative, Nostalgia & 'Women's Time'

What happens when women come into power and identify with it? What happens when, on the contrary, they refuse power and create a parallel society, a counter power which then takes on aspects ranging from a club of ideas to a group of terrorist commandos?...If the archetype of the belief in a good and pure substance, that of utopias, is the belief in the omnipotence of an archaic, full, total, englobing mother with no frustration, no separation, with no break-producing symbolism (with no castration, in other words), then it becomes evident that we will never be able to defuse the violences mobilized through the counter investment necessary to carrying out this phantasm, unless one challenges precisely this myth of the archaic mother. It is in this way that we can understand the warnings against the recent invasion of the women's movement by paranoia, as in Lacan's scandalous sentence "There is no such thing as Woman." Indeed she does not exist with a capital 'W', possessor of some mythical unity--a supreme power, on which is based the terror of power and terrorism as the desire for power (Kristeva 481).

This chapter considers the various social, cultural and political implications of the nostalgic/revival paradigm for women. Examining the nostalgic discourses underpinning modern concepts of historical form, narrative and political economy, this survey proceeds by way of a discussion of the function of "the logic of identity" or "identity thinking" in modern representational practice. It then situates the gender transformations of gender-based genre productions enacted by what I have called the revival text in relation to the confrontation between the two temporal forms that Julia Kristeva has suggested characterize postmodernity: the modern, linear and 'Historical' form that produces subjectivities as self-knowing, self-identical entities; and, the mythic, repetitive mode of temporality that constitutes subjectivities in contradictory and often diverse social positions.

Counterposing Kristeva's concept of 'Women's Time' with Fredric Jameson's "cultural logic of late capitalism," this discussion provides a broad historical context within which to consider the social production of identity in the crime narratives under study, in relation to postmodern textual practice. Although the essays were written several years apart for different reasons and from very different perspectives, the characteristics and problems that each identifies as specifically postmodern are nonetheless strikingly consistent. However divergent their political responses, together they debate a fair range of the problems and possibilities for politics that this epoch poses and enables. For these reasons their positions are developed in some detail. In particular, the chapter focuses on the limits and possibilities of shifting modes of time that each author considers, insofar as these changing historical forms permit and promote different representational practices. Finally, the chapter traces the different functioning of nostalgic discourse within three historically discrete periods of globalization, and contends that the "revival" narrative works to redress the governance of the logic of identity to which the nostalgic discourse more typically subscribes, by way of its critical appropriation of nostalgic sentiment.

### *The Logic of Identity Politics*

As the above excerpt from Julia Kristeva's 1979 essay, "Women's Time," so deftly illustrates, the founding concepts of certain modern forms of social organization—utopia being the *ur*-form of the modern social—and the idea of

"Woman," as the 'possessor of some mythical unity', are mutually dependent, discursively entwined concepts. With "Women's Time" Kristeva's objective was to illustrate the semantic valence of "the feminine" within the modern political imagination (dominant or alternative, as the case may be) by sketching a recent history of feminist political practice along the narrative lines of the Oedipal text. The juxtaposition demonstrated the limits of a political economy articulated in relation to a "logic of identity," to use Derrida's terms. An exclusionary logic, the "logic of identity" forms the basis of a metaphysics of unity; it formulates objects, subjects and systems as whole and complete unto themselves and conceives of the identity of these things to be equivalent to their representations. That which cannot be accommodated by the concept is expelled to what Derrida calls 'the accidental' realm, Adorno 'the addendum' and Kristeva, the 'heterogeneous'. The logic of identity plays itself out in social organization by ordering communities according to categories of sameness and difference, permitting the same while excluding the different.<sup>1</sup> As we shall see, in modernity women function as the *ur*-form of the heterogenous.

"Women's Time" is postmodernity. Kristeva traces her history of feminism against a history of 20th century political economy and her emphasis on the geo-political factors influencing social transformation is more or less consistent with other sociological accounts assessing the impact of increased globalization on

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For a feminist reading of "the logic of identity" as it is expressed in social organization see, Iris Marion Young.

socio-cultural forms and political processes.<sup>2</sup> The feminist subject that Kristeva traces along the lines of the Oedipal text is a historically particular discursive construction. Her history distinguishes first, second and third generation feminism in terms of historically changing, politically informed ideas on identity and community, situating each generation within a shifting socio-symbolic field. In this instance, the term generation “implies less a chronology than a *signifying space*, a both corporeal and mental space...which does not exclude...the *parallel* existence of all three (generations) in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other” (Kristeva, 483). In fact, it is the tension of these competing “generations” that constitutes political practice in the epoch Kristeva has called ‘women’s time’.

In Kristeva’s history of feminism, feminists at the turn of the century concerned themselves with the political project of national inclusion—a room of one’s own but within the father’s house, so to speak—and aspired to equal status in national politics. The second generation of feminists, which started to form after the second world war and emerged as a substantial political force in the sixties, sought differentiation from the nation because it did not account for gender difference within the public sphere of national debate.<sup>3</sup> This later

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Among the many accounts reviewed in the course of this study, in particular those of David Harvey, Fredric Jameson, Scott Lash and David Urry, Doreen Massey and Ed Soja inform this discussion.

<sup>3</sup>

This summary represents European and to some extent North American feminists and is quite specific in this regard.

retrenchment coincided with the general devaluation of the concept of nationhood after “the 1929 crash and the National-Socialist apocalypse demolished the pillars that, according to Marx, were its essence: economic homogeneity, historical tradition, and linguistic unity” (Kristeva 471). These negative factors and the positive factors of a wide-spread, increased sensitivity to socialist principles after the second world war, along with the intellectual popularization of Freudian theories of sexual difference, facilitated the emergence of a form of socio-cultural organization defined in terms of symbolic differences first and foremost. Identification with subjects in corresponding positions within the symbolic field challenged the more linear model of nationalist identification. This is not to say that nationalism became a nonfunctional discourse, but that social organization responded to both temporal and spatial contingencies simultaneously, the one in a “diagonal” relationship to the other.

Economic *homogeneity* gave way to *interdependence* (when not submission to the economic superpowers), while *historical tradition* and *linguistic unity* were recast as a broader and deeper determinant, what might be called a *symbolic denominator*, defined as the cultural and religious memory forged by the interweaving of history and geography” (Kristeva, 471).

The institutionalization of European feminism after the second world war represents one of a number of responses that social groupings “united in space and time have given, not to the problems of the *production* of material goods (i.e.

the domain of the economy and of human relations, politics, etc., but those of *reproduction*, survival of the species, life and death, the body, sex and symbol” (ibid). Age, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality represent various other axes of identification through which communities are formed and for which political agendas are drawn. <sup>4</sup> To the extent that subjects positioned in diagonal relationships are subjects positioned through multiple associations and identifications, the symbolic field informing social relations is necessarily destabilized in kind. Otherwise static and hierarchical relationships, defined through static and hierarchical fields of signification, are now refracted through multiple perspectives on the world and it is the proper negotiation of each different identification that comes to define political practice in the era Kristeva has defined as ‘Women’s Time’.

In Kristeva’s essay of the same name she argues that the social relations and cultural forms and practices resulting from this geo-political phenomena are

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Dick Hebdige dates the beginning of the West’s disenchantment with the philosophy of history and the generalizing discourse associated with the Enlightenment–Hegelianism and Marxism. in particular—with attempts made in the 1950’s by such thinkers as Merleau-Ponty and Sartre to rescue Marxism from the generalized concept of social change it had inherited from Hegel. Certainly “the revelations of the Moscow Trials, and after 1956 with the invasion of Hungary” sealed the fate of such totalizing discourses (186). In France, the disaffection of students with the French Communist Party in the mid-1960’s foreshadowed the suspicion that was widespread by 1968, of “any kind of political program formulated by an elite and disseminated through a hierarchical chain of command” (188). The feminisms and counter-cultures of Paris were matched in the United States with Woodstock. Haight-Ashbury, the hippies, the Weathermen, the Panthers and anti-Vietnam protests.

While in Paris, Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari excavated and redeemed the buried, repressed and forbidden discourse of the mad and the marginal...young men and women stalked around cities as far apart as Los Angeles and Liverpool wearing T-shirts decorated with a screen printed photograph of Charles Manson staring crazed and blazing eyed out into the world at chest level (189).

primarily informed by the confrontation of the two concepts of temporality that govern these two different modes of identification: a modern, linear form of historical progress and a more circular and enduring "monumental" form of time. Kristeva's interest in temporal form is as much concerned with the means by which History is chronicled--for individuals and groups alike--as it is with the idea of the temporal mode as a universal organizing principle which measures social relations in terms of linguistic structures and *vice versa*, signification in terms of 'human' relations. The modern, linear mode of temporality founds the basic principals of national unity and the patriarchal/familial form and orders social relations in *hierarchical* terms. The contrasting 'monumental' temporal mode addresses subjects according to the *common* rather than differential values of their places within the symbolic order. Finally, this confrontation between models of socio-cultural organization and temporal forms is expressed in social discourse as a contest over identification and the stability of socio-symbolic relations.

Kristeva's narrative distinguishes itself from other sociological accounts of 20th century political economy because it addresses the question of globalization in social, historical, psycho-linguistic and feminist terms simultaneously. Her link between Utopic and Oedipal narratives provides a partial explanation, at least, for the stubborn resilience in contemporary discourse, of a concept of identification formulated on a linear model of historical process, one that produces identities in fixed and hierarchical terms. Premised on the notion that the modern historical form is expressed in and shaped by both the cultural and psychoanalytical



functioning of the Oedipal myth, Kristeva argues that the circulation of ideas about history, sexuality and sociality in modern social discourse works to reproduce their shared founding concepts. The cross fertilization of these ideas has the consequence of displacing the effect of alienation that the subject experiences upon the acquisition of language, onto "woman" who, positioned in the myth at the beginning of the subject's history, is the determined cause for the Oedipal subject's inevitable downfall. Kristeva's approach underscores the significance for women of the confrontation of two modes of temporality. Insofar as they are synonymous, linear, Utopic and Oedipal modes of identification all displace the deep emotional conflicts that result from the recognition of difference—social, cultural or sexual—onto a feminized other.

For these reasons, it is significant that the postmodern, *post-feminist*<sup>5</sup>, post-war revival text tends to exaggerate and/or parody the classical Oedipal story. Articulated in relation to recent and contemporary, popular feminist discourse, typically these productions invert or hyperbolize the sex-gender relationship of the key characters in the story. In those instances where the revival text addresses a pro-feminist reader, such as is the case with female hard-boiled detective fiction, the parodic demonization of the female subject position works to denaturalize the Oedipal myth in order to revise and re-inscribe "Woman's" position. In other instances, however, the exaggeration of women's causal relationship to historical

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I am using the term "post-feminist" to represent a historical period after feminist discourse has become more widely diffused, not after feminism's political demise, although the sliding between the two meanings does bring an important element to the privileged meaning, as it raises the question of feminism's current political efficacy.

decline works to reinforce this outlaw status. The representation of the 'true crime's' of Aileen Wuornos and Tonya Harding worked hard to achieve such significance. Such is the ambiguous nature of the nostalgic paradigm to which this model of historical form belongs.

### *Longing & the Compression of Space and Time*

The shift from modern socio-cultural organizations to postmodern forms corresponds to the shift from industrial to post-industrial economies, Fordist to Postfordist labour practices and national to global marketplaces. Different scholars of postmodernity place different emphases on the factors informing these changes and argue the degree, significance and scope of the resulting cultural and social impact; however, the historical conditions Kristeva's narrative outlines are generally agreed upon. Most writers concur that changes in economic practices and advances in mass communications technologies have facilitated the compression of temporal and spatial contingencies.<sup>6</sup> As global capital has sought out new markets and information has come to circulate faster, production lines and times have shortened and both commodities and information now have shorter shelf lives. We have seen faster turn-over times in business, cycles of employment, material and social practices and intellectual trends. The shift to market governance and price deregulation has promoted an intensified

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See my "Introduction" and/or David Harvey, Arjun Appadurai, Doreen Massey, Scott Lash & John Urry for different approaches to the concepts of space-time compression.

corporate competitiveness which has put pressure on labour organizations to capitulate to industry and government in labour disputes and provided the rhetorical means, if nothing else, for the lifting or lowering of health and safety standards and for the dismantling of government systems of health care. In the west, national economic bases have shifted from those derived from natural resources to communications industries and, similarly, from the manufacturing of goods to the production of services. Patterns of immigration have followed the global reorganization of labour, markets and industries, and these changes in population flows have affected the stability and coherence of cultural communities, which now form over vaster distances than ever before.

Fredric Jameson argues that these economic phenomena are reflected culturally in the kinds and qualities of contemporary cultural exchange; in the fast accumulation, reproduction, circulation and exchange of signs as well as the particular characteristics that they exhibit. With the "extinction of the sacred and the 'spiritual,' the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day; and it is clear that culture itself is one of those things whose fundamental materiality is now for us not merely evident but quite inescapable" (Jameson 67). This culture is of a particular order. Unbounded, 'deregulated', or regulated differently, it is a new kind of cultural arena where high and low mixes and mingles:

The postmodernisms have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader's Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B

Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer "quote" as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance (Jameson 2-3).

Jameson argues that the consequence of this "new culture of the image," is the weakening of historicity, which is to say the destabilization of identity--the 'deregulation' of identity, if you will. In this instance, the image is conceived as a simulacrum, not a representation of something that exists in the world. It is the photograph, and even more particularly, the flatness of the photographic negative, seemingly at odds with its potential capacity towards endless reproduction--its ability to generate image after image without returning to its source--that captures the current, "virtual" status of representation of all kinds, aesthetic, religious, symbolic and most importantly, political. A "vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum, " the past of Jameson's postmodernity no longer *unfolds* organically but *opens* indiscriminately (Jameson 18). In this sense it is vulnerable to the same vagaries of demand that Julia Kristeva has suggested defines the pre-modern, "monumental" form of temporality that has reemerged in postmodernity, to confront the linearity of modern forms of time. The static symbols of monumental time are capricious in their transactions and without the regulating function of the linear temporal mode can be deadening in their effects.

In Jameson's view, the experience of this past is no less emotionally resonant because of its inherent inconsistency. In fact, it may be more so as historical narratives and themes have come to take up so much contemporary cultural life. Jameson refers to what he calls 'nostalgia deco' to direct our attention "to what is a culturally far more generalized manifestation...in commercial art and taste" of nostalgic sentiment: a historical sensibility which encompasses such various things as the restoration of historical buildings and urban centers, the growth in theme parks and malls, the boom in flea markets and confessional literature (19). In a similar vein, David Harvey distinguishes between modernity and postmodernity in relation to the particular qualities of the memorial forms to which each epoch gives rise:

Being, suffused with immemorial spatial memory, transcends Becoming. It founds all those nostalgic memories of a lost childhood world. Is this the foundation for collective memory, for all those manifestations of place-bound nostalgia that infect our images of the country and the city, of region, milieu, and locality, of neighborhood and community? And if it is true that time is always memorialized not as flow, but as memories of experienced places and spaces, then history must indeed give way to poetry, time to space as the fundamental material of social expression. The spatial image (particularly the evidence of the photograph) then asserts an important power over history (Harvey 218)

Thus, from Jameson's perspective, "what is enacted is a nostalgia for nostalgia, for the grander, older, extinct question of origin and telos of deep time

and the Freudian unconscious, for the dialectic as well as all the monumental forms left high and dry by the ebb of the modern moment” (Jameson 156).<sup>7</sup> Unlike “the pain of a properly modernist nostalgia,” the recent nostalgia boom mourns modernity itself (Jameson 156). In this regard, many of the texts that I refer to as ‘post-war revival’ texts, can be seen to romanticize the existential crises of modernity—to romanticize romanticism, in point of fact. Much of this material derives its sensibility from a *film noir* aesthetic, and as everybody knows, *noir* makes everything sexy. Giving hyperbolized expression to the experience of loss, the *noir* universe runs on pure desire. However, in the revival genre this romanticization is also always held in check by the dialectical structure of the nostalgic text. As Žižek has noted, the structuring principles of nostalgia guarantee an ironical distance from the lost object (Žižek 1991).

Jameson, on the other hand, argues the impossibility of politics from this position: as signs come to refer to other signs, the intertext of this recycled imagery merely constitutes a “pastiche” of stereotypes about history which in the end is more symptomatic of the “waning of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way” than productive of any significant historical analysis or critique (Jameson, 21). As materials and designs are mined from the various cultural productions of previous eras they carry aesthetic references to these

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Jameson’s use of the term monumental and Kristeva’s are similar. However, as we shall see in our later discussion of the space-time relations of postmodernity, the notion of time underpinning Jameson’s postmodernity can not accommodate past and future temporalities simultaneously. Thus, the productive function of the monumental form that Kristeva hypothesizes is lost to Jameson’s theory.

earlier moments with them, but insofar as no linear history of social events is given, these representations merely provide abstract cultural references. Like the displaced objects in the early 'natural history' museum, these signs seem to have been salvaged from a long-lost and primitive past. What amounts to so much anthropological clutter results in a "chaotic depthlessness," and, ironically, it is the sheer density of these "nostalgic" second-hand, debased representations presently circulating in popular culture that forms the basis of both Jameson's and Harvey's claims that the postmodern experience is spatialized and superficial. Without concrete historical referents to orient subjects, experience is only and shallowly aesthetic (Jameson 6). Insofar as "personal identity is...the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future," facilitated through language, Jameson argues that the instantaneous circulation of signs and symbols in contemporary culture promotes a breakdown in the signifying chain and the postmodern subject, represented here by the figure of the schizophrenic, "is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (Jameson 26-27).

Jameson's own historical narrative is a veritable straight line: the postmodern schizophrenic displaces the modern hysteric, the postmodernist's fragmentation replaces the modernist's sense of alienation, and the de-centered subject takes over for the unified subject whose identification with historical narratives guaranteed *his* fixed or stable identity and, more to the point *his* authority in the world. In the end, Jameson's unified 'man' is a historically specific expression of

subjectivity whose representation has similarly specific political consequences, centering certain subjectivities at the cost of de-centering others.

While Jameson's argument derives from the same socio-linguistic theory of subjectivity that Kristeva's does, for him the efficacy of politics rests on the stability of a system of meaning based on some sense of equivalence between things and their representations, while the instability of identity offers the only opportunity for social transformation for Kristeva. Against Jameson and Harvey, Kristeva looks to the aesthetic dimension for the possibility of social transformation. The signifying practices of poetry, art and religion hold out hope insofar as they "provide (subjects) with a *representation* (animal, female, male, parental, etc.) in place of what constitutes them as such" (Kristeva 483). However, in this instance there is no expectation of an *a priori* correspondence between the symbolic position and the subject of that symbolization. Finally, the issues she raises in "Women's Time" relate to the constitution of subjectivity, its expression, resistance and/or maintenance through cultural forms.

If "Woman" does not exist, she must be constantly invented. Angela McRobbie has argued that practices such as "pastiche, the ransacking and recycling of culture, the direct invocation of other texts and other images can create a vibrant critique, rather than an inward-looking second hand aesthetics" (McRobbie 23). In this context, aesthetic practice contests the origins of significations in an obvious bid to control their ends.



Jameson claims that “the spatial peculiarities of postmodernism” are “symptoms and expressions of a new and historically original dilemma, one that involves our insertion as individual subjects into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities” (Jameson 413). But, insofar as gender is not the sole determinant of women’s fates, this “fragmented” identification is further enhanced or multiplied, in relation to the many other “diagonal” axes through which social relations are negotiated; an experience that can only ever be reprised in political representation in temporal and spatial terms simultaneously. In bell hooks’ words: “Language is a *place* of struggle,” (hooks, 1984, 15, my emphasis).

...one pauses to remember choices, location, tracing my journey from small town southern black life, from folk traditions and church experience to cities, to university, to neighbourhoods that are not racially segregated, to places where I see for the first time, where I read critical theory, where I write theory (hooks, 1984, 15) .

Furthermore, Stuart Hall has found the experience of fragmentation to be wholly *modern* insofar as it constitutes the experience of the colonized subject. “Now that, in the postmodern age, you all feel so dispersed I become centered. What I’ve thought of as dispersed and fragmented comes, paradoxically, to be the representative modern condition! This is coming home with a vengeance” (qtd. in McRobbie 27). Jameson’s claims are not only ethnocentric but historically short-sighted in this regard.

Clearly the fragmentation, destabilization, 'deregulation' of subjectivity is an ambiguous phenomenon. While the breaking down of crude categories of identity permits otherwise 'marginal' identifications to come to the fore, the question still remains one of political agency, of "who gets to be able to express their fragmentation, and who is able to put into words or images or sounds, the language of their private, broken subjectivities. In short, who can contest, who can represent and who gets to be listened to?" (McRobbie 29).

Notwithstanding the 'devolution' of the bourgeois model of the public sphere, its rhetorical modes still prevail to the extent that "public" over "private" interests are privileged subjects of public debate and this distinction still favours fraternities of "free and equal" men (Fraser 1993). If the issue of fragmentation is taken up, it still favours this latter constituency. The 'deregulation' of gender and sexuality only benefits the fragmented subject if alternative identities are given political representation in public debate. On the other hand, the deregulation of identity risks the loss of different forms of collective voice: of labour organizations, women's organizations, poverty organizations, and the like. As Hal Foster points out, the recognition of difference

must be seen in relation to the dynamic of capital, its reification and fragmentation of fixed position... if we celebrate hybridity and heterogeneity, we must remember that they are also privileged terms of advanced capitalism, that social multiculturalism coexists with economic multinationalism. In the New World Order difference is an object of

consumption too, as mega-corporations like Coca-Cola (We are the World) and Benneton (United Colors) know well (Foster 212).

This thesis traces the discursive production of female criminality in recent popular culture as it reflects upon and represents this type of equivocation. The risks of multiple identifications are taken up both directly and indirectly in the recent feminist revival of hard-boiled detective fiction. Running parallel to the solution of crimes against private property, the enigma of women's identity is thematized in the plot-lines of these popular texts and, by association, the dangers and anxieties attending criminal investigation inform these narrative concerns. In other instances the destabilization of identity is addressed more metaphorically, in the media representations of women's crime that focus on the home life (or its absence) of the female perpetrators. Much of the attention given to the crime spree of female serial killer Aileen Wuornos focused on her homelessness. A relationship between the instability of the socio-symbolic order and the economy is produced through these types of discourses on women's criminality that render the female criminal responsible.

#### *Time, Space & Postmodernity*

Jameson's schizophrenic, postmodern subject is as physically displaced as he is temporally and cognitively disoriented. Here again Jameson's interpretation of the postmodern condition is myopic. The depthlessness of postmodern "virtuality" is reflected in the corporate architectonics that define America's urban spaces.

It can be experienced physically and “literally” by anyone who, mounting what used to be Raymond Chandler’s Bunker Hill from the great Chicano markets on Broadway and Fourth Street in downtown Los Angeles, suddenly confronts the great free-standing wall of Wells Fargo Court...a surface which seems to be unsupported by any volume, or whose putative volume [rectangular? trapezoidal?] is ocularly quite undecidable (Jameson, 12).

In Jameson’s postmodernity, the actual physical experience of the social field is flattened and aestheticized. And this empty ‘reality’ is contrasted with the paradoxically more complex and multidimensional experience of technological mediation, television, in particular. As such, Jameson’s postmodern social field exists outside of representation as a lived experience—which is to say outside of the political sphere: “somehow real but untrue, thinkable but unrepresentable, and thus doubtful and unverifiable” (Jameson, 363). This parallel universe may house “real bodies” and facilitate “the extraordinary demographic displacements of mass migrant workers and of global tourists...to a degree unparalleled in world history” but because these scenes are witnessed *via* mediated representations, they have no real social impact (Jameson 363).

It is significant that for Jameson the embodied experience is visual and the imagined experience is more corporeal. As Doreen Massey argues, this “spectacularized” model of the postmodern social field has consequences beyond what its Debordian/Baudrillardian problematic suggests. It is not just that the postmodern social bond is *represented* as lived without actually being constituted

through lived social relations, but that the model of spatial-temporal relations upon which all of these concepts rest is irreconcilable with the notion of space as a mode of social relationship. As Massey has demonstrated, there is an implicit contradiction in Jameson's perceptions of social and cultural experience, one which derives from the concept of space/time relations to which he subscribes. He treats time and space as discrete phenomena. In his description of the new urban environment he sees the spatial functioning as the ground upon which temporal or social processes unwind. In his discussion of cultural mediation, the temporal plane provides the *raison d'être* for space. The migrant subjects of postmodern globalization that he views on television occupy or leave spaces, they don't play a part in their constitution. But, spaces and times are necessarily inter-related dimensions and these "definitions of both space and time themselves must be constructed as a result of interrelations" (Massey, 1994, 261).

The conceptualization of a dynamic interrelationship between space and time is important for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the notion of a space/time interrelationship opens up the possibility of thinking about space and more urgently, "place" as its corollary point of articulation and/or product, as "integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics..." (159). This is to say that "place" as it might represent the spatial contingencies of identity--one's place within private or public spheres, for example--is not static but active as it is informed by time. It has effects. And one's place within either of these spheres necessarily changes through time. If you think of time as history and history as subjectivity and subjectivity as something that is shaped by

context, and context or space as something expressly informed by history or time, neither space nor time can be conceived as separate terms or conditions. Not only does history take place but it takes shape as it conforms to given environments or contexts and in this way history is informed by spatial contingencies. The beauty of thinking of space/time relations in this way is what it allows of political possibilities: how one can conceive of changing places and of having places change them.

If space has a social dimension, so too are representation and reality entwined. It is not inconsequential that the spatial and the simulational represent the passive terms in the binaries of space and time, representation and the real. In a very real sense, Jameson's critique of the superficiality of the postmodern condition sets in motion a whole set of problematic suppositions. When positioned at the origin of a signifying chain these dichotomies support a hierarchy of relationships within other oppositional terms: time to space, figure to ground, mind to body, self to others, male to female, first world to third, north to south, west to east, modernism to postmodernism, the avant-garde to mass culture, and so on and so forth... (Massey, 1993).

There is an interesting parallel to be drawn here with the sense of panic in the midst of exhilaration which seems to have overtaken some writers at what they see as the ungraspable (and therefore unbearable) complexity of the postmodern age. And it is an ungraspability seen persistently in spatial terms, whether through the argument that it is the new (seen-to-be-new) time-space compression, the new global-localism, the breaking down

of borders which is the cause of it all, or through the interpretation of the current period as somehow in its very character intrinsically more spatial than previous eras... It is hard to resist the idea that Jameson's...apparently vertiginous terror...in the face of the complexity of today's world...has a lot in common with the nervousness of the male modernist, nearly a century ago, when faced with the big city (Massey, 1994, 259)

There is a long history of cultural associations between women and mass culture and women and space. In this regard, the fact that the female subject position is the principal point of narrative interest in both post-WW II narratives and the revival text is significant. As we shall see, *film noir* and *neo-film noir*, new and old women's pictures and certainly the melodramas of both eras all feature stories relating women's criminality to the changing boundaries of public and private, urban and suburban spaces and relate this restructuring to shifts in signifying practices and forms.

#### *The Global Logic of Late Nostalgia*

Once again we witness the implication of "the feminine" in discourses of political economy, here invoked to articulate the limits of the social field, the outside of representation, the end of history and the post of postmodernity. Post or not, we still confront the same stubborn point of resistance to alternative modes of subjectivity that determined the gender-specific outcomes of the modern historical

narrative for its subjects. At best a paradoxical story, within the modernist regime, "man lives in relation to his lost 'origin', striving always to reconnect with it as he situates himself in the flow of history" (Jones 2). This history has as its basic requirement the repudiation of this origin.<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin described the tragedy of this paradox allegorically, through the figure of "the angel of history" who, caught up in "the storm of progress," flies backwards towards the future, "while the pile of debris before him grows skyward" (Benjamin 257-258). In Laurie Anderson's recent revision to the story, this wreckage is *his-story*.<sup>9</sup> Insofar as modern "history" is written along the same narrative lines as the Oedipal text, it is framed by the life and death of the omnipotent maternal figure. A story told from the perspective of a future time that looks back towards a past that defines it, but that also lies outside of representation, 'history' is the story of the male child's entrance onto the oedipal stage, and his eternal longing to return to the fullness of the pre-oedipal mother. "History," as Roland Barthes has pointedly observed, is "that time when my mother lived before me" (Barthes, 1982, 65).

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Kristeva notes that the mastering gesture of this modern historical mode can be interpreted in relation to the more typically masculine psychic disorder of "obsessive-compulsion" while the denial of historical separation that characterizes a temporality conceived in purely spatial terms, reflects the "hysterical" symptomology more generally attributed to women. Her observation intends to acknowledge the differences between temporal modes as differences that are traditionally rendered in gendered terms, not to naturalize the gender-genre of these different modes of representation. That Kristeva's postmodernism represents the confrontation of these forms reflects her more complex understanding of the relationship between gender and representational form.

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Anderson's song "Strange Angels" appeared on an album of the same name, released in 1989 by Warner Records.



The contradiction we witnessed in Jameson's perceptions of spatial and temporal experiences speaks to the confrontation of the two modes of temporality that Kristeva has claimed defined the postmodern experience. If the modern mode favours the temporal axis and the mythic, 'monumental' mode favours the spatial, in juxtaposition each attitude is exaggerated and thus even more dramatically contradictory. Wells Fargo Court is necessarily flatter than Raymond Chandler's Bunker Hill. A building cannot replace a myth so much as underscore the difference between past and present, the real and representation. On the other hand, such contradiction is integral to the modern historical myth. In Arjun Appadurai's words:

One of the most problematic legacies of grand Western social science...is that it has steadily reinforced the sense of some single moment...that by its appearance creates a dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present...Reincarnated as the break between tradition and modernity...[it] distort [s] the meanings of change and the politics of pastness...[But, insofar as the world we live in is one] in which modernity is decisively at large, irregularly self-conscious, and unevenly experienced...surely [this] involve[s] a general break with all sorts of pasts... .A theory of rupture takes media and migration as its two major and interconnected diacritics (Appadurai 4).

On some fundamental level, the "history" of modernity is a nostalgic narrative. In fact, the experience of nostalgia presupposes a number of specifically modern conditions that reflect upon the phenomenon of globalization

and thus relate both to Appadurai's diacritics of modernity, media and migration, and to Jameson's notion of postmodern fragmentation: the notion of history as decline; a sense of a loss of coherence or wholeness and certainty; the feeling of the loss of simplicity, spontaneity and authenticity in expression; and the sense of a loss of individual autonomy (Stauth and Turner, 1988; Robertson, 1990; Frow, 1991).<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, nostalgic discourses predominate in discursive formations addressing globalization. Not only is nostalgic discourse fully bound up with the modernist myth of progress, but, in modernity the concepts of nostalgia and progress are mutually implicated. Their conceptual coherence has played a central part in the discursive constitution of sociality in the west.

Roland Robertson distinguishes three historically specific types of nostalgia that relate to the experience of globalization. The first, "pre-modern" manifestation was more directly existential, "arising more 'naturally' from (the sense of) estrangement or alienation" of changing modes of knowledge as they were experienced at the dawn of the Enlightenment project (Robertson 53). Deriving from the Greek words *nostos*, to return home, and *algos*, or pain, the concept of "nostalgia" as it is currently used was first defined in the medical

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Compare Jameson's constitutive features of postmodernism:

a new depthlessness which finds its prolongation both in contemporary "theory" and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose "schizophrenic" structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone—what I will call "intensities"—which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime; the deep constitutive relationships of all this to a whole new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole new economic world system (Jameson, 6).

literature of the seventeenth century, in order to diagnose the psychological effects of homesickness (melancholy, weeping, anorexia and despair) displayed by the Swiss mercenaries, fighting away from home (Onions, 1966; Robertson, 1990).

The second two manifestations of nostalgia arise in relation to two different phases of globalization. The most concrete cultural effect of nostalgic discourse produced during these global phases is what Robertson has called "the universalization of particularism." During its first phase (approximately 1880-1925) this involved the international institutionalization of a specific notion of society. Its reference points are precisely defined and include: nationally constituted societies; the individual; the system of international relations; and humankind. Several forms of international agreement and organization concerning the "world-as-a-whole" emerged during this period of time, facilitated by the extensive development of communication technologies (or, as the case may be, in order to facilitate the effective functioning of these technologies): the institutionalization of World Time and the rapid completion of the global expansion of the use of the Gregorian calendar; the establishment of the Geneva and Hague conventions, the World Court and the League of Nations, all of which contributed to the development of the abovementioned set of criteria used to define the constitutive parts of the social (Robertson 51).

At the close of the 19th century, these themes were 'willfully' incorporated into discourses supporting various burgeoning nationalisms, and more generally, discourse supporting the idea of the society as a bounded and self-similar unit.

During the later, more recent stage of globalization we witness the intensification of these reference points and their redirection to serve the aims of transnational capital. We see a mode of nostalgia where the nostalgic tendency is exacerbated in relation to strategic and somewhat paradoxical identity productions. These productions promote the idea of difference as a common, *global*, condition. With each successive stage the sense of home as “a specific geographic locale with its own distinctive atmosphere,” is eroded (Davis, 1974, 124). Likewise, the “universalization of the particular and particularization of the universal” is intensified and in postmodernity provides capital with the international system of standards and, increasingly, world views that it needs to make and sell its products in the global marketplace.

Modernism enjoys many contradictions. As a historical epoch it defines itself in relation to a past it can't access or even explain, a past, moreover that is forever changing: reinvented at different historical stages. In the contexts of modern and postmodern globalization processes, the nostalgic discourses of 'pasts' and 'pastness' serve contradictory political and economic aims. Both colonization and modernization relied on negative discourses of pastness to standardize social and cultural practices. In these contexts, nostalgic discourse functioned to invent historical divisions and geographical distinctions between cultural communities. And, these divisions and distinctions functioned politically to the advantage of the most 'advanced'. Functioning in the service of burgeoning nationalisms, a more positive nostalgic discourse valued tradition and traditionalism. In this instance, the deep history of individual cultures legitimated

modern, nationalisms. In postmodernity, nostalgic discourses paradoxically exploit the common standards and world views achieved by modern globalization in order to maintain economic differences between global subjects.

*Gender & the Social Contract: The Private Public Sphere*

William McNeil has demonstrated that nostalgic discourse is central to the production of modern concepts of sociality. Sometime after 1750 in Western Europe, as classical Latin and Greek become a central part of the educational curriculum, “the pagan authors of Rome and Greece [offered] educated Europeans an ideal of life built around participation in a self-governing city-state” (McNeil, qtd. in Robertson 49). The nostalgia for a homogeneous rural society that constituted the ‘classical ideal’ of the city state, achieved an ideal of social coherence at the cost of “the overlooking of the foreigners and slaves who lived in ancient Athens [and Rome] in their periods of imperial glory” (McNeil, qtd. in Robertson 49). Based on a logic of identity, this classical ideal of society excludes individuals whose identities do not conform to a fairly narrowly conceived set of criteria, in this instance the criteria of common geographical, linguistic, class and gender associations.

As in Rene Girard’s study of sacrificial crisis, the expulsion of these outsiders from the social unit helps to constitute the very social bond that defines it. Studying the persistence of sacred rites in secular rituals, Girard looks to the narrative formula of the Greek tragedy to argue the proposition that social bonds are forged through repetitive, ritualistic contests between equal opponents. The

sacrificial crisis is inaugurated not by the differences between equally matched opponents but by their loss (Hart 144). "All these acts of violence gradually wear away the differences that exist not only in the same family but throughout the community" (Girard 271). In order to avert the erosion of individual identities and the resulting breakdown in the social bond, another opponent, whose difference is greater but not overly obvious, is brought into the competition to provide a scapegoat for this intensifying violence. Moreover, "sacrificial substitution implies a degree of misunderstanding. Its vitality as an institution depends on its ability to conceal the displacement upon which the rite is based" (Girard qtd. in Hart, 44).<sup>11</sup>

This model of sociality depends upon, even as it reproduces, a symbolic field ordered by the myth of the archaic mother. Girard's theories of symbolic sacrifice correspond closely with the Oedipal negotiations described by psychoanalytic theory in this regard. In fact, as Lynda Hart has argued, "the sacrificial crisis with its resolution through substitution is a virtual paradigm for the structure of 'desire itself', a Desire that holds a monopoly in a phallogentric sociosymbolic" (Hart 145).<sup>12</sup> In psychoanalytic theory, desire is said to originate in the alienation of the subject from its being that occurs as he or she acquires language and comes

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<sup>11</sup>. See Lynda Hart for a version accommodating the sacrifice of women.

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Hart notes that Lacan's mirror theory was developed after his study of the infamous Papin sisters' murder trial. Charged with the killing of their employers, Lacan claimed that the sister's violence resulted from a narcissistic over-identification with each other. Thus "the violence of identification that the mirror stage presumably produces is a reconstruction based on the observation of female criminals whose actions would become the paradigm for a generalized theory of femininity *per se*. Whereas male criminals would always be classified as anomalies, departures from the norm, female criminals would become the rule derived from these exceptions" (Hart 147).

to perceive his or her own difference from objects and people in the world. Deriving from the logic of the symbolic order, the sexualized female who represents social difference is the *prima facie* sacrificial scapegoat for the common symbolic bond between men. If, as Susan Stewart claims, "the prevailing motif of nostalgia is the erasure of the gap between nature and culture and hence a return to the utopia of biology and symbol united within the walled city of the maternal," on some fundamental level, the archaic mother is the source of all social and cultural desire (Stewart 24).

The semiosis of "the feminine" as the repudiated origin of the social subject is implicated in the political unconscious of early Social Contract theories. The contract between free and equal "individuals" to participate in the setting, governing and following of mutually beneficial rules, marks the transition from a State of Nature to the state. Central to the founding discourses of political economy, the 'identity logic' organizing the nostalgic paradigm emerges in Hobbes's Leviathan, (1651) as the basis of the social contract. Here Hobbes asserts that the modern state evolved in response to the fear of the unassimilated other--the 'neighbor' whose unregulated presence within the group may threaten another individual and thus, the group as a whole. Like the foreigner, the criminal situates the boundaries of the social. As Michel Foucault has put it:

The least crime attacks the whole of society; and the whole of society--including the criminal--is present in the least punishment. Penal punishment is therefore a generalized function, coextensive with the

function of the social body and with each of its elements (Foucault, 1979, 90).

Furthermore, this social bond is a *fraternal* bond and equivalent to the public sphere in this regard. Since women were thought not to be able to transcend their bodily natures and such transcendence was the condition of social participation, women's bodiliness was the condition of her exclusion from public life. Carole Pateman has noted that the classical texts of political economy were specific in their use of the terms 'men' and 'individuals' to designate the social actor. Hobbes's belief that "in the natural condition women are men's equals and enjoy the same freedom" was the only exception to this general rule (Pateman 5). Otherwise, where men consented to be governed by other men, "women were subordinate to them by nature" (Pateman 11).

The private sphere was defined by similar logic and to similar ends. In agreement with Locke, Rousseau writes that "the oldest of all societies, and the only natural one, is that of the family" (Pateman 11). As such, he effectively naturalizes a form of family association specific to the Enlightenment, for as Pateman notes, this is the same as saying that "the family precedes, or can exist in the absence of, wider social institutions or 'civil society'; it exists in the natural condition" (20). It may seem paradoxical that the family unit is seen both to derive from a State of nature *and* to provide the source or foundation for the state. However, Rousseau pictures the role of the family in the state as one of



fostership: the 'free and equal' individual is so only insofar as *he* governs *his* own little commonwealth

Will the bonds of convention hold firm without some foundation in nature?

Can devotion to the state exist apart from the love of those near and dear to us? Can patriotism thrive except in the soil of that miniature fatherland, home? Is it not the good son, the good husband, the good father, who makes the good citizen? (qtd. in Pateman 25)

"Woman" stands between the State of nature and the state, as the guardian of the moral order. It is only within the context of a domestic sphere governed by the law of the father (and the bourgeois father, I might add) that women's moral authority can prevail, for it is by the example of their compliance that women represent "a social pattern, and thus give meaning to the natural world of birth and death and other physical processes, of dirt and raw materials, that is integral to domestic life" (Pateman 24). The moral repertoire of the modern society is derived from the nuclear family, which is to say, from an Oedipalized social order.

However, because women face nature directly, and because, giving birth and in their other bodily functions, they appear as part of nature, they exemplify the ambiguous status of the family as both natural and social. Women impose order and foster morality; but they are also in daily contact with dirt and with natural processes only partly under our control. They cannot escape being tainted by this contact or completely transcend the naturalness of their own being. Hence they represent both order and disorder, both morality and boundless passion (Pateman 26).

That Freud's theories of sexuality and the family are thematized along this same sexual hierarchy and justified in the same terms--female nature against male order and convention--is not coincidental.<sup>13</sup> Representing the principal model of sociality tendered in liberal social theory, the Oedipal narrative is one of the classic texts revived during the early colonial regimes. The model of social relations that Freud argued in Civilization and Its Discontents picks up several threads in these same "classical" ideals. Certainly he shares with Rousseau the view that anatomy is destiny. More to the point, Freud's Oedipal complex grounds the early contract theorist's pre-modern biases about women's innate lack of justice in a far-reaching theory of civilization. As Pateman observes, "civilization is the work of men in the most profound sense, for it is men alone who possess a fully developed super-ego" (Pateman 23).

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Teresa de Lauretis notes that the Oedipal narrative adopted by Freud is of a very particular order, not the myth in its generic formulation but a very specific version. Authored by Sophocles, "the Oedipus of psychoanalysis is the *Oedipus Rex*, where the myth is already textually inscribed, cast in dramatic literary form, and thus sharply focused on the hero as mover of the narrative, the center and term of reference of consciousness and desire" (de Lauretis, 1984, 112). Following the work of Vladimir Propp, de Lauretis locates the significance of the resurgence of this particular version

at the historical crossroads where two forms of succession meet and clash: an earlier one in which power was transferred from the king to his son-in-law through marriage with the king's daughter, thus through the agency of the 'princess,' and a later form in which the transfer occurred directly from the king to his own son. Because the transfer of power implied the necessary death usually the killing, of the old king by the new one, the later form of succession gives rise in folklore to the theme of patricide and its corollary, the prophecy...with the advent of patriarchy and the strengthening of paternal power as the very foundation of the state, that function (regicide, now patricide) becomes extremely ambiguous. For in such a system, a son cannot wish, let alone execute the killing of his father; Oedipus is a criminal though unwittingly... (With) the full establishment of patriarchy...the importance of the paternal function is manifested in the theme of the child-hero who does not know his father and sets out to find him. (1984, 114- 115).

The same rationale for women's exclusion from the public sphere is discernable at every stage throughout its short history. From the early social contract theories of the 17th centuries to the developments of civil societies with class distinctions based on the strict maintenance of gender norms, to the social engineering-cum-medico-scientific projects of the 19th century, and the pseudo-social democratic public sphere enjoining late industrial capitalism in the 20th century, the concept of the social as a public sphere of reasoned debate amongst free and equal participants excluded women's participation by objectifying them (Habermas, 1989; Fraser, 1993; Landes, 1988; Ryan, 1990).

Finally, that Levi-Strauss's study of kinship structures in "primitive" cultures comes to rest on the same Oedipal narrative is also a function of its historical situation. The early phase of globalization is synonymous with colonialism and its disciplinary corollary is the emergence of functional anthropology. His claim that the incest taboo universalizes standards of sociality by universalizing the "sign" of "Woman" as the sign of social exchange, also necessarily universalizes a concept of home modeled on the nuclear family. This has dramatic and potentially violent implications for women in general, but is even more threatening for women identified with the "primitive" cultures under study. As the lynchpin of social exchange within their designated cultural group they become the most vulnerable members of the group from both within and outside its boundaries.

In this, as in all "master" narratives, the system of values within which these rules are expressed is understood to exist in advance of their actual expression. Here, the Oedipal narrative is a lie repeated to reproduce the lie of an

evolutionary model of history. In a tight tautology, the nostalgic sentiment that inspires this narrative production of history guarantees the reproduction of the nostalgic narrative which finally, in effect, guarantees 'man's' rule over nature and all things deemed natural. This privilege would seem to have evolved naturally, and, it would also seem, much like the right of kings. In this sense anthropological discourse fully embraces the nostalgia of early colonial enterprises: the "pastness" of the newly observed cultures provides the modern social collective with its origin.

While the Western imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved the political and symbolic incorporation of African and other territories into the national identities of the imperialist nations, it also, on the other hand, involved the attribution to primal societies of cohesive functionality--which exercise actually combined a modernist notion of function [where form follows function] with a nostalgic injection of Western *Gemeinschaft* [community] (Robertson 46).

This is the basic premise of the concept of 'the ethnographic present', developed by critics of early functionalist anthropology to describe the relativity of the cultural constructs defined by this discipline.<sup>14</sup> The 'ethnographic present' represents:

a culturally distinct time (tradition) always outside about to undergo the impact of disruptive changes associated with the influence of trade, media,

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See James Clifford, Trinh Minh-ha, Virginia Dominguez. *The Politics of Representations: Discussions in Contemporary Culture*. Hal Foster, ed..

missionaries, commodities, ethnographers, tourists, the exotic art market, the 'world system'. A relatively recent period of authenticity is followed by deluge of corruption, transformation, modernization (Clifford 73-74).

Furthermore, the resemblance between the nostalgia for a stable self that Jameson's discussion revealed and this anthropological concept is rather striking. If, in Clifford's view the rupture is given to define 'the other' as outside modernity, in Jameson's nostalgia, this rupture is repressed but defining of the modern, male self as 'other' in postmodernity.

*Fort/Da and Globalization: "Woman" in the Postmodern Social Field*

The two modes of temporality that exist concurrently within our present historical epoch represent the confrontation of two models of socio-symbolic organization. And, like the relationship Kristeva schematized between the subject produced through a national narrative and the subject identified through common (rather than differential) symbolic positions, one can conceptualize the relationship between these different Oedipal organizations, as the "interweaving of history and geography". This schema makes clear that the model of a social field organized around "the logic of identity" that reinforced national narratives, and social orders based on set hierarchies no longer prevails. Rather, within a contemporary socio-symbolic order each subject position is doubled, both "inside and outside gender" and as such "at once within and without representation". But what ordering function does the subject position "Woman" now serve, if that which de

Lauretis has claimed of women's subject position can now be said to be true of all subject identifications?

In the epigram at the beginning of this chapter Kristeva points to some of the problems facing the feminist community in its second stage. As she notes, a community modeled on a logic of identity, even if it is shaped according to common rather than opposed symbolic positions, reproduces the same kind of socio-symbolic field as that of the previous social order. Adherents to this model of sociality still believe in the basic integrity of the concept of "Woman" as the measurement of difference between individual subjects. A concept of community modeled on the ideals of sameness and difference reproduces the same extra-social position that the former order afforded "Woman", even as it hopes to center her. Actualized or not, the radical feminist utopia of a world without men necessarily rests outside of the patriarchal social field. Sovereign in the feminist utopia, she is an outlaw in the patriarchal social field. Originating from both perspectives, much recent, post-feminist cultural production representing 'the independent woman' tends to criminalize her. The reported rise in actual crimes committed by women is thought to be tied to the 'expanded zone of comfort' that women now experience as they function in public life, which is said to derive from feminist ideas about women's entitlement (Scrapec, 1993; Pearson, 1998). In subsequent chapters I argue this very point, suggesting that the discursive criminalization of the subject position "Woman" functions to represent the dissolution of social relations. What I now want to suggest is that this shifted socio-symbolic logic has significantly affected representational processes and so

looks to a very different political regime than a political process built upon a modern concept of historical continuity.

On one hand a diagonal relationship between gender and/or sex and/or age and/or class and/or ethnicity and nationhood insists on multiple generational narratives. On the other hand, if recent shifts in socio-cultural organization have resulted in the privileging of lateral, necessarily non-hierarchical symbolic identifications over the hierarchical, national and familial modes, questions relating to historical and linguistic association are necessarily pushed to the fore of political debate. Kristeva makes this point advocating the role of aesthetic practices in political endeavors:

If the social contract, far from being that of equal men, is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of differences which in this way produces communicable meaning, what is our place in this order of sacrifice and/or of language? No longer wishing to be excluded or no longer content with the function which has always been demanded of us (to maintain, arrange, and perpetuate this socio-symbolic contract as mothers, wives, nurses, doctors, teachers...), how can we reveal our place, first as it is bequeathed to us by tradition and then as we want to transform it?...This leads to the active research...being carried out by women in the human sciences particularly those attempts, in the wake of contemporary art, to break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract. I am not speaking of a

“woman's language,” ...Nor am I speaking of the aesthetic quality of productions by women... this new generation of women are showing that its major concern has become the socio-symbolic contract as a sacrificial contract (Kristeva 477-478).

Such an aesthetic approach maps the physical shape of the social and political fields and highlights the blind spots of the dominant accounts of history that form and sustain these spaces. For these reasons the political significance of an aesthetic approach to representation should be evident. However, as we have seen, despite these apparent accomplishments some cultural critics see such contemporary aesthetic practice to be principally and problematically informed by nostalgic sentiment. Jameson, of course, argues that the appropriation of historical materials in the context of a late-capitalist economy built upon the commodification and recuperation of all imagery and signification is a politically naive gesture. And Harvey maintains that ‘place-based politics’ are reactionary as they express a desire for stable and coherent identifications within equally stable and coherent, and perhaps even transparent, cultural narratives and social systems. But as we have also seen, the management of nostalgia has long been a principal strategy in the exercise of politics.

Critics of the ever-growing heritage industry are nonetheless right to worry about the impact of the increase in nostalgic productions (Coombes, 1997; Dunn & Leeson, 1993; Keith & Pile, 1993; Fox-Keller, 1991; Haraway, 1989). In different ways and for different reasons, the rise in theme parks like Disneyland and commercial mega-development projects like the West Edmonton Mall and



the London Docklands renovation, exploit and manage nostalgic sentiments for capital gains. In the first instance these productions reconstruct a past without conflict, with no real depth, and do so at the cost of the erasure of vital cultural histories. In the latter case, and more ironically, nostalgia for lost tradition is produced to justify housing expropriation and land appropriations to the same effect.

Likewise, critics concerned with the political effects of nostalgia in advertising and product packaging have every right to worry about the perpetuation of this logic of identity, especially because the pasts recalled in this enterprise are entirely artificial. For, as Arjun Appadurai has noted, "in...creating experiences of losses that never took place...[nostalgia-based] advertisements... .invert the temporal logic of fantasy and create...much deeper wants than simple envy, imitation, or greed could by themselves invite" (Appadurai 76). They create deeply felt inadequacies, and seemingly inconsolable losses to produce a subject identity that is highly vulnerable to ideological indoctrination.

Finally, the nostalgic narrative has an ambiguous status for women. The 'laws of being and the laws of place' are gendered according to the structure of desire that nostalgia perpetuates. The past longed for is the past of maternal plenitude which is indissociable from those specific views of the feminine that tie in to nature and social possibility. Referring to the Fort/Da 'string' game that Freud's grandson played on the threshold of identity, Michel de Certeau suggests that this place, this *home*, this matter is a palimpsest for the inscription of subjectivities at the cost of the dispersal of its conceptual coherence.

No doubt one could trace this differentiation further back, as far as the naming that separates the foetus identified as masculine from his mother-- but how about the female foetus, who is from this very moment introduced into another relationship to space? In the initiatory game, just as in the 'joyful activity' of the child who, standing before a mirror sees itself as one (is it she or he, seen as whole) but another (that, an image with which the child identifies itself), what counts is the process of this 'spatial captation' that inscribes the passage toward the other as the law of being and the law of place. ... Thus begins the walk that Freud compares to the trampling underfoot of the motherland... (de Certeau 110).

What then of the impossible experience of the woman's separation?

### *History Repeats Itself*

Just as the production of nostalgia is an ongoing political strategy, so too 'history' is a textual construct. As John Frow reminds us, to the extent that the writing of history is a rhetorical project, "the question cannot at all be about the gap between representations of history and history 'itself', but only about the relative effectiveness, the relative political force of different representations" (Frow 134). The emotional force of the nostalgic narrative is its insistence on origins and authenticity, immediacy and the transparency of meaning. Its political force, on the other hand, is simultaneously its strength and its weakest link. As Susan Stewart conjectures, "nostalgia is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of

all repetition and denies the repetition's capacity to form identity" (Stewart 24). In its expressed desire for the return to an authentic experience, nostalgia is hostile to the idea of mediation but it is also a major cultural narrative and as such, as Michel Foucault has observed, it must repeat itself endlessly, "spoken and respoken, indefinitely, beyond its formulation" in order to achieve its effects (1971, 152). Its authority is not a condition of its singularity, but is derived from its distribution and dispersion through constant repetition.

In fact "History", for Foucault, repeats itself. If the form and function of the historical narrative, the *raison d'être* of history as text, is to solicit identifications, it only enlists them through the action of repetition. Reading Foucault, Judith Butler argues that "the subject who is produced through (discursive) subjection is not produced at an instant in its totality; it is in the process of being produced, it is repeatedly produced (which is not the same as being produced new again and again)" (Butler 237).

For Butler, subjection is:

neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction in production, a restriction without which the production of the subject cannot take place, a restriction through which that production takes place... *and it is in the possibility of a repetition that repeats against its origin that subjection might be understood to draw its inadvertently enabling power* (237, my emphases).

The critical perspective that insists that the nostalgic narrative is a regressive production does not allow for the possibility that some degree of transmutation will occur within the discursive process. It is just as likely that the nostalgic production of identity will fail or at least produce identities that do not conform exactly to the narrative parameters of the traditions invoked. This is the nature of the 'reverse discourse': the resistance in language that results from the usual functioning of representation. A 'reverse discourse' posits an identity in contradiction to that anticipated in previous manifestations of this same identification—this same naming-of-the-thing, in other words.

Foucault's account of the *historically* specific rules which operate to categorize, organize and control discourse is concerned with how and in which circumstances these various procedures prevail to condition social relations: how and when individuals are authorized to speak and therefore how power is cultivated and reproduced in local social arrangements. In this explanation Foucault claims that since the Enlightenment the rules and regulations that categorize and control discourse do so in relation to a specific conceptualization and utilization of truth. As these rules and procedures locate that which is spoken within or outside of the realm of truth, the authority of the speaking subject (located in kind) is legitimated or not. The question of whether or not contemporary representations of the feminine express something new or not is relevant only in so far as it concerns the potentiality of such contemporary representation to enable "new" social or enunciative positions as they challenge prior representational determinations as "being in the true".

To the extent that much contemporary popular representation of gender sees the feminine as a function and effect of discourse--this is to say much contemporary, popular representation is highly self-reflexive--and this representation is inflected, in dialogue or exchange with contemporaneous feminist discourse which sees female subjectivity as both a condition and an effect of knowledge and power, I would claim that these representations do introduce something new. Newness, certainly, in the thematics of this discourse, for what could be newer (relatively speaking, even in recent history) than to represent gender as first and foremost, an unstable, contingent term inscribed in and by relations of power. Equally, if not more so, this newness is felt in a new female subject position from which this discourse is enunciated.

Until recently feminist discourse has been considered 'outside the realm of truth' because it has challenged the sex-gender bias of the processes and representations of knowledge. Feminist discourse has sought to expose how regimes of truth are self-perpetuated; both the basis upon which relations of power and knowledge are built and their effect. As such, the subject position that is constituted through feminist discourse is newly gendered, and newly and productively self-conscious of its status as being-in-the-true. In this way, much contemporary, feminist, cultural practice can be imagined as instances of, what Foucault has called, "reverse discourse" in action.

This is not to say that this negation is symmetrical: that behind what is given lies what has been cut out. Discourses are discontinuous. What is not allowed expression within the context of a particular discipline or discursive arena may

exist elsewhere. Foucault's method requires an appreciation of the specificity of discursive events. In each instance, discourses are always "new" in the sense that they emerge differently "articulated" in both senses of the term Stuart Hall intended when he described the processes of popular culture: on the level of enunciation and of connection. Conditioned by the internal limits and rules of each discursive context, such articulations of discourse necessarily position their subjects in different, and often contradictory relations to speech (Hall, 1986).

The relatively recent emergence of the feminist-informed mode of hard-boiled detective fiction is exemplary of the institutionalization of feminist discourse in popular culture and as such provides an instance where a discourse which heretofore has been considered outside of the realm of truth and therefore excluded, has come to be integrated "within the true" by virtue of its particular discursive conjunctions: a disciplinary discourse—feminism—with a popular cultural representational regime of discourses on legality and subjectivity.

Foucault's method suggests that discourses are not created 'new' in the sense that they are ideas thought for the first time and spoken by independent subjects, but emerge in speech by virtue of specific epistemological and historical preconditions. The conjunction of discourses from the disciplines of women's studies (themselves crossing disciplines of philosophy, medicine, studies of language and cultural representations) and the 'literary' or 'authored' discourses of popular cultural texts promote shifts in the conceptual coherence of their terms.

The discursive preoccupation with origins, sameness and difference that nostalgic narratives display thus opens up what Butler calls "the unconscious of

power' to describe the mechanics of reversal. Insofar as nostalgic production is innately repetitive, it can and should be seen as a discursive production that is exceptionally vulnerable to transformation. Furthermore, as it repeats itself, and necessarily repeats itself differently each time, the nostalgic production also provides an important measure of social change. I'm not suggesting a causal relationship between generic productions and social life, in this instance, the generic productions of the revival production reflecting the historical specificity of the social environment within which they occur. Rather, this generic mode emerges from within a historical moment wherein history is at large and open to the exercise of politics. It is not outside of or distinct from a field of social relationships but is itself part of a social action, part of the functioning of political relations of power, and equally part of its contestation (Bennett, 1990). The measure of social change this kind of textual production enables involves the historical specificity of the discourses it engages, and the simultaneous production and reflection of the specific concerns of the text.

Writing on the emergence of the novelistic mode and of the genre of the novel itself, Stephen Heath has suggested that the peculiarities of mode or genre cannot be accounted for in terms of underlying social conditions (Heath, 1982). Instead, they form a part of a wider culture. So too does the nostalgic, 'revivalist' text emerge as a condition of postmodernity. The encounter between conflicting temporal forms and modes of identification that Julia Kristeva has suggested represent the central condition of postmodernity explains the discursive emphasis on symbolic relations that this revival mode engages effect. Thus, *the modern*

nostalgic template of the Oedipal narrative functions as the generic dominant and it is against this that the historical specificity of each of the genre's affected is measured. Genres do not emerge, Bennett suggests,

as a mediated reflection or refraction of society, nor as a distinctive semiotic production of ideology—as if society or ideology had clearly defined existences which could be described independently of the operations of the literary sphere—but as a distinctive sphere of social action that is centrally implicated in and imbricated with the constitution and functioning of political and ideological relations of power and its contestation (108).

And neither do modes of their functioning. Thus, genres and their historically specific manifestations enact the functioning of gender transformation.

In the introduction to this thesis I suggested that the widespread popularization of feminist rhetoric linked to the nostalgic discourse of a recently intensified discursive production of globalization elicited the genre transformations evident in the genre revival phenomenon. It did so forcing questions of identity to the fore of the popular cultural text. Insofar as the ironic component of the nostalgic mechanism keeps the fascination with sameness in check, the correspondence between the gender and genre relationship can be contradictory.

In this chapter I have been concerned with developing a broader historical context within which to view the relationship between postmodernity and genre and shown how the confrontation of two modes of temporality that Julia Kristeva claimed define contemporary social experience finds correspondence in the



notion of the revival text. The tensions between the historical premises of the modern concept of genre as a historically evolving formula, and a notion of genre derived from a pre-modern, mythic sensibility, of a symbolically consistent mode of representation, forces the question of the political efficacy of the different historical forms to the fore. In the linear, modern mode of time subjectivity emerges through a temporal process and is grounded by relations of difference, but in this grounding it is stubbornly linked to place—as position—in a one-to-one relationship. In this model of subjectivity identity is a function of a social relationship in which the relation terms are fixed to accommodate the dominant term. A disruption of this time-space relationship causes a destabilization of that subjectivity. In the repetitive and more 'spatial', monumental mode identity is not tied to place but to a notion of time conceived as infinite and ever-expanding. Symbolically consistent, it is unchanging and thus not a relational term. In postmodernity, the confrontation between the modern and premodern temporal forms works to reinforce the mechanisms of representation that distinguish each mode. In and of itself, the revival text is a political text. It raises questions of origins and identification. Left unchecked, the response to these questions threatens to reinforce a social field modeled on identitary thinking. On the other hand, it also has the potential to produce new subject positions in the social field. By repeating itself and repeating itself differently each time, the nostalgic production also provides an important measure of social change.

## Chapter Two

### **Deregulation and the Domestic Sphere: Representations of Female Criminality and Space in the Popular Culture of the 1990's**

#### *Telling Stories*

As the story goes, Aileen Wuornos, a 36 year old, transient, hitch-hiking, lesbian prostitute who "worked" the Florida highways to pay for her motel rooms and booze, shot "as many as ten" middle-aged men in north central Florida, between the months of July 1990 and January 1991, in a series of incidents which have contributed to her current label as "a female serial killer" (MacNamara 1991). In June 1991 she was arrested, charged with, and convicted of homicide in five of these killings. In all, she claimed self-defense. Found guilty at her first trial, she pleaded no contest to the subsequent charges but has since filed for an appeal for a mistrial and is now on a death row in a Florida prison, awaiting the decision. One of the principal grounds for her appeal is that evidence was not presented at the first trial that Richard Mallory, the first man she killed, had a history of violent sexual assaults on women. It was never known to Wuornos's public defender and not introduced by the prosecutor (Hart).

The following is an excerpt from Wuornos's testimony at her trial for killing Richard Mallory:

He started kissin' on me. He starts pushin' me down. And I said, wait a minute, you know, get cool. You don't have to get rough you know. Let's have fun....I said I would not [have sex with him]. He said, yes, you are,

bitch You're going to do everything I tell you. If you don't I'm going to kill you [and have sex with you] after you're dead, just like the other sluts. It doesn't matter, your body will still be warm. He tied my wrists to the steering wheel, and screwed me in the ass. Afterwards, he got a Visine bottle filled with rubbing alcohol out of the trunk. He said the Visine bottle was one of my surprises. He emptied it into my rectum. It really hurt bad because he tore me up a lot. He got dressed, got a radio, sat on the hood for what seemed like an hour. I was really pissed. I was yelling at him, and struggling to get my hands free. Eventually he untied me, put a stereo wire around my neck and tried to rape me again....Then I thought, well this dirty bastard deserves to die because of what he was trying to do to me. We struggled. I reached for my gun. I shot him. I scrambled to cover the shooting because I didn't think the police would believe I killed him in self-defense...I have to say it. I killed them all because they got violent with me and I decided to defend myself...I'm sure if after the fightin' they found I had a weapon, they would've shot me. So I just shot them..<sup>1</sup>

Lynda Hart ends her 1995 study of popular representations of lesbian sexuality with this excerpt from Wuornos's testimony. Explaining her decision to do so, Hart refers to Wuornos's concern that the police might not have believed her claims to self defense. "I repeat her words at length, here, hoping that

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<sup>1</sup> This portion of Wuornos's testimony appears in Phyllis Chesler, "Sex, Death and the Double Standard," On the Issues, Summer 1992, p. 31 and is reprinted in Hart, p. 135. Hart notes this part of the testimony was revised for publication. The revised portions involve Wuornos's re-presentation of Mallory's words. In effect, the censorship protects his words in her testimony (Hart 182, n1).

somehow they will fill the gaping black hole from which they emerge and ineluctably return"--to come to Wuornos's defense, if you will--by telling her story again "in a way that perhaps can be heard" (136). Insofar as this chapter is principally concerned with the relationship between symbolic and political representation, which is to say between the objects and subjects of representation, I want to begin with Wuornos's account of her own story. I don't believe anymore than Hart does that my representation of her words can save Aileen Wuornos. Nor do I offer this analysis of Wuornos's crimes and their representations as an alternative or supplement to the dominant narrative accounts of her case because I think I understand her crimes or motivations better or even because I support her actions. Rather, I am obliged to bare witness to her experience of the justice she met upon her arrest because I too sink "in and out of this incredible space," the symbolic field as a vacuum, the black hole of language and law within which women are positioned as absent, to which they have no symbolic rights or privileges and little actual protection within the secular institutions governed by its order and form.

This chapter is concerned with the relationship of symbolic and real social positions: How one reproduces and reflects the other. It considers the question begged of Wuornos's case in historical terms. What happens when a woman refuses to be a symptom of man? What happens when women reject their symbolic positioning? Why Wuornos now? It is certainly not the first case on record that collapses female criminality and female sexuality. It is, as we shall see, the lesbian and/or hyper-sexualized female figure who has long provided the

singular trope for representing female criminal behavior. Likewise, the criminal or deviant woman is the singular trope for the representation of female sexuality. Female sexuality and female criminality are tautological in this regard. This female representational complex has historical precedents in both legal and cultural representations and continuing semantic currency insofar as the expression of female sexuality and/or desire remains the limit-point of the symbolic field. (Hart 143)

The chapter aims to achieve a better understanding of how definitions of gender and sexuality are engaged in the representations of female criminality in popular culture and the law, and to what end. Towards *this* end, various media accounts of the case of Aileen Wuornos will be considered as a case study. The term 'representation' is used intentionally here. It is meant to refer to a signifying practice: the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping, an image of a criminal subject, as opposed to the reflection and/or transmission of a criminal subject, already given (Hall 1977, 64). The premise from which this chapter proceeds—and indeed from which the thesis itself departs—holds that criminality is not, in and of itself, a given set of actions and behaviors; rather, it is that which is defined at the juncture where the law interprets and/or "represents" historically determined cultural values and social sanctions.

Similarly, not all acts of violence are defined as criminal. They too are classified in relation to particular cultural and social determinants which contribute

to the evaluation of the context within which these acts are commissioned. As Charles Acland has suggested, while,

(t)here is a materiality to crime; violent acts occur, there are victims, and there are perpetrators.... there is no necessary link to the 'knowable' in the crime's explanation and resolution. Ultimately, it is worth remembering that justice is not wholly motivated by the crime but by the historically constituted category of the 'just' (Acland, 1995, 21).

Moreover, the rules with which criminality is determined submit to shifts in interpretation at particular social and historical junctures.<sup>2</sup> For example, the use of 'battered woman syndrome' as a mitigating factor in legal arguments supporting acquittal or reduced sentencing, in the trials of women who kill their batterers--regardless of any immediately precipitating threat--is a recent legal phenomenon. As such, the receptivity of the law to such claims, conceivably, can be related to the current social climate which has treated women's issues, in general, and domestic violence in particular, as pressing social concerns.

In fact, the Aileen Wuornos case tests the acceptable limits of the battered woman defense. The description of the "date" rape she suffered at the hands of her "john", a serial rapist, is horrifying. The emotional impact of Wuornos's description of the brutal torture she experienced rivals that inspired by any story I have read, heard or seen. Yet, the reasons Wuornos gives for her reticence to

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For a discussion of proposed legislation to consider battering as a mitigating factor in the sentencing process, see Victor Streib.

come forward seem to me even more frightening still. As commonplace as they are, her words are chilling, "I didn't think the police would believe I killed him in self-defense..." (qtd. in Hart 135). This case clearly marks a historical moment when public interest in and sympathy for women's social, legal and reproductive rights was displaced by the wide-spread representation of Wuornos's case as an instance of the independent woman's lawlessness. It brings to an end an unprecedented period of tolerance for feminist participation in public debate. Thus, along with the more feminist-positive representational regime which predominated before the Wuornos era, a feminist perspective in the media-aided public sphere of social debate was also displaced. The growing public awareness of such women's issues as domestic and sexual abuse, date rape and sexual harassment, hard won through two decades of various feminist legal and media campaigns, was rapidly unseated by the emergent conservative and sensationalist-styled backlash in the media that was exemplified by the reportage of Wuornos's case.

Three tangentially related suppositions underpin this discussion. First, if the dominance of women's issues in the popular cultural productions of the early nineties was any indication of the scope of feminist politics in contemporaneous social life, social relations between men and women should have exhibited tensions around issues related to women's social roles, and these tensions should be reflected in legal discourse. Secondly, "the law's" definitions of crime and criminality should be seen to emerge from a pool of representational terms which are similar to, and possibly shared by, other cultural phenomena. And

finally, given these hypotheses, popular culture's representation of women should both reflect, and contribute significantly to, the social definitions of criminality informed by women's changing social roles.

### *Gender and the Serial Crime*

Aileen Wuornos's story resonates in the popular imagination as meaningful, and, as such, has received a significant degree of attention in the press. Within weeks of her capture, two movies and three non-fiction books about her life were in the works. In the first few years after her arrest several television and film documentaries, and at least one made-for-tv movie were aired, and numerous newspaper accounts--both tabloid and not--kept Wuornos's story and the issues it raised, in the forefront of the news. As stated above, the media response to Aileen Wuornos's case can be seen to mark a turning point in the scope and quality of feminist discourse in public debate. Shifting the content of popular women's discourse away from discussions of women's social and sexual victimization towards the idea of women's aggression, Wuornos's case linked discourses on gender and sexuality to criminality, prostitution, homosexuality, rape and heterosexuality, the nuclear family and inter-generational deviancy.

This said, Wuornos's case's significance is not given in advance. As Charles Acland has stated, "events do not speak their 'newsworthiness'" (1992, 140). Rather, "with this culturally defined category stands an informal set of criteria informing what is to enter a position of popular scrutiny," and these criteria are no



more apparent than is the newsworthiness of any individual social event (Acland 1991, 140). Furthermore,

while the social function of the news is to provide knowledge of an event, this knowledge comes at a cost. As we enter into a position of knowledge, we also enter into a relation of and to power... [As we assume] the weight of the power to organize, to moralize, to valorize (about criminal events as reported), we enter under the weight of this power....a power that is enacted upon events and our understanding of events, hence it is enacted upon us (Acland, 1991, 140).

There are a number of factors which contributed to this crime spree's status as sensational, which, although they may seem obvious, are so only to the extent that these factors have been culturally evaluated as significant. It was not, in fact, the first case of female serial killing, as most of the media reports claimed. Women's serial criminality may be rarer than men's, but it is not unheard of: 12 to 15% of all murders are committed by women, and of that group of offenders, 17% are charged with serial crime. What is rare about Wuornos's crimes is their public nature. Women serial killer's do not ususally kill in public or kill strangers (Scrapec, 1993; Pearson, 1997). More so, at the time these events took place and were reported, Wuornos's bisexuality was a titillating factor, given the relative rarity of alternative sexualities in popular representation. Social prerogatives contribute to the cultural investment in framing events in particular ways. To the extent that human sexuality functions as a pivotal component in power relations--it is, in fact, a primary site of socialization--the newsworthiness of

Aileen Wuornos's crimes can be seen to have been decided, in large part, through her sexual and gender transgressions alone. Over the course of this chapter I will argue that Wuornos's crime spree inaugurated a discursive regime in popular culture of representations of femininity and feminism that demonized women's social and economic independence through hyperbolized representations of female criminality linked to equally exaggerated representations of the shifting boundaries of public and private space. The disarticulation of the concepts of gender and sex that representations of Wuornos's sexual orientation and violent actions enabled amplified the idea of a breakdown in the social bond that the serial crime has always signified. Her crime was not only a crime against sociality, but against signification; against the idea of causal relationships across the board.

Jon Stratton argues that because serial criminality has been "generically constructed" as a motiveless crime and therefore irrational, both the crime and its representation ("the two are inextricably linked") are related to the modern production of the social (77). More than the shared repertoire of values that define the Social Contract as a bond between 'free and equal men', the social is also a relation of difference produced through the technological apparatuses of the state: systems of security, census, public record, medicine, pedagogy, law. "In the surveillance order of the modern state everybody is under suspicion, everybody is a suspicious criminal," notes Stratton (88). Walter Benjamin said the same when he opined of life in the modern city: "No matter what trail the *flâneur* may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime" (qtd. in Stratton

77). Stratton goes further to suggest that “modern murder is situated at the apex of state/individual relations in the social” (81). Because the murderer appropriates the state’s sanctioned right of killing, unlawful killing or murder is among other things a rebellion against the state, which is to say the social component of the political economy (Stratton).

Surveillance is a rationalist mechanism that presumes a causal relation between things: on the most basic level, to see is to know and to know is to understand. Connections between objects and phenomena are presumed to exist in advance of their discovery, and then presumed to be self-evident if visible. Accordingly, the idea of a motive, or a link between crimes and their commissioners, organizes the understanding of social relations in modernity. “Motives,” Stratton claims, “expressed the discovery of individuation in the mass” (81). In this way, “criminality began to be understood in the context of the social, rather than as an effect of individual biology. The identification of the murderer was a consequence of the fundamental rational connectedness of the social” (Stratton 91). Incomprehensible, serial murder emerged initially as a motiveless crime. “What makes this criminal dangerous is that s/he—but, as we shall see, ideologically speaking he—threatens the social order established through the state” (Stratton 82). I will argue, however, that since the *female* sex is the unknowable one, it is *she*, ideologically speaking, whose unknowability threatens the social order and the state.

In his empirical history of serial killing Elliott Leyton looks for motive in the social class of the early serial killer. While no personal connection actually exists between the 19th century multiple murderer and his or her victims, Leyton argues that a social relation can be insinuated insofar as the bulk of these killers were 'middle-class functionaries', and their victims, their underclass.

If the prevailing 'need' of the era's economic formations was to discipline the lower orders into accepting the time-table of the machine and industrial employment, then this form of homicide can be usefully seen as a means by which these new members of a new middle class took the prevailing ethos to its logical conclusion. In killing the failures and the unruly renegades from the system, and doing so with such obvious pleasure, they acted as enforcers of the new moral order (276).

In Leyton's account, as with Stratton's, the gender profile of the serial killer is male. The generic construction of the crime as a crime against the social order defines the social relation as a public relation, as opposed to one that is also negotiated in private terms. In this sense, the social is reified in the process of being gendered and has the effect of excluding women from the social relation and the public sphere. Towards the end of the 19th century and early in the 20th century, upon the effective reification of the social through the twinned mechanisms of intensified globalization and mass mediation, the discursive experience of the social underwent a transformation. Similarly, so too did the generic construction of serial criminality transform: the classes of killer and victim become inverted. According to Stratton,

where the modern serial killer aided in the production of the social, the postmodern serial killer takes the social for granted and acts on it as a reification. This development is reinforced by two interconnected things. On the one hand the gradual breakdown of the moral consensus which underpinned the modern social and the corresponding normalization of the experience of anomie and, on the other, the shift towards the society of the spectacle (84).

In the postmodern, the serial killer functions less as an enforcer (and, equally as a producer) of social boundaries, and more as vengeance seeker whose crimes are symbolically enacted by the excommunicated against those who they perceive as their excommunicators. Often involving sexual violence or torture, this late modern or postmodern, mid-20th century, male serial killer projects his anger onto women who already *represent* an existent social bond from which he feels disenfranchised. Acting upon a "representation", the postmodern serial killer's violent crimes against women are interpreted as aesthetic rather than functional acts and thus form part of the simulated postmodern social relation.

Stratton maintains that postmodern serial murder is still male because "the modern state is still exclusively patriarchal" and because "the mythical origin of society... is thought of as being between men.... it is no wonder that the mythic modern serial killer who helped to produce the social, and the postmodern anomic serial killer who is a mediated transformation, a return of the repressed, of Hobbes's male killer in the State of Nature, are, indeed, both male" (85). But as we have seen, the war between men that constitutes the social bond, sacrifices

'Woman' in the process of social formation. The social contract is a fraternal contract because it separates public from private life and men from women. Thus, "woman" and the private sphere are the repressed of the social relation. Modern or postmodern, the serial killer is equated with the feminine position as s/he constitutes a threat to the public social bond. But if postmodern serial killing is said to be an aesthetic effect, rather than to act formatively as it did in modernity, all the more reason to see the female serial killer as the mark of a new social order. If 'Woman' is a sign of the social bond, the unleashed female subject position can only have a direct effect on signification. The 'Womans's' refusal to function as a symbol of man is also a refusal of representation.

While Aileen Wuornos's serial criminality was not original insofar as its sex/gender profile is concerned, it was enacted differently. Candy Scrapec distinguishes between men's and women's serial crimes at the level of *modus operandi*. While both male and female criminals act "out of a need for a sense of the self as actor; a need for power," women tend to kill people they know and do so closer at hand, usually in the home (Scrapec 244). Known as 'black widows' or 'angels of death', the female serial killer kills her family and dependents: her husband, lover, child or charge. Cases involving a sexual component are common, although more typically the motive is said to be money or attention. Wuornos, on the other hand, killed strangers with whom she 'just happened' to have had sex and, more to the point, she killed them in public, in self-defense. This difference, as Scrapec notes, represents the most significant recent change

in the profile of the female serial killer. Their numbers remain consistent, but their methods and situations are different.

Perhaps the most useful concept to understand these changes is that of the 'comfort zone'....While comfort zones are often physical spaces, they also include psychological environments. Criminals tend to behave in ways that at once maximize their sense of mastery and minimize any anxiety. They experience confidence and a sense of security when they operate in particular ways, under known conditions. This familiar arena or comfort zone may in large part account for the differences in *modus operandi* between men and women. Like men, women choose means that are accessible to them in terms of their familiarity and availability. It is more likely, for example, that a man will be exposed to and (in the USA at least) socialized in the use of weaponry during his life than it is for a woman; therefore a man will use a gun when he commits a crime, while a woman, who experiences guns as more foreign, is less likely to do so. None the less, in the United States, we are beginning to see cases of women who, like Aileen Wuornos, take up arms and commit serial or mass murder (Scrapec 258-259).

Joan Lyon has traced a history of the symbolic functioning of the unseated sign of "woman" alongside the role actual female historical figures played in the formation of the modern society. Lyon follows the "public political woman" from her early days as "firebrand" in the early moments of the French Revolution to her

late 20th century manifestation in the “nineties Riot Grrls or seventies Witches, troping...on the meticulous appearance of middle-class ladies while furtively burning “Votes for Women” into golf course greens with acid, or planting elaborate bombs in newly built mansions” (Lyons 9). From ‘firebrand’ to the ‘bread rioters’ at the end of revolution, from the 19th century British suffragist to Soviet post-revolutionary: for all, the street became a stage for political action and the public woman--both fact and symbol of the everyday--challenged the abstract realms of social fraternity.

Denied legal recourse by her sex, she challenges the hypocrisy of man-made law through her self-conscious embodiment of institutional failure: she is the contradiction that cannot be accounted for ideologically, the dissident mother (whether actual or virtual), the woman who can manipulate gender codes at will, temporarily suspending the ‘natural’ femininity that putatively consigns her to private-sphere management. She enacts a performative critique: her violent street actions reveal the poor fit between liberal theory and actual government practice, and like subsequent avant-gardists whose work gestures towards subject positions outside ideology, she evinces pointed public response (Lyon 12).

Nonetheless, the incomprehensibility of Wuornos’s crime spree was a central feature of its representation, and it may be this more than the individual criminal act, that has made the public response to this crime so pointed. Because she killed serially, her claims of self-defense have been challenged by the courts and in the press. And if, more generally, her motivation was represented as resulting



from an early experience of abuse and the high degree of dysfunctionality in Wuornos's childhood home life, Wuornos herself has vehemently rejected this rationale (MacNamarra; "Dateline").<sup>3</sup> Rather, she has shown no remorse for the killings and none for the fact that she placed herself in potentially dangerous situations over and over again: 'seeming to ask for it' as Jane Pauley framed the point when she interviewed Wuornos on an NBC, "Dateline" documentary.<sup>4</sup>

In this regard, public response to Wuornos's case bears some similarity to the response to serial killer Henry Lee Lucas, who, in 1984, claimed responsibility for an extraordinary pattern of serial criminality. As incomprehensible as Wuornos, Lucas maintains that he killed over three hundred women, setting a new record for multiple homicide. Jeffrey Pence's analysis of the film made about the Lucas's case provides some insight into the historical significance of Wuornos's serial crime spree as well.

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Wuornos protested this rationale both in court and on at least two occasions in media interviews: first when she appeared in a two-part, Dateline documentary ("Programmed to Kill" and "Confession of a Female Serial Killer"); both aired on NBC August 27, 1992; and later in Nick Broomfield's Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of A Serial Killer (1993). In the "Dateline" interview, Wuornos claimed that "I took my past and threw it in the river. I never dwelled on my past... I killed [those men] in self-defense".

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Wuornos's defense was perhaps not so much inexplicable as it was surprising for its use of current 'feminist' rhetoric on spousal abuse. In her confession to the police she claimed self-defense, as many as 53 times. When asked in her Dateline interview how she could make such a claim based on the fact she had killed as many as seven men, she replied in terms clearly drawn from popular feminist discourse:

*I was going out with hundreds, maybe thousands [of men]...I was raped and tormented and defending myself. It was justifiable homicide... I don't understand how nobody can understand how a prostitute can be raped, because when a man rapes a woman he assaults your whole body... I'm not out of control, those men are out of control. I'm sick and tired of those men out there thinking they can do whatever they damned well please with our bodies and think they can get away with it because its a male dominated society and we can treat you the way we want to, abuse you, treat you [badly] destroy [you], it don't matter cause we [sic] can get away with doing these things...*

In 1984, ex-convict Henry Lee Lucas confessed to torturing, maiming and killing over three hundred women in the course of an eight year killing spree. His serial killing went undetected until he was jailed on suspicion of murdering an elderly neighbor who had befriended him. Even after Lucas's capture his earlier crimes were only investigated after he passed a note to the deputy claiming "I have done something terrible, and I want to talk to the sheriff" (qtd. in Leyton 17). Lucas continually revised his claims, sometimes adding, sometimes subtracting from this number. He also taunted the police with the fact that his *modus operandi* was not consistent and therefore prohibited them from clearly establishing a criminal profile. While it was impossible to prove the exact number of his crimes, the police investigation uncovered evidence that supported his involvement in a large number of these cases.

Pence compares Lucas's serial murders to the serialization of popular cultural narratives and argues that the historical significance of the Lucas crime story relates to its dramatic serialization. Comparing serialization to narration as different forms of representation, he suggests that Lucas's crime narrative's inability to effect closure "also constitutes the agonistic relationship between narrative and serialization, a process which perpetuates (or serializes) their contestation while expressing its unresolvability" (Pence 528). Even more dramatically, the story encapsulated the inability of narrative to contain the threat of violence through explanation. "If narratives of motivation cannot retrospectively contain the threat of violence through explanation...confidence in

the future capacity of such discourses to narrativize or anticipate violent crises is also shattered" (Pence 528).

In this regard, the incomprehensibility of Wuornos's crime spree also reflects the contestation and unresolvability of the two modes of temporal organization which, as I have suggested previously, defines the present epoch as 'Women's Time'. Representative of the teleological aims of all modern Historical processes, (of nation states and nuclear families and, of course, of the narrative process itself), time in Modernity was conceived of as a linear and progressive movement. Having an originating moment, a middle-age, and most importantly, because everything else depends upon it, an end, it is, finally, the time of narrative itself. Temporal movement in postmodernity is more circular and repetitive. Like the serial productions of popular culture--the daytime soap operas, the seemingly endless TV re-runs of popular series from the 1960s and 1970s, the surge in historical theme parks, second hand clothes and even recycling campaigns--monumental or serial time returns over and over again, in a seemingly infinite process of resurrection. In postmodern representation there is no ultimate death, no final determinacy, and thus no fixed subjectivity. Rather, time is repetitive and mythic in its tendency to recall the same symbolic positions and situations over and over again. Wuornos's and Lucas's unmotivated, remorseless, repetitive crimes struggle to elicit a narrativization that, by necessity, remains elusive and thus "the contestation between narrative and serialization remains unresolved" (Pence 543).

### *Talboids, Talk Shows & Burning Beds*

The cultural investment in sexuality, its deviations and/or gender conflicts, is easily measured. Any weekly television guide's listings of made-for-tv movies, or daily talk-show programming provides such proof. At the time that the Wuornos case came to public light, rape and rape revenge, as thematics, had long been common currency in these productions; dramatically locating gender politics at the site of women's bodies themselves. The introduction of unrepentant female criminality into this formula was a relatively new phenomenon. Aileen Wuornos's story was timely. In part, its timeliness was determined by the same social prerogatives that dictated the cultural investment in the *fictional* narratives about female criminality in circulation during the same time span, that married representations of women's public and professional ambitions to crimes against the patriarchy.

The representations of women that have predominated in popular culture since the mid-eighties are of a remarkably different kind than were their predecessors of a decade before. In a little over ten years, since just before the end of the Cold War, upon the advent of mass civil rights and liberationist movements, and just after the global political swing to the right, the representation of "Woman" in popular culture has gone from the financially independent, sexually or ideologically liberated woman (Saturday Night Fever, (1977); Personal Best, (1982); An Unmarried Woman, (1978)), to the female outlaw (Terminator II, (1991); Romeo is Bleeding, (1993); The Last Seduction,

(1994)), and from the sympathetic-battered-wife-as-criminal (the made-for-tv-movie, The Burning Bed, (1984)) to the batterer-victim-as-serial-killing-prostitute (news accounts and the made-for-tv movie of Aileen Wuornos's case). Most strikingly, the new women of popular culture are usually armed and consequently quite dangerous, especially since they're generally portrayed as really, very angry. The women in Terminator II, (1991), Blue Steel, (1990), Silence of the Lambs, (1991), Thelma and Louise, (1991), V.I. Warshawski, (1991), Basic Instinct, (1992), Fatal Attraction, (1993), Disclosure, (1994), Romeo is Bleeding, (1993) and The Last Seduction, (1994), like their real-life counterparts Amy Fisher, Bambi Bamemek, Aileen Wuornos, Lorena Bobbitt, Tonya Harding and Wanda Hollowell, the Texas-Cheerleader-Murdering-Mom, are fearless, physically powerful, often intellectually superior and bent on revenge. They're mad as hell and they either won't or can't take it anymore, depending upon where you stand.

It is striking the extent to which the narrative and thematic parameters of Wuornos's story in its various manifestations resembled those of other, current pop cultural productions featuring female lawlessness. And more interesting still, on at least two occasions reports on the Wuornos story invoked this relationship by making implicit and explicit references to the contemporary fiction film Thelma and Louise. The header note for "Kiss and Kill," a September 1991 Vanity Fair article on Wuornos characterized the story that followed as "a dark version of Thelma and Louise" (MacNamarra 91). And, the made-for-tv movie of her story, Overkill: The Aileen Wuornos Story, opens with Aileen and (her lover), Tyria

careening around a curvy Florida back road in a scene that looks like it was stolen directly from the fiction film.

One might better call Thelma & Louise the liberal, middle-class precursor to the Wuornos story. Thelma, played by Geena Davis, and Louise, played by Susan Sarandon, despondent in stifling and disappointing heterosexual relationships, leave home on a weekend get-away. After killing a would-be rapist their plans to return home are thwarted and they spend the rest of the film running away, both from the law and from their restrictive gender roles. In the process, the women 'appropriate' men's roles and lifestyles and form an intimate bond that leans very close to a sexual relation. Correspondingly, and not insignificantly, the women's criminality escalates in correlation with their gender transgressions. That the scope of women's criminal actions is strictly limited and regulated by the same criteria that governs women's social behaviour is a point that Louise wryly makes while robbing a convenience store: "there's no such thing as justified armed robbery". More to the point, after murder, women's gender transgression is the apex of criminality—insofar as it threatens the social order. The narrative wraps up with the women cornered at the Grand Canyon. Rather than take their uneven chances by submitting to the law, they choose the canyon; the final frame of the film freezes the image of their car in suspension over this spacious void.

The social significance of Wuornos's crime is entirely dependent upon a contiguous relationship between real life and fiction. Like those other, aforementioned pop cultural productions, the Wuornos story and that of Thelma &

Louise are stories about the then current state of gender relations: the congruence arising between these two crime stories emphasized the common features of the narrative events of all of the others. In this case, both were stories about the normative definitions (and their limits) of female sexuality, articulated around the subjects of attempted rape, violent revenge and women on the run. In those instances when the synchronicity of these two stories were invoked, they were fixed in a relationship of ontological difference. However, in representation the difference between an account of a real life event and one of a fictional nature is not given in advance.

David Chaney has suggested that fictional entertainment "is a vicarious experience...which would not accept itself as a way of knowing but implies a contextual world which can be taken for granted" (Chaney 452). The implication of a "contextual world which can be taken for granted", although inverted in this instance--the fictional story of Thelma and Louise provides the context for the real-life story of Aileen Wuornos--is what harnesses the meaning of one story to the other. The strong accord between the two stories and the backhanded way in which the fictional world supports the plausibility of the "real" makes the meaning of their correspondence resonate as an instance of cultural negotiation. Both are objects of popular culture that carry meanings in similar and interdependent ways and as such these two texts occupy, not opposite but differently attenuated positions on a playing field negotiating cultural values. Their positions are articulated along the lines of feminist politics and the stakes of this contest are the acceptable limits of female rage. In this context it is not

inconsequential that despite the pathological aspects of Wuornos's serial criminal activity, feminist cultural production, in the form of critical theoretical response, film and video projects, photo-based installation works and even theatre, have championed Wuornos' cause.<sup>5</sup> The symbolic value of the multiple social transgressions that her story enacts is read through what has become common semantic currency in pop cultural legal scenarios: "the Thelma and Louise defense."

Kristen Lentz argues that the figure of the armed, vengeance seeking 'bad-girl' of this recent representational regime emerged through the symbolic space opened up by the "sex-war" debates within the feminist community during the seventies and early eighties.<sup>6</sup> Both discursive formations involve the appropriation of masculine cultural terrains (sexual representation, in the earlier instance, and guns and action scenarios, in the latter), and for both, the rhetorical fulcrum is constituted through the binary of pleasure/danger: the "sexual bad girls of the sex wars...serve as ancestors to the violent bad girls" (Lentz 375). Both offer alternative representations of women's social relationships and both provide

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Besides the aforementioned Broomfield documentary on the media's response to this crime (Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer, 1993), the American women's performance group "The Theory Girls" have produced and performed various works addressing the case (for a partial transcript of one such performance, see Critical Condition, ed. Amy Scholder; for documentation of an installation work, see, "Murder as Phenomena," Camerawork (Fall-Winter, 1992)).

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The kinds of revenge narratives that Lentz discusses in her essay, like those discussed in this thesis, share some of the features of the rape-revenge film where vengeance seeking women are armed and dangerous (The Accused (1988), or I Spit on Your Grave (a.k.a. Day of the Woman, (1977)). However, the differences in the films discussed here are significant. The protagonists of the bad-girl films take pleasure in being bad, vengeance is only one part of the narrative drive. See Carol Clover for an excellent discussion of the rape-revenge film.



symbolic images of agency and action that would seem to contradict the representation of women as victim, that an earlier generation of feminism took for granted. However, if as Lentz suggests "rebelliousness is the next of kin to revenge," the sense of agency produced by the rape revenge narrative is highly circumscribed (Lentz 396). This story is necessarily dependent upon a prior representation of woman-as-victim.

As Lentz points out, citing William Warner's work on gender in action cinema (1991), the narrative arrangements of violent spectacles are gender specific. The protagonist's dual function as both the subject and object of violence is part of the diacritical movement of the action genre. And, this performance is highly controlled insofar as its gender-particular modes of rationalization permit its spectacularization to be consumed with pleasure. For the male action hero, this two-part structure involves an initial masochistic submission to violence in order to justify the hero's own, subsequent violent actions. As Lentz points out, however, the male hero's suffering is always a temporary condition while the female action hero's is not. The internal, psychological complex of S/M that explains performances of male aggression does not easily account for women's historical relation to violence. As Lentz argues, "since 'masochism' suggests that one subjects oneself--however involuntarily--to pain (instead of being subjected to it by others), this term cannot account accurately for women's relationship to pain resulting from battery and rape" (Lentz 377). Typically, action narratives exploit women's ongoing, historical relationship to danger. According to Lentz, the attitudes assumed by the female protagonist of the revenge scenario limit the

transgressive potential of these texts. She cites V.I. Warshawski in the film of the same name and Sarah Conner of Terminator II as two significant exceptions to this rule. In the first instance the protagonist wisecracks her way through a series of violent attacks, shrugging off the pain as if it were merely a temporary imposition. Similarly, Sarah Conner's victimization at the end of Terminator (I) and her initial torturous institutionalization in T2 are clearly endured as temporary conditions.

It is thrilling to see a character, male or female, break into action against what the individual film defines as oppressive and unjust. But it can be doubly thrilling to see the woman act fearlessly, independently, even violently against that which oppresses her (or those she seeks to protect). The context of the cultural overdetermination of woman as the passive, masochistic silent (or shrieking), and powerless victim she has often been in the film, fiction, television and everywhere else her representations appear ...can intensify the 'liberation effect' of the 'sadistic' shower of bullets the protagonist may vengefully produce in the 'final cascade'. In other words, the oppressive conditions which women must endure as women offer a powerful narrative justification for the 'spectacular action' of their violence. These films thus capitalize two-fold on the transgression of a woman stepping into the perpetrator's shoes (Lentz 378).

On several occasions Aileen Wuornos has assumed the kind of 'nonchalance' attitude that Lentz claims more typically characterizes the male action hero. And, like those exceptions to the action-heroine-as-victim rule that Lentz notes, the

snideness of Wuornos's comments in several of her interviews betrays the radical difference she has made to the representation of women's victimization.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, unlike the singular occurrence of rape or violence which more typically founds the action of the women's revenge plot (and narrative itself), Wuornos's serial vengeance more reflects the seriality of action sequences of the male genre, thus effectively shifting the formal and discursive limits of women's popular culture.

*The Discreet Relations of Private and Public Life*

On the night NBC's Dateline aired "Programmed to Kill" and "Confessions of a Female Serial Killer," a two-part documentary on the Wuornos case, Hurricane Andrew was ravaging Florida's coast. In the transition from one news story to the next Jane Pauley, Dateline's female anchorperson, took the opportunity presented her by the natural disaster to underscore the story's meaning as news. "More on Hurricane Andrew later, but first a story of *unnatural* violence--the case and confession of a female serial killer."

It is both appropriate and ironic that Pauley should frame Wuornos's story within the confines of the binary of natural and unnatural acts. Appropriate because of the way in which it figures Wuornos' story against a ground traditionally gendered as feminine--that of nature--and female nature is what is

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During the "Dateline" interview, Wuornos responded to concerns about her lack of remorse saying: "I'll tell you another thing, I'm sick and tired of the families [of the victims]. I've got a message for those families. You owe me. Your husband raped me violently. You owe me. [I don't] owe you".

seen to be contested here. Pauley's comments are ironic, if unconsciously so, because the concept of something natural about sexual nature is what operates to sustain the notion of gender specific behavior in the first place.

As Michel Foucault has discerned in his historical investigation of sexuality, the concept of sexuality as a naturally derived set of desires, directed in a naturally derived way, which can only be categorized as natural or not, heterosexual or not, after the fact of their expression, is a relatively new phenomenon. Dating from the late 18th century and corresponding to the advancement of scientific, medical, legal and legislative methods for defining and controlling human subjects and their movement, what we know of the experience of sexuality, Foucault contends, is rather "the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors and social relations by a certain deployment deriving from a complex political technology" (Foucault, 1978, 127).

From this perspective, our experience of sex is the result of the meaning it has been given through the various discourses about women, children, procreation and deviance, which circulate through the social institutions of pedagogy, medicine, economics and demographics. The aims of this 'technology of sex' are to ensure the survival and hegemony of the bourgeoisie through the institutionalization of the family and family relations. What Foucault's theory lacks, but does not preclude, as Teresa de Lauretis has pointed out, is an understanding of the forms sexuality takes--its genders--and how these forms exist as the basis for the notion of family itself. Re-writing Foucault, de Lauretis claims that "gender is not something originally existent in human beings, but the

set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors and social relations," which, she goes on to argue, are reproduced through the institution of heterosexuality (de Lauretis, 1987, 3). Where, for Foucault, the institution of the family is the site at which the technology of sex is deployed, for de Lauretis the institution of heterosexuality is the site for the deployment of the technology of gender. Gender, then, supports the institution of heterosexuality upon which the institution of the family is based.

If these are the sites upon which bourgeois hegemony rests, then this is what Wuornos's crimes threaten to despoil. What Pauley has conceived of as unnatural about Wuornos's crimes is not that they were violent, but that their commissioner was female. The premise from which Pauley's conclusion derives is one which subscribes to what feminist social scientists have called the sex-gender system: a means of classifying human behavior and traits based on the government of an ostensibly pre-given sexual nature. In the sex-gender system female-gendered subjects are passive, nurturing, emotional, and dependent because of their sexual capacity to reproduce and the hormonal contingencies which follow from this function. Wuornos's identity as a bisexual prostitute sets her outside of this system; outside of the institutions of heterosexuality and the family where the sex-gender system is reproduced. And finally, it is against the discourse of the family and heterosexuality that the significance of Wuornos's criminality is primarily defined.

Hart's study of popular interpretations of lesbian sexuality traces the historical configuration of the 'invert' as part of the triadic construction of deviant femininity

in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that founded the sex-gender system (Hart 23). Defining the boundaries of proper Victorian femininity—piety, chastity and maternal devotion—the female ‘invert’ enters history at the same time as the female offender of early criminology and the ‘narcissist’ of psychoanalysis. The sexologist Havelock Ellis’s distinguishes the ‘invert’ from the ‘normal’ woman by “the fact that she makes advances to the woman to whom she is attracted and treats all men in a cool, indifferent manner” (qtd. in Hart 7). By similar methods of observation and even more intense calculation and measurement, the early criminologist Caesar Lombroso found that very little distinguishes the born female offender from the normal woman, only this same kind of masculine behavior: “the ‘born’ female offender is really not a woman” because in dress, manner and eroticism she behaves like a man (Hart 13). Finally, Freud’s narcissist reveals similar characteristics and tendencies as she seeks herself in her love-object: not the love of a man but a woman. These overlapping discourses render lesbianism, criminality and narcissism virtually indistinguishable and all, not incidentally, function to reinforce class lines and racial distinctions. Ellis’s research claimed that while female homosexuality did exist, it did so only under special circumstances and was only commonplace among the ‘lower races,’ the working class’, and the ‘criminally deviant’. Of Ellis’s research, Hart notes,

situational homosexuality was found to be particularly prevalent among working class women, whose close proximity to each other under stressful conditions inclined them to engage in homosexual acts... As an identity that was created ‘for women’ that was formulated on the principle of

excluding women of colour and working-class women, *the secret* of lesbianism as a mysterious or esoteric content was produced as a discursive effect, an act performed by the hierarchical structure of a dominant ideology that systematically maintains itself through secret(ing)-- setting apart, distinguishing, sifting. The distinction that was being made between heterosexuality and homosexuality was thus built on a prior division between white, middle-class women and other(ed) women: women of colour and working class women (Hart 4).

It was, in fact, the threat that the *secret* of this 'other' sexual orientation would spread into the middle-classes if it were defined in legal discourse, that posed a dilemma for British legislators in 1921. Lord Desart, the British director of public prosecutions, reasoned: "You are going to...bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamt of it. I think that is a very great mischief" (qtd. in Hart 1).

Aileen Wuornos was not only a lesbian serial-killing prostitute. She was also homeless and subsequently de-classified. That she only killed white, middle-aged, middle-class men is significant in this regard. The specific anxieties her actions inspired related to a perceived breakdown in the boundaries of class systems that are maintained through the gendered organization of public and private space.

It can be argued that real-life and fictional crime narratives featuring female criminality are more abundant in popular cultural productions at historical

moments characterized by shifts in social roles and relations. The figure of the deviant female or female criminal drawn in historically-specific garb and employ is held accountable for these changes; her removal or redress promises the restoration of social order. Not insignificantly, one reporter called Wuornos a 'highway femme fatale' (Hart 140). As Mary Ann Doane has shown, the *femme fatale* is a recurring "figure of a certain discursive unease" in modernity (Doane, 1991, 1). Signifying a "potential epistemological trauma...her most striking characteristic....is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be" (Doane, 1991, 1). Insofar as she emerged alongside urbanization, new technologies of production and reproduction, and psychoanalysis, the *femme fatale* functions as the sign of representational distress: in signification generally, but more specifically in the representation of the social relations of the late nineteenth century (Doane, 1991, 1). Much 19th century literary and pictorial enterprise adopted this figure, adapting her for different rhetorical purposes. Alternately associated with the styles of Decadence, Symbolism and Art Nouveau, she appears in Charles Baudelaire's and Theophile Gautier's writings, and the paintings of Gustave Moreau and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. However, it is her twentieth century manifestation, aligned with the Berlin-cabaret-decadence that prefigured Nazism, that informs the contemporary *femme fatale*: Marlene Dietrich's cabaret singer in The Blue Angel (1930), and the character Sally Bowles from Christopher Isherwood's novel, Good-bye Berlin (1939).



Linda Mizejewski argues that it is the character of Sally Bowles, in particular, who now reappears “to represent each decade’s version of a historical dilemma, a haunting of conscience in the years since World War Two” (5). It is through her that “we posit and signify our difference...our horror at and moral superiority to what we would like to think of as historical aberration and nightmare” (5). In each instance of her reappearance, “political disavowal is enacted as sexual repudiation, and a particular heroism is made available for the protagonist” (5).

Although iconographically consistent with the Bowles character, the scheming, excessively sexualized female protagonist of the 1940s film genres like *film noir* and the ‘woman’s picture’ provided a figure of accountability for another kind of crisis. In these instances the narrative sexual repudiation of the female figure marked a disavowal of another kind; one that is more economic than political. Since her appearance followed the post WW II reorganization of the American economy, this *femme fatale* hyperbolically represented the threat posed by economically independent woman working outside the home to the family as a stable social institution (Place, Polan).

Each historically particular characterization of the female deviant or criminal helps to define the shape of the arenas wherein social stability is conceived to be threatened and where it is conceived to be potentially restored. Considering the global recession, radically destabilized social field and hopelessly pathologized domestic arena of the late 1980s, the figure of female criminality in circulation in popular culture at that time was not merely drawn around threats to the family

institution as it orders social relations. More ambitiously, it was constructed to account for the dissolution of "the boundaries of subjectivity in so-called post-modern...life" (Jones, 1991, 297).

Amelia Jones has noted how the narrative lines and enunciative strategies of many of the films about female crime and criminality that appeared during the late 1980s and early 1990s were drawn along the same lines as the classic genres of *film noir* and the 1940's woman's film.<sup>8</sup> She argues that like these earlier genres, films such as Presumed Innocent (1991), Half-Moon Street (1986), Working Girl (1988), The Good Mother (1988), Baby Boom (1987), Die Hard (1987) and Pretty Woman (1990), narrativize "the rise and fall of career women in contemporary American life ... to punish these deviant women or reinscribe them in traditional family structures" (297). What distinguishes the new genres from the old is their articulation of feminist discourse. Jones contends that contrary to the original woman's film where women's independence was merely a threat, "it is the very escape of today's upper middle-class women in actuality from [the] familial and broader restraints that motivates the new woman's film's violent operations to close down her professional and sexual 'independence'" (299).

The specific plot summaries, characterizations and narrative resolutions that characterize what Jones has called a "new women's" genre differ in various ways

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Insofar as the family melodrama is "distinguished by the large space it open[s] to female protagonists, the domestic sphere and socially mandated 'feminine' concerns" it shares common ground with the woman's film (Gledhill 10). Thus, Christine Gledhill defines the woman's film, or woman's melodrama as a sub-set of melodrama tailored for female audiences (1). See also, Doane 1987.

from the larger pool of popular crime narratives discussed in this thesis.

Nonetheless, her genre definition offers a provisional demarcation of the 'revival' text, and in this particular instance perfectly describes the thematic orientation of the Wuornos story. Common to Jones's "new woman's genre" and my 'revival genre', are three distinct features which are linked together: the heightened sexual disposition of the female protagonists; a preoccupation with women in public life, and a motivation rationalized by a traumatizing formative experience in the home.

The structuration of these recent texts by what Jones, after Alice Jardine, has called "male paranoia," not only articulates a subtly attenuated difference between the agendas of the new genres and those old genres to which they refer, but differently inflected narrative needs. (Jones 297) While in each of these contemporary productions, the narratives of female crime and deviance are elaborated through a close scrutiny of the female character, they are equally, if not even more directly, concerned with the relationship between the site wherein the crimes are enacted and that within which their motivation is induced. It is not inconsequential that, without exception, the telling of the Wuornos story has been framed between a present "*ur*-public" exhibition of excessive sexuality and a past infused with domestic tragedy. What would seem to be resisted is not then, as before, the shifts in social and gender roles, so much as what these shifts reveal: the diminished capacity of the concept of home to articulate a private safe harbour separate from the threatening public sphere--with all the ideological unfastening that attends such a state.

Representations of private and public space predominate in both generations of these stories. These narratives' attempts at recontainment work around the boundaries of either space. The private and the public are constructed alternately as both fixed and unstable entities: their boundaries displaced only to be restaged again. The work of signification requires an appreciation of normative values, so when the persistent question "Why did she do it?" is raised, first and foremost, the early and recent home life of the accused is scrutinized for signs of psychic or physical abuse. Finally it is the rhetorical construction of the criminal rationale that distinguishes the new texts from the old. In the current, post-feminist regime, absent fathers, incapacitated and/or absent mothers, disappointing, if not abusive, marriages are acknowledged only if they can account for deviance as defined against a very different concept of the family and the home.

The narrative trajectories of both Aileen Wuornos's story and that of Thelma and Louise unravel along this same sequence of events. In Wuornos's case, an abandoning mother, perverse father, cruel grandfather, incestuous uncle and unwanted adolescent pregnancy determine Wuornos's transience, teenage prostitution, lesbianism and alcoholism and logically culminate in a killing spree (MacNamarra; "Dateline"). Similarly, in the film Thelma & Louise, the suggestion of abuse in Thelma's past provides the rationale for her criminality. My point here is not to deny the significance of very real, formative experiences of abuse in patternings of violent and criminal behavior, but to emphasize that as these narratives of domestic dysfunction are invoked to accommodate the construction of particular (in this case criminal) characterizations of gender, on a symbolic

level a chilling effect is achieved. As both the victim and the perpetrator of violence, the female subject in these popular fictions is denied recourse to the social order. She is left homeless, floating in a post-domestic void.

It is paradoxical that regardless of the particular virulence which characterizes much contemporary representation of the domestic sphere, the concept of 'the public' with all *its* attendant ferocity maintains its integrity defined against the notion of home as a safe and nurturing space. A binary, public and private are relational terms. Kristen Bumiller, writing on the representations of violence *against* women in legal culture, has suggested that "the most conspicuous aspect of the event [itself] in terms of its symbolic representation is not the portrayal of the victim or of the defendants but the emphasis on the setting of the crime" (Bumiller 99). The dichotomy of public/private is fully exploited in stories of female commissioned crimes combining violence with sex. Thus the crimes are only meaningful insofar as they define the boundaries of legal protection.

In the multiple versions of Aileen Wuornos's story, this dichotomy is wholeheartedly subscribed to, if only to be collapsed. Violence linked with sex becomes spectacularized in the public setting of the highway (which, with no attempt at irony, Jane Pauley, in her introduction to the Wuornos story, characterized alternately as "a tough and lonely world of truck-stops and truckers" and a benign cultural thoroughfare "carrying unsuspecting tourist families to Disney World"). On a number of levels, Wuornos's story effected a confusion between what is properly zoned public and what is clearly private space. On one

level, the setting of story was "discordant with the social concept of consensual (legal) sexuality as a private and intimate act" (Bumiller 99). On another level, and regrettably so, her story contradicted the more typical site and victim typology of sexual violence. Thus the Wuornos crime story emphasized the re-spatialization of public and private life that women's 'liberated' sexuality threatened to force. The compound effect of these conceptual contradictions was to call forth and create a tension around the question, not of private sexual relations, of female desire and its machinations, not "what do women want?", but questions revolving around the limits of women's social relation, "what can women have?" By what means? And, to what effect?

The symbolic weight of Wuornos's actions may resonate beyond what the popular narrative resolutions of her story can contain, but the representational subversion that her violent actions portend is highly circumscribed. For, despite Wuornos's story's current 'suspended' ending, from the moment Wuornos transgressed her socially defined gender boundaries she was left without a recognized social space. She was literally *and* symbolically, homeless. Life in motels, in truck-stops, on the highway: the romance of the male outlaw and the road movie does not translate gender with ease. As Janet Wolff has noted, travel is a gendered concept. (Wolff, 1993) Women's access to the social is conditional upon her ability and willingness to represent a stable entity, a subject position and a particularly inflected concept of space. Like the phallus, women do not 'have', in the sense that they own, but merely represent the notion of home. Wuornos's story makes this sexualization of the social contract crystal clear. In

representational terms, the impact on women, as social subjects, of the dissolution of defined boundaries is critical. The male paranoia structuring these narratives of female criminality has served a double blow. As both victim and perpetrator, without recourse to the social order, the female subject is left floating in space.

As Mark Wigley has astutely observed,

to ask the question [what role does private space play in defining public violence?] is not to investigate some form of domestic violence that precedes that of the public. It is not to point to some fundamental violence within the wall of the house that makes the violence that occurs outside them possible. Violence does not simply occur "in" a space, whether public or private; it is implicated in the very production and maintenance of the distinction between spaces. Such distinctions are no more than a certain effect of an ongoing violence, an effect which in turn makes other forms of violence within our culture possible (93).

Aileen Wuornos's actual murders aside, her crimes are meaningful for what they are given to represent of current shifts in social and economic conditions. Aside from the fact of her declared bisexuality, the gender inversion Wuornos enacted through her sexual independence and her violent claims to public life function as an illustration of the precariousness of the institutional alliance between gender, heterosexuality and the bourgeois family--of bourgeois hegemony, itself. Insofar as the Wuornos story traces the consequence of

women's refusal to be a representation of man, it gives literal voice to the narrative preoccupation of the revival text and the new women's genres. It also demonstrates the violent repercussions of women's symbolic resistance. Rejecting her place within the symbolic order, 'woman' loses access to a place within the material world. Such is the relationship between private and public violence.

### *Sentencing Patterns*

It is by now a commonplace that representational practices take their objects, not as reflections of the real but as tropes: figures or symbols that measure the excess, conflicts and shifts in the social field. Indeed, once a particular issue or event enters into any order of representation its identity is, of necessity, no longer fixed. As Rachel Bowlby has put it describing the influence of advertising on contemporary political representation, "individuals, like objects, are open to any and every kind of verbal or visual portrayal without there being any original nature which the picture might be said to represent" (Bowlby 8).

When one turns to the subject of women's crime, sexuality and criminality are collapsed in rather complex ways through the representational operations of popular culture. Marking 'the female essence' in advance as pathological, this representational tendency has *the effect* of holding 'the feminine' in a kind of limbo. Assuming no direct responsibility for her actions--neither as agent nor as innocent of her crime--the *figure* of the female criminal subject instead becomes



something of a social barometer, measuring the conflicts and changes of social life.

To return now to the question of effect--as problematic as the term can be--since the social field is made meaningful through various popular cultural engagements with the figure of the feminine, the relationship that actual women hold with that field is highly volatile and complex. As criminologist Frances Heidensohn has pointed out, when

offenses which have apparently nothing to do with sexuality are...committed by *actual* women [they are] transformed [by way of their representations in both popular and legal culture] into expressions of female sexuality or [its lack]...thus creat[ing] the compulsive, [and/or] menopausal woman shoplifter...or the pre-menstrual [and/or adolescent] violent woman...[and] an associated range of feminine stereotypes in which deviant behavior, sexuality and sickness are all enmeshed... [T]his group of images of deviance...tend to be built on 'scientific bases', chiefly of the medical kind, but they have long since slipped in to popular currency. " (Heidensohn 95).

Similarly when offenses which have apparently nothing to do with class, ethnicity or sexuality, are committed by *actual* women identified in these terms, they are discursively transformed into more complex expressions of sexuality and/or its absence, and sexuality and gender are deployed to other, more complex socio-political ends. Representations nonetheless have consequences for actual

women. The originary subject/object of representation may not occupy a place in its transformed state but representations do return to confront their originary subjects.

Whereas it might seem that the conflation of female sexuality with criminality should be an historically obsolete phenomenon, it is still pervasive in both popular and legal attitudes towards women's crimes. Not only do perceptions of women's sexuality and gender as fixed concepts defined by the operation of sexual difference, contribute to perceptions of crimes, but claims can be made that they underwrite the laws, legal decisions and sentencing procedures as well. Mary Jo Frug has thoroughly catalogued the means with which the law permits and sometimes mandates: the sexualization, terrorization, and maternalization of the female body, with rules that criminalize sexual conduct, inadequately protect women against physical abuse and provide social rewards for women who singularly assume childcare responsibilities. Furthermore, these rules operate to support essential female differences as they encode the female body with terms such as weak, sexy, or nurturing (Frug 1049-1052).

Citing two studies on sentencing patterns across and within gender categories, Meda Chesney-Lind has concluded that married female defendants receive preferential treatment over those who are single, non-monogamous, mentally unstable, or with a past history of drug abuse; and that the degree of severity of the offence committed by either group had little, if any, adverse effects on this class-gender paradigm (Chesney-Lind 91).

The collapse of violence and sexuality in figures of the female as criminal can be explained in terms of the pervasiveness of sex-gender system bias' which operate in both the representational practices of popular culture and the law. As Chesney-Lind has commented: "we often ...overlook the important role of the concept of criminals as 'outsiders' in the maintenance of the existing social order" (78). While women's rightful place has been defined as within the home, this location, by definition, places her 'outside' the sphere of public relations. She is outlawed from the public sphere.

Clearly, harsh public punishment of a few "fallen" women as witches and whores has always been integral to enforcement of the boundaries of the "good" woman's place in patriarchal society...(O)ne of the most popular beliefs, concerning women's crime, is that it has vastly increased as a direct consequence of the women's movement (Chesney-Lind 78f).

The language Wuornos used in her defense clearly drew from feminist representations of female social and economic victimization that were in circulation in social discourse at that time, but the case also advanced feminist dialogue on the relationship between gender and public/private relations. If the proliferation of images of female criminality circulating in the popular culture of the early 1990's reflected a boundary dispute where the lines of the feminist debate over women's social, legal and economic rights were drawn clearly as matters which also distinguish the concepts of public and private space, the Wuornos case inaugurated a representational regime specifically preoccupied with the role

that the conceptual coherence of gender plays in the maintenance of the public/private division. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the discursive emphases of those women's crime stories that followed the Wuornos case privileged the denaturalization/deconstruction of gender, discursively linking an instability within the sex-gender relations with the instability in financial systems subsequent to the recent re-configuration of international economic relations. While the question of identity construction had long been a central preoccupation within academic and more strictly feminist discursive contexts it had not been as explicitly or substantially addressed in a popular cultural context. As we have seen in the Wuornos case, this conceit has the twofold consequence of rendering social relations in political terms, and justifying women's exclusion from public life as her independence threatens its 'natural' order.

## Chapter Three

### Revisiting the Scene of the Crime: Hard-boiled Femininity, Space and Identity

Stories...carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places. They also organize the play of changing relationships between places and spaces. The forms of this play are numberless, fanning out in a spectrum reaching from the putting in place of an immobile and stone-like order (in it, nothing moves except discourse itself, which, like a camera panning over a scene, moves over the whole panorama), to the accelerated succession of actions that multiply spaces (as in the detective novel or certain folktales, though this spatializing frenzy nevertheless remains circumscribed by the textual place) (de Certeau 119).

The aim of this chapter is to map the arrangement of discourses specific to the detective genre as it is engaged by female hard-boiled detective fiction in its representation of space. It considers how these representations determine and are determined by the status of the subject in the socio-symbolic field. Premised on the notion that the public, and in particular the urban public space inhabited by the male hard-boiled detective, is characterized as alien to or "other" than himself--in some fundamental way, feminine--this chapter will examine the ways in which the female hard-boiled detective moves through this alien/familiar terrain in the negotiation of her own social relations, and relatedly in the negotiation of alternative conceptions of space and spatial relations that heretofore have been founded on gendered terms.

### *The City of Detective Fiction*

The city of classic hard-boiled detective fiction is at best a highly ambiguous place: "a surface of specious and ambiguous glamour hiding depths of corruption," as John Cawelti has so very precisely described it (156). Indeed, if this city is shaped by the languorous laced steelwork of its ports and bridges, breathtaking skylines and dazzling nightlight, it is only given texture by a populus more picturesque than sublime: by the pick-pockets and grifters, wicked women and drunks that line its streets. Thus, as Raymond Chandler has suggested, it's a place where "no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing" (Chandler, 1944, 236). But if this is true, it is true only so far as this lawlessness constitutes a test. A special breed of men can and do move through these streets who have what it takes to conquer them. The world of classic hard-boiled detective fiction is, finally, only a "real man's" world, and if its survivors are tough enough it is because--all claims to a moral superiority and steely self-sacrifice aside--it is always, and inevitably, set in a space that stands as a symbol of 'Woman'.

The classic hard-boiled city is most typically imagined as the post-industrial, debased heir to that feminized topos, Mother Earth. "Instead of the fertile valley [the detective] finds the cultural cesspool, containing the dregs of a neon-and-plastic civilization," as George Grella has noted of the hard-boiled world (112-113). More significant, however, is the nature of the relationship that the hard-boiled detective forms with the city. As a relational term, which in other, identificatory instances the category of 'Woman' fulfils, the hard-boiled city stands

as an 'Other' to the hard-boiled detective. As the female social subject is "called Woman and defamed" so as to "secure [the male subject's] own self-knowledge and truth", so too is the city to the detective in hard-boiled detective fiction (Rose 50).

When Lacan claimed that "the Woman does not exist" his purpose was to denaturalize the category of Woman. No body actually lives in this position. Rather the category is "a falsification that provides a guarantor of fantasy" (Rose 48). The city of hard-boiled detective fiction is likewise vacant. No one actually lives in this world. While it may be frequented by a lawless class, this population is largely transient, merely passing through on its way to jail or some similar kind of real or imagined hell. A trope of economic despair and futility, "the imagination of disaster" that pervades the city of hard-boiled fiction was "Depression-bred" according to David Reid and Jayne L. Walker (57). Hence, Reid and Walker argue against the conventional sociological readings of *film noir* and hard-boiled detective fiction that claim the world depicted in these narratives represents the actual social conditions in America after the second world war. Moreover, they suggest that as a literary conceit, the city represented in hard-boiled detective fiction goes back to the previous century. The *roman noir* city of the late 1920's and 1930's marked "something very much like a return of the repressed" insofar as its characteristic representation of widespread social violence and disorder resembled the same kind of urban milieu depicted in the 'city-mysteries' genre of a century before (Reid and Walker 66). In both genres the repressed anxieties

over changing economic and social arrangements return in the form of a debased and sexualized urban environment. Peter Brooks has also traced the genealogy of the *noir* city to nineteenth century literature, in this instance to Balzac's literary critique of massification and urban life. Brooks writes that this fictional world was subsumed by an underlying manicheism and the narrative creates the excitement of its drama by putting us in touch with the conflict of good and evil played out through the surface of things--just as description of the surfaces of the modern metropolis pierces through to a mythological realm where the imagination can find a habitat for its play with large moral entities (Brooks 1972, 199, qtd. in Reid and Walker 68).

*Roman noir*, like the city-mysteries of a century before, are prelapsarian myths. In this regard, Cawelti's claims about the gendered representation of the city are significant: "[the] danger and betrayal [that] emanate from [the hard-boiled city]... are most often manifested in an ambiguously attractive and dangerous woman" (Cawelti 156). Stephen Neale has claimed that the narrative preoccupations of the detective story, "dramatize the tensions inherent in the signifying process through the mobilization of a series of discourses concerned with the Law, the symbolic and with knowledge" (Neale 26). As such, these discourses are mobilized in relation to specific narrative arrangements. It is against the ambiguity of the city that the detective discovers truth, and against the unknowability of Woman, as female character and feminine sign, that the detective defines himself as whole. At some fundamental level the primary



operations of this genre are divided between those relating to the reconstruction of a crime through the syntax of gender, and those relating to the story's similarly filtered interrogations of space in both signification and social relations.

This said, the overdetermination of fixed gender roles and gender-specific arrangements does not guarantee the stability of these terms. On the contrary. It invites speculation on their actual effectivity in signification. Indeed, as Dana Polan has argued,

to a large degree, forties narrative is nothing so much as a vast meditation on place and space, on the field in which action and meaning are constituted...[W]hat the representation of space here provides is not the stability of a symbolic system where everything has its fixed value but rather an instability where each space can have multiple functions...(Polan 252).

Rather gender-specific concepts of public and private space hold meaning as terms that attempt to produce a sense of stability rather than things that are in and of themselves stable entities. "Home" for example "works vigorously to close out the world of ambivalent interactions, of ambivalent meanings" (Polan 252). Gender and concepts of domesticity are fused so that if, as Polan argues, *film noir's* narrative themes emerge during a housing crisis in America, the infamous *femme fatale* hyperbolizes anxieties over social accomodation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dana Polan argues that during the course of the second world war, there was a serious lack of available property and no rent control. After the war, the housing problems continue, with the solution that the suburbs promised short lived. Criticism of the suburbs as overly rationalized follows quickly on the heels of the pre-fab phenomenon. See Polan, 251-308.

More commonly, scholars of this period in popular culture maintain that social organization during and after World War II had changed dramatically to alter social and symbolic relations.<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Harvey's interpretation along these lines provides the standard historical explanation.

(t)he appearance of the early film noir coincides with the rise and fall of nationalistic ideologies generated by the period of total war... the ideology of national unity which was characteristic of the war period, and which tended to gloss over and conceal class divisions, began to falter and decay, to lose its credibility, once the war was over. The encounter with a peace time economy, with its threat of high prices and rising unemployment, began a process of general disillusionment for many of those returning home after the war, in search of those values which they had fought to defend. It is this breakdown, also, this erosion of expectations that finds its way into the *film noir* by a series of complex transmutations (26).

Coincident with the intensification of the globalization of capital since the late seventies and early eighties, the emergent sub-genre of "female" hard-boiled detective fiction addresses similar issues of identity and economic stability. But in this instance the rhetorical emphasis is not focused on the stability of spatial

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In addition to Polan's historical analysis, see Janey Place and Sylvia Harvey. Frank Krutnik provides a Freudian argument along these same lines that contends that the discursive orientation of the film noir text was aimed at restoring a 'phallic order, threatened by women's increased employment during the war. For an opposing view, see Reid and Walker who argue the economic and social reorganization of the post-war years was negligible compared to that of the thirties and that it is the depression years that this film universe better describes.

designations insofar as they guarantee symbolic placements, as in forties narrative (Polan). Rather, female hard-boiled detective fiction novels address the gender specificity of spatial definition. More than a simple inversion of the gender attributes and identities of the detective and the criminals who marshal the conflicts and resolutions of these texts, female hard-boiled detective fiction is a contest over the conceptualization of the role that gender plays in signification and the status of the feminine in popular discourses related to the law and the symbolic field—especially as they emerge in relation to the conceptualization of space.

Since 1977, when Marcia Muller introduced her street-wise private “eye”, to readers of American detective fiction, a remarkable range of detective types have emerged within the genre. Many of the characteristic features of the classic mode of hard-boiled fiction remain consistent in the various treatments of these new hard-boiled detective stories—things such as a pared down writing style, attention to the “exhaustive details of...bathing, dressing and interest in food,” (Lawrence qtd. in Reddy 94), and most importantly for my purposes here, settings exclusive to public, and specifically urban milieus. However the substantial differences in class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race and, above all else, gender, that arise to distinguish these new investigators, allow a range of social relations that rest on and are productive of space and spatial determinants to emerge and be expressed.<sup>3</sup> Departing in significant ways from the formula set

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The Crossing Press published M.F. Beal’s single lesbian feminist crime novel Angel Dance, featuring Kat Guerrero, a Chicana, lesbian hard-boiled private eye in 1977, as well. P.D. James

by Muller, Sara Schulman created Jewish, lesbian, feminist writer/detective Sophie Horowitz and Katherine V. Forrest wrote the lesbian police officer, Kate Delafield, both in 1984. In the same year, in England, Gillian Slovo invented serial detective, Kate Baeier, a Jewish freelance journalist/part-time detective and Portuguese immigrant to London. Val McDermid presented lesbian journalist/sleuth Lindsay Gorden in Britain in 1987. Clearly informed by the discourses of identity politics, variations on the theme have proven endless.<sup>4</sup>

My analysis of this feminist genre focuses on series written by Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky, both of whose novels, like those of Muller, represent the genre in its initial manifestation. My interest in these series, however, is not specifically concerned with their originary status. Rather, the issues that these two authors address corresponds to the issues raised by the media representation of Aileen Wuornos's crime: issues that take up the question of gender identity relating changes in concepts of gender and women's social roles to historically specific changes in women's material situation. Written in the late 1980's and early 1990's, from a feminist perspective, for a feminist-identified audience, the detective novels discussed in this chapter situate the Wuornos case in relation to shifts in feminist discourse during the same time frame.

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published An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, introducing female agency detective Cordelia Gray, in 1972. However the roots of this female character are found more in Agatha Christie's Miss Marple character, than Raymond Chandler's Phillip Marlow, or Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade.

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My favorites, for different reasons, include Evelyn E. Smith's impoverished, blue-blooded American heiress, senior citizen, artist and "occasional assassin" Susan Melville; Trella Crespi's Italian advertising executive, part-time crime investigator and culinary genius, Simona Griffo; and Barbara Neely's African-American servant-cum-detective, Blanche White. The various, multiple occupations of these detective fiction heroes is typical of the genre in late, global capitalism.

Referring to what he has termed "[the] Technicolour *film noir* renaissance," (films like Public Eye, The Two Jakes, and Barton Fink), Dean MacCannell has made the important observation that this revival has "occur[ed] as the interior space of classic (1945-55) *film noir* is being excised from the American city" (MacCannell 281). "One of the nonreversible changes Reagan and Bush visited on America was the removal of the kind of urban domestic space once inhabited by the poorest of the working poor" (MacCannell 281). Not coincidentally, female detective fiction emerged at the same time. The films considered by MacCannell to constitute this *film noir* renaissance "stym[y] understanding" of the current political climate and its consequences for the people who live in the spaces described in its texts. In contrast, the conscious political objective of Grafton's and Paretsky's female detective fiction, and perhaps a key to what its popularity may express of related contemporary social anxieties, is to provide a fiction-based analysis of the relationship between these new social, political and fiscal economies.

People actually live in the city described in Grafton's and Paretsky's female hard-boiled detective fiction. The city described is a city which is not made sensible through any nostalgic appeal or fantasy relation. Rather, the sentiment that persists as a determining feature in these series takes the form of grief evolving into anger over the loss of relations grounded in the "Real": loss of things like homes, communities and social place.

As Henri Lefebvre has claimed, space is a social relation "inherent in the relation of property and linked to the productive forces that fashion this end" (Lefebvre 286). Space is permeated, supported, produced by and producing of social relations. Mapped in accord with social positions, the movement through the public and private space that these new detectives trace marks the urban and sub-urban space according to social-status-specific relational rules. For the female detectives of this new genre phenomenon, what is at stake in this traversal is the solution to a crucial and pressing enigma: if, as has been insisted of late, the current symbolic field is radically unstable, what is the current relationship between Woman--both as subject position and as a correlate sign of the spatial determination of 'home'--and the increasing disappearance of the concrete material effects which are framed by the concept of Woman and by which this concept is framed: matters like homes, communities and viable positions within the social field?

*Boundaries & Divisions: Territories of the Feminine*

Henry Bambord Parkes observed that the detectives who move through the hard-boiled worlds created by pop fiction writers such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett--Phillip Marlowe, Sam Spade--are "actually...avatar[s] of that prototypical American hero, Natty Bumppo, also called Leatherstocking, Hawkeye, Deer Slayer, and Pathfinder" (qtd. in Grella 106). Parkes remarked that the protagonists of both the American frontier adventure story and the hard-boiled detective story share common features: a high level of intelligence (of a

determinedly anti-intellectual type) combined with "an innate sense of justice and freedom from all social or family ties except those of loyalty to male comrades; and above all a claustrophobic compulsion to escape from civilization" (qtd. in Grella 106). But where the frontiersman of the adventure story could escape to the untamed, untrammelled wilderness of the American west to ensure his moral, ethical and spiritual well-being, "the detective novel concerns itself with what happens to the national hero once...he runs out of 'territory'" (Grella 112). Unlike his predecessors, the hard-boiled detective's westward journey ends not at "the Edenic land of his dreams, the Great Good Place of the American imagination, but the Great Bad Place... 'California, the department store state', a green and gold land raped of its fecundity and beauty" (Grella 112).

Nina Baym has noted that the idea that "as something artificial and secondary to human nature, society exerts an unmitigatedly destructive pressure on individuality..." is central to the myth of individuality that these fictions promote (Baym 71). Although not particular to American popular literature, this concept is central in importance to American popular literary traditions.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore,

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It is this aspect of the American popular literary tradition that marks the single most dramatic departure by hard-boiled detective fiction from the European, specifically British, detective story. Whereas the detective fiction trajectory of Arthur Conan Doyle through Dorothy Sayers and Agatha Christie to P.D. James focuses its narrative objectives on the restoration of social order (as predicated on class arrangements), over and above the spiritual safe-guarding of its individual subjects, in the American mode questions of "the self" and its fundamental nature take priority over questions related to the maintenance of class-based social organization. American and British mystery fiction traditions differ in this regard. The British detective, behaves in the manner of a private citizen who brings the criminal to justice in order to preserve the natural rights of passage within the social order of things. In this sense, the rules of law and of the social are congruent in the British genre. In the American hard-boiled tradition the social and legal orders are only reconciled through the figure of the private-eye-cum-'dick'-for-hire whose semi-official status exemplifies American individualism. (Watson, Stratton).

"given the original reality of large tracts of wilderness, the idea seems less a fantasy, more possible in reality or at least more believable in literary treatment" (Baym 71). Even while nature and civilization are opposed (nature is nurturing and society threatening), the similar relationship between the "individual" subject and the environments of either American frontier or detective fiction puts these two different relationships on common ground. By turns positive and negative, both imagine a pre-existent space that can somehow satisfy all desire. Both relationships are built upon a fantasy of power, a sense of deserving and an insistence on having it all. <sup>6</sup>

Juri Lotman has discussed the elementary sequence of myth in terms that suggest the gendered concept of narrative structure itself. In his structuralist account, narrative is a simple chain of two functions that repeat themselves: "entry into a closed space, and emergence from it" which can be interpreted in the first instance as : "a cave', 'the grave', 'a house', 'woman' ( and correspondingly be allotted the features of darkness, warmth, dampness); entry into it *is interpreted* on various levels as 'death, 'conception', 'return home' and so on; moreover all these acts *are thought of as mutually identical*" (Lotman qtd. in de Lauretis, 1984, 118, emphasis in de Lauretis). Teresa de Lauretis argues that, "in this mythical-textual mechanics, then, the hero must be male, regardless

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6

While the scope of this chapter prohibits the development of this idea, a compelling argument could be made to read 'the American Myth' for what it expresses of New World/Motherland separation anxieties.



of the gender of the text-image, because the obstacle, whatever its personification, is morphologically female and indeed simply, the womb" (de Lauretis, 1984, 119). Home, nature, Edenic plenitude, that which is full, complete, bounded and/or static, if not juxtaposed against the body of the feminine, is itself represented under the sign of 'Woman'. Exemplary of capital 'W' -- Woman, the environment/setting/space of narrative action in both frontier and detective fiction is likewise drawn to epitomize the feminine as ground. Debased in the form of the social, pure in the form of nature, the relationship that the frontiersman holds to his environment and that which the detective holds to his city are both equally determined by an overvaluation of the maternal figure. Whether utopic or dystopic narratives result, these stories are always staunchly conservative, harkening back, invoking memories or imagining a time when the world was experienced as whole, and safe in that regard.

Film critics Tania Modleski, Dana Polan and Kaja Silverman have observed that much of Western narrative tradition represents similar stories of resistance to 'civilization'. Against Raymond Bellour, who argued that the happy ending of American cinematic narrative is happy because it ends in the hero's successful Oedipal transition, Modleski contends that these films are more obviously about the hero's "failure to remain at the pre-Oedipal stage of development" (1982, 74). She argues that the emotional tenor of the narrative encounters of these texts derives from the hero's fear of cultural subjection where this submission involves

the hero's embracing of his socio-sexual position and the recognition and repudiation of the female subject, as a sexual being.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Silverman concludes that: "the present social order in the West legislates not against Oedipal desires, but against the impulses not to be Oedipalized--[an] impulse. . .virtually synonymous with a refusal to be culturally subjected" (qtd. in Modleski, 1982, 74). Likewise we find the progression of the detective story arrested and redirected at those moments in the narrative when the protagonist is confronted with the demands of such socio-cultural processes. In this regard, the setting and female characters of the detective story are interchangeable. The city and the "Woman" both pose cultural consequences. And, as I argue in Chapter Four, in relation to the similar narrative trajectories of the classic *film noir* text, the feminine symbolic position is subsequently hyperbolized in those genres primarily concerned with the conjunction of secular and symbolic law: detective fiction and melodrama in particular.

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7

The pre-oedipal is both an unconscious, retroactive psycho-sexual structure in which an attachment to the maternal figure and its representative objects predominates, and an interval in psycho-sexual development that coincides with the imaginary stage preceding the Oedipal complex. In its unconscious, retroactive mode, the pre-oedipal functions as a form of fantasy identification that works to maintain and reinforce the cultural identifications enacted at the symbolic stage. (See the thesis "Introduction", p. 10 n. 4, and Whitford 345, for fuller description of the pre-oedipal as an unconscious psycho-sexual structure). In the developmental phase, the "pre-oedipal, phallic or archaic mother...[centres] the child's fantasy of an omnipotent and absolutely powerful, sexually neutral figure...a fantasy of the mother who is able to grant the child everything, to be its object of desire, and in turn, to be the subject who desires the child as her object" (Grosz 314). Both primary and retroactive modes of pre-oedipal identification are, however, highly ambivalent and this ambivalence is principally directed at the maternal figure who is by turns, a champion and devourer. Significantly, ambivalence also characterizes the treatment of female characters in the current revival phenomenon. Reconsidering the functioning of the feminine sign in the processes of social and cultural representation, the "Woman" in these texts is still, by turns, a champion and a devourer. In this instance however, the female figure challenges patriarchal authority in a contest over the gender of the primary signifier.

Freud relates the anxiety towards cultural subjection to a twinned set of pervasive cultural tendencies: the overvaluation of the maternal figure and the debasement of the sexual female subject. Writing on the "Universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of love," Freud argued,

we cannot escape the conclusion that the behavior in love of men in the civilized world today bears the stamp altogether of psychical impotence. There are only a very few educated people in whom the two currents of affection and sensuality have become properly fused; the man almost always feels his respect for the woman acting as a restriction on his sexual activity, and only develops full potency when he is with a debased sexual object; and this in its turn is partly caused by the entrance of perverse components into his sexual aims, which he does not dare to do. This is the source of his need for a debased sexual object, a woman who is ethically inferior, to whom he need attribute no aesthetic scruples, who does not know him in his other social relations and cannot judge him in them. It is to such a woman that he prefers to devote his sexual potency, even when the *whole of his affection belongs to a woman of a higher kind*...It sounds not only disagreeable but also paradoxical, yet it must nevertheless be said that anyone who is to be really free and happy in love must have surmounted his respect for women and have come to terms with the idea of incest with his mother or sister (Freud, 258, my emphasis).

Tania Modleski has noted the contradictions between this statement and the interdiction against incest which forms the basis of Freud's Oedipal complex, appreciating the important implications for feminist criticism of this contradiction:

...if it can be shown that popular [narratives] *themselves* work to displace the primacy of symbolic castration...we can begin to locate the oppression of women elsewhere than in the castration complex (specifically here, locating it in the early mother/child relation), then the burden is placed on history and social formations, which are susceptible to change, rather than on biology (Modleski, 1982, 74).

Women's inferior social status is not derived from their sexual difference but from their social identification as maternal figures: their place within the home and family works to subordinate them, not the other way around. It is not their sexual-cum-animalistic natures that determine their place outside of public life but their maternal function, and both the frontier story and the classic hard-boiled detective story can be seen to reveal the same type of displacement in relation to this phenomenon. These are not stories about the desire to assume the place of the father, rather they lament the loss of maternal plenitude and they do so by debasing the sexual female figure and the public sphere of political and economic relations.

Thus, in classic detective fiction, we find the female figures not only dramatically contrasted, but left behind. A good woman/wife/mother opposite is juxtaposed against the sexualized *femme fatale*, only insofar they both function

symbolically to describe that moment in the male child's Oedipal process when the maternal figure becomes sexualized and repudiated. The emotional force of these fictions is not determined by the promise of Oedipal resolution, but a moment of hyperbolized resistance to the Oedipal stage. These resistances are usually successful. At the end of the story, we have Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe walking away alone.

Modleski has suggested that this narrative phenomenon goes a long way to shift the terms of women's oppression away from a justification based on fundamental sex differences and towards a rationale based upon social conventions. However, this impulse is still problematic because it is based upon a logic of identity. Iris Marion Young has observed that this logic of identity underpins the concept of community as well as that of individuality. The hero of the frontier or detective fiction may stand outside of the social--"the particular as accidental lying outside the essence"--but the urge to unity is no less determinant here, it merely functions in reverse (Young 307). "Like most...oppositions [that between] individualism and community have a common logic underlying their polarity, which makes it possible for them to define each other negatively" (Young 307). The concept of individuality subscribes to and depends upon the notion of sexual difference to the extent that such difference divides the subject from the 'other' in the world. In this regard, it is not inconsequential that the essence of an "encroaching, constricting, destroying society is represented with particular urgency in the figure of one or more women" (Baym 73). If nature is conceived as "simultaneously...a virginal ground and a nonthreatening mother," then the

social, which is all that we accept on becoming cultural subjects, as well as the process by which we separate from the mother, necessarily stands as oppositional, as "temptress, antagonist [and] obstacle" (Baym 72-73). The frontiersman's and the detective's rejection of society is founded on a strict division between what is perceived as full and complete through its maternal status and all that, by impossible contrast, is devoid of such intimate connections.

*The Discursive Production of 'Home' in Post-WWII America*

According to Dana Polan, the idea that there is no Eden, no safe and succoring haven from the social world runs through most popular cultural narrative productions in America after the second world war. Thus "'nature' ceases to be a steady value and becomes no more than one structural component in a permutational field" (Polan 258). Importantly, the concept of home serves the same semantic function as nature—an originating source. Likewise the concept of home was "grounded in nothing that assures its permanence or its invulnerability; in certain cases, a disruption can even show up the extent to which dependence on 'home' is not some sort of natural activity, but a social phantasm run through with a lingering desperation" (Polan 254).

It is by now commonplace to find in the *film noir* or post-WW II narrative, the expression of social anxieties related to shifts in the symbolic field: generally as regards the diminished authority of the paternal metaphor, but more specifically focused on the centrality of the feminine role in the maintenance of social order.

Similarly, in the classic hard-boiled detective fiction that informed the *film noir* genre, women are typically responsible for the narrative crisis, either directly as the murderer, or indirectly as the sexual provocatress who inspires the desire that fuels the criminal act. They are almost always the character who is punished.

The hyperbolized sexuality of the *femme fatale* and the exaggerated non-sexuality of the sweetheart-wife/mother in forties *film noir* and family melodrama have been read as a sign of the centrality of the feminine in America's post-war social organization (S. Harvey, Place, Polan, Williams). The exaggerated femininity of the female character in popular cultural production during this period of time has been interpreted as an expression of social anxieties relating to women's changing social roles.

As Polan has noted, American popular narratives of the forties figured women as essential to the stability of the national/domestic economy. Not only did popular cultural representations of women in domestic roles and relations embody American nationalist ideology--'what they were fighting for'--but they were also featured as consumers. Alfred Hitchcock's adaptation of Daphne Du Maurier's novel Rebecca (1942) and the film Now Voyager (Irving Rapper, 1942) offer classic examples of such representations. Not incidentally, these stories revolve around the female characters' negotiations of their social positions. Scanning fashion magazines and shopping, the heroines achieve social standing through these different manners of consumption.

Despite women's war-time roles as producers, and the diminished availability of household products to consume, women were figured as central to the post-war 'economic recovery plan'. Thus the narrativization of space in these texts also serves a productive and prescriptive function. The instability of the concept of home opens up a space for its redefinition, and with that a redefinition and reinscription of the gendered relations upon which the conceptual coherence of the home is based.

Writing on the 'women's film' as a post-war genre, Mary Ann Doane has described the close relationship between the intensification of consumerism and the textual and economic ties between different modes of women's popular culture that occurred during this same period of time. Doane lists "three instances of the commodity form in its relationship to cinema" (Doane, 1987, 25). The first, fully consistent with the idea of "Woman" as the primary sign of exchange within patriarchal culture, involves the solicitation of women as consumers based on their closer identification with the image: their representativeness. "The female consumer is invited to witness her own commodification and, furthermore, to buy an image of herself insofar as the female star is proposed as the idea of feminine beauty" (Doane, 1987, 25). Furthermore, "this level involves not only the currency of a body but of a space in which to display that body: a car, a house, a room filled with furniture and appliances" (Doane, 1987, 25). The second relationship between cinema and women's symbolic construction as consumers is more direct, involving the contractually agreed upon commodity tie-in between the studio and a corporate



sponsor. Finally, the last instance of the commodity form in cinema "is the film itself and its status as a commodity in a circuit of exchange" (Doane, 1987, 27). In this regard the film promotes a "certain mode of perception which is fully adequate to a consumer society and which, for the female spectator, initiates a particularly complex dialectic of 'being', 'having,' and 'appearing'" (Doane, 1987, 27).

Perhaps the most significant factor fueling the simultaneous polarization/thematization of gender specific roles and spatial designations was the violent reshaping of American lifestyles brought about by the development of low density suburbs after the war. Among the many changes in social practice that this population shift brought about, the move from urban to sub-urban lifestyles explains the shift from collective consumption to more discrete individualized consuming practices--to consumption based on a niche-type marketing that benefits from and reproduces discourses on identity (Lash and Urry 164). Simultaneously, anxieties about the rough and tumble hard-boiled city re-emerge in social discourse at the same time as the safe, affordable private yards and gardens of the suburbs enjoy representational hegemony.

#### *Pandora's Box*

The new female hard-boiled detective genre redresses the formulation of identity as a strictly divided relational term that was reflected in the male genre's hero/city-*femme fatale* identificatory dynamic. The emotional force of female

detective fiction is not derived from anxiety over the dissolution of boundary lines between private and public life, but from anxiety over how these differences are determined through the discursively regenerated relations of subjects and space. The different female hard-boiled detective series scripted by Sue Grafton and Sarah Paretsky are exemplary in this regard. Grafton's crime fiction terrain can be seen as a fiction-based deconstruction of the social sites where rigid definitions of female identity are confirmed: the home, the family and its inherent heterosexual relations. Paretsky's series of hard-boiled fictions featuring female detective, V.I. (Victorial Iphigenia) Warshawski, focus on the the political apparatuses that maintain the divisions between private and public space in both class and gender terms.

Upon the discovery of an unknown set of family relations in "*J*" is for *Judgement*, a recent novel in Grafton's series of alphabetized mystery stories, Kinsey Millhone, the series' female detective hero, says to her landlord, Henry Pitts, "[it] feels like a can of worms...Pandora's box...Big Trouble" (1993, 164). The ostensible anxieties that she expresses would seem reasonable enough for anyone anticipating the emotional costs of forced intimacy with people who are, in fact, strangers. In this instance, however, the stakes are much higher. The introduction of family relations to Kinsey Millone's life threatens to disturb, if not dismantle, the carefully constructed identity that she has molded for herself. Until this novel, the hard-boiled detective heroine that Grafton created was, relatively speaking, a self-made woman. Orphaned at five, she taught herself the more

basic life skills "like making shadow puppets, drawing pictures, and how to read" (1993, 135). Raised by a now deceased, unconventional aunt, Millhone's childhood rearing involved, among other things, lessons of responsibility and aim, learned at the same time she learned to shoot a gun. The detective's identity was not so much Oedipally negotiated, as it was the product of a feminist campaign. Subsequent modifications to this feminist subject were self-consciously determined, selected more than nurtured or cultivated.

In part, Kinsey Millhone has modeled herself on and against various fictional figures and heroes; she has assumed her identity by watching television and movies and flipping through comics, novels and various life-style magazines. On one occasion she describes an investigative maneuver as: "the modified version of my best junior G-man stance" (1985, 42). Another time, revealing the kind of image she hopes to project, she reports, "I wanted her to think of me as Wonder Woman, bullets ricocheting off my wristbands" (1993, 195). Given the absence of traditional family history, these characters, among the many other fictional and celebrity figures represented in Grafton's mystery series, serve to undermine the supremacy of the 'natural' or familial determinants that are more typically at work in the construction of pop culture's fictional characters.

The orphaned status of the female private investigator has become a staple of the genre. In part, the convention invites consideration of the experience of the single, independent woman in public life while giving rise to a critique of the nuclear family. It is also a trope that enables discourse on social relations more generally. Sarah Paretsky's series of hard-boiled mysteries featuring private-eye

V.I. (Victoria Iphigenia) Warshawski approaches the question of identification in more historically and geographically specific terms. Warshawski's dead relatives and their pasts return to haunt her, informing who she is, how she behaves, and finally, what she can see and discover. At least one chapter in each novel opens with a nightmare interweaving her own present-day trials and tribulations with stories of her mother's tortured youth growing up in Italy, under Mussolini's fascist dictatorship. At some point in each book her ex-cop father's expectations of her are held up to her by his angry ex-colleagues, as something she has missed living up to, if she even tried to aim for them at all. Nonetheless, the absence of blood ties opens up a space for Warshawski to take a family of her own choosing. Each novel sees Warshawski negotiate intimate relationships with a few select neighbors and friends.

Elaborated against and alongside what seems to be a deeply ingrained and resilient Oedipal narrative, the stories thus imagine alternatives to social and community relations modeled on the Oedipal family form. Thus the books reflect upon the recent intensification in the confrontation of two identificatory modes--one inherited, one more self-consciously determined--in a post-cold war economy. The city of Chicago, its political past and present, its industries, developments, communities and ball teams are subjects in their own rights in these stories. Told from the perspective of the radically altered industrial landscape of America in the 1980's, the narration of these spaces provides a living tableau of social change against and through which V.I. Warshawski's family and community takes form.

In Grafton's recent book, Kinsey Millhone's invocation of the Pandora myth in response to her recently discovered relatives is an expression of the anxieties and ambivalence that accompany any critical engagement with questions of origins and identity. But it is equally a metaphor for the theoretical quagmires encountered by the feminist cultural critic and/or producer working along these same investigative lines. Laura Mulvey has suggested that the Pandora figure might be considered emblematic of the feminist project. Perhaps *the primary* masculinist cultural trope of femininity—one which defines the feminine as both mystery and threat—Pandora, she claims, also represents the “transgressive desire to investigate the enigma of femininity” that characterizes much contemporary feminist work on and in popular culture (Mulvey 66). The ‘can of worms...Pandora’s Box...Big Trouble’ that Millhone anticipates in reconciling a ‘natural’ family history with one which she has designed for herself, are also the problems the feminist subject must confront as she critically negotiates a history of cultural representations of female gender and sexuality that, as a consequence of their longstanding hegemony may, as well, assert themselves as natural rather than culturally defined.

Until recently and by virtue of Millhone's relative autonomy, the series presumed a large degree of agency on the part of this female investigator to determine her own identity. With the introduction of a family and the attendant emotional implications that ensue from its discovery, the series has shifted to encompass a more complex analysis of gender and identity, one which raises questions about the structural limits of such agency in self-definition. Likewise

V.I. Warshawski's makeshift family life represents a similar confrontation between agency and inheritance. Paretsky's focus on the extended family as a model of community raises these questions of identity in explicitly political terms.

Grafton's and Paretsky's series offer exemplary opportunities to examine the contested field of identity politics in this recent variation on the hard-boiled sub-genre of detective fiction, both in terms of the critical themes they engage and for their interpellative aims and effects.

### *Space and Social Relations*

*"A" is for Alibi*, the introductory novel in Grafton's series, begins with the spare style typical of the hard-boiled tradition.

My name is Kinsey Millhone. I'm a private investigator, licensed by the state of California. I'm thirty-two years old, twice divorced, no kids. The day before yesterday I killed someone and the fact weighs heavily on my mind. I'm a nice person and I have a lot of friends. My apartment is small but I like living in a cramped space. I've lived in trailers most of my life, but lately they've been getting too elaborate for my taste, so now I live in one room, a "bachelorette." I don't have pets. I don't have houseplants. I spend a lot of time on the road and I don't like leaving things behind. Aside from the hazards of my profession, my life has always been ordinary, uneventful, and good. Killing someone feels odd to me and I haven't quite sorted it through (1987, 1).

As Millhone herself states of this report, "the language is neutral, the terminology oblique, and neither quite says enough" (1987, 1). This would seem to be its point. A poor second in vitality to the celebrated terseness of her male colleagues, Grafton's style is intentionally restrained. The male hard-boiled detective fiction writer's 'realistic' language was intended to evoke the vernacular of a tough, unforgiving 'street'. Its 'neutrality' and 'oblique terminology' inadequately articulated the 'ordinary uneventfulness' that characterizes the 'cramped space' it regularly assigned women and which formed the background against which 'male' toughness could take shape.

Female hard-boiled detective fictions typically proceed by way of critical parody. They appropriate the role of the male hero in order to trace the generic means by which these fictions define women's place 'in the home', which is to say outside of, or supplemental to the public sphere. However Grafton's character's expression of self-satisfaction, in this instance, is significant in its appreciation of the small space afforded her. Kinsey Millhone is usually more caustic. What she says of another character in this same novel could easily be said of her: "sarcasm came easily to her, an automatic reaction, like someone with a smoker's cough" (59). Thus, the number of subsequent times throughout this book, as well as the series itself, that Millhone makes the same grateful claims about her domestic allotment, is indicative of an ironical exception to the ironic position. This exception is most significant because of what the generic terminology that identifies the rental classification denotes. If not explicit, the information gleaned from her introduction leans more towards a masculine-typical profile. It is only the

spatial designation of her home--'a bachelorette'-- that gives Millhone's gender away and serves to identify the detective's social status within a specific and narrow field of identificatory terms. She is divorced. (And, it might be noted, considering the etymology of this spatial designation, Kinsey Millhone is wholly committed to remaining single).

Like her apartment, Kinsey's workplace is small. In addition to a minimum fee paid on a case-by-case basis and 'in lieu' of rental monies for two rooms with a separate entrance in a small corner of a larger suite of offices, Kinsey does a limited number of investigations for her landlords at The California Fidelity Insurance Company. A quintessentially late-capitalist labour arrangement, they save money on health and employment benefits and other full time percs, by not hiring a detective full-time and she remains, relatively speaking, a 'private' eye. Her satisfaction with the arrangement is less certain, more ambivalent in point of fact. In some instances she expresses contentment similar to that which she derives from her home, and for similar reasons. Her pleasure with this arrangement is contingent upon the relationship to the law that it suggests. Just as Millhone is a bachelorette in her personal life, she is likewise autonomous in her professional realm. Not contractually committed to any particular version of truth--especially that defined by the workings of capital, implied by her landlord's name, The California Fidelity Insurance Company--Millhone is minimally complicit with the system of justice that the insurance company/capital represents. On the other hand, the anxieties of labour flexibility--the temporary nature of this relationship--and the stresses and insecurities of constantly needing to solicit a



new client base are debated in these novels with almost the same frequency as issues of gender and space are raised.

All the major critical thematics in these books revolve around the relations of gender and space. Millhone's autonomy is defined, in the first instance, by virtue of a simultaneous invocation of gender and marital status. In the second instance this identity is derived by way of a professional arrangement which affords her an independent, if live-in, relationship with an institution representing property rights. In a complex way this fiction proceeds from an understanding that the boundary lines dividing the public and private spheres are artificially protected and maintained by other sets of relations and other sets of fixed conditions. Kinsey's rental property expresses her autonomy as contingent upon its definition of her public status. Her public office arrangements determine her professional autonomy as only provisionally independent of the insurance company, which stands in these books as the economic equivalent of property law. Finally, her part-time contractual labour arrangement describes the economic relationship of women in concrete terms.

Space, gender, economic and legal/civil statuses are co-determinate factors in Grafton's crime fiction. The categorically defined spaces of private and public life, while understood to be co-extensive in this series (fragmented and multiplied by the cross pollination of legal determinants), are nonetheless characterized according to the gender of the person who occupies them. The detective's movement through the public and private spaces of everyday life is scripted to redefine these spaces; at the very least to re-narrativize them, building outwards,

upwards and sideways, upon the stories about these places that have already been told. Such is the work of generic repetition.

In his study of the resistant potential of the social practices exercised in the course of everyday life, Michel de Certeau has argued that pedestrian movement of this sort constitutes one such operation of resistance. An adaptation-cum-illustration of Michel Foucault's discourse theory, de Certeau's essay describes the critical function of the appropriation in language as it is embodied in the 'everyday practice' of walking.

The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple 'enunciative' function: it is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies relations among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic 'contracts' in the form of movements (just as verbal enunciation is an 'allocation', 'posits another opposite' the speaker puts contracts between interlocutors into action). ...Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it 'speaks'. ...But [even if] her walking is...controlled negatively by proper names...these names [necessarily] make themselves available to the diverse meanings given them by passers-by; they detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define and serve as imaginary meeting-points on itineraries

which, as metaphors, they determine for reasons that are foreign to their original value but may be recognized or not by passers-by....(97-104).

As de Certeau notes in the epigraph to this chapter, “stories carry out a labour that constantly transforms places into spaces” (de Certeau 116). In doing so they open up the proper name of the place to contest. In this sense, space is an open territory. Like signification and language itself, space permits mobility even if place, which is more static, does not.

Paretsky's fictions place the detective within a rapidly changing cityscape so as to re-narrativize the *noir* city by scripting a more nuanced representation of the gender dynamics of such 'everyday' space. Burn Marks (1990), a story involving crises in family relations, shady land deals and urban renewal, arson and homelessness in epidemic proportions, is an especially useful example of how Paretsky's fictions, and this genre more generally, work to unmask the way that social oppression is predicated on conceptions and determinations of space and its social relations.

As the story opens, V.I. (Vic to her friends) Warshawski is awakened in the middle of the night by her Aunt Elena, her dead father's sister and her closest living relative. Arriving drunk and filthy, Elena convinces Warshawski to take her in with a story about her S.R.O. (Single Resident Only hotel) having been burnt to the ground. In the course of finding other, affordable accommodations for her aunt, the detective discovers the S.R.O. was torched as part of a crooked land development scheme; a scheme, moreover, tied up in backroom politics, police

corruption and homicide. Condensing issues related to the emotional negotiation of familial expectations, roles and responsibilities with issues related to crime, here conceived as the diminishment of public obligation, the narrative events of Burn Marks reach critical mass in two similarly scripted action scenes which work to demystify the female body when coded in sexual or maternal terms alone.

In the first sequence Aunt Elena calls her niece to an abandoned rooming house. The narrative sequence begins articulating the emotional conflicts felt in responding to a call to nurture, but it winds up as an extended exposition on the demands made on the female body as it is caught up in the effects of simultaneously deteriorating familial and civic arenas. Paretsky coyly appropriates the metaphor of a "thousand points of light" that George Bush invoked to dramatize the new kinder, gentler community of civic-minded Americans in his New World Order, to describe the 'points of light' Warshawski sees after her response to familial and civic obligation results in her being clubbed on the head. Upon waking, the detective discovers her unconscious aunt, the smell of fire and, over the course of her heroic escape and rescue of Aunt Elena, the extraordinary physical capacity of the female body moving through the wasteland of what is, for all intents and purposes, an abandoned domestic site. The attention to the agonizing details of the body in distress take up ten full pages of description. What follows is a condensed version of this action sequence.

My headache had returned full force. I tried desperately to be sick. My empty stomach could produce only a little bile, which left me more

nauseated than ever...I sat up and got so fierce a stab of pain that I cried out. And realized beneath the pain that I wasn't home in bed--I had been lying on a couch, one that smelled so bad I couldn't lie back down even with my aching head...When I stuck out a gingerly hand I could feel the tufts of padding spring out. My groping hand came on a leg...a thin bony knob of a kneecap, the hem of a thin, cotton house dress. Elena. She'd called me, gotten me to the burned-out shell of the Indiana Arms. And then? How had I come to be unconscious?...I couldn't remember and it was too much work trying. (178)...I blundered around the room, tripping on nameless forms, running into some bedsprings with enough force to jolt my ribs and make tears stream down my face....When I finally found the door I couldn't open it...I was locked inside (179)...I plowed four shots into the hinges where they attached to the wall, bracing myself each time for the recoil, for the sound...When I finally got back to my feet I pushed against the door. I was so feeble at this point that I couldn't put much into my thrust...I tucked the gun back into my holster, sucked in a deep breath and flung my right shoulder against the door...The reason I'd been smelling smoke since I came to was because the damned building was on fire (180)...Elena didn't weigh much, but even if I'd been totally myself, I couldn't have carried her far...It might be more awkward, but the mattress would make a good barrier if we had to go through fire...even that much effort made me pant and brought another wave of pain crashing across my brain to the front of my head. I had to lean against the wall until it

receded...Once in the corridor I began a nightmare journey. Around us in the dark the rats were twittering, unnerved by the fire and trying to delve deep into the bowels of the building....smoke was starting to drift toward me down the hall (181)...My arms were beginning to tremble from overexertion. I couldn't remember any real poems so I started chanting jumping-rope rhymes to give some rhythm to my movements and take my mind from my fatigued body (182)...The rope burned my bare palms. My biceps had pretty much turned to water by now and strongly resisted the idea of more exercise. "You're at the wall now, Vic--go for the burn," I mocked myself, then returned to the rope chants...the door was shut...it was scalding to the touch...In the dark I was seeing pinwheels spinning through the elevator shaft, flashing strobes of light from my burned-out retinas. Future and past disappeared into an endless present, presence of rope, of muscles beyond fatigue, of hand over raw hand, and the unbearable sound of my own voice spewing out childhood chants (183-84)...Slowly, each leg weighing a thousand pounds, I dragged myself down through the cloud of smoke, past the point of feeling, to the place where breath and sight were collapsed into one solid pinpoint of agony, finding the end of escape, sinking down, feeling the bottom flight fall loose and my feet dragging on the ground (186).

Here Warshawski's complex social positioning mirrors the proper relationship of public and private life. She functions as a maternal/familial figure for her Aunt Elena (however forced this relationship may be here), and as self-appointed

representative of the paternal figure (as she assumes the role of the private investigator). These roles are dramatically enacted and set within a space emblematic of the exhaustion of urban habitation. The space of the home is here reconfigured as something whose frontiers encompass both terms of any binary relationship—specifically that of the public and private spheres. Mirroring the first action sequence, the second, which provides the narrative crisis in Burn Marks, is determined by the same familial/civic demands that inaugurated the former. It places the same, if not greater demands on the female body as it moves through space. Only here the action does not evolve within the ruins of domesticity, but within the space erected upon those ruins: The unfinished site of the new corporate/condominium complex.

Peter Brooks has stated that “narratives in which a body becomes a central preoccupation reveal the effort to bring the body into meaning...(to) dramatize the ways in which the body becomes a key signifying function in a text” (Brooks 8). Equally, the relationship of the narrativized body to the particular space it is given to move through is crucial to the decoding of its significance. V.I. Warshawski’s excessively physical traversal of the abandoned domestic space and the unfinished hull of its corporate replacement is scripted to signify a different status for the female body in relation to space itself. No longer strictly sexual, nor even nurturing in any straightforward way, the female body juxtaposed against the hard-boiled city does not lend itself to the kind of reciprocal identification that the male detective’s body against the city did. In Burn Marks, space in and of itself is

not so much gendered as it is gendered in an economic determination and, by extension, the gendered body's relationship to space is similarly defined.

### *Family, Friends and the Single Life*

In "D is for Deadbeat, after waxing poetic about of the efficiency of the layout of her bachelorette, the detective sings the praises of the single life: "Sometimes I stand in the bathtub, elbows resting on the sill, and stare at passing cars, just thinking how lucky I am. I love being single. It's almost like being rich" (21).

Unlike the male hard-boiled detective that Geoffrey O'Brien has described as "[s]ingle, poor and lonely, [who] stays so by choice, guard[ing] his incorruptibility by his aloneness," she is merely single, by choice. In Grafton's books there is a relationship between gender, marital status, material wealth and isolation, but no logical equation between isolation and loneliness. Outside of the sphere of social relations where women's representative function demands her constant self-conscious, self-surveillance, Millhone's physical isolation offers her opportunity for deeper thought and self-reflection.

Furthermore, being single is not, as O'Brien would contend of Millhone's male colleague, "a measure of [her] uniqueness" (O'Brien xiv). On the contrary, singleness is the status of many of the different female characters who populate these books. Female hard-boiled detective fiction is nothing less than a vast meditation on post-domestic social arrangements. Generally speaking, Millhone's female friends are single by choice. Rosie, the closest to a live maternal figure in Millhone's life, is a 66 year-old, single (although dating), bar and grill owner. Until



recently, Vera, the detective's friend at work, enjoyed her single life as a sexual provocatrice. On the other hand, the women the detective meets in her line of work, and whose options have not been self-determined, often have single lives that are barely tolerable. In "G" is for Gumshoe, for example, Millhone is hired to find the roving, demented mother of a woman who is described as "the kind of woman who, a hundred years ago, might have spent long years in a sanitarium with a series of mis-diagnoses stemming from anxiety, unhappiness, laudanum addiction or an aversion to sex" (1990, 7). Her investigations uncover a trunk full of family skeletons replete with psychotic and murderous patriarchs that have left the lives of generations of women irreversibly scarred.

The women in Grafton's books--lonely or otherwise impoverished--are neither necessarily single, nor necessarily cash-poor. They range from women like Niki Fife in "A" is for Alibi, a financially dependent woman whose husband cheated on her knowing the state's custody laws wouldn't grant her a divorce on the grounds of adultery, to rich women like Glenn Callahan, whose husband exploits and abuses her, knowing the same state's laws will give him 50% of her money in a divorce settlement. As Maureen Reddy has noted of the female hard-boiled genre as a whole,

whereas the treatment of women as objects in male hard-boiled detective fiction results in a clear strong pattern--women are all potentially destructive and predatory, with some women redeemed by their willingness to submit to patriarchal rule--women's private-eye novels encode no simple reversal of this pattern...(subsequently) by removing

women from the position of "other," these novelists open up an enormous range of possibilities for portraying women (Reddy 102).

This is evident in Grafton's series. Inadequate fathers and abusive boyfriends are balanced by vengeance-seeking sisters and mothers and psychotic wives. While not all the women are good guys, if they are bad, this has little, if anything, to do with some unqualified notion of women's innate criminality.

In the male genre of hard-boiled detective fiction the private eye "prefers to live alone, without social or family ties which he finds as threatening to his integrity as the corrupt world in which he moves" (O'Brien xiv). This preference in Grafton's heroine's life extends from the same kind of understanding, but in this case it is one in which dysfunctional family life is not merely *similar* to the corruption experienced in public life, it is one and the same. Familial dysfunction and public corruption form a continuum of experience in women's lives. More significantly, the earlier, male mode of hard-boiled detective fiction cast the responsibility for the dissolution of either sphere squarely on the shoulders of the wayward woman. In the women's version of this genre, motives for criminal actions and the source of responsibility are not so clearly given.

Unlike the crippling father-daughter relationship which explains the criminal activity in such male hard-boiled novels as Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep, women 'act out' in Grafton's books for more complex reasons and in more complex ways. The dysfunction of the family has no mere binarily determined core. It does not result from any simple or single dyadic or triadic dynamic within the family but is broadly systemic, embracing family relations within and across

generations, inclusive of partners, parents, and siblings, and spiralling outwards to encompass the community as a whole. Responsibility is dispersed in Grafton's fiction along multiple circuits of cause and effect.

In "F" is For Fugitive, Ann, the murderess, is the jealous/devoted daughter of Royce and Oribelle, an abandoning father and chronically ill mother. Ann is romantically interested in Dwight, a married man with a roving eye and his own chronically ill wife. But, Dwight favours Jean, Ann's brother's girlfriend. Ann kills Jean to frame her brother Bailey, punishing him for stealing father Royce's affections away from her, and to protect Dwight from having to acknowledge paternity of Jean's unborn child. While Ann is responsible for the crime(s), her criminality has not been solely precipitated by her father's emotional absence, or her mother's physical incapacity. Rather, there are more subtle and circuitous trajectories of interpersonal degradation drawn throughout the family as a whole. The father has not only emotionally abandoned his daughter, but has more dramatically abandoned his wife as well. Ann is left to assume a parental role in caring for her mother, a maternal role in caring for her brother, and by extension, what would seem a pseudo-spousal role in her relations with her father. This crisis is not an example of any *simple* Oedipal failure. Furthermore, the pattern of familial dysfunction in "F" is for Fugitive manifests itself in the relationships that this book's characters entertain outside of the domestic environment. Here each individual constellation of psychic effects is superimposed on top of another constellation so as to produce a toxicity that is social rather than individual in form

and finally more responsible for the various crimes committed in this book than is any, one character. Ann's public persona is modeled on the role she assumes within her family. A guidance counselor at the local high-school, her otherwise collegial relationship to fellow counselor Dwight takes on similar dimensions to those of her relations at home. Likewise Dwight's domestic conflicts are echoed in his professional life. Dwight's emotional neediness is widely solicitous. Not only does he seek emotional salvation in his relations with Ann but, even more inappropriately, he exploits the authority of his care-taking role as a guidance counselor by having an affair with Jean. Jean's own psychic life is itself marked by variously absent family members and unmet needs, the consequences of which ripple out into her public field.

Typical of the other novels in this series, the plot is soap opera-like. But unlike the soap opera, which is serialized around the same set of characters, in Grafton's work the cast is replaced in each installment (with the exception of the primary characters). Tania Modleski has claimed that the serial narrative continuity of the soap opera promises that no matter how disordered the family or community becomes it will never completely break down (1982). In Grafton's work, on the other hand, the family function is hardly restored, if ever. Because Grafton's series' appropriation of a traditionally male-identified genre of popular culture represents a deconstruction of popular cultural constructions of gender, such work is necessarily dependent upon a critical engagement with the institution of the family, not exclusively for its determining role in the spatial designation of gender roles and relations, but for its determining function in the

process of engenderment itself. As Teresa de Lauretis, among other feminists, has shown us, the family, as it engenders social subjects in heterosexual relations, functions both as the primary site of the reproduction of gender and its effect (de Lauretis, 1989, 16-18). Stable gender-specific roles and relations maintain patriarchal authority; their stability is crucial to capital's hegemony, representing and reproducing divisions in labour by gender, and thus protection within and control over public space. The appropriation of paternal authority by the female hard-boiled detective draws attention to the vacancy of the paternal function within the public sphere of the law. More importantly, it underscores the connection between these functions across private and public domains.

In Paretsky's fiction, family life is represented as a historically specific condition, bound up in local political and economic histories as much as it is in individual genealogies. On the first page of Blood Shot, V.I. Warshawski remembers her past in pointedly political terms. Returning home to her old neighborhood to come to the aid of a friend she reminisces:

I had forgotten the smell. Even with the South Works on strike and Wisconsin Steel padlocked and rusting away, a pungent mix of chemicals streamed in through the engine vents. I turned off the car heater, but the stench--you couldn't call it air--slid through minute cracks in the Chevy's windows, burning my eyes and sinuses...Decaying bungalows looked on the South Works from the right side of the street. Some were missing pieces of siding or shamefacedly showing stretches of peeling paint. In others the concrete in the front steps cracked and sagged. But the

windows were all whole, tightly sealed, and not a scrap of debris lay in the yards. Poverty might have overtaken the area, but my old neighbors gallantly refused to give in to it. I could remember when eighteen thousand men poured from those tidy little homes every day into the South Works, Wisconsin Steel, the Ford assembly plant, or the Xerxes solvent factory. I remembered when each piece of trim was painted fresh every second spring and new Buicks or Oldsmobiles were an autumn common place. But that was in a different life, for me as well as South Chicago, (1988 1-2).

A primary thematic in this series is that identity is a product of a geographically specific class and mixed ethnic community. Arriving at the home of her childhood friend, Warshawski's memories intensify, focused on her own family life.

My gloom increased when I made the turn onto Houston Street. I'd last been on the block in 1976 when my father died and I came back down to sell the house... That was the last time I had talked to any of the other neighbors who had known my parents. There was genuine grief for my gentle, good-humored father. Grudging respect for Gabriella, dead ten years at the time. After all, the other women on the block had shared her scraping, saving, cutting each penny five ways to feed and shelter their families. Now she was dead they glossed over the eccentricities that used to make them shake their heads--taking the girl to the opera with an extra ten dollars instead of buying her a new winter coat. Not baptizing her or giving her to the sisters at St. Wenceslaus for schooling... (10-11)

Communities made up of women 'making do' form a leitmotif in this series. Warshawski's closest friends are women and one, in particular, Lotty Herschel, serves the multiple nurturing purposes of being mother-surrogate, colleague, community leader, doctor and friend. An older woman and survivor of the concentration camps during the holocaust, Herschel's history compares with that of Gabriella's and thus she fits the gap in Warshawski's life left by her mother's death. In this regard, Rebecca Pope has argued that the series follows a long tradition of literary representations of female friendship but with a significant difference. The series' focus on Warshawski's maternal and pseudo-maternal relationships departs from the model proposed in Victorian literature where mothers pass down traditional values to their daughter; in this way the mother/daughter bond served as a vehicle for patriarchal interests (Pope 158). In Paretsky's fictions, "female friendship is explicitly opposed to patriarchal values and institutions" (Pope 158).

Noting the continuance of this tradition in the earlier detective fictions of Dorothy Sayers and Josephine Tey, Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple argue that the 'closed community of women' "provide[s] a site for the explorations of women's bonds outside the romance plot" (52). In Paretsky's fiction, the communion of women has all but replaced the heterosexual union--the family, in point of fact. Pope goes so far as to speculate about the homosexual overtones in Warshawski's relationship with Lotty Herschel, noting that while the protagonist's heterosexual relationships change from book to book, her close friendship with Lotty Herschel grows stronger in every one. In Guardian Angel, a

fairly recent book in the series, Warshawki herself voices the depth of this connection: "I loved Lotty. More than any other person I could think of" (1992 181).

However, women's bonds are not something that is given in advance in this series, but something that is selective and hard won if achieved at all. The complex and often contradictory shapes and political commitments of women's communities is a thematic that runs alongside the primary narrative lines of Burn Marks' story of corporate greed, political corruption and familial dysfunction. Looking to trade favours for housing for her Aunt Elena, Warshawski approaches an old female colleague and union activist who is now organizing a political benefit for another old friend, running as the token female and Hispanic representative on a municipal board. In return for finding Aunt Elena affordable housing, the benefit organizer asks Warshawski to stand behind the politician so that it doesn't look like she has sold out to a corrupt state politician supporting her bid for election. Invoking Warshawki's feminist roots, the organizer challenges the detective's continuing feminist commitment. "She'd used flattery, Fuentes's pro-choice record, and my guilt for having dropped out of political action for so long to get me to agree to be a patron" (20).

The community of women represented at the political function-cum-barbeque is not the feminist community of yesteryear but includes "young women in thigh-high minis...threading their way cheerfully through the throng with canapé-laden trays" (38), and "women wearing nylons and high-heels...stretching their long,



tanned legs and taking innocent pleasure in their own beauty...look(ing) almost indistinguishable in their Ann Klein shorts suits" (38-39).

Paretsky doesn't romanticize the political communities of the past. The ethical trade-offs that form the bonds of political community, in the present tense of the story, are no less conflicted than they were in earlier generations of political activism, merely different. At present, as the price for accepting the state politician's support in her bid for political clout, Roz Feuntes, the would-be politician, has to "swallow a few things...the sidelong looks from the party regulars (who think) Boots is getting a piece of Spanish ass." In the past, the benefit organizer was also "one of those people who...chose her issues carefully. She'd been active in our drive to unionize the (Public Defender's) office...but she'd steered clear of involvement in the politics of abortion--she didn't want anything to drag her down if she'd decided to run for office" (19).

In Paretsky's series, the disintegration of one community is balanced by the dysfunction of another, and both characterizations of social form address the loss of a historical stability that is otherwise achieved through the nuclear family. Both historical memories provide resonant emotional conditions, not only because they dictate the actions taken by the characters in all of the books, but because they inspire similar nostalgic sentiments in the readers of these texts. In that "each genre...engages and structures differently the two basic subjective mechanisms which any form of the (narrative) balance involves--the want for the pleasure of the process and the want for the pleasure of its closure,"--detective fiction's structure of enigma-investigation amplifies the tension between process and

position, which is to say between the becoming and being of a subject (Neale, 26). Because the drama in Paretsky's fictions is enacted on the ruins of the subject's past--which is the past of collectivity and subjectivity expressed through the logic of identity that founds subjectivity in contrasting relational terms--the epistemological force of these narratives is articulated to a search for identity in its social relations first and foremost. These books thus offer their readers a highly pitched mode of reader identification; a strong sense of coming home insofar as the issues raised matter intimately to each reader, albeit in different ways. These narrative productions can be seen to produce a sense of community along the same lines as the one they represent as lost, but with the difference that these social relations are always conflicted and in process.

The sexuality and romantic attachments of the female detective are central to her character development. Whereas in some instances her sexual characterization is predictable, given the fem/machismo defining this sub-genre--Kinsey Millhone, for one, is known to leer--more typical, is a romantic and sexual ambivalence, predicated, not on fears of intimacy, *per se*, but on a basic distrust of the institution of marriage. On the subject of marriage, Millhone is blunt: "about every six or eight months I run into a man who astounds me sexually, but between escapades, I'm celibate, which I don't think is any big deal. After two unsuccessful marriages I find myself keeping my guard up, along with my underpants" (1986 11). Similarly, for Paretsky's Warshawski, marriage is not in the cards. Describing a man she is dating, the detective explains her reluctance to become more serious, "Michael hangs out with a crowd where the wife is the

little woman who stays home and has kiddies...it's not my style, never has been, and never will" (1990, 134)

In "J is for Judgement, Kinsey Millhone's distaste for housewifery is markedly more pronounced. Musing on the wedding consultancy business of a wife who has been betrayed and abandoned--first by her husband who, unbeknownst to her, faked a suicide to escape legal prosecution for illegal real estate deals; and then by the insurance company who, in the absence of a body, refused to pay her claim--the detective expresses wonderment and disdain:

I wondered idly if Dana ever told these young brides the problems they were going to run into once the wedding was over with: boredom, weight gain, irresponsibility, friction over sex, spending, family holidays... Maybe it was just my basic cynicism rising to the surface, but cost-per-person food and drink breakdowns seemed trivial compared to the conflicts marriage generated (1993 106).

With three romances in ten books--none lasting--Millhone's pledge to an independent lifestyle has remained constant. When sexual relationships occur in this series, they do so, it would seem, not so much to satisfy the unstated, if acknowledged, demands for romantic success that predominate in much of women's popular fiction, but to address other concerns. Another standard of the genre, Millhone's relationships usually involve men she meets professionally--criminals, cops and other private eyes. Mixing professional and private relations, the female detective's sexual anxieties and romantic ambivalence inspire feelings

attributable to women's experiences of social inequities and injustice as they necessarily affect both public and domestic spaces.

In "A is for Alibi, Millhone gets involved with Charlie Scorsoni, a man whose interest in her, she later discovers, is part of a criminal campaign. Dazzling her with sex, he hopes to derail any professional interest she may otherwise have in his personal life and business. More than just a clever inversion of the criminalized sexuality known to male hard-boiled detective fiction, Grafton's scripting of Millhone's relationship with Scorsoni underscores the significantly different determining function of male sexuality in female detective fiction. The similarities between the male and female hard-boiled representations of sex and sexuality begin and end with the way they exploit the conflicting responses to sexual desire. Just as the male hard-boiled detective fiction tends to represent sex in a double-edged manner: "as an object of pleasure [which] has a disturbing tendency to become a trap," so too does the female version of the genre exploit sexual tension. But, the masculine genre deflects sexual anxiety through recourse to various, albeit similarly toned, descriptions of hyper-masculine behavior without acknowledging sexual anxiety, *per se*, as its source. Mickey Spillane's writing, while somewhat extreme in this regard, nonetheless "embodies in heightened form the pure skeleton of the formula" (Caweleiti 190). Responding to the sexual advances of the murderess in I, the Jury, by shooting her, Spillane's detective Mike Hammer reports the incident contemptuously:

When I heard her fall I turned around. Her eyes had pain in them now, the pain preceding death. Pain and unbelief. "How c-could you?" she gasped. I only had a moment before talking to a corpse, but I got it in. "It was easy," I said (174).

In the male detective genre, this overstatement of misogyny is part of a symbolic denial of complex sexual and status anxieties (Cawelti 1976). The female detective's response to sexual tensions is more self-reflexive. In "D" is for Deadbeat, Millhone's sexual ambivalence about Charlie Scorsoni slips from anxiety into out-right fear, from fear into uncertainty, until finally, in the last instance, her 'gut feelings' are proven to be justified.

My early-warning system was clanging like crazy and I wasn't sure how to interpret it. It's the same sensation I have sometimes on the twenty-first floor when I open a window--a terrible attraction to the notion of tumbling out... (52) There was something else about him too...the same sense I'd had before of sexuality that surfaced now and then. Sometimes he seemed to emit an almost audible hum, like a line of power stations marching inexorably across a hillside, ominous and marked with danger signs. I was afraid of him... (146) Charlie Scorsoni was still (a suspect) on my list and the realization had a disturbing effect... (175) Maybe I was just being perverse, pushing him away because I needed space between me and the world... (183) He'd played me for a sucker...It had been too long since I'd cared about anyone, too long since I'd taken that risk and I'd already invested too much. I just had to slam the gate shut emotionally

and move on, but it didn't sit well with me... (202) Maybe I was crazy. Maybe I was making a fool of myself... In his right hand was a butcher knife with a ten-inch blade. I blew him away (214).

The presence of Charlie Scorsoni in Kinsey Millhone's life inscribes sexual desire as dangerous, if not deadly. However, the sexual repression potentially provoked in the scripting of this relationship is undercut by Millhone's clear articulation of the necessary ambivalence that attends feminine sexual desire; an ambivalence resulting not from psychic limits, but from memories of past romantic failures, not to mention the acknowledgment of 'real', socially and culturally sanctioned, male-sponsored danger and threat.

If Scorsoni represents the ambivalence of female heterosexuality in its necessary complicity with patriarchy, then Jonah Robb, a police detective whose marriage is on again, off again--and when on, "open"--serves to characterize the inadequacy of women's relationship with patriarchal law. Emotionally invested in his family, Jonah is only more fully available to Millhone during periods when his marriage is off. Even then it is clear that their relationship is only temporary; in the long run, it serves his needs more than hers. Significantly, Millhone first meets Jonah in a book entitled "D is for Deadbeat", a story about the moral and ethical crimes committed and precipitated by a self-centered, despicable man.

### *Absented Places/Appropriated Spaces*

Linda Hutcheon defines parody as “a form of imitation characterized by ironic inversion” which not only refuses the terms of the original narrative production but critiques it in a knowledgeable fashion: “parody is, in another formulation, repetition with critical distance which marks difference rather than similarity” (Hutcheon, 1985, 5). According to these terms, female detective fiction is a parodic genre. As such, these genre revisions prioritize difference rather than sameness in the relations between things: in social relationships, certainly, but also and importantly so, in identificatory processes themselves. Hutcheon also notes that “irony has an evaluative edge and manages to provoke emotional response in those who get it and those who don’t...the ‘scene’ of irony involves relations of power based in relations of communications” (Hutcheon, 1995, 3). Explaining the mechanics of such appropriative acts in spatialized terms, Martha Rosler has suggested that,

in general it is through irony that quotation gains its critical force. One speaks with two voices, establishing a kind of triangulation--the source of the quotation is placed *here*, the quoter over *there*, and the hearer/spectator/(reader) *there*--and by inflection, one saps the authority of the quote. Irony, however, is not universally accessible, for the audience must *know* enough to recognize it (p. 81).

This said, female hard-boiled detective fiction is an explicitly political enterprise insofar as it re-circulates the feminist discourse it has inherited from the feminist

productions of earlier decades, re-casting it according to contemporary feminist issues. By virtue of its ironic use of gender codes and conventions, this sub-genre can be seen to anticipate the readership of the feminist subject whose relationship to the dominant cultural text Teresa de Lauretis has defined as "doubled," "at once within and without representation" (de Lauretis, 1989, 10).

Seeking to articulate the limits of interpellative action on 'the subject of feminism'--an argument which allows for a degree of agency on the part of the feminist reader of popular cultural texts--de Lauretis has taken issue with Louis Althusser's influential theory of the workings of ideology ('in general', rather than as it is employed by particular ideological state apparatuses), by critically exploiting the distinction Althusser has made between the statuses of ideological practice and scientific analysis.<sup>8</sup> The former, in Althusser's claim, is characterized by the unconscious or imaginary relations of individuals to the "real" relations within which they live. Scientific analysis exists outside of ideology (presumably the space of conscious "real" relations), where theory does its work.

De Lauretis has made the point that if feminism is both a theoretical enterprise and a conscious, "real", lived experience, then 'the subject of feminism' necessarily exists in "doubled time and doubled space" (de Lauretis 1-26). As a consequence of this twinning, the subject of feminism is never wholly interpellated by the ideological. The movement between these spaces characterizes the

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<sup>8</sup> In brief, Althusser's theory of interpellation describes the ideological process whereby the subject is 'hailed' by the mirror-like identificatory mechanics of representation, so as to confirm 'him' in productive and reproductive social roles.



subject de Lauretis has in mind. "The movement between them, therefore, is not that of a dialectic, of integration, of a combinatory, or of *differance*, but is the tension of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy" (26).

Together, de Lauretis' and Rosler's conceptualizations of the rhetorical dynamics of an appropriative feminist political practice offer a formulation of the interpellative dynamics taken up and, in fact, effected by Grafton's and Paretsky's female hard-boiled detective fiction. In Grafton's series, the dynamics are engaged by an interdependent series of narrative motifs that address and detail the mechanics of two primary constitutive practices defining female identity: the engenderment of the subject within the family, and the representational practices of cultural production.

In "J is for Judgement, Kinsey Millhone muses to herself, "in theory, I'd suddenly gained an entire family, cause for rejoicing if you happen to believe the ladies magazines. In reality I felt as if someone had just stolen everything I held dear, a common theme in all the books you read on burglary and theft" (1993, 174). Significantly, Millhone's claim on meeting her first cousins-- 'that they looked "not like [her] but like the way [she] felt she looked to others," (167) expresses the crux of the detective's new-found problems in precise Althusserian/Lacanian terms. Shifting the register of familial determinants from one modeled on the Oedipal narrative's presumption of 'natural' order, to one based on a more discursive, and thus productive, ideological plane, these texts employ a strategy of resistance, similar in kind to de Lauretis's theory of extra-

interpellative practice. Whereas the emergence of her long-lost family dispels the faith Millhone has held in her own fantasy of a seamless, self-determined identity--the personal qualities she most cherishes as self-created are revealed to be shared by her relatives--it does not disavow the possibility of exacting a degree of agency in the processes of identification.

"J" is for Judgement intertwines this narrative of Kinsey Millhone's identity crisis with a mystery story about the impact made on the family of Wendell Jaffe, husband and family man, by his re-emergence seven years after he (supposedly), committed suicide. Initially (and predictably, given her oft-stated disgust with the "feminine" position) Millhone identifies with the patriarch.

In a curious way I felt a fleeting bond with the man as I tried on the idea of changing identities. Being a liar by nature, I've always been attracted to the possibility. There's a certain romance in the notion of walking away from one's life and into another, like an actor passing from one character role into the next...The past has a way of catching up with all of us (12).

In some curious way we were in the same position...trying to understand what our lives might have been like if we could have enjoyed the benefits of family life, looking at the mislaid years and wondering how much we'd missed...There were obvious differences. He had voluntarily surrendered his family, while I had never known mine existed. More telling was the fact that he wanted his family back and I wasn't sure I did (258).

Renata Huff, the woman with whom Jaffe had been in hiding, kills Jaffe and confesses to Millhone that she did so on passionate grounds—he betrayed her by going back to his family—and then she walks into the ocean to commit suicide. When neither Jaffe’s three million dollars or Huff’s body are found, Millhone begins to doubt her investigation’s conclusions, if not its orientation from the outset: “I’d been viewing this as Wendell Jaffe’s story—but what if it’s [Renata Huff’s]”? (287). If this is Renata Huff’s story and Millhone’s identification with Jaffe then shifts to accommodate Huff’s perspective, then Kinsey Millhone is no longer a woman whose past has caught up with her, but an actor in a drama scripted by someone else. Whether Oedipally derived or socially constructed, the detective’s agency is still circumscribed.

The subject exemplified by the new hard-boiled female detective, of which Kinsey Millhone and V.I. Warshawski are ‘good enough’ representatives, is thus a subject both self-consciously engendered and otherwise positioned by a set of determinants that while already in place, are nonetheless shifting. A subject constituted in a triangulated relationship, the modes of interpretation within which she works are likewise shaped. These models of interpretation not only account for difference as a determining term of meaning, but by inflection, take account of what that difference means.

Dean MacCannell has argued that the radically destabilized status of the paternal figure in post-war narrative expressed the radical perversity that characterized the symbolic field under post-industrial capitalism.

Under the guise of the traditional father figure (the figure of denial and lack) a neo-totemic father operates who again thinks he deserves and can have it all, all the pleasure and all the wealth—all that is important is the preservation of the image of an ideal bourgeois freedom and respect (MacCannell 291).

MacCannell claims that the detective hero who stood outside the social field described in these hard-boiled fictions symbolically prefigured the homeless subject of today's social field. Insofar as the detective hero "abjured regular, orderly, routine, normal, for-profit pursuits" he remained outside the law (MacCannell 287). "The homeless now, on this plane of history" claims MacCannell, "tell the truth that *film noir* tried to anticipate, that the moral formulations of the paternal order are a *sham* (MacCannell 287).

As one among the many other contemporary representations of women in more active relationships with the law that have emerged of late (either criminal figures or justice seekers), the female hard-boiled detective does much to enhance the idea that the symbolic field has, in fact, radically shifted from even that which was expressed in popular cultural narratives a decade ago, let alone since the forties. In this new strain of detective fiction "almost ritually...it is now solely the male villains and not the male heroes who are inscribed through their sadistic fantasies and practices" (Glover and Kaplan 216). Equally here, there are "more women as civic actors, but hardly a *femme fatale* to be found" (Glover and Kaplan 216). Still the appropriation of the masculine position in

contemporary female-hard-boiled crime fiction does not simply echo, in reverse, what most analyses of *film noir* claimed was the hyperbolized status of 'the feminine' in postwar narrative. And neither does the relationship of the female hard-boiled detective to the law simply invert that held by the male detective in the classic hard-boiled story. These stories are not about the threatened coherence of the male symbolic position. More relevant to the emergence of this character in contemporary narrative is the *frisson* produced by the juxtaposition of the subject's past and present symbolic positions--the sense of a hyper-arbitrary relationship between gender and subject position. I would contend that the concerns that frontier literature and early detective fiction expressed in relation to gender and spatial definition are raised in female hard-boiled detective fiction as matters that are not so much inverted as they are doubled. Where the early genres conceived of space as a static term against which the identity of the protagonist was constituted, in the recent manifestation of this genre, space is not an identity that is given in advance of identification. Rather, this new genre reflects upon the interdependent relationship of the markers and the marked in spatial designations.

While the political objectives of this genre are highly successful in challenging the symbolic means with which women's social status is ideologically maintained, the emergence of a female figure as a subject held in limbo might also express contemporary social anxieties related to the condition of the contemporary subject itself. The symbolic currency MacCannell claims for the homeless subject may

equally be that of the female hard-boiled detective: "that everyone under advanced capitalism is 'excluded but present'" (MacCannell 291). Even while exhumed from a subordinate and relational position to the law, the female detective is only very tenuously held in her appropriated position.

As anticipated by the male version of this hard-boiled fiction, the emergence of this female genre recognizes that the current symbolic order is a sham. Whereas the displacement of the dominant position of the paternal metaphor would be welcomed, the displacement of the feminine that follows, holds serious consequences for real women. Since women's place in relation to the home is exempted, and women's place in the public sphere lacks stable grounding, women are without any sure place at all. In these revised/feminized fictions, the homeless figure is prominently inscribed across various (albeit commonly circumscribed) social roles and relations. While the violence that is directed towards the female characters in male detective fiction is expressive of hostility towards the loss of maternal plenitude, in female detective fiction the violence is expressive of hostility toward the perversion of a social order that potentially denies all subjects, regardless of position, the protection of status in the social field--given literal expression in female hard-boiled fiction as the place of the home.

## Chapter 4

### *Noir, Nostalgia and the Virtual Imaginary*

#### *Women and Film Noir*

"She's taken the name Kroy, Wendy Kroy...it's New York spelled backwards," realizes Clay Gregory, the betrayed, beleaguered and vengeful husband of the most vicious *femme fatale* to grace the *film noir* screen in years, if not the most vicious ever. Glancing in the mirror as he muses on the whereabouts of his runaway wife, Clay catches the name of the city in the mirror-image of the poster behind him and remembers "she has a trick where she can write backwards". Wendy--Bridget, in point of fact--used it before at the story's outset when she wrote a note to hubby Clay on the back of an emptied box of condoms just before she took off with the ill-gotten gains from *his* big drug deal. Out of the shower, he finds the note and holds it to the mirror: "We can't celebrate without these". It doesn't take him long to realize he's been had, that there's no celebration, she's not coming back. There is no 'we' any longer...just him and his own mirror image. If this 'Woman' existed before only as 'a guarantor of his own fantasy', for all intents and purposes now she does not exist at all. No body and no fantasy live there: Nothing at all against which he can measure himself.

John Dahl's *film noir* remake The Last Seduction (1994), doesn't miss a trick. Reprising the narrative plot-line of Double Indemnity (1944), and mixing in a little of The Maltese Falcon (1941), and the de Balzac novella, Sarrasine, for good

measure, Dahl's film pushes the conventions of the *noir* thriller to its limit point. The seamless corruption of the postmodern, *noir* city is given literal voice in the deadly sexuality of a woman who would just as soon kill you as look at you: She'd do almost anything for a buck. The twisted deformity of family relations, the diminishment of paternal authority, the loss of related values in work, in money, in community, in all forms of representation are hyperbolized in the characterization of this socio-pathic, cross-dressing woman-as-victim-as-con-artist threat. Wendy Kroy not only turns the language of patriarchy backwards, but flatly parroting recent social discourse on spousal abuse, mockingly turns the language of recent feminism inside out as well. Wendy builds a slap that Clay gave her during a quarrel into the basis of her new con. With a smirk on her face she tells her new boss and boyfriend, and anyone else who'll listen, that her husband had been abusing her all along. Taking up where the earlier *noir* seductress left off, the *femme fatale* of The Last Seduction does not merely facilitate the crime of patricide, she commits it. She kills the patriarch and gets off on it too. She enjoys using her feminine wiles to set the guys up to take the heat and seems to enjoy even more that she doesn't have to try very hard at all to convince them. A few tired old lines, a few tired old tricks and this new bad woman gets away with it.

Interpretations of the roles that women occupy in the *film noir* universe vary only slightly. It is generally agreed that the classical *film noir* narrative (circa 1941-1958, roughly WWII to the 'Cold War') "expressed [America's post-war



sense of] alienation ... locating its cause squarely in the excesses of female sexuality (natural consequence of women's independence) and punish[ing] that excess in order to re-place it within the patriarchal order" (Kaplan 4). Positions differ, however, as to whether or not this expression of female sexual desire can be wholly re-contained by the resolution of narrative conflicts. While most analyses of the formal operations of the classical cinematic narrative suggest that the re-containment of conflict is almost always achieved by narrative closure (typically any conflict initiated by a female character's expression of social independence as sexual independence, is resolved either by marrying or killing her off), Janey Place, for one, has argued that the pleasure gleaned by the spectator from the vision of the *femme fatale's* sex/sensuality surpasses in intensity what the moral message of such narrative resolutions might otherwise hope to entertain (Place 35-54).<sup>1</sup> However, given the certain artifice of the new *femme fatale*, it is more than a little difficult to reconcile her cold, faux femininity with the notion of sensuality or even liberated sexuality. Rather, as Amelia Jones has said of Presumed Innocent (1990) and Fatal Attraction (1987), films contemporaneous with and generically overlapping the *neo-noir* project, "these films work to mutilate or reincorporate the characters who represent a new femininity" by representing the desires of independent and/or professional women as pathologically depraved (Jones 298).

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<sup>1</sup> See Rachel Du Plessis, for a feminist analysis of narrative closure.

There is, however, another perspective from which to consider these female roles. While not as manifestly positive as Place's, it is nonetheless provisional of an important and alternative articulation of the role of the female figure in this stylistic universe; one that attributes power to "the feminine" as a sign in social and linguistic terms rather than as a set of traits that are biologically derived. While the conventions of the classical *film noir* and the detective fiction genres are fairly narrowly circumscribed, the roles played by each component part are complex and multiple. The genre includes a male detective hero, a criminal and/or *femme fatale*, who often, but not always, serves the same character function, a good woman/wife/mother, against which the bad woman is defined, and a narrative movement characterized by conflicts, detours and dispersions. The genre's symbolic, hermeneutic and action codes are enacted through each of these features.

Most dramatically, the *femme fatale* of the *film noir* narrative is imbricated within these narrative operations, as instrumental to the instantiation, sustainment and finally, in some way, the resolution of the chain of each sequence of events. Less a question of the agency awarded any individual female character and more the ubiquity of the sign of 'the feminine' as it is manifest in the various female character's roles within each filmic text, both 'good' and 'bad' poles of the feminine operate interventionally within what *otherwise* would be a linear and cumulative history of events. If the de-routing and dispersal of the *film noir* narrative (which Dana Polan has recognized as a key feature of forties narrative

in general and the *film noir* narrative in particular), is directed almost exclusively by what amounts to a detour sign in a dress, the function of 'the feminine' as a determining feature of the formal operations of narrative in the *film noir* text must be reassessed.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will explore some of the structural dynamics of the classical *noir* and the *neo-noir* narrative insofar as they express conflicts over shifting modes of temporality and socio-cultural organization as transformations in the symbolic Order. The functioning of the fatal women of both 1940's and 1990's *noir* universes will serve as a measure of shifting modes of subjectivity and signification, and of politics itself: all serve representative functions. In this regard, it is not insignificant that the new *femme fatale* of the new *film noir* texts *performs* rather than embodies her gendered identity. As postmodern texts, "the vacuum of authority is a key component" of this genre, as Ruby Rich has noted (10). *Neo-noir* films rely on quotation, appropriation and homage to achieve their effects. Thus, if the new *femme fatale* "is utterly lacking in subjectivity", as Rich has claimed, it is because her repertoire of behavior is always already understood: already seen, interpreted and dispersed (9). In this instance, "Woman" is clearly more a functioning than a function of representation, a representatum that can't quite seem to find its way back to its source. And if this is true of gender, is it not true of all modes of differentiation and all representation?

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<sup>2</sup> See Polan, especially his chapter "Blind Insights and Dark Passages", 214-221.

This chapter looks at Edgar Ulmer's classic *noir* film Detour (1945) and Alfred Hitchcock's quirky *noir* take-off Shadow of a Doubt (1945) as examples of *film noir* in its classical period and John Dahl's The Last Seduction (1993) and Barry Levinson's Disclosure (1994) as examples of the genre in its *neo-noir* mode, and compares the films in relation to the feminine functions of their different Oedipal narrative structures. I will be arguing that the hyper-self-reflexivity apparent in many *neo-noir* texts invokes a nostalgic sentiment that forcefully situates these films within a historical relationship. While the film Disclosure is less obviously self-reflexive than The Last Seduction, or many of the other films in the *neo-noir* detective fiction mode, it still functions within the historical context provided by the framework of genre. The differences between the two modes of genre revisionism do, however, determine the gender-based differences involved in reading these two kinds of revival texts. The chapter asks how each of these films register historically specific attitudes towards gender. What discursive formations are articulated in relation to the text's own discursive interest in shifting socio-symbolic functions? Who is the subject of these texts?

### *Neo-noir and Generic Histories*

A flat-out parody-pastiche of references to earlier *noir* texts, Dahl's *film noir* reprisal, along with those other, roughly contemporaneous, early nineties, '*neo-noir*' film productions in the crime/detective story mode, The Grifters (Stephen Frears, 1990), Barton Fink, (Joel Coen, 1991), Romeo is Bleeding (Peter Medak,

1993), Body of Evidence (Uli Edel, 1993), Serial Mom (John Waters, 1994), and To Die For, (Gus Van Sant, 1995), fit the category of film that Fredric Jameson has labeled 'nostalgia-deco', Dean MacCannell the *film noir renaissance*, and that I have called the 'revival' text. To the extent that both these other critics view these postmodern style revivals as ahistorical, decorative and/or solipsistic, the recent *noir* resurrection has been deemed a problematic cultural phenomenon. For Jameson, the parodic flatness of such productions amounts to nothing more than an aesthetic conceit, "amputated of the satiric impulse...of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists... (it is) blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs" (Jameson 16-17). In the 'nostalgia film' everything "conspires to blur its official contemporaneity and make it possible for the viewer to receive the narrative as though it were set in some eternal thirties, beyond real historical time" (Jameson 22). And, for MacCannell, the *film noir renaissance* merely deepens the nostalgic attitude inherent to the *film noir* text itself: "the groundless 'nostalgia' these fictions provide historically disconnects us from the real sources of our suffering" (MacCannell, 281). (It should go without saying that from a feminist perspective other problems with this *noir* revival come to mind, specifically, the problematic relationship women have to these text's constructions of femininity.)

On the other hand, the discursive arrangements of the *neo-noir* film in the detective mode are highly contrived—overdetermined, in fact. And it is because of

this that they should be considered as historically reflexive and significant textual productions. The text's attempts to establish an explicit link between the viewer's situation and that on the screen, which is what Jameson expects from historical practice, is not a matter of reproducing a specific political history or a set of characters or social events. It is not a matter of connecting the 'real' and its representation', but of engaging and exercising a historically specific constellation of discourses. The nostalgic effect is always a byproduct of genre repetition itself: a form of representation that necessarily invokes the discursive arrangements of its past lives. The nostalgia that Jameson claims is inspired by nostalgia film is, however, of a different order than that expressed in the language of modernist literary form. It is the "desire for desire," not desire itself, that Jameson claims characterizes the postmodern nostalgic mode (see chapter one).

Significantly, Jameson's critique of nostalgia deco, raised in relation to the 1981 Lawrence Kasdan thriller, Body Heat, addressed the displacement of the narrative function by a nostalgic aesthetic, which is the crux of the confrontation between temporal forms that this thesis addresses. Much like the postmodern confrontation between linear and repetitive models of historical process (which inform, in turn, static concepts of identity or complex, dynamic and mobile identifications), postmodern genre productions juxtapose two narrative modes. The linear drive of the classical historical narrative plays off of the symbolic emphases of the serial mode. The encounter exaggerates their common concern

with the production of identity. Thus, the given traits of the *film noir* genre become hyperbolized.

Appropriately, Slavoj Žižek has explained the difference between Jameson's first and second order nostalgia as a difference in their configurations of history and myth. In the case of the more pure, modern mode of this sentiment, "a fragment from the past which serves as the object of nostalgia is extracted from its historic context, from its continuity and inserted into a field of timeless present" (Žižek 112-113). This is the operative critical principle for aesthetic strategies of montage and appropriation and the political worth of nostalgia: its dialectical function. A moment of historical rupture, the gesture itself is tautological as it defines historical difference by virtue of its own functioning. Held in check, the relationship between past and present is not posed as one of continuity but negative reflection.

On the other hand, with 'nostalgia deco' "we view the present itself as if it were part of the mythic past," and the present/past becomes fetishized (Žižek 112-113). Thus, from Jameson's perspective, the only interpretive possibilities postmodern nostalgia invites relate to its status as fetish. Žižek's clarification of Jameson's theory of nostalgia, however, opens up alternative critical possibilities in his elaboration of the structural dynamics of just such a psychic mechanism. Our relation to the nostalgic text, Žižek tells us, is always divided between fascination and ironic distance: fascination with the gaze and ironic distance toward its diegetic reality. For, "the real object is not the displayed scene but the gaze of the naive 'other' absorbed and enchanted by it" (Žižek 112-113).

Through our identification with the naive 'other', "we see ourselves seeing" (Zizek 112-113). The fascination of the nostalgic image is indeed what it promotes of narcissism. On the other hand, this narcissism does not remain unchecked. And, as we have already noted, discussing the ambivalence of the nostalgic paradigm in Chapter One, the ironic distance that, according to Zizek, constitutes the conscious half of the ambivalence of nostalgia, both marks and gives licence to the possibility of historical meaning: "The very form of its historical context determines that we perceive it as a... 'meta-text' (ibid). Since the neo-nostalgic text is specific to postmodernity--to 'women's time'--it is not inconsequential that the dialectics of this order of nostalgia resemble the relationship the feminist viewer of popular cultural productions has with representation itself, according to Teresa de Lauretis: outside and inside of representation--of the imaginary relation--at one and the same time.

Whether or not the specific ideologies reflected upon in each genre--the western and its myth of the frontier, the horror genre and its nightmare/dream of monsters, or the detective fiction and the symbolic law itself--are still believable in postmodernity, or have been lost along with all the rest of the 'grand narratives' of progress, is an issue central to generic revision in all of its forms. However, the recuperation of historical materials is different for standard modes of generic revision and for what I'm calling the revival text. Where the genre revision implicates a linear mode of historical progression, the revival text engages the "historicity" of the original material more parodically and hysterically. It doesn't seek developmental transformation, but leaves the generic material much the



same as it was originally, and then 'turns it inside out'. The revivalist film marks time through generationally specific differences in modes of signification, laid against the calendar of generic form and convention. Who the subject of the film's enunciation is, and how that subject is solicited is determined by the specific narrative structures and discursive arrangements that are in play in the genres in question. In the *neo-noir* universe, historical change is registered only very broadly in the shifting generic conventions of the detective story and within the range of narrative forms that constitute the 'woman's picture' genre: gothic romance, family romance, and melodrama.<sup>3</sup> The common discursive preoccupations of all of these genres are the status of the symbolic in its governance of the relations between public and private space.

Following Roland Barthes' theory of narrative as a complex of codes, Stephen Neale has devised a theory of genre that provides a useful way of thinking about the historical functioning of generic form. He considers genres to be regulating modes of the narrative system which, in classical cinema, is a process that involves the transformation of the balance of elements in a discursive formation, for which narrative is a pretext. These 'elements in question' and their ordering and disordering, "are not simply reducible to the signified components of a given

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Whether or not *film noir* is more properly a genre or a movement is a question that has never finally been resolved (see Place). I would like to suggest that it is both a genre and a movement. As a genre it is classically associated with the film version of the detective fiction. As noted above, its generic features include a detective/protagonist, a criminal, a woman who often, but not always, is a *femme fatale*, and a complex, conflicted narrative trajectory. Insofar as these features are broadly inclusive, they overlap with other generic organizations, most commonly the women's film genres of melodrama and gothic romance. More generally, as a movement or style, the *film noir* text impresses its aesthetic onto other cultural productions. In this sense, as Geoffrey O'Brien has noted, it is a fashion more than anything else.

narrative situation, nor are they solely the product of the narrative considered as a single discourse or discursive structure" (Neale 20-21). They are signifiers that are brought together in a narrative process which involves "the inscription of a number of discourses and...their modification, restructuration and transformation" as they interact (Neale 20-21). The balance that is achieved is "essentially a function of the relations of coherence between the discourses involved," of how and what they signify when brought together (Neale 20-21). In the detective genre, the discourses that are mobilized relate to crime, legality, justice, social order, civilization, private property and civic responsibility: the balance is constructed in terms of the "presence/absence, effectiveness/ineffectiveness of legal institutions and their agents" (Neale 20-21). Moreover, a definitive balance is not the object of these narrative processes, for if one were to be achieved it would "suture' a lack which...would insist all the more strongly, all the more uncomfortably in the interstices of an ever more frenzied repetition" (ibid). Genre specificity is a function of particular combinations of discourses and the conflicts that arise in bringing them together.

Still, the *primary* narrative crisis of the genres that are inscribed by both forties *noir* and nineties *neo-noir* aesthetics, is invariably linked to a crisis of signification related to a crisis in the socio-symbolic field. Both of these issue forth in these texts to an unprecedented degree, and in an especially hyperbolized form, as symbolic excess. As Barthes has suggested of narrative form very generally, the symbolic economy merely provides one code among others within which the

textual signifiers of an object of analysis can be grouped. What is more, “the symbolic grouping...is a place for multivalence and reversibility...this field can be entered from any number of points” (Barthes 1974, 215). The discursive regime of the symbolic order is one among many inscribed by the *film noir* text. The myriad of companion discourses—about representational and fiscal economies, housing and social accommodation—have a role to play in the balancing of narrative events, and in the genre’s historical transformations.

The following discussion will explore some of the structural dynamics of the classical *noir* narrative insofar as they express conflicts over shifting modes of temporality and socio-cultural organization as transformations in the symbolic Order, and consider the recent re-emergence of the *film noir* text, in both its detective and “new woman’s picture” forms, along the same lines. For the purposes of analyzing what determines and limits the conceptual power of the feminine in the social discourses engaged by the *noir* and *neo-noir* texts, I would like to draw very generally on the method Barthes used in *S/Z*, for his analysis of Balzac’s *Sarrasine*. Observing that a common structural logic prevailed in the relationship drawn between the economy, modes of representation/signification and the symbolic register around which that story was framed, Barthes conjectured that *Sarrasine* “represents the very confusion of representation, the unbridled circulation of signs, of sexes, of fortunes” that results when “the paradigmatic slash mark which permits meaning to function...life to reproduce and property to be protected” is removed (Barthes 215). *S/Z*’s analysis of *Sarrasine*

is, in fact, a story about the status of discourse in modernity: of the value given antagonism and conflicting images in the cultural production and social life of modern 'man'.

In the films that make up both *noir* and *neo-noir* production cycles, three interpretive routes into the film texts--the symbolic, the economic and the rhetorical, or representational--are features foregrounded in the primary narrative lines of the texts. *Noir* and *neo-noir* highlight stories about representation of all sorts. While the discourses on gender are privileged in these generic forms, discourses on the economic situations within which these gendered subjects find themselves are always secondary concerns. Typically, the particular nature of the economy in these *noir* worlds finds its base in a mode of production relating to representational regimes that prevail in post-WWII and postmodern epochs. The insurance salesmen, con-artists and merry-widowers of the post-war period's analogic representational economy are the telephone sales managers, electronic oddsmakers and cyber-technicians and designers of the post-cold war years' virtual worlds and economies. If, as Barthes has claimed of the representational regime of modernity, it was "fatal" to the conceptual coherence of the transcendental subject "to remove the dividing lines" between the real and its representations--between the masculine subject and his female other--what fate then awaits the unfixed, unstable subject of postmodernity when the dividing line between referents and references is not so much removed, as simulated; when both the real and its representations exist in virtual space and time?

*The (Conceptual) Power of the Feminine: 'Detour' and 'Shadow of a Doubt'*

Most scholars of the forties *film noir* and "woman's genre" argue that the sexually expressive *femme fatale* was a sign of the psychic trauma attending the shift in the American social landscape just as WW II was ending and after the war (Doane, Kaplan, La Place, Place, Polan, Williams). I want to shift and emphasize the individual terms of this claim. I want to stress that the women of *film noir* were not just the most vibrant of the many highly expressive signs contained in these texts--the city, its under-class, the natural, home and suburban landscapes--but were rather more central and ultimately very *specific* signs of socio-psychic conflict. If *film noir* has given us the baddest women of film, it has also given us some of the most pure.

Some analyses of post-war narrative claim that the hyperbolized 'femininity' that *film noir* promotes, displaced a nebulous set of cultural neuroses onto the body of an 'other' who stood in for contemporaneous or lingering (as the case may be) war-time anxieties around foreign power and its threats (Polan, Place). Others argue that this emphasis on the feminine was a form of a hysterical symptom. In this theory, the anxieties and fears about social changes that troubled the American collective unconscious after the war, were thought to have symbolically manifested on the part of the body *politic* where the most dramatic of these social changes were discursively, if not actually, located (La Place, Williams). I want to follow this latter route and consider what the hyperbolized

femininity of the female characters in *film noir* might suggest of the changes affecting of post-WWII social life.

In this regard, Julia Kristeva's analysis of shifting social and cultural organization in Europe, post-WWII may hold some truth in an American context as well. Kristeva contends that the idea of the nation had exhausted itself by the end of the war and that the European socio-economic ensemble reorganized itself along common symbolic lines rather than the linear, national modes of identification that prevailed prior to the war. If this is true of American social and cultural formation as well, it elucidates the socio-psychic tensions that were both exploited and exacerbated by the discursive regime guiding America's post-war 'economic recovery plan' and were ultimately manifest, for better or worse, in all of its cultural productions. In an American context the radical potential of a socioeconomic grouping organized according to common symbolic identifications can be seen to have been harnessed to an unprecedented forceful petition to conform to the regulating principles of the prior symbolic order—for the sake of the economic security of the nation, if not in its name. The figures of the feminine in *film noir* are figures defined in very specific relationships to that new symbolic order and as such may be expressive of the deep-seated conflicts at the heart of a population reconsolidating along the lines of gender solidarity, first and foremost. Dependent as it was upon the *willing and able* participation of all of its members, the feminine was nonetheless conscripted to act as the moral linchpin around which the rules of symbolic membership were defined.

In this regard, the role of the feminine in the *film noir* narrative is not an exact expression of sexuality or its lack. Rather the hyperbolized poles of femininity--sexual vs. maternal--expressed by *film noir's* female figures can be read as a sign of the centrality of the feminine in America's post-war social organization. Her appearance represented an insistent and intense expression of contemporaneous social anxieties relating to heretofore unimagined pressure to conform to the imperatives of the symbolic order so as to maintain collective identity and fuel economic power. Female characters appear in the *film noir* narrative at determining points of the narrative action, to control and spoil--at the very least reroute--the linear historical trajectory of the *noir* hero. Her predictability in this regard speaks to the significance of forties narrative's radical form. As a determinant of a narrative logic that defies the notion of historical continuity upon which the concept of nation depends, the regulating function of 'the feminine' in the post-war, *film noir* text marks the instantiation of a radically different moment in social relations where the social association is forced and over-determined.

The following discussion explores the function of the feminine in two classical *film noir* texts: Edgar Ulmer's Detour (1945), and Alfred Hitchcock's Shadow of a Doubt (1943). Exemplary of the *noir* form and aesthetic, Detour's character functions, narrative structure and emotional tone render the post-war social experience as an extraordinarily dark existential crisis. Hitchcock's film, on the other hand, provides the exception that proves the rules of the genre, at least insofar as the aesthetics and character functioning are concerned. Substituting

sunny noon-time skies and small town family life for the dark, expressionistic, night-time urban streets more typical of the *noir* universe, the 'shadows' in Hitchcock's film are not cast by dark figures lurking under city street lights, but by mom and dad, Uncle Charlie and niece Charlie, sitting around the brightly lit family room of their small town home.

Both films' narrative trajectories are, however, determined by the function of the female character. If, as Tania Modleski has claimed, the notorious Vera of Ulmer's Detour provides one of "the most ferocious, persecutory *femme fatales* in the history of the cinema," then niece Charlie of Hitchcock's Shadow of a Doubt furnishes the most pure sign of woman (Modleski, 1982, 73). It was in writing about Detour, in fact, that Modleski observed the contradiction between the Oedipal interdiction against incest and the narrative direction of *film noir*: "[this film] derives its emotional force...from [the hero's] failure to remain at the pre-Oedipal stage of development" rather than his "failure to accede to the symbolic" (74). As already noted in my discussion of the gendered representations of space in detective fiction, in Chapter Three, Modleski's observation is crucial to rethinking the situation of women's oppression outside of the model that standard accounts of psychoanalysis provide. Pre-Oedipal longing derives not from biological factors determining sexual difference but from social productions of family relations and identifications, which is a condition that can change, and, as we shall see in our study of these films, does change according to changing social and historical circumstances.



Modleski's analysis of Detour along these lines lays important ground for my own, for both Detour and Shadow of a Doubt. But where Modleski has focused on the psychic mechanisms internal to the film (albeit as expressive of more general cultural conflicts), I would like to reverse the orientation of that discussion and concentrate on the ways in which these films address the more general conflicts of a shifting socio-cultural organization. The confrontation of the two socio-symbolic formulations that Kristeva proposed are expressed in these films, mapped against the Oedipal narrative that provides the structuring principal of the film's narrative form. I argue that both films, albeit differently, remark on the artificiality of symbolic relations during this moment in post-war American culture, and recognize the critical role that the female symbolic position played in the maintenance of the linear historical, model of modern social relations that was on the wane during this period.

In classically existentialist *noir* style, the narrative of Detour unravels retrospectively. Beginning at the end of the story, the film opens with the protagonist, Al Roberts, sitting in a roadside café relating the ill-fated tale of his quest to be reunited with his long-time singing partner and sweetheart Sue. Sue left Roberts and their relationship behind when she set out for Hollywood in order to "improve her position in the world." At the outset of Roberts's quest he is picked up hitchhiking by Charlie Haskell, an older, sick and seemingly malicious man who mysteriously dies just after Roberts takes his turn at the wheel. Thinking no one will believe he didn't kill the man, Roberts hides the body, assumes Haskell's identity and continues on his way. Further along the road

Roberts picks up Vera, "the classic spider woman" of cinema. Unknown to Roberts, Haskell had picked up Vera earlier and she recognized the car. For Roberts, however, Vera's apparent knowledge of Haskell's death and his own imposture is uncanny.<sup>4</sup> In the end it is Vera and the knowledge she possesses that irrevocably thwarts Roberts's quest. Vera blackmails Roberts, binding him to her with her knowledge of his accidental, but no less illegal, accession to Haskell's position. Roberts accidentally kills Vera after she threatens to turn Roberts over to the police. At film's end we find Roberts alone and on the highway, once again. The car that picks him up this time belongs to the police; in the end, he meets his fate through the power of the secular law as it enforces the symbolic Order.

A series of images of Sue and Roberts on stage, as two of a number of members of a larger *jazz ensemble*, recur though out the film at very particular instances to propel Roberts on his journey to be rejoined with Sue. These flashbacks to "the old days" when the two performed together on the same stage at "The Break of Dawn Cafe" provide the structuring motif and determining force of this film. To further emphasize the temporal conflict that these fantasy sequences signal, they are initially framed in the rear-view mirror of the car in which Roberts has thumbed a ride. The images appear at the moment Roberts

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<sup>4</sup> The story supplies a credible explanation for Vera's knowledge. Haskell himself told Roberts that at an earlier point in his trip he had picked up a woman who answered to Vera's description. However, she reveals her knowledge to Roberts with such abruptness and outside of any immediate textual context, it would seem that this knowledge and her relation to truth manifest some agency outside of the ordinary forces of cause and effect.

decides to embark on his journey and again just before Haskell dies and Vera is killed. Because the story is told in a series of flashbacks, where the film's beginning is really the story's end, it is this fantasy-sequence--inclusive of its various repercussions--that appears before Roberts is forced to submit to both the laws of the symbolic order and narrative closure.

Modleski notes that Roberts's desires to be reunited with Sue are paradoxical. While given voice as romantic and potentially sexual desires, his vision of his future with Sue is manifested in the film's story, in recurring images from the past. Upbeat, rhythmic, brightly lit, these are the most sensuous image sequences in the film; their harmonic intensity is in sharp contrast to every other scene in the film. Framed by a glow of perfect fulfillment, these images represent Roberts's pre-Oedipal plenitude, which Sue's assertion of independence forced to an end (Modleski). In these terms, Roberts's cross-country journey was inspired not by the desire to be reunited with Sue as her husband and father to her children, but, Modleski maintains, by Roberts's desire to reunite with Sue as a child would want to reunite with his mother.

I would concur with Modleski that Detour marks an especially intense and specifically determined anxiety in relation to Oedipal transition: a desire to remain in the fullness of a pre-oedipal maternal connection that is dramatically more intense than the force of the castration anxiety upon which the successful negotiation of the Oedipal crisis is supposed to depend. If Sue represents the maternal and Haskell the paternal figures of negotiation in the Oedipal campaign, then Roberts's journey is ill-fated precisely because of the insistent memory of

Sue that marshals his desire. However, I think that Roberts's relationships with Sue and with Vera are more complicated and more ambiguous than Modleski's analysis allows. I also think that Roberts's Oedipal transition has been completed, albeit not in a way he might have anticipated, let alone in a way he might have desired. Roberts's relationship with Vera represents the state of social relations in America after the second world war.

There is an odd and important parity between the terms of the recurring imagery that drives Roberts's desire for a re-union with Sue--and over whose recurrence Roberts seemingly has no control--and those determining Vera's almost astonishing knowledge of Haskell's death and Roberts's cover-up. The 'vision' from Roberts's past has a regularity and force of insistence, and most importantly an inherent sociality, that is equal to the power and social force of Vera's 'visionary' apprehension of the social logic upon which the Oedipal journey is determined. Sue's power over Roberts may, in fact, be both maternal and libidinal, but it is the social bond re-presented by the fantasy imagery that is its primary significance. The fantasy of their relationship that Roberts replays over and over again, represents their participation within a whole "social" ensemble. Thus, even as incestuous desire is recalled by the fantasy, its social prohibition is reinforced as well. This re-staging of the regulating principles ordering proper social relations prefigures the impossibility of any ultimate resistance to the Oedipal project.

Vera's power over Roberts is not so much founded on her knowledge of his 'criminal' accession to Haskell's social position, as on her immediate re-

cognition/understanding of the socio-symbolic demand. Recalling Freud's summary judgement of women's relationship to representation, upon meeting Al Roberts after he takes up Haskell's place within the social field Vera "makes her judgement and decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it" (Freud, 1963, 187-88). With a swiftness of recognition akin to the supernatural Vera recognizes in Roberts's imposture of Haskell, his necessary, albeit highly circumstantial, submission to the inescapable, highly mediated Oedipal/social law that requires his socio-sexual, cultural inscription, and more, the role she can play in relation to it. The cognizance that Vera exercises is, however, of a different order than the immediacy of knowledge that Freud describes. It is inspired not by the recognition of sexual difference but by the appreciation of the symbolic position as a masquerade: the observation that Roberts's pretense of authority is not naturally derived but appropriated. In the same way that Haskell's death, while not murder, was no accident, Vera's appearance in Roberts's life was not merely an unfortunate turn of events preventing him from realizing his reunion with Sue. Both were part of an imposed process of subjection to cultural imperatives that became inevitable when, after Sue claimed her independence, Roberts failed to relinquish his desire.

Haskell and Vera, in all their lurid excess, are Roberts's Oedipal companions. Fraught with guilt, vulnerable to extortion, Roberts's experience represents the male Oedipal path in post-war America. Vera's power over Roberts is expressed by way of a blackmail scheme involving imposture to inherit the real Haskell's

claims to power--his name and patriarchal rights and capital, and, with this a guarantee of economic power and success--and this situation requires Roberts's participation in a dark parody of domestic, marital relations. The masquerade of symbolic relations rehearsed in Detour also intimates the falseness of a sense of any substantial collective unity underscoring the concept of nationhood in America at that time. The idea of collective goals and ambitions represented by the Roberts's desire to be reunited with Sue deteriorates in the rerouted drive across America.

Alfred Hitchcock's Shadow of a Doubt opens with a spectacular, if unusually short, scene of ballroom dancing. Quickly cutting to the ubiquitous *film noir* opening shot of a port in a large city, the camera closes in on an inner-city street, moves through the window of a rooming house, across a floor littered with money, to finally, (with the aid of the soundtrack) connect this image with its source: Uncle Charlie, laid in thoughtful repose on a bed at the center of the room. The music of the opening scene--the title of which, we find out later is "something like" "The American Waltz,"--is interrupted by an announcement by the housekeeper that Charlie had a couple of visitors while he was out.<sup>5</sup> Charlie then sets the story in motion by making plans to hide from these 'visitors', visiting his sister's family back home in Santa Rosa.

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Raymond Bellour has claimed that the title of this song is "The Merry Widow" waltz, but this is not given in the film itself nor listed in its credits. See Bellour, 1979, 74.

What the image of Sue and its associated song were to Detour, the opening image of ballroom dancing and its melody are to Shadow of a Doubt. They frame the story, and recur throughout the narrative at determining points in the story's unraveling. More importantly, the song links the two protagonists--Uncle Charlie to niece Charlie--and thus metonymically, the image of social dancing is the form and meaning that their relationship will take. If Detour imagines the Oedipal negotiation as a road trip, full of kinks and detours, but nonetheless linear, Shadow of a Doubt conceives of the process more spatially, in the patterned movement of a waltz. And, importantly, while the male may lead in this social practice, ballroom dancing only allows a small avenue of interpretation within a highly circumscribed space.

Marrying the concept of a homeland with that of home, it is significant that Hitchcock has set the better part of this film and this problematic within an American small-town family. One of the few films he shot on location, it is, nevertheless, one of his more surreal. For all their pretenses to normalcy, Santa Rosa and its inhabitants are too good, too perfect, too ordinary representatives of American life in the forties. The weather's always fine. The town is picturesque, pristine and orderly. (Our first, bird's-eye view of Santa Rosa circles around to close in on a traffic cop at its center.) Its citizens, if a little prim, are still good-hearted folk. Insofar as home life may be uneventful, it *looks* comfortable. But the serenity expressed by the film's descriptions of domestic space remains on the level of the visual alone. The script imbues its figures on this domestic field

with a melancholic range of emotions and neuroses that signal a much richer vein of discontent.

When we first meet niece Charlie—who, as Raymond Bellour has noted, is first shown "in a pure mirror-effect" of Uncle Charlie, laid across a bed—she is beginning to show signs of symbolic unrest (Bellour, 1979, 112). Family life is beginning to seem a mere charade of good intentions. In conversation with her father, niece Charlie complains "...I'm talking about soul. Eat and sleep and that's about all [we do]. We don't even have any real conversations anymore ...I don't believe in good intentions anymore, all I'm waiting for is a miracle." Her father, while seemingly mild-mannered and complaisant (Dean MacCannell has described him as "something of a noodle"), nonetheless spends his evenings with his neighbor plotting out a perfect murder campaign (293). And Charlie's mother—perhaps the most obviously hysterical of the characters in this film—pines for a time when she was not "her husband's wife" but the prettiest girl in town. Ann, Charlie's younger sister, believes that truth (about life in general, but specifically, about the art of flirtation) is best found in good fiction, and complains constantly that her family's reading habits are wanting in this regard. Given his place in the family, the baby brother doesn't feel justly spoiled, he just feels forgotten. And, for all intents and purposes, after the moment at which this dissatisfaction is expressed, he is. Uncle Charlie is the baby brother privileged with attention. Fussed over, he is the subject of enunciation of the filmic subtext: the character who perhaps best personifies the role of the father in America's post-war symbolic regime.



Niece Charlie's adoration of her Uncle is expressed—as the film's cutting would have it—as he makes his plans to return home and these feelings are voiced in relation to her concerns for the present and future status of her family's well-being; a concern which is focused, finally, on the lot of her mother. "Poor mother, she works like a dog. We should do something for her. She's really a wonderful woman. She's not just a mother..." Uncle Charlie, she decides, is this miracle—an adult subject who seems to be able to have it all. She thinks Uncle Charlie is "the answer" to the family's problem. In this regard niece Charlie's impulse to call Uncle Charlie back home is less meaningful as a sign of incestuous desire (although the narrative successfully exploits the tensions of its potential here), and more as an emblem of her especially strong epistemophilic drive. Furthermore on Uncle Charlie's arrival she clearly states what she perceives to be the nature of their bond: "We're not just uncle and niece" she tells him. Rather, they are linked, she claims, on a psychic plane. Recalling Vera's seeming psychic connection in Detour, she too has an inexplicable but sure knowledge that he has a secret that he hasn't told anyone and that she and she alone is destined to discover.<sup>6</sup>

Niece Charlie does not so much discover Uncle Charlie's secret, as it is suggested to her by the police, who allege that her beloved Uncle Charlie is not

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In her book The Women Who Knew Too Much, a study of Alfred Hitchcock's filmic obsession with women, Tania Modleski argues that the films reveal men's fascination with women's closer relationship with the body. Akin to pre-Oedipal longing insofar as it accords mythic power to the feminine, this fascination "undermines their efforts to achieve masculine strength and autonomy and is the primary cause for the violence towards women in Hitchcock's films" (1988, 8).

the perfect man she thought he was but a notorious "widow marrying murderer". At first Charlie is reluctant to believe the charges, so the police, and one police officer especially, begin a campaign to convince niece Charlie of her uncle's guilt. Throughout the rest of the film, the police investigation parallels the police officer's literal courtship of niece Charlie and as a series of incriminating coincidences compel her to accept the charges as truth, the romance heats up.

A series of increasingly closer "accidents" threatens niece Charlie and brings the narrative crisis to a close. Suspecting Uncle Charlie's culpability, niece Charlie tricks him into leaving town by resorting to his own exploitative methods. Stealing back a stolen ring that he had earlier used to try to buy her silence, niece Charlie forces her uncle's actions, by wearing the ring as a sign of her independent, unlawful powers. Struggling to throw her off the train that he boards to leave Santa Rosa, Uncle Charlie's final attempt to wrest power away from his niece is thwarted when she pushes him in the path of a train coming towards them on another line.

If Detour begged the question of post-war Oedipal ambivalence in the masculine subject, focusing on the tenor of Al Roberts' resistance to symbolic ascension, this ambivalence founds the narrative crisis in Shadow of a Doubt. This is how the uncertainty attending the shifting post-war socio-symbolic order plays itself out. An imposter, the new patriarch channels his residual Oedipal stage anxieties to his own advantage, exploiting the status of the place he has been handed without having to relinquish his pre-oedipal desire. As Dean MacCannell has argued,

For all its pathological manifestations, traditional family structure under democracy has been replaced by something more pathological still... No longer under the 'absent father' guarantor of the symbolic order, democracy gave us the *present* father, not symbolic but real; this father is not ignorant but obscene... Under the guise of the traditional father figure (that is, the figure of denial and lack) a neo-totemic or capitalist father operates, who once again thinks he deserves and can have it all, all the pleasure and all the wealth (291-292).

Uncle Charlie, the "merry widow [marrying] murderer" of Shadow of a Doubt, wears the mantle of symbolic power accordingly. He assumes his position in the symbolic, only so far as he can exploit it to both post and pre-Oedipal ends. If, as MacCannell has claimed, post-Oedipal Charlie is the "capitalist 'angel of death'" who executes only "those guilty of nothing except a kind of enjoyment that the capitalist would want to monopolize for himself", his victims are also, and perhaps more importantly, fantasy invocations of the mother (293). His crimes are thus, as Raymond Bellour has noted, a form of murder/possession of the mother--a fantasy return to the pre-Oedipal stage (Bellour, 1979, 112).

Uncle Charlie enjoys the new, equivocal status of the male Oedipal position and with this ambivalence conceded in advance, Shadow of a Doubt shifts its concentration to map the conflicts between psychic and social pressures at work on the female subject on the Oedipal stage in America during the latter years of the war. While the Oedipal process in Shadow of a Doubt is notably different from that described in Detour it is no less hystericized. Most significantly, this

difference is determined by gender. Detour's male hero's accession to his place within the symbolic field is blatantly coerced. In Shadow of a Doubt niece Charlie's transition is more cautiously and delicately engineered. The 'shadow of doubt' of Hitchcock's film's title is equally the question of guilt that the narrative seeks to uncover as it is the fringe trace of shadow, the penumbra, that marks the excess of the Oedipal eclipse of the feminine position. This is, in fact, the focal point of both films, the singular residual aspect of the Oedipal conflict in late and post-war America that each film renders clear. The Oedipal/symbolic function is a sham (MacCannell).

Focusing on the relationships between the neo-totemic father as personified by Uncle Charlie and the daughter/niece that this new patriarch must at least pretend to protect, and that between both of these subjects and the law, what Hitchcock's Shadow of a Doubt is stammering to tell us about ourselves is that regardless of the position that each subject occupies in this new order, their limits are equally, if differently, circumscribed by a new, less figural, more secular law. It is not insignificant that even though the police have monitored Uncle Charlie's transgressions from the beginning, their surveillance activities increase dramatically only after he re-enters the unstable family home. Nor is it insignificant that Charlie is warned off her uncle by a suitor who works for the police. For Uncle Charlie's infractions of the traditional symbolic code can be tolerated, even encouraged in this new regime only if they remain veiled, only if they do not exacerbate the instability of the home and hearth that the female subject's successful conscription into the symbolic order is intended to conceal.

The emotional force of this film is derived as much from any threat of retribution from uncle Charlie as it is from the tenor of niece Charlie's newly grounded emotional conflicts. Niece Charlie is caught between a decision to preserve the status quo of an unstable family (Uncle Charlie included), and to renounce it. Niece Charlie's newly grounded Oedipal conflicts are traced out in this juxtaposition. Importantly, she is not so much required to forsake the plenitude of her own pre-oedipality in order to assume her place within this new symbolic order, as she is compelled to forfeit the opportunity to exploit the potential deviance of the new, Oedipal order. Her knowledge of the sham of the neo-totemic father, places her, like Vera, in a position of strength. Here knowledge is power in the form of a fair share of ill-gotten gains.

It is this possession of knowledge of Uncle Charlie's ambivalent status in the symbolic order that is niece Charlie's most valuable asset, and thus this narrative's most powerful determining force. It enunciates the potential such a position promises her, not by the reflection she passively receives in her proper symbolic relationship, but by the advantage that the knowledge of the precariousness of the symbolic Order offers her to subvert the symbolic law. Raymond Bellour has suggested that the train that carried Uncle Charlie to Santa Rosa at the beginning of Shadow of a Doubt was the sign of Uncle Charlie's fantasy unfolding-- "the conditions of its enunciation" (Bellour, 1977, 73). If this is true, then the oncoming train that finally kills him could well be its mirror opposite,

a sign of niece Charlie's conditions of enunciation and the potential of her threat as her own phantasy unfolds (Bellour, 1977, 73).

In Detour, Al Roberts' symbolic (im)positioning makes visible the cost to the post-oedipal masculine subject of the transnationalization of post-war economies in ethico-political terms. In his coerced symbolic ascension, Roberts's forfeiture is equally that of the plenitude of the mother as that of the productive concept of a motherland. The contingent and perhaps more significant loss he suffered as a consequence of his forced, and ultimately futile, accession to the symbolic order, was the sovereignty the masculine subject heretofore enjoyed in his relationship with its Laws. In post-war America the symbolic functioning of patriarchal authority does not involve the regulation of symbolic law, but the twisting of its rules. The absent, determining function of paternal authority has shifted to reveal a position occupied by an exploitative authority figure. In Detour, Roberts's forced culpability and inevitable arrest are testaments to this; in Shadow of a Doubt, the detective's increasing surveillance of Uncle Charlie is equally telling. It is here too--on the shaky ground of the law of the father--that Hitchcock's Shadow of a Doubt makes its strongest claims. If the heretofore inflexible law of the father has been so diminished as to permit Uncle Charlie a position on the symbolic stage that is so remarkably ambivalent, then the position it affords niece Charlie may be, at least potentially, equally unstable.

It is perhaps the radical *potential* of the destabilized female subject in post-war America, more than its occurrence in fact, that has determined the manifestation

of a hyperbolized femininity in forties narratives in general, and in particular, in the *film noir* text. For regardless of the degree of imposture enacted by what MacCannell has called the 'neo-totemic' or 'capitalist father', if the neo-totemic father hopes to retain the power of his place within the symbolic order, he must at least, as Juliet Flower MacCannell has suggested, maintain the illusion of his role "exercising his paternal/parental function of 'protecting and saving'" his wife and female child (qtd. in MacCannell 291). Whether overly idealized or overly debased, for all its inexactitude, the hyperbolized sign of the feminine in post-war America's cultural productions is perhaps the greatest excess of the nation's Oedipal eclipse. Its proliferated manifestation is perhaps the most damning evidence of the extent to which the instability of the female subject threatens to reveal the *neo-totemic* masquerade. The recuperative project that targets Shadow of a Doubt's shaky niece Charlie can be seen to have been launched, first and foremost, with these concerns in mind.

Dana Polan has asserted that the erratic trajectory typical of the *film noir* narrative subscribes to a concept of time that Juri Lotman has called 'historical'. Characterized by unpredictability and arbitrariness and "the unrecalable" gesture, 'historical time' is distinct from the concept of 'mythic time' in its determination of narrative closure. Under the direction of 'mythic time' "narratives begin by a self-engendering fiat--'in the beginning'...and end by fiat, the sense of an ending as finally no more than the authoritative imposition of an ending" (Polan 217). Polan argues that the *film noir* text subscribes to the concept of historical time that is

linear and ultimately modern, insofar as so many of its plot lines describe ambitions that express a "desire to leave the endless cyclicity of defeat, for a utopia of wealth and power" (Polan 219).

I would contend that the organizational logic of *film noir* illustrated in both Detour and Shadow of a Doubt subscribes to a concept of time which is, in fact, much more complex. Neither 'historical' or 'mythic', but both at the same time, this concept of time aligns more with that which Julia Kristeva has called 'Women's Time' to describe the postmodern confrontation of two temporal dimensions: a modern linear 'historical' temporality and a repetitive, monumental or 'mythic' temporality. The kind of time that Kristeva has called 'monumental' constitutes its identities and social positions within the symbolic order as given by a logic similar in kind to that which imposes narrative endings by fiat ('the vagaries of demand'). The insistent nature of 'mythic time' might be seen as 'women's time's' organizing principle. The 'arbitrariness' of historical time is palpable in the excess generated by the (im)positioning of the *film noir* subject into a rickety symbolic order. In this sense, the notion of 'women's time' equally and importantly derives some sense of its meaning from the concept of 'historical time'.

The principal effect of the progression of the 'mythic' narrative's events is a form of desire akin to that of the longing for a pre-Oedipal return--a longing for plenitude that historical time exploits only to convert before it concedes. As such, the manifestation of an erratic trajectory in the narrative form of the *film noir* text



is not so much a consequence of any forcible reminder of history's "reversible and resistant materiality" as it is the demonstration of the radical political potential of the historicized/hystericized myth (Polan 216). The narrative form that predominates at this emergent moment of 'women's time' reflects a mutated form of desire akin to that inspired by a new and potentially inflammatory socio-symbolic arrangement.

*'Neo-Noir' and Late Capitalism: The Feminine as Free Agent*

In the last chapter we considered the role that feminist discourse plays in the dis-articulation of concepts of home and femininity. Now we have explored the ways in which the narrative forms and contents of cultural productions just after World War II, reflected the fundamental instability of these terms as mutually determined or determining. *Neo-noir* combines these two discursive perspectives. More significantly, the *neo-noir* phenomenon represents a post-feminist moment when the conceptual coherence of these combined terms is completely exhausted. The *neo-noir* text expresses an intensification of the discursive consideration given to the exhaustion of the relationship between these concepts in the generic productions within which they assume pride of place. Most striking in this film phenomenon is that the ambiguity of the feminine sign is gone. The most dramatic difference between the classical and *neo noir* universes is the later absence of a dualism defining this term. There is no happy housewife: No good pole opposing the bad inhabited by the *femme fatale*. They

are one and the same thing. Vera is resurrected. Niece Charlie is grown up and exploits her knowledge of the Oedipal sham. The come-back character who is most remarkable of all is Charlie's little sister Ann. In her most recent manifestation, this character's book smarts 'about the truth of life in general, but more specifically about the art of flirtation', have been substantially refined. Rather, the possibilities for the continuance of family life in the *neo-noir* universe are tied to the stabilization of the male figure, here placed in the feminine position.

This is true of all the films in the larger *neo-noir* cycle--those of the revived detective genre as well as the revived melodrama.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the *neo-noir* narrative the men are dead, in jail or waiting for the tides of affirmative action to turn. The women, on the other hand, are spending their winnings, out of the house, out on the town and at the top of their game. If, in its earlier manifestation, the *noir*-toned investigation of the crime story characterized the diminishment of the individual's authority in the global public spheres of transnational capitalism, it also coloured the narrative focus on the personal, domestic conflicts of professional women in the "woman's picture" and melodrama genres of post-WW II American cinema. In the *neo-noir* universe,

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As mentioned above (p. 189), the detective mode of the *neo-noir* genre features films like The Grifters (1990), Barton Fink (1991), Romeo is Bleeding (1993), Body of Evidence (1993), Serial Mom (1994), and To Die For (1995). The films that Amelia Jones has called 'the new woman's genre' qualify as films made in the melodramatic mode of *neo-noir*. This cycle of films is best exemplified by Fatal Attraction (1987), Basic Instinct (1992) and Disclosure (1994). Others include Presumed Innocent (1991), Half-Moon Street (1986), Working Girl (1988), The Good Mother (1988), Baby Boom (1987), Die Hard (1987) and Pretty Woman (1990). See chapter two, p. 116.

however, the diegetic point of view of the revived, revised detective film is that of a woman, while that of the "new woman's genre," as Amelia Jones has called it, is not that of the professional woman herself, but of her male counterpart: "the resentful, white-guy, white collar, heterosexual victim", as J. Hoberman has dubbed him, "the great kvetch" or "whiny white guy", for short (31).

There is no difference between maternal and sexual roles in the *neo-noir* narrative and there is no difference between subjects, between objects and their values, or between objects and their representations. The Last Seduction (1995) is a story of gender bending, gender fraud and mutated desire before it is anything else. A story of misfortune, misrepresentation and misunderstanding on a grand scale, the narrative crisis begins and ends with a deadly misrecognition: the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the functioning of 'the feminine' in postmodern life. That the film actually opens on the 'shopfloor' of a high-pressure, low paid telemarketing world is significant in this regard. The social economy of late-capitalism depicted in this story is best represented in the hyper-alienated 'virtual commodity' world of telephone sales. The sign of "woman" has no substance in the circuit of social exchange and neither does its corollary, the commodity as the sign of value in economic exchange. Nothing but representations change hands in an economy of services and signs, but if this is the case, the 'real' rather than its representation, has become an illusive, ever-receding object of desire. Significantly in this opening scene, when Bridget/Wendy offers a telephone salesperson the choice of a 'real' dollar as a

bonus for making a sale or a potentially more valuable rare old coin, he chooses the sure thing, the dollar.

The Last Seduction is Wendy Kroy's story and as such marks a radical departure from the point-of-view structures of the classical *film noir* text. From the opening sequence to the closing frames she takes command of the narrative action itself, steering the story around the minor obstacles that the men in her life pose along the way. The story follows Wendy from the shop floor to her living room, where she steals the cash hubby Clay made through his own shady deals. From there Wendy heads out of town to hide out for a while and sets up shop in Beston, a small town in upstate New York. On her first night out she meets up with Mike, a guy who, it turns out, will be the subject of her next confidence scam.

Like the mark in Double Indemnity, the duped foil in The Last Seduction works in the insurance game. And, likewise Mike is seduced more by the lure of a 'real' woman, than by the promise of material wealth, in and of itself. But this time this woman is not like any woman he's met before, not even like the last 'woman' he met and mistakenly married before he found out she was really a man. When Mike first meets Wendy and buys her a drink she tells him to "fuck off". Here the tables are turned since the classical *noir* moment, and the precognition that defined women's knowledge of the Oedipal sham is the gift of the male. Like hubby Clay, who knew, as if by magic, what name his wife had taken, Mike seems to know what 'this woman really wants'. "I'm hung like a horse" he persists in his pickup routine. He knows, even if he won't admit it, that femininity

itself is a scam. And, properly inverted, Wendy plays her new role to perfection: "Let's see" says she and looks into his pants. This lady's not going to make the same mistake as that man. "I won't buy any until I know what I'm getting," she continues. "How many women have you had?" "Any prostitutes?" "Any men?"

Later in the story, Mike asks Wendy where he fits into her life. "You're my designated fuck," she responds. When he says he might want more from their relationship, she retorts "then I'll designate someone else". Later, still wanting intimacy he asks "What are you so scared of?" So, she gives him the explanation he seems to expect, delivered with little if any inflection: "I'm just getting out of an abusive relationship, I'm afraid to get close to any man..." Then she turns, smiles and asks, "Will that do? You know a fuck doesn't have to be more than that."

In a bid to get herself out of her own jam, Wendy later decides to exploit Mike's sensitivity and orchestrates a complicated confidence scheme that she passes off to Mike as a proto-feminist-vigilante insurance scam, but is, in fact, a plan for Mike to murder her husband so she can keep the stolen cash. Posing as an abused ex-wife, Wendy suggests to Mike that they might build a bond of intimacy by working together, selling insurance plans and murder services to other abused spouses. Using personal information 'hacked' from various bank and insurance company data banks, Wendy prepares a list of more than two hundred husbands whose records indicate they have residences and expenditures available to women other than their wives. When Mike balks at the plan--"It's not moral to kill"--she goes into a serious flirtation routine.

Like Charlie's sister Ann, Wendy does all the things that 'the books' say you do to get and keep your man. She wears the shirts that he's left behind, and says that they remind her of him and doodles hearts and flowers and "I love Mike" beside his name on her message pad, only to leave it in view for him to see. Winning his trust, she talks him into murdering "those lying cheating men", but really sets him up to murder her own husband, who she misrepresents as a foreclosure lawyer whose wife bought into the insurance murder scheme, because "She said she had bought things over the phone before".

But Mike can't do the killing and when Wendy comes in to finish her husband off, she tells Mike she knows about his first romantic mistake and mocks him. Peeling off her clothes to reveal that she is wearing men's underwear, she taunts him some more. Enraged, he rapes her. But she's prepared for this too. She's even set it up. Taunting Mike about his mistaken marriage to a man, Wendy dials 911 and lets the phone receiver fall so that the operator can listen in on Mike's angry raving response. At the film's end he's in jail for raping her and killing hubby Clay, and Wendy's driving the streets of New York in a long black limousine.

Reprising the Double Indemnity narrative of adultery, blackmail and insurance fraud, The Last Seduction ties it to the tails of an updated version of the story of Sarrasine. The film takes off just before Balzac's story leaves off, just before his young naive painter dies for the grave social error he makes when he believes a representation to be real. Sarrazine's mistaken desire for the image of feminine beauty in the veiled body of the castrato, La Zambinella, is doubled in this story.

It is first recast somewhat abstractly in the fate of hubby Clay, who believed the 'Woman' did exist, and then reprised more substantially in the story of the young small town kid that Wendy Kroy dupes into killing her "cheating, abusive husband". But Wendy Kroy only finally manages to set up and set off her doting lover, by revealing what she knows of his past mistakes and ambitions. Much like Sarrasine, when Mike first left Beston, New York to start his future life, he fell in love with a drag queen. In his desperation to believe that the 'Woman' existed, he married a man who looked like a woman, the first night he met her. The 'reality' that finally floods out alongside his destiny, was not the discovery that gender is not tied to bodies. Rather, he discovers that his *investment* in believing in the equivalence of sex and gender is so great that he will sacrifice anything to cover over the truth that it is not.

Writing about 'the return of the real' in appropriation art, Hal Foster has argued that at the same time that this "vaunted critique of representation...of artistic categories...media myths and sexual stereotypes" sets out "to expose the illusions of representation, it can poke through the image-screen" of language and convention that veils the reality it tries to hold back (Foster 146). While the strategies of isolation and exaggeration used by both appropriation art and generic parody, *derealize* the appearance of reality, they *realize* the sense of desire that the image itself solicits. First and foremost, the desire solicited of the representation is the desire to be subject for an Other.

Here the imaginary pleasure...goes bad, becomes obscene, displaced by a real ecstasy of desire shot through with death, a *jouissance* that lurks behind the ...image screen...This shift in conception--from reality as an effect of representation to the real as a thing of trauma--may be definitive in contemporary art, let alone in contemporary theory, fiction and film (Foster 147).

The *neo-noir* film teases out the trauma of masculinity through the rent in the image-screen torn through by feminism, and by eroding concepts of nationhood, history and subjectivity that in other times and places centred the male subject. The 'real' is both the central preoccupation of these texts and their discursive effect. Lifting the slash/mark that divided the maternal and sexual female subject, the "real" from its representations, symbolic values from their material objects in the world, and skewing these things to the more corporeal sides of each of these binary terms, these films turn perversely on a fascination with the monstrosity of gender reassignment in a universe of unstable signs. The fascination with gender transformation that the neo-noir text displays is *realized* in the detective genre revival through the hyperbolization of female sexuality. In the 'woman's picture' the traumatic real takes shape through its focus on the emasculated male subject.

Along with Basic Instinct, (1990), and Fatal Attraction (1991), Disclosure (1994) belongs to a trilogy of 'new woman's films' that cast Michael Douglas as the disenfranchised paternal authority of late capitalism. These films are



exemplary of what Susan Faludi has termed a cultural backlash against advances made by women in public and professional life. It should be noted, however, that this backlash has been launched against perceived, not actual gains made by women. Rather, this response is more likely related to a feminist rhetorical bias in recent social discourse.<sup>8</sup> Unashamedly and rather perversely overinvested in the discourse of family values, the abovementioned cycle of films cast the office environment as a veritable Garden of Eden before the fall, citing the entrance of women into the professional sphere as the primary threat to an otherwise committed, self-controlled and contained family man.

Disclosure is a particularly interesting film to discuss for the manner in which it departs from the typical narrative focus of the others in this cycle. Unlike the others, and significantly so, its professional woman is no killer. Furthermore, the sexual politics that first made Michael Crichton's book, and then the movie a *cause célèbre* merely inaugurate and give a specific texture to Disclosure's more central preoccupation. It is the status and value of gender in a world increasingly defined by 'virtual reality', more than gender-based sexual dynamics, that is taken up in this film's narrative concerns. When it opened the movie received a great deal of criticism for its inversion of feminist discourse on sexual harassment. But

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Kristen Lentz has linked the emergence of the female action heroine and female detective with a conservative woman & guns discourse. Like the conservative recuperation of the feminist anti-pornography position, the conservative twist on the image of an armed and dangerous woman fueling feminist-inspired pop cultural productions, justifies women's armoring through recourse to anti-government, class-ist and racist and ultimately sexist rhetoric. If women need guns it's only because there are not enough real men around to protect them. In its anti-government mode, this discourse constructs the 'white guy, white collar, heterosexual' as the victim of liberal government policy.

the infamous, female-initiated seduction scene takes place, is reported and judiciously "handled" well before mid-way in the film. Like many of the other texts addressed in this thesis, the film's focus on the sexual conflicts attending shifting gender roles and relations is a cover for other kinds of conflicts accompanying other kinds of social shifts. In this instance the repressed conflict relates to changing representational forms, manufacturing practices and labour relations. In Disclosure, however, the staging of a gender war to obscure these other, hidden conflicts is self-consciously enacted. In doing so the text draws distinct links between changing concepts of gender and sex and changing representational and economic practices.

Disclosure makes explicit what generally remains a critical subtext for this cycle of films. While the critical analysis of these films' generic precursors maintained that the heightened sexual anxieties that shape the figure of the wayward, ambitious and/or predatory woman hail from male fears of symbolic displacement, given perceived changes in the labour force, the symbolic and the economic remain the explicit focus of Disclosure and detail the means with which gender manifests itself in the political dynamics of corporate power.

In Disclosure, Tom Sanders, played by Michael Douglas, is the production manager for Digital Communications, a software company developing "Archamax". A state-of-the-art storage and retrieval system that allows access to information through Virtual Reality, "Archmax" is also the technology upon which the future of DigiCom (read capitalism) is waged. Up for a big promotion, Tom

loses out to Meredith Johnson, played by Demi Moore, an old colleague and ex-lover who will likely rekindle the old flame. And one night Tom does indeed find himself cornered in her office. In a gender-inverted scenario of the more typical office sexual harassment scene, Meredith makes the advances only to later claim that *he* harassed *her*. As the narrative unravels, the harassment charge is revealed to be a ruse. It seems that Meredith was brought in by the company to stage just such a ploy for the purposes of discrediting Tom. His knowledge of the manufacturing line of one of DigiCom's pet projects risks exposing the company's hand in production foul-ups, on the eve of a massive corporate merger. Tom eventually overhears Meredith plotting against him and hacks into "Archamax" to find files or information that might exonerate him. While he *physically* negotiates the cavernous, neo-classical, albeit 'virtual' corridor of "Archamax"'s information warehouse, Meredith logs on and into the system, to wipe out the files. Trading passes to Disneyland for old "hard-copy" files stored in the company's plant in Malaysia, Tom uses the information to unmask Meredith's role in the production jam. He had ordered his parts from an automated manufacturer, while she had hired the cheaper, human labour of the third world to do the job. Tom's reputation is cleared, his wife and friends believe him at last. Meredith is fired and a female "person" is given her job. In the 'high stakes' world of virtual representation, there is no necessary equivalence between sex and gender, and gender only matters if it can be exploited for economic gain.

### *Gender in Virtual Time & Space*

At one point almost mid-way through the film Disclosure, Tom blows his cool and shouts, "Why don't I just be that guy, that evil white-guy you're always complaining about?" He calms down and explains to his disbelieving wife that what went on with Meredith was not about desire but power, "and when did I ever have any power?" In view of the film's overall treatment of gender, Tom's questions are not simply rhetorical. While Disclosure's discourse on changing gender and sex divisions of labour would seem to want to promote the idea of gender as a stable identity, it does so paradoxically despite its investments otherwise, in a model of gender that is quite dramatically *unstable* and unfixed. At the risk of over determining Tom's remarks, his outburst can be read as a statement of principle. He believes his gender role is a matter of design and accepts it as an effect of social discourse, something he alone has no power to change.

When traditional models of gender are invoked in Disclosure--say, for instance when Tom tells his wife he can still support his family on his own, or when he says to his son "I am the Father and when The Father says put your jacket on, you put your jacket on"--it seems half-hearted at best, more pathetic in point of fact, as if he recites these lines in order to remember what is expected of him. In Disclosure the cliches of gender are not as important for what they allow of real bodies, as for how they can be exploited for economic gain. After all, Meredith's contract with the company merely required her to *play* the part of the *femme*

*fatale*, not be it and she plays that part to the hilt. But, the end of the workday is also the end of her role play. An itinerant *femme fatale*, Meredith's gender performance doesn't benefit her. It benefits the company who commissioned it. After Meredith takes the fall for DigiCom's cost-cutting fiasco and Stephanie, a long-time loyal company gal, is hired to replace her, Bob Garvin, DigiCom's head, takes the trouble to point out that her appointment is not pro-active, she is merely, the best "person" for the job. In the end gender doesn't matter at all.

Each discursive category of the text is likewise ambivalent. Discourses related to the relations of gender and sexuality flip flop, for example, between those supporting female sexual expressivity (predictably these are all found in Meredith's lines) and those promoting family values (Tom's feeble retorts). The representation of the economy is equally polarized. Discourses that frame the nurturing paternalism of company life are conditioned by constant threats of economic instability. And, as the title of the film suggests, the democratic possibilities of new information technologies are balanced by continuous reminders of the threats these technologies pose to the truth. "The legacy of modernity" Bob tells Tom, "is that we have information, but no truth".

J. Hoberman has suggested that Disclosure belongs to "the bedroom horror genre": "an inverted Gothic romance in which women overcome men and bodice ripping is a source of masculine pain or....death.... (and where) a cozy home or congenial workplace (is transformed) into an arena of mortal combat" (31). Thus, the pressure of the discursive specificity of the horror genre has conditioned the

ambivalence of a set of representations of sexuality and the economy that have been defined in explicitly metaphysical terms. The film links the monstrous threat of the uncastrated female to a Frankensteinian-type narrative preoccupation with the role of advanced imaging/information technologies in the work place. And both of these concerns are taken up within discourses on autogenetic invention that cast the operations of twentieth-century capitalism in explicitly sexual, predatory terms.

As management, Meredith's sexual voracity attaches itself to both capital and its products. In a building climate of paranoia and combatative tension, when Tom queries a co-worker as to whether Meredith and company have got to him, the co-worker responds by personifying and gendering big-business in Darwinist terms. Waving around a computer part, he states: "they are the next step in human evolution: smarter, better, they're only going to keep a few of us around as sperm donors and kill the rest off."

This type of sexualized fear is the *leitmotif* of Disclosure's discourse on the fate of the worker under late-capitalism where the prerogatives for faster and cheaper production demand a high degree of flexibility in labour markets. Whereas the character of Meredith lays claim to the lion's share of such sexual rhetoric, it is not female sexuality *per se* that is most frightening, but the sexual and physical violation of the subject by the economy itself. As the film opens, Tom meets a former fellow executive. The unemployed man suggests that instead of being "surplussed" by his company, it could be said he was

"sodomized". In the same vein, after Tom's experience of harassment, it is not the rapacious Meredith who revisits to seduce him in his nightmare, but DigiCom's chief exec, a white-haired, white-bearded, man.

Given that Disclosure's gender war is fought out in the Darwinian world of corporate-backed research and development of cyberspace technologies, the issue is not merely who gets the job, but if there will be jobs to be got--if human labour is necessary in a "virtual" world--and only then, who will best be suited to manage a virtual labour force. When the dust clears over the harassment suit, it settles on a conflict over human vs. automated production. In Disclosure, the conceptual coherence of gender as a biologically determined condition has been abandoned. In its place the film promotes the idea that gender is discursively constituted. In view of the film's discourse on changing systems of representation, its articulation of the idea of gender as a social construction slides into the idea of virtual gender roles. Furthermore, the linguistically based model of gender that the film advances is engaged in a discursive formation that worries the possibility of the obsolescence of the labouring body on one hand, and on the other, encourages a return to traditional gender roles--virtual as they may be. It is the female body that might matter most here.

Michel Foucault has claimed, "space is in our language today the most obsessive of metaphors...not because we have no other recourse; [but] because it is in space that language deploys itself, determines its choices, draws its figures and translations" (Foucault, from Le Langue de l'espace, 329, in Simon, 178). In

Disclosure the articulation of space as the primary axis of experience is central to the narrative's concerns. In the film, the production of virtual space forms the basis of the new global economy and the rightful occupation of public space is posed as the object of contest in its gender war. But even more crucially the film maps the relations of 'reality' and 'virtual reality' in spatio-temporal terms.

The idea of 'reality' as a distinct mode of experience is given shape in Disclosure through the various discursive dichotomies that structure this film. The 'real' appears as a site of the struggle, however weakened, between labour and capital. And, if, from the film's beginning, both the conceptual and actual boundaries marking private and public space are represented as fast disappearing, their protection is the determining feature of the narrative's events. The 'real' in Disclosure is conceptualized much like the world of modernity that Barthes found in Sarrasine. Even with no dividing line between the real and its representations, and all subjects subject to castration by the *processes* of economic exploitation, there is a sense that there is a substance to the body subjected, vulnerable as it may be.

One could say that the space of reality is represented as dialectical, as Paul Virilio has suggested of the representational logic of the industrial era: a logic characterized by the represented object's deference to time or 'the past', to prior existence, so to speak. Like the past/present dialectical logic of Jameson's modern nostalgia, 'the real' and its opposing term 'the representation' confirm each other's values.



On the other hand, Virilio explains, 'virtual' reality is based in a paradoxical logic where the "reality of the object in *real-time* is definitively resolved...the paradoxical image" he continues, "acquires a status comparable to that of surprise" (qtd. in Blouin and Michel, 11). Virtual reality is paradoxical--'a surprise'-because its objects have no actual history, no prior basis in fact. Yet even if unanchored, purely imaginary phenomena they achieve the 'effects' of materiality. In Disclosure the unreal, unpeopled corridors of Archamax cast virtual reality as a space with just such effects. With no prior point of reference in the world, 'virtual reality' is the future: the last instance that finally comes.

*The Virtual Imaginary:*

In this chapter I endeavor to demonstrate the relationship between changing concepts of femininity and the narrative trajectory of the *film noir* text as both relate to historically specific discourses on representation and changing geopolitical and social economies. I argue that the manifestation of the detective genre in its classical *film noir* mode addresses the late-capitalist corruption of the symbolic order within an American national context, and that *film noir's* scrutiny and exaggeration of female sexuality demonstrates the significance of the feminine position in the maintenance of symbolic relations during a period of intensified globalization. Discussing the structuring conventions of classical *film noir* narrative I note that the feminine character functions to deroute the progression of the narrative/Oedipal trajectory. This functioning of the feminine

also exposes the artificiality of gendered subject identity, an artificiality or plasticity which the mythic performing of genre exacerbates in each of its repetitions.

In the *neo-noir* mode of detective fiction this already exaggerated attention to gender artifice deepens and supplants the symbolic relationship as the genre's primary preoccupation. In fact, the trauma of gender pretense sears through this otherwise parodic narrative to reveal a fixation with reality itself: the *neo-noir* text is gripped by the potential atrocities of gender assignment insofar as they might represent the same potential for wholesale transmutation in a world of unstable signs.

While Disclosure is less obviously self-reflexive than The Last Seduction, its narrative attention to the relationship between matters of gender, representation and the economy demonstrates the same keen interest in 'the real' as a receding mode of experience, as the more parodic, *neo-noir* manifestation of the detective genre. And, both the detective and melodrama *neo-noir* texts focus their fascination with the failing relationship between the real and its representations on the deceptions of both genders. But this attention is not equally dispersed across gender, nor is it the same in each generic cycle. While female gender bending gets the lion's share of attention in both generic productions, it has different significance and different effects in each case.

In each of the texts discussed in this chapter, the formal and narrative function of the gender performance is distinct. In Disclosure gender performance is more

a discursive conceit than a sustained dramatic performance. Raised in the plot and linked to discourses advancing a conflicted relationship between affirmative action and the economic imperatives of globalization, the performance of gender becomes a moot point. Merely one of a large number of tricks in a corporate magic kit, in Disclosure gender performance is an isolated strategy with the advantage given to the boss. Thus, the relationship between gender and the institutions of heterosexuality and the family remain unexamined and virtually unchanged.

On the other hand, the extreme flattening of gender in The Last Seduction reveals the limit points of gendered identification and in doing so, the mutual dependence of the binary terms that support it. Wendy Kroy can only be the successful woman she aims to be, if the men in her life continue to believe in the surface appearance of things. The almost hysterical dedication to genre convention in The Last Seduction prohibits any simple nostalgic engagement with this text. Rather, insofar as the sharp satire of gender roles and social relations that the 1990s production realizes is linked to discourses on shifting economic and representational conditions it provides ample historical reflection on the changing relationship between gender and sex, representation and the real. More, it functions as a morality tale addressing the highly conflicted status of imaginary identifications within a late capitalist economy of signs and symbols. In a world where "you have information, but no truth," and identification is not a matter of recognition and representation but misrepresentation and misrecognition, the political value of identity is underscored.

Finally, the films solicit different forms of spectatorial engagement. Despite its thematic interests in the diminishing relationship between representation and 'the real' in postmodernity, Disclosure operates within the context of a realist aesthetic and as such its narrative processes function in and for a subject. As Disclosure incorporates the concept of gender as performance into the narrative conflict, the idea appears as discursive contradiction that the narrative process works to resolve. And in this process it realigns the conflicted subjectivity within the context of a linear relationship of cause and effect.

The more mythical, revivalist mode of generic functioning of The Last Seduction denies the production of subjectivity through the narrative process. Holding the genre at a distance, it holds the viewer in a meta-historical relationship with the text: outside genre and gender.. More importantly, its inherently repetitive nature keeps the many possibilities for subject identification alive.

## Chapter Five

### Women, Class & Tabloid Trash: Gender, Genre and the Made-For-TV-Movie

#### *Women in the News*

In early January of 1994 American National Team figure skater Nancy Kerrigan was attacked while taking a break from her skating practice. Her legs were beaten with a police baton. It was later discovered that the husband of Tonya Harding, Kerrigan's main competitor in the US Championship, was involved in the assault. In the end, Harding's husband and bodyguard were indicted for the beating, and Harding pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to hinder prosecution, for her involvement in fabricating an alibi for the two men. The story became a media sensation and sustained interest long after the February Winter Olympics offered the women an international platform to play out their by-then infamous competition. Jill Dianne Swenson reports that between the months of January and March, 1994, NBC and ABC each aired three stories on Harding/Kerrigan and CBC, four, while the tabloid news shows American Journal and A Current Affair aired twenty-one and nineteen stories respectively (Swenson 204-205). These were just the nightly newscast's responses to the conflict. Daily talk shows, sports shows, specials, interview shows and a made-for-tv movie addressed the topic as well. At the height of its coverage the story received 263 minutes of network time over a two-month period. Comparatively,

the story of the Berlin Wall and the fall of communism got 252 minutes at the peak of its coverage (Swenson 204-205).

In large part, the media response to this story was self-reflexive. Most coverage commented on the media's part in shaping and intensifying the "cult of personality" that sustained the enormous amount of interest this otherwise peripheral story of bad sportsmanship (*sic*) had attracted. NBC's made-for-tv-movie, Tonya and Nancy: The Inside Story (1994), took this general tendency to the extreme, framing the attack, the subsequent Olympic skating competition and all the media attention these events garnered, as a parable about the politics of representation in a late-capitalist economy. The movie was narrated by a middle-aged, white, male scriptwriter whose job it was to foreground the codes and conventions that typify the tabloid reconstruction of news stories and to offer an analysis of the representational function of women in a capitalist economy. Presented as a pseudo-docu-drama, the movie was structured by a series of mock interviews and testimonials with actors playing the parts of the various experts and witnesses. The interview subjects included Harding's mother, a newspaper editor, a network executive, a cynical ex-jock and a left-over 60's radical. Each addressed the camera with stories about the image manipulation associated with the career advancement that these women experienced, *before and after* the incident. Obviously 'set-up', these commentaries were interwoven with dramatic sequences representing the two women's personal and

professional histories in the melodramatic form more typical of the made-for-tv-movie.

The Inside Story's interest in the Harding/Kerrigan story was not just concerned with the subject of women and crime but with women and crime and representation. Issues related to women's sporting competition were collapsed with issues addressing female competitiveness and class conflict, and these with concerns for the tremendous expansion of both America's media and corporate power. In significant ways, The Inside Story was also a story about global competition and its impact on class structures within the North American economy. And, while the story itself focused on a conflict between two white, working-class women, the gender and class identity of the film's narrator suggested that the movie might have had more significance for a white, middle-aged, middle class man.

This chapter will discuss this made-for-tv-movie as representative of a shift in the media response to women's crime during the middle part of the 1990's. A self-reflexive take on the media spectacularization of female criminality, Tonya and Nancy: The Inside Story offers a good example of one of the more intriguing representational trends to emerge over the past few years. Otherwise considered part of what has been called, "the tabloidization of journalism," the distanced, cynical style of this particular 'tabloid' story not only represents a more general shift in the framing of "Reality-based" television programs, but also marks a similar kind of shift in the thematic orientation and generic conventions of the made-for-tv-movie. Historically, the TV movie has provided a public site within

popular culture that privileges the dramatization of social issues of particular interest to women. Like the 'women's picture' discussed in the last chapter, these films typically focus on a female protagonist, offering her the principal access to point-of-view structures and the position of enunciation within the film's discourse (Doane 1987). The Inside Story departs from the more conventional TV movie formulation on a number of these points. Unlike the usual storyline in which working-class heroines rise above adversity to act as agents of social change on behalf of their class and community, in this instance both protagonist and antagonist are working-class, and both are heroines, each in her own right: the antagonist, Tony Harding, is represented just a wee bit more ambitious than the other (and not incidentally, a wee bit lower than working class). Posed against each other, the adversity and goals of the two are bound together within a system in which the sexism and exploitation that they struggle to rise above also found the value system at the end of the climb. Finally, this is a story about a woman's violence against another woman; as such it weighs the odds in the contest over female identity *against* a sympathetic representation of "Woman".

Simultaneously, it delimits the effectivity of women's discourse on critical social issues that the TV movie form has otherwise enabled. My objectives are to trace out the tensions at play as the transformed genre of the made-for-tv-movie negotiates the question of gender and class identification, and as it contributes to the shape and character of women's participation in the public sphere.



### *Smart Women, Foolish Choices*

There was a joke making the rounds in the spring of 1994 that neatly summarized the kinds of concerns the female criminal symbolized for the North American media consumer at that time. The bait line asked: Who is the most feared and hated woman in America? The answer: Tonya Rodham Bobbitt. Besides the Harding/Kerrigan event, 1994 was also the year First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's involvement in a shady land deal came to light, in the scandal since dubbed Whitewater. And who can forget Lorena Bobbitt who, in the same year, cut off her husband's penis with a carving knife, claiming self-defense against marital rape.

Like the Freudian symptom, the joke condenses veiled social anxieties. In this instance, these anxieties are related to a historically particular configuration of economic, political and sexual issues. As such, this joke marked a significant departure from the kind of approach that had been taken to represent the woman's crime story since the Aileen Wuornos case set the former standard in 1990. Where the Wuornos crime story and those that immediately followed revealed a cultural preoccupation with the de-naturalization/deregulation of gender and domesticity, they did so, for the most part, by abstracting the relationship between the private sphere of sexual relations and the public domains of political and economic life. Rather, the 'public sphere' remained the limit point of the public/private relation. By mid-decade the discursive orientation of the women's crime story revealed the opposite to be true, emphatically foregrounding the role that gender plays in political and economic process.

In 1994 the bumper crop of bad girl stories were not as concerned with the gap between what is natural and contrived in the performance of gender, as they were with the extent to which that gap could be successfully disguised, and through what means--Tonya Harding's and Lorena Bobbitt's stories explicitly, and Hillary Rodham Clinton's somewhat tangentially. In the end, the story of ice skater Harding's commissioned attack on fellow competitor, Kerrigan, was not only a story of a soured competition between female athletes, told through competing representations of "Woman", but a story of class differentiated habits of consumption. With Kerrigan representing the lower middle-class, blue-collar position, and Harding the lower class pretender to the middle-class position, the differences between the two were measured against a scale of good and bad taste. Thus, what the two women bought or wore, what commercial sponsorship each attracted, who they hired to manage them; these subjects were as much the component parts of the story, as were the attack and its subsequent investigation. Likewise, the reporting of Bobbitt's and Clinton's crime stories channeled questions of guilt and innocence, motives and mitigating factors through representations of each woman's shopping lists. Bobbitt's world of fast foods, fake nails and tanning salons and Clinton's of precarious cattle futures and shady land development schemes may have reflected very different consumer profiles, but both posed questions of sexuality and gender in terms of economic considerations.

There is a fundamental relationship between gender, crime and class that can be traced in all crime narratives, not just those whose focus is women's crime.

As reconstructed in the popular imagination, the significance of crime is often first understood in class-based terms. In this context, crime is perceived to be a transgression of the 'appropriate' aesthetic distance, in both social relations and the world of objects.<sup>1</sup> The relation of aesthetics and crime has long been a subject of philosophical discussion. Friedrich Schiller considered this relationship in his 1802 essay "Reflections on the Use of the Vulgar and the Lowly in Works of Art," (1802):

A man who robs would always be an object to be rejected by the poet who wishes to present serious pictures. But suppose this man is at the same time a murderer, he is even more to be condemned than before by the moral law. But in the aesthetic judgement he is raised one degree higher and made better adapted to figure in a work of art (qtd. in Black 34).

Thomas de Quincey's 1827 essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts," purposely misappropriated the term to take issue with the way in which the Kantian aesthetic displaced the moral dimension in philosophical debate. De Quincey's essay offers a parodic critique of the aesthetic attitude towards crime.

I could mention some people (I name no names) who have been murdered by other people in a dark land; and so far all seemed correct enough; but, on looking further into the matter, the public have become aware that the murdered party was himself, at the moment, planning to rob his murderer, at the least, and possibly to murder him, if he had been strong enough.

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Adapted from German philosophy, the use of the term aesthetic here denotes a relation of taste.

Whenever that is the case, or may be thought to be the case, farewell to all the genuine effects of the art (qtd. in Black 34-35).

Joel Black summarizes the aesthetic criteria applied to crime as follows:

“crime may evoke a feeling of sublimity so long as it is a disinterested, malevolent act. Murder loses its claim on the aesthetic judgement if the assailant acts out of petty self-interest, as in the case of robbery, or if the victim turns out to be a thief or a killer himself, instead of a helpless innocent (34).

The various media representations of Lorena Bobbitt's crime of castration were striking for the way in which they adopted this aesthetic criteria, despite Bobbitt's claims of self-defence. Besides mining the more obvious symbolic currency of the story, the coverage developed a narrative of hot-blooded Latino-adolescent-hormonal rage by taking note of selective details of the setting of the crime and the subsequent events that were descriptive of very particular, class-identified values. Vanity Fair's article, “A Night to Dismember,” saw fit to note Lorena Bobbitt's shopping list the night of the incident. She picked up a bucket of “Kentucky Fried Chicken” from the strip-mall near her home. “Spandex” shorts figured prominently in the description of the alleged rape scene. The 1991 “mercury Capri” that took her past the “7-11” convenience store to the “Patty-Kake Day Care” where John Wayne Bobbitt's penis was tossed and later found and placed in a “Zip-lock” baggie; her husband's various, ill-fated job experiences at “Burger King” and the “Red Lobster”; her career as an artist/technician at the “Nail Sculptor”; her youth spent in Venezuela going to “Pizza Hut” and “McDonalds” and watching “The Flintstones” on TV; and so on and so forth, *ad*

*nauseum*, all oozed significance as markers of the adolescent tempered, commodity-driven, suburban, working-class cultural melting-pot of present-day America, where this crime took place. In this presentation, Lorena Bobbitt's crime is seen as symptomatic of the disposability cult of the crass fast-food culture depicted in the narrative. Again, while quite different from Hillary Clinton's white-collar crime, nonetheless the rationale for both criminal motivations is tied to the trait of excessive materialism. And, as I will demonstrate, the representation of the Harding/Kerrigan story also decided Harding's criminality on evidence of excess material desire. In the end, these women wanted too much: too many material goods, too much media attention and, finally, way too much economic success.

While not all crime narratives apply the same aesthetic criteria, as a general rule the appropriate aesthetic distance is defined by the standards of a dominant class. It follows that this aesthetic distance is reinforced rather than determined by a power that keeps economic necessity (and thus everything else) at arms' length (Bourdieu 55). The appropriate aesthetic distance is given to be a distance 'naturally' assumed by a dominant class. By these same standards, the even more natural tendencies of the aspiring classes are even more dramatically expressed in the foreshortening of this distance through the commission of crimes concerned with material gain or class ambition. Pierre Bourdieu has claimed that "the refusal of nature, or rather the refusal to surrender to nature, which is the mark of dominant groups...is the basis of the aesthetic disposition" (Bourdieu 40). Since women's 'nature' is traditionally held to be closer to nature,

women are held potentially closer to a criminal disposition regardless of their class affiliation. By the same standards, criminal behavior motivated by material need is feminized and more likely to be represented as policed.

Bourdieu has also observed that consuming practices are a form of communication, "which presupposes mastery of a given code" (Bourdieu 2). This mastery of the codes of class disposition was a central component of the women's crime narrative profile of 1994. Bourdieu claims that, "a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the two sexes in their socially constituted dispositions"(40). Thus, the lower working-class and service industry sector are defined by Bobbitt's and Harding's conspicuous consumption. In general, women's consuming practices are of particular interest in determining the stability of class factions. Across all class categories, the "division of labour between the sexes gives precedence to women in matters of taste" (Bourdieu 109). Thus her social practices and experiences are always highly regulated, regardless of class. As studies of kinship rituals have shown us, women's social value is fully bound by and bound up within a semiotic practice. She is both the *ur-gift* in symbolic exchange between communities and the representative term by which the value of this exchange is measured.

By and large, Tonya Harding's crime was narratively reconstructed as a crime of excessive and evident bad taste. Most, if not all, of the reportage focussed on

her alleged propensity to make poor consumer choices.<sup>2</sup> Not only did these news stories cast her as a woman who *chose* a physical confrontation with her opponent over the more demure and visual competition that the sport and its strict gender imperatives would seem to dictate, but all the other *choices* that both Harding and her husband made were also as tasteless as they were unsound—from make-up to skate blades and costumes, from career management to the dull-witted thugs he hired to beat up Kerrigan. In an article in *New York* magazine in August of 1994, Tad Friend went so far as to suggest that, “pool-hustling, drag-racing, cigarette-smoking, trash-talking Tonya” was “the ultimate icon of “White Hot Trash” culture (Friend. 22-25).

She of the bleached, permed hair; the blank cheap eyes; the rabbit-fur coat and the job working at Spud City. She who skated to ZZ Top and whose bodyguard Shawn Eckardt, drove a 1974 Mercury with missing hubcaps. She whose ex-husband, Jeff Gillooly, just sold the X-rated video of their wedding night to *Penthouse*, which has made it available to a bemused public through an 800- number (Friend 25).

Sam Stoloff has argued that more than anything else, “the episode tapped profound anxieties about social class in the United States” (Stoloff, 226). There was good reason for such anxiety in 1994. In October of that year, the American

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In this regard it also ran a close discursive parallel to the representation of Wanda Hollowell's story. The “Texas cheerleader murdering mom,” was also the subject of a cynical look at media's sensational response to women's crime. The made-for-tv-movie, The Positively True Adventures of the Texas Cheerleader Murdering Mom, (HBO, 1992) starred Holly Hunter in the lead role.

Census bureau reported that the number of people living below the poverty line in the U.S. had risen to 15.1% of the population. While in 1962 the richest 20% of the world population had 30 times the income of the poorest 20%, by 1994 that gap had expanded 60 times (Britannica, 1995, 144). Nineteen ninety-four was also the year that the post-cold-war revision to the GATT Treaty was signed (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades). While, in theory, consumers stood to gain from freer international trade, in the form of more products and lower prices, in fact the increased international competition put pressure on industry to implement more flexible manufacturing processes, threatening employment and economic stability at home in North America. This year also witnessed an unprecedented wave of international expansion in retailing, especially in the discount store sector, and heralded the proliferation of the supercentre--a hybrid retail outlet which included a discount store and supermarket under one roof. Companies like Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and the Home Depot Inc. moved into Canada, Mexico and the U.K., and Wal-Mart announced plans for later expansion in Argentina, Brazil, Hong Kong and China. Nineteen ninety-four also saw the emergence of interactive home shopping via CD-ROM-computer connections. In many communities across North America these trends were fiercely opposed. Residents feared that the greater competitive powers of giant retailers and the introduction of centralized retailing practices would devastate local business communities.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most popular accounts of the Harding/Kerrigan case related the issue of crime to class through a discursive



emphasis on consumerism. But while the confrontation between the two skaters was frequently identified in the press as such a class rivalry, with the physically lithe, socially more demure Kerrigan representing a proper middle-class position and tough-talking, strong and muscular Harding, assuming an indeterminate lower-class form, it was seldom noted that the two skaters were both from the same working class origins. Rather, the anxieties tapped by the Harding/Kerrigan spectacle concerned the reshaping of middle-class distinctions. The physical violence of their skating competition rendered the unstated but always understood differences between the middle and working classes both clear and painful. It drew attention to the ever-expanding strata of a lower socio-economic class and in doing so, dispelled the fantasy of a democratically entitled, homogeneous white middle-class that fed into America's myth of a classless system. It was, in fact, the middle-class commentators that found Harding's working class world strange. "Both as an object of scorn and of fascination, Harding was the stronger emotional pole in the drama, because, for the middle-class she represented the class Other" (Stoloff 228).

The present version of the myth of the classless society to which the United States has long paid lip service, was born of the relative prosperity of a post-war economic situation. This middle-class view holds that the white population of the U.S. is largely undifferentiated with a thin stratum of the obviously poor at one end and an equally thin layer of richer folk, at the other. There are similarly dispersed factions within this otherwise homogeneous, middle-class body--the "blue collar" or "skilled working class" at the bottom and upper and managerial

class at the top. The "blue-collar" faction is understood "to be socially conservative and comfortably, if shabbily, well off," and its representation as such functions to reinforce "the post-war fantasy of universal prosperity, with home ownership for all, and families supported on a single industrial income" (Stoloff 230).

As represented, Tonya Harding's more meager background posed a serious challenge to this mythology. Largely figured through descriptions of her body, Harding's class status was characterized by her size, and most of all, by her reported tendencies to corporeal excess. Juxtaposing Tonya's cigarette smoking and asthma condition, her muscular physicality and shoddy costume construction, her growing fleshiness and the rumour that she once posed topless, the cliches of class and aesthetic distance were configured through the body of a white, lower-class woman who was seen to be both literally and figuratively spreading into a middle-class world.

Kerrigan's representation, on the other hand, invoked the cool dispassion and control of an "ice princess". The "swan" to Harding's "ugly duckling" Kerrigan was portrayed as "brave" and "classically beautiful". Reporting on the results of a skating competition that took place just after Kerrigan's knee injury had mended, one journalist evaluated her performance through a commentary that collapsed proper social behavior with a body that responded properly to paternal authority: "she did what she was told...Every finger, every hair was in place" (qtd in Thernstrom 153). On the other hand, Richard Cohen, in the Washington Post, went so far as to call Harding a mutt. "Harding stands in contrast, not only to her

rival, but to her sport itself. She's a mutt among supposed purebreds" (Cohen A27). Kerrigan was a perfect child of the blue-collar-cum-middle-class household, while Harding was the fatherless, 'mongrel' daughter of a six-times married, 'trailer-trash' mom.

Most tellingly, Harding competed for material gain, and Kerrigan for the pure sport of it. Kerrigan's motives were pure: "Take any [of the endorsements] away and I would still do it. I didn't know there was any money until two or three years ago, when I got a couple of endorsement contracts. I had no idea. I do it because I love it" (qtd. in Stoloff 230). Harding, on the other hand wanted the money: "to be perfectly honest what I'm really thinking about is dollar signs" (qtd. in Raymond 137). As Stoloff has commented, "the idea of classlessness rationalizes the position of the successful stratum...(who) dominate the means of social representation" (Stoloff 229). For this faction of the middle-class, Harding represents a rupture in that otherwise seamless fabric of white plenitude; she's the animus in the post-industrial nightmare of growing economic despair, the return of the 'real' which threatens to unravel the properly assimilationist fantasy Kerrigan's embodied representation functions to perpetuate.

### *Women, Media and Tabloid Journalism*

As we have seen, class and gender are not exclusive categories. In the representation of the Harding/Kerrigan competition they reached a point of saturation that was one of the affair's most significant aspects, especially insofar as these categories were further linked to a critique of representation itself. With

notable self-reflexivity, the producers of the Harding/Kerrigan story also exploited the recent market viability of crime as a staple of American popular culture. In the form of stand-up comedy, documentaries on media practice, made-for-tv movies, telephone phone-in shows, daily talk-shows, and as part of the general, print-media reportage, by 1994 the idea prevailed that the crime story now gleefully reversed the age-old adage that 'crime doesn't pay'. In fact, crime paid and paid big to media producers. Thus the spectacle value of crime became imbricated in the meaning of the individual criminal acts that initially launched the media's interest in this story.

NBC's made-for-tv-movie, Tonya and Nancy: The Inside Story, was exemplary in this regard. At one and the same time it represented the story through an account of class fractionalization filtered through a narrative of women's sport competition, and a contest over the redefinition of both the lower middle-classes and the subject position "Woman", that were drawn through an allegory about changing values of truth and objectivity. Together these symbolic approaches to status re-definition worked to reify a highly stylized, and thus much diminished notion of each of these social identifications. If gender is a performative project, in important ways so too is class. Fused to a crime narrative in the Harding/Kerrigan story, these performances were more burlesque than drama, proper.

What has been called 'the tabloidization of journalism' relates to the same socio-cultural/socio-economic phenomenon that has spawned the

spectacularization of the women's crime story.<sup>3</sup> That its emergence has been coincident with the representational regime this thesis considers, is consequential. In a profound way, the "feminization" of the news represented by this shift in representational form is a function of the intensifying spectacularization of social experience; the semantic currency of the "feminine" is intensified in kind. Because the principal strategy of the tabloid investigation involves the invasion and ordering of private life, this trend gives rise to a host of serious ethical issues. Nevertheless, the trend towards the tabloidization of news programming is not without its positive side. For one thing, the tabloids more often address social, cultural and moral issues than do the network newscasts which favour legal, procedural and bureaucratic matters (Swenson). More importantly, the tabloids abandon the pretense of objectivity and in doing so, privilege subjective and emotional responses to the subject at hand. In contradistinction, more traditional journalistic contexts devalue subjectivity, providing "further evidence that feminine narrative and discursive styles of

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Ken Auletta has argued that the emergence of the tabloid-style news docu-drama with its emphasis on domestic crime is an economic phenomenon that can be traced to budget cutbacks in network news programming in the mid to late eighties. Auletta claims that the sale of the large networks to larger media consortiums forced cuts to the expensive news budgets, in turn, forcing TV news producers to buy their material from the guy-on-the-street-with-the-steady-cam (Auletta, 1996). In the same vein, Ellen Hume has argued that the recent surge in tabloid-style news and documentary features relates to the increased competition new communications technologies have brought to bear on the traditional media. Internet and cable services offering specialized packages to individualized consumers have set a new standard for fast delivery and selectivity in information that has cultivated a taste for fast, short information-based communications. The superficial, sensationalist tabloid news item offers a cheap and cognitively competitive alternative to the more time-consuming and expensive in-depth report (Hume, 1995).

storytelling are pushed to the periphery of professional journalism” (Swenson 217).

Otherwise called “Reality Programming”, the emergence of the tabloid news format phenomenon dates to the debut of A Current Affair in 1986, followed by Cops and America’s Most Wanted in 1988. Originally products of the Fox network, “reality shows quickly proved attractive to networks and syndicators in that they were not only cheap to produce (and buy) but were solid ratings performers” (Seaton 45). Moving from public to private issues and from objective to subjective reporting styles, tabloid television news has also become more overtly a form of entertainment (Seaton, Swenson). Considered a “soft” rather than “hard-boiled” news show format, the spectrum of Reality Programs comprises tabloid-style news magazine shows, video-verité and recreated crime, rescue and “man-hunt” programs, and family amateur video shows. The genre conventions that define the “Reality Program” include: the representation of “real-life” events; a concern for moral issues, often focusing this concern on the disorder or deviance of home and family; and, the expression of these dilemmas in highly emotional terms. These generic characteristics also define women’s popular culture and thus lend themselves to characterization as feminine. Commenting on historical attitudes towards tabloid journalism, Beth Seaton succinctly characterizes the taste-based critique brought to bear on the genre even now:

Consumers of these programs were imagined as the tele-visual equivalent of those big-haired women who supposedly frequent the supermarket’s

check-out lines—checking out the tabloid’s sensational stories of lust, adultery and the occasional Elvis sighting—while waiting to buy this week’s supplies of cheese-whiz, wonder bread and diet coke. In effect, both the tabloid shows and their audiences were derided within an evaluative framework of gustatorial, aesthetic and moral distinctions: signifying not only the processed junk food of a “feminine” mass culture which holds no productive or aesthetic value, but the bad taste of the “feminized” masses, who are consumed by the urge to buy into the small fibs and excessive fabrications of the tabloid’s screaming headlines. (Seaton 45).

Recent tabloid news programming exhibits the same conservative biases that are reflected in the orientation of the contemporary tabloid stories. Despite the fact that its production leans towards a level of self-consciousness-cum-self-reflexivity absent from the preferred, network form of news broadcast at the other end of this aesthetic spectrum, the tabloid news story targets subject matter that works to define the boundaries of class.

Seaton points to the hyper-dramatization of “the real” in recent reality broadcasting as an instance of the genre “foregrounding its own constructedness and cultural status as television and ‘bad’ television at that. Hence, the faked factuality of reality TV can be found to reveal the codes and processes of an ideological realism, rather than to disguise such codes as common sense” (Seaton 46). Otherwise, these productions are geared towards “repairing, rather than tearing, the insidious wave of a conservative ideology” (Seaton 46). If the tabloidization of news programming is thought to represent the feminization of the

news, the stories are told from the point-of-view of a white, male middle-class subject. The lion's share of stories featured in tabloid journalism are about the policing of the private sphere of domestic relations, especially if this sphere rests outside of the dominant culture's purview, the supposedly ungovernable space of a marginalized class. As Seaton argues, "rather than exposing reality for the purposes of social critique, such programs are geared towards the production of social consent wherein the spectacle of violence condones the authority of a violent policing power" (Seaton 47). In this sense, the Harding/Kerrigan conflict offered a perfect opportunity to authorize the policing of the private sphere of the rising white, lower classes, especially the rising ranks of white, lower class, working women. While the shift to tabloid journalism is said to represent the simultaneous de-classification and 'feminization' of the news, at the level of enunciation the class and gender orientation of these programs is still largely middle-class and male.

#### *Men, Melodrama and 'The Inside Story'*

Similar to the aesthetic and class-gender re-arrangements exhibited by then-current Reality Programming, NBC's Tonya and Nancy: The Inside Story uses distancing techniques to foreground the constructedness of the story, and shifts the traditional gender orientation of the made-for-tv-movie's melodramatic form from a female to male perspective. In a bid to expose the structures of representation at work in the narrative production of the Harding/Kerrigan conflict,



competition and subsequent news story, the film significantly alters, although it does not completely reject, what Elayne Rapping has identified as the "hokey realist conventions" that more typically constitute the primary aesthetic orientation of the made-for-tv-movie form. The movie frames the story with an "ideology critique" aimed at the mechanisms of representation at work, both in the worlds of ice-skating and the news. The story's screenwriter-cum-narrator and the family, friends, colleagues, journalists, producers, abuse survivors, ex-jocks, sports agents, skating judges and fans who are the subjects of the "restaged" interview sequences relate Harding's and Kerrigan's professional and personal histories in terms derived, for the most part, from popular feminist discourse about gender and domestic abuse.<sup>4</sup> If Harding was guilty of overstepping the line of proper sporting competition, she herself is depicted as a victim, not only of an impoverished background, but of both spousal and parental exploitation as well. Both women are portrayed as victims of a system that places its highest value on an impossible female ideal.

While the framing of this story clearly intends to stem criticisms of the movie's own exploitation in advance, it also works to reinforce a certain distance between

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The distancing techniques used in Tonya and Nancy: The Inside Story are relatively commonplace in independent documentary film productions. Such practices as repetition and disjunctive editing/narrative developments and visual and narrative references to the different representational apparatuses within which the story is framed have been inherited from the avant-garde theatre of Brecht and the experimental cinema of such documentarians as Fredrick Wiseman (Titi-cut Follies, 1967; Models, 1992), and more recently film makers such as Erroll Morris, (The Thin Blue Line, 1988) and Nick Broomfield (Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of A Serial Killer, 1993). While relatively new to this genre, distancing techniques are not without precedent. As, mentioned earlier, The Positively True Adventures of the Texas Cheerleading Murdering Mom (1992), an HBO movie-of-the-week, starring Holly Hunter, employed many of the same strategies. Their extended use in Tonya and Nancy: The Inside Story, is, however, a first for network TV.

the viewer and the actual subject of the story. Far beneath the import of ethical and moral judgement that are inspired by the criminal acts that initially attracted the media's attention, and even lower, beneath the moral outrage this story should engender regarding the diminished state of social relations displayed by the incredible fascination the public found in this story, The Inside Story offers only irony and a level of cynicism that borders on contempt as it describes the Harding/Kerrigan conflict as just another instance of an always, already ongoing production of "Woman". In the same way that the recent tabloidization of journalism has 'feminized' the content of the news but 'masculinized' the spectatorial position, the distancing techniques engaged by this made-for-tv-movie enact a similar supersession, in this instance masculinizing both content and position.

Lynn Spigel has observed that the film's hyper-self-consciousness functions to displace the more typical gender-identification encouraged by the traditional made-for-tv-movie.

Although the publicity for the movie positioned it as a woman's film, the story, in fact, is not Tonya's or Nancy's. Instead the movie is constructed as a self-reflexive tale narrated from the point-of-view of a cynical male TV writer... .In this framing device the fiction TV writer takes the place of television (and television criticism) itself; he literally becomes a cool medium through which the melodramatic story of a hotheaded woman is communicated. Moreover, the framing device sets us up as cool spectators by distancing us from any emotional attachment to the story....

The movie in this sense is a kind of anti-melodrama melodrama which, in the most cynical terms imaginable, cashes in on the public appetite for scandal while at the same time uses conventions of tabloid journalism to present itself as hipper than the "woman's" genre it seeks to exploit (Spigel 196).

Historically, the melodramatic form taken by the made-for-tv movie has privileged the dramatization of issues of special interest to women, especially working class women: issues concerning the conflicts between home and family life and the public sphere of work and legal action. Themes of domestic violence, social injustice, health care, and so on, are a staple of this tv format. In context of an intertextual relationship with other discursive structures, it has traditionally provided a strategic situation within which to raise these issues in public debate. Perhaps most significantly, as Elaine Rapping has noted, the TV movie has thematized the issue of "Woman" as an unstable concept in an age when female identity is most definitely in flux and therefore a matter of contested terrain (Rapping 96).

If this issue has been taken up here and debated in the context of recent made-for-tv representations of women's crime, it has been framed by the dramatization of stories about women involved in violent crimes directed not against the patriarchy, but against other *women*. Tonya and Nancy: The Inside Story is only a more focused and explicit instance of this general tendency. Amy Fisher. My Story: The Lethal Lolita (1992) told the story of Amy Fisher, a young

middle-class teenager who shot the wife of her older, working class boyfriend so she could spend more time with him. And, the already noted The Positively True Adventures of the Texas Cheerleader Murdering Mom told the story of a woman who hired a hit man to kill a teenaged girl, her daughter's main competitor for a place on the high school cheerleading squad.

As part of this emerging pattern in popular discourse concerning women and the crime of class ambition, from the start the press opposed Harding and Kerrigan in highly cliched terms: Kerrigan was to Harding as good girl was to bad; virginal to sexual; pure at heart to calculating, artistic (feminine) to athletic (more butch) and so on and so forth, ad nauseam. The economic stakes in this particular women's sporting competition merely provided a sub-text for the more central narrative about the economic stakes in a more primal competition between women. Insofar as the virgin/maternal (the Madonna) and the sexual woman provided the two basic poles of this contest, The Inside Story metaphorically addressed the point of conflict/resolution in the Oedipal experience that produces subjects in gendered subject positions; the point at which the maternal figure is opposed to the sexual being and the female subject is simultaneously over-evaluated and debased. (Articulated in relation to discourses of criminality and class ambition, though, the odds on the outcome of this particular Oedipal contest seem to favour the debasement of both feminine positions.)

The Inside Story offers the female spectator an ambiguous, or, at the very least, a highly ambivalent relationship to this double-edged story about female competition. On one level, the movie offers the female viewer an opportunity to take sides and act out the fantasies and projections of the meanings of success and failure for female skaters. Women's figure skating competitions deploy representations of clearly defined feminine roles and conventions. As such, to act out the fantasies and projections of success and failure for the different female skaters is to act out the fantasies and projections of success and failure for different kinds of women. On another, more abstract level this film narrative revises the classic story of female competition, with the hyper-sexualized Harding challenging the pure virginity of Kerrigan's archaic maternity, extending an opportunity to the female viewer to revisit and potentially revise the conflicts attending her own Oedipal story.

In the first instance, as Judith Mayne has observed,

It doesn't require too much imagination to see that the fear of falling in figure skating represents more than a failed jump. It represents confidence in the spotlight, or the lack thereof, and during the Harding/Kerrigan story, it represented a kind of moral gauge, particularly when Kerrigan completed her short and long programs "flawlessly" (to use her overused word). Falling becomes an indication of a variety of syndromes that are presumed to be particular obstacles to female athletes--poor self esteem, fear of success, terror of the spotlight. And, in the most general and far reaching sense, the fear of falling on the ice

represents a discomfort with spectacle and public exposure in general... .  
Figure skating offers a display of grace and femininity to which women in  
this culture are presumed to aspire; in this sense, figure skating offers a  
spectacle of identification... .But then there is the nagging question of the  
fall--and of the fact that what spectators actually see in watching figure  
skating is less an idealized spectacle of femininity than the potential acting  
out of the failures of *femininity* (Mayne 82 - 83 ).

The pleasure the female viewer might experience upon the skater's fall is not  
always a pleasure taken at the expense of the skater. From a feminist  
perspective, the potential for failure in women's sporting events provides an  
emotional outlet for expressions of subversion to patriarchal demands. To miss  
the mark of this particular sporting spectacle is to rupture the otherwise seamless  
performance of feminine ideals. For the female viewer, the possibility of falling  
thus marks a moment of possible resistance.

In much the same way that American cultural productions of the forties gave  
form and expression to male pre-Oedipal longing, this representation of women's  
sporting competition refers to women's anxieties regarding socio-symbolic  
positioning. A psychoanalytic interpretation of this scenario sees the encounter  
concerned with more than female identifications *per se*. Rather it is a contest that  
decides the kind and quality of all of women's social relationships, but especially  
her social relationships with other women. The separation of mother and child  
that results from the girl's Oedipal transition informs her future relationship with

her mother, as well as with other women. Following proper Oedipal resolution, these relationships will be based on a low level of competition for paternal attention and affection, with the mother's sexual availability weighed against the girl's potential maternity. The exaggerated, mythic status of Harding's bad girl and Kerrigan's good daughter forced this competition, and by association all of women's social relations, onto a pathological plane.

Significantly, much of the reportage of the Harding/Kerrigan conflict, and the Olympic coverage of the skating event in general, focused on the subject of good and bad mothers. Harding's real mother was an abusive, hot-headed stage mom and the coaches Harding turned to for surrogate mothering proved to be ineffectual in offering her any maternal support or protection. Kerrigan's mother, on the other hand, was depicted as a saint. Legally blind, she nonetheless went to all of Nancy's performances--"she can sense beauty" (Spigel, 199). And, with a little help from Nancy's dad she even ironed Nancy's skating costumes (Duffy, qtd. in Wiegman and Zwinger 113). In helping Nancy prepare for her work in the outside world, she helped rather than hindered her daughter's maternal separation.

At the Winter Olympics, the story of mothering provided a narrative backdrop that intertwined nationhood and parenting. Katarina Witt's East German parents were presented as victims of communism. The sportscasters repeated the fact that France's flashy Surya Bonaly was at the Olympics with her adopted mother, *ad nauseam*, in a bid which seemed equally cast to explain the different skin colours of the two, as it was to assure the largely white, middle-class audience

that the darker daughter had the proper license to compete in this white, middle class world. Finally, while Oksana Baiul was motherless, her absent mother haunted Baiul's biographical representation. For very different reasons, Baiul's story, like Kerrigan's, became a story of competition fueled by maternal longing. As Spigel has commented, the extraordinary emphasis placed on women's separation anxieties over the course of this Olympic coverage worked to cast all of women's competitive impulses as abnormal: "excessive relational bonds with the mother (whether good or bad) cause the woman to compete as a *compensatory act*--not as a "normal" form of female behaviour (Spigel 199).

From a psychoanalytical perspective, for the male viewer the fear of falling to which the sport of women's figure skating gives rise inaugurates a repetition of equal but different significance. The possibility of the female skater's fall does not represent the possibility of his own escape from socio-symbolic positioning, but the opposite insofar as it re-presents that first fall from grace that the "castrated" female represented for the male child. In general, the media represented this skating competition as a contest concerned with sexuality and coming of age that was very much geared towards the re-production of sexual difference. This said, the distanced perspective of The Inside Story's cool, male journalist juxtaposed against the heatedness of this particular sporting competition, determined this difference to emerge from an encounter between women where the male has no relational position. Thus the opposite poles of



Madonna and whore were posed as naturally occurring female identities, not relational terms that enable male subjectivity.

The Inside Story expresses the same conflict over changing temporal forms that the other genres that this thesis has discussed, have taken up. Only in this instance, the critical perspective from which the other genres address postmodern socio-cultural rearrangement is not serious, just cynical. The irony that the female detective fiction story critically thematizes or the *neo-film noir* productions offers as dark, hyperbolic parody, is only half-hearted in The Inside Story. Peter Sloterkijk has argued that such universal, diffuse cynicism prevails in contemporary culture. Simultaneously the legacy of the popularization of the “ideology critique” of critical theory and the general, wide-spread social rebellion of the 1960's, and the tremendous recent growth of global capitalism, such cynicism, Sloterdijk argues, breeds just such forms of *enlightened false consciousness* as that displayed by this made-for-tv-movie.

It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and unsuccessfully. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them in practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered (Sloterkijk xii).

The depth of The Inside Story's “ideology critique” is limited. Even as it foregrounds its representational strategies, its own bid for the ideological effects

of realist representation remains unacknowledged. Likewise, the scriptwriter-cum-narrator's introductory comments may refer to the exploitation of these young women by an image obsessed world, but they do not address the more immediate problem of the gender and class displacement enacted by the image obsessed producers of this made-for-tv-movie. When the narrator claims that the story is "...a strange, dark (fairy) tale where monsters eat little children", the monsters he refers to are the other image managers--the press and corporate sponsors--not the spectators of this movie.

The movie's stated objectives are to call the truthfulness of gendered representation itself into question. Since the movie raises issues relating to women's identity alongside those addressing the spectacularization of social life in terms of the mythic substance of this type of story, it further mythologizes and thus naturalizes the events that took place. It may provide a self-conscious reflection on the media's exploitation of Harding's criminality, but it still does not mirror the processes of representation at work in its own particular mythic production. In the end, the critical framing of the journalistic apparatus that The Inside Story aims for, is more concerned with the deterioration of the values of objectivity through which the old style news media legitimated its narrative productions, than it is the problem of representation itself. Roland Barthes would have called it 'mythification by means of inoculation': "One immunizes the contents of a collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of generalized subversions" (Barthes, 1972, 150).

Sacrificing the bad seeds of tabloid-style journalism, exploitative family arrangements and corporate image management, and most importantly, the falsity of the subject category of 'woman', the film allows other myths of representation to hold sway: first and foremost, the supposed objectivity of old-style, fact based, journalistic reporting. Significantly, this subject is embodied by the use of a middle-aged, middle-class, white male author/narrator. As the effectivity of the concept of 'woman' is rendered suspect through the film's focus on these two different women's public image manipulations, other subjects, whose authorial status remains unquestioned and thus unimpinged are brought in to take her place. Harding and Kerrigan are shown to be nothing more than signifiers while the spectators, fans, viewers, commentators and, most insistently of all, the old-style fact-based, male author, still register as self-identical subjectivities.

The validity of each of the interview subject's representations of the Harding/Kerrigan conflict is evaluated according to the same criteria used to evaluate the proper performance of femininity that the film critiques. Gender and class specific, Tonya's emotional, working-class, female fan is contrasted with Nancy's angry, but wise, and more identifiably middle-class male supporter. Tonya's side portrays Tonya as a victim. Nancy's portrays Tonya's victimhood as "bleeding heart crap". Tonya's emotional, female empathetic supporter is clearly more personally identified with her skater and by the same standards, Kerrigan's angry, male fan is more distanced. As these two interview subjects speak to the processes of image manipulation that is the ostensible subject of this film, they

themselves are distinguished by their gender-specific proximity to the image repertoire in question.

Finally, the Harding/Kerrigan conflict is not merely represented as a contest between middle-class and lower-class, good and bad versions of womanhood. It is also represented as a competition between two types of feminism. As Diane Raymond has observed, the media representation of the Harding/Kerrigan sporting competition both paralleled and intersected the tide turned against feminism, which was portrayed in the media during the same general time frame as a movement that was breaking apart because of internal divisions, not because of political and economic resistance to 'women's liberation'. In the general media coverage of the Harding/Kerrigan affair, the exaggerated polarization of two skater's differences matched the degrees and kinds of difference the media ascribed to the different sides in the "war" within feminism. Following suit, The Inside Story contrasts Nancy to Tonya as "victim"; "gender" or "difference" feminism was contrasted in the press with "do me"; "equity", or "power" feminism. In the war within feminism, the "victim", "gender" or "difference" feminist was represented as someone who believes women are victimized by men. In this feminist model (for which Andrea Dworkin serves as a good example) women's oppression may be a social phenomenon, but it is nonetheless based on the inherent differences between the sexes. Men are naturally more violent and women are naturally the weaker sex. The "do me", "equity" or "power" feminists (of whom Camille Paglia is a classic example), are represented as those women who believe "victim" feminism engenders fear in

women and that this, more than any other social factor, keeps women down. Rather, as the term “do me” suggests, these feminists accept the dangers of heterosexuality as part of the pleasure.

Nancy is shown in the movie as a victim not only of Harding’s beating, but of the extraordinary pressures placed on competitive women to maintain an outwardly feminine disposition. Her scenes always begin or end with a close-up shot of the skater’s face as she forces a tearful, trembling smile to cover over her inner angst and pain. With the exception of one scene in a psychiatrist’s office, Kerrigan is never shown out of range of her family or sports agents. Her financial, emotional or social co-dependence is one of the most striking features of this film’s representation of the ‘good girl’ skater. On the other hand, in-your-face, tough talking Tonya is on her own. The quintessential new independent woman, she calls her own career shots, only briefly giving in to the manipulative pressures of her less-talented hubby. No victim of the media, when she appears in close up, she plays to the camera, flirting, mugging and, in one instance while wearing a t-shirt with “no comment” written upon it, she acknowledges her savvy, skating close to the press and movie cameras with her own camera in hand.

Just as the movie’s representation of the differences between the two competitors glosses over their more obviously similar class, race and gender experiences so too, by inflection does it simplify the spheres of feminism. The Inside Story caricatures the conflicts between Harding and Kerrigan and between ‘gender’ and ‘power’ feminism in the terms of a contest with only one winner. In doing so it invokes a model of historicity and thus subjectivity grounded by

notions of linearity and progression that is at odds with the text's otherwise consistent representation of female identity as an ever changing, and thus always changeable, cultural production. In the end, Nancy not only represents the 'more natural' victimized role of women but a more proper historical position, and Tonya, the overly ambitious, power-crazed, female pretender, a historically specific 'feminist' threat to this order of "natural" progression".

*The Carnival, The Kynic and Radical Self-Consciousness:  
Irony & the New Woman*

Discussing gender differentiated spectatorship in film, Mary Ann Doane has observed that the popular imagination perceives the female spectator as a subject who "gives in" to her fascination with the image: too close, overly involved and identified with the image ideal, "these are the tropes that permit woman's assumption of the position of 'subject' of the gaze" (1987, 2). Doane's own studies of the spectatorial relationship solicited by the 'women's picture' concur with this perception. Denied access to sexuality and subjectivity--to the gaze, in point of fact--Doane claims that women's identifications with the passive representations of femininity in these productions occur through masochistic fantasy scenarios (1987, 18-20).

Tania Modleski views the identificatory relationship generated by the "woman's film" in similar terms, and for spectators of either gender. Writing on Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, Modleski claims the film draws "the audience into a close, even suffocating identification with (the) characters" as it takes as its subject "the

potential terror and loss of self involved in identification, especially identification with a woman" (1988, 55). For the female viewer, however, her identification with the suffering of the passive female subject on the screen allows her to witness her own suffering by proxy. For the female romance reader, this suffocating closeness provides an escape into 'self-forgetfulness' that she can never achieve in her everyday social life where she watches from the discrete distance permitted by her transvestite viewing position. More typically she sees herself through the only subject position offered to women: she sees herself seeing herself as a man sees a woman (Modleski, 1982, 52-54).

The observation of this distance, I might add, is the kind of spectatorial relationship that Teresa de Lauretis has argued constitutes a 'feminist' viewing situation. It is an ironic distance, after all, that characterizes the feminist's relationship to the dominant cultural texts. Whether it is a cool, ironic distance, such as that The Inside Story displays, is another question altogether. The problem that this made-for-tv-movie poses for feminist theories of spectatorship relates to the kind and quality of ironic self-reflection that the genre has recently assumed. This irony is expressed through the emotional tone that the melodramatic narrative typically negotiates.

Elayne Rapping's understanding of women's identifications with the made-for-tv-movie text follows a logic similar to those of the feminist studies of women's popular culture cited above, but with a significant difference. Because the made-for-tv form integrates raw emotion and ideology, it not only arouses the viewer's close sympathetic identification, but his or her sense of civic responsibility. Since

the distance that The Inside Story assumed from the story's principal conflict was striking in this regard, its pseudo ideology critique would seem to have enacted a displacement, not only in the form's gender-specific mode of identification, but more importantly, in its political effectivity. Rapping argues that the made-for-tv-movie is the last self-consciously serious genre "in an age when irony and sarcasm are thought to be the appropriate attitudes toward political and social problems" (ix). Whether or not the kind of irony exercised by The Inside Story is commonly used in the TV movie, it does have its precedents in the melodramatic forms from which the made-for-tv-movie derives its conventions, emotional tenor and plot line. The 'women's picture' of the forties is the immediate historical precursor in American popular culture for the melodramatic genre of the made-for-tv-movie.

Thomas Elsaesser traces two genealogical currents in the development of this Hollywood version of the family melodrama: one leading from the post-revolutionary French romantic drama, and the other from the medieval morality play and other early forms of popular entertainment. Both, he notes, use ironic strategies, albeit quite different ones and quite differently. And, both of these melodramatic forms and ironic functions inform this text. As we shall see it is the balance of the two that might best allow the female and working class spectator who is otherwise displaced from her viewing position, to assume an active, resistant spectatorial relationship to the new made-for-tv-movie.

The more obvious current leading to this Americanized family melodrama derives from the French romantic drama, which emerged through a shift from



public to private perspective in dramatic productions first enacted by the pre-revolutionary sentimental novel. Historically, the dialectic of expression/repression that Peter Brooks has claimed characterizes the melodramatic form, has served the political purpose of rendering social conflict in high relief. Distinguished by a plot structured by emotional upheavals, its principal feature nonetheless, is its un-individuated, mythical characters. The characters embody the emotional conflicts expressed in the plot situations, even if they do not express these emotions themselves. The sentimental novel, of which Richardson's Clarissa is an excellent example, posed the historical struggles of class conflicts upon the rise of the bourgeoisie metaphorically as sexual exploitation and rape (Elsaesser 45-46)

The other current informing the American melodramatic imagination leads from the late medieval morality play and other early popular forms of entertainment, such as folk-songs, fairy-tales, music hall drama, and the German *Bänkellied*: "the latter coming to late literary honours through Brecht in his songs and musical plays, The Three penny Opera or Mahogony" (Elsaesser 44). It is a satirical, carnivalesque mode and functions through expressions of revelry and burlesque-bawdy performance.

From the pre/post-revolutionary family melodrama The Inside Story derives its ironic sensibility from the striking imbalance between intellectual and emotional resources displayed by its characters. Here, "[i]rony privileges the spectator *vis-à-vis* the protagonists, for he [*sic*] registers the difference from a superior

position" (Elsaesser 66). True to form, we see Harding's and Kerrigan's faultlines long before they do. Both Harding's and Kerrigan's highly developed athletic skills are contrasted with their own particular weaknesses. Both display poor judgement in their management choices, but Harding is emotionally deprived and Kerrigan is, arguably, psychologically unbalanced.

Elsaesser suggests that "pathos results from non-communication or silence made eloquent...where highly emotional situations are underplayed to present an ironic discontinuity of feeling or a qualitative difference in intensity, usually visualized in terms of spatial distance and separation" (67). Similarly, Peter Brooks contends that emotional and/or intellectual disjunction is the defining feature of the genre (1976). He argues that the narrative tension of melodrama is a structural relation which is derived more from the ordering and disordering of the relations of muteness and expression than from the order/disorder of any actual discursive formation that defines generic specificity. It is the muted content of the narrative rather than that which is actually expressed that conveys the significance of the story.

In The Inside Story the orchestration of these expressive intensities is manifested in relation to the media response to the story. The movie depicts the media's overinvestment in the different class values of the two skater's performances of gender as the displacement of a more appropriate emotional response to these women's physical and emotional manipulations. In fact, the principal narrative tension in the movie derives from a struggle that pitches both skaters against the press and their individual image handlers. Finally, the story is

about these women's inability to express themselves in the face of such mediation. The film's representation of the criminal attack echos this dialectic. Here, the 'wack heard around the world' that caused Kerrigan's initial injury, looks more like a tap. Thus the melodramatic structure of expression/repression is played out in The Inside Story between the hystericized response of the media to changing value systems and the repression of the female body under seige.

The Inside Story only partially transforms the emotional power that the TV movie more typically exploits to deliver its social message: from self-consciously serious to cynically debased. Through ironic distancing it transforms the mainstay of the emotional content into issues for intellectual consideration. But, this made-for-tv-movie is no more cynical or debased than earlier forms of melodrama. Certainly as Elsaesser has observed, the popular American version of the genre has always addressed the diminishment of social experience and moral commitments in American life:

The discrepancy of seeming and being, of intention and result, registers as a perplexing frustration, and an ever-increasing gap opens between the emotions and the reality they seek to reach. What strikes one as the true pathos is the very mediocrity of the human beings involved, putting such high demands upon themselves trying to live up to an exalted vision of man, but instead living out *the impossible contradictions that have turned the American dream into its proverbial nightmare* (Elsaesser 67, my emphasis).

Reflecting upon the 'ever-increasing gap' between what we desire from the subject position 'woman' and what we get instead, The Inside Story's narrator/scriptwriter summarizes the pathos of these skaters' story in hyperbolically cynical terms:

Nancy and Tonya--we deified one and we demonized the other and we imprisoned them both in images that we used to sell soup and newspapers and Olympic games and TV movies...Nancy the good became the richest silver medalist in Olympic history and she went on to Disneyland...and Tonya the bad, she came back to Portland, pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to hinder the prosecution of a crime, and tried to change her image. But no one believed her except a Japanese promoter who tried to get her to wrestle for a million dollars as Tonya the terrible (The Inside Story).

The new point-of-view structures and levels of enunciation displayed by this particular text constitute the most significant transformations in current melodramatic form. The viewers of The Insider Story may have a better informed relationship to the text but the perspective that it offers is stubbornly distinguished by race, class and gender. What I will argue now is that the traces of the *Bänkellied* mode of melodrama that are everywhere in the media reportage of the Harding/Kerrigan competition, as well as the made-for-tv-movie text, offer a mode of reception that can reposition the female and middle-class spectatorial relationships that this movie otherwise displaces.

From the *Bänkellied* melodramatic form, this made-for-tv-movie borrows the structure, tone and tempo of the story. Historically, this mode used the heavily repetitive verse-form of the ballad or the mechanical rhythms of the barrel organ, adapted in song by the singer, to effect a distancing or ironizing in the moral tone of the story by its unexpected emphasis. The Inside Story uses the repetition of flashbulbs and false interview starts, endless video and photographic overlays, the hyperbolized characterizations of good and bad femininities, and of course the ideology critique launched by the narrator and interview subjects, to effect the same kinds of estrangement. More, the hyperbolic character of the story resembles the satirical tones of the *Bänkellied* melodramatic form and it is the spirit of defiance that issues forth from this celebration of excess, especially in the bawdy bodiliness of Tonya Harding's bid for the gold, that inspires the greatest amusement and thus the greatest resistance of all.

Peter Sloterdijk has proposed that the cynical attitude that prevails in so much of contemporary cultural life can be most effectively counterbalanced by a very similar attitude. Sloterdijk posits that the Diogensian spirit of 'knyicism', when placed alongside the cynical demeanor can revive the long-lost critical function of the ancients' cynical temperament. The kynical spirit is both satirical and celebratory, it defies laws and conventions through bodily activities. Like Mikhail Bakhtin's vision of a popular, festive, carnivaleque cultural dynamic, and like the world of melodrama, it is a world view that can be traced back to the middle ages. The carnivalesque, like the Diogenesian spirit, prefers clowns and magicians to

priests and scholars, the corporeal excesses of the body to the rationalizations of the head and heart. The carnivalesque mode prevailed throughout the reportage of the Harding/Kerrigan story. Focused on the bodies of the two skaters, and perhaps even more on the failure that haunted the whole story, beginning with the attack, the carnivalesque mood takes hold though the absurd calamities visited on all of the players, in fact, through the misadventures of the entire middle class world represented in and by skating culture.

While the perceptions of the Harding/Kerrigan story were certainly derived from the middle-class pool of representation, nonetheless they circulated and were celebrated outside of the purview of the white, male middle-class proper.<sup>5</sup> Insofar as the discursive formation within which this story of women's competition was located engaged the question of class dispersion through discourses on class-based practices of consumption, issues related to the changing global economy were brought to the fore. The part-time and short-term underpaid workers in the service industry, students, women, gays and lesbians and subjects of the various ethnic and immigrant communities most vulnerable to economic changes can take hold of these absurd representations and celebrate the sheer audacity of all the players. Most of my students and friends were on Harding's side of the staged contest between different kinds of femininity. We admired the straightforward manner in which Harding voiced her rather uncomplicated

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In fact, many of the references cited in this chapter testify to an alternative position. My research has benefited from the publication of a book of 'feminist' essays on the Harding/Kerrigan story in 1995. Women on Ice: Feminist Essays on the Tonya Harding/Nancy Kerrigan Spectacle. Ed. Cynthia Baughman.

ambitions. We liked her pool playing and tough talk because it contrasted with the good girls and boys we otherwise all have to be if we are going to make it in this world.

Since the carnivalesque attitude takes form through parody, it both builds upon the discourses and forms of dominant forms of popular culture and infects them. Where The Inside Story's ideology critique helpfully circumscribed the social relationships of greatest significance for women and the working classes that were open to parody, it was the vernacular textures and tones of these subject's material experiences that informed the discursive orientation of the ideology critique in the first place. Significantly, the film's treatment of the sexual body's insistent *material* relations with the political and economic realms marked a radical and important departure for this pop-cultural form. Whereas the conventional TV Movie allows and promotes the relations between private and public spheres, Rapping notes that,

the public sphere itself is never mapped. Rather it is denied in favour of a personal, individualistic sense of how progressive change occurs. Typically TV movies do not portray a political world in any meaningful sense (Rapping 40).

More characteristically the made-for-tv-movie has privileged representations and ideologies of the nuclear family; none of the characters of these traditional TV dramas, not even those who are named as politicians, are seen as public actors, "but individualistic heroes who get their primary identity from their family role" (Rapping 41).

The symbolic approaches to women and consumption that predominated in the media coverage of women and crime during the mid nineteen-nineties positioned women as both the objects and subjects of economic and political relations. In doing so these representations materialized something which is essentially abstract--the politics and the economic imperatives that affect female subjectivity.

In the end, concerns for shifting class arrangements predominated in social discourse at this time, especially concerns for a shrinking middle-class. While the stories about women and crime that circulated during this time had specific narrative features, and equally specific discursive arrangements, all seemed excessive in their representational investments in relating crime to America's 'domestic economy'. The extraordinary emphasis on the consumer profile of those named as protagonists of these crimes elaborated a tragic narrative about the erosion of American values, seen through the lens of aesthetic judgments defined by the criteria of class-based taste. Women's crimes in the mid-nineties were represented as the logical extension of a highly commodified and competitive American working and lower middle-class whose over-arching ambition was measured in the shopping practices and competitive excesses of its women.



## Conclusion

Over the last decade the concepts of femininity and gender have become destabilized in social discourse. In many of the representations of popular culture these destabilizations have been linked to stories of women and crime. Tracing the discursive construction of female criminality in the popular culture of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the thesis considers the relationship between the idea of gender instability and the gender-based transformations of popular crime genres, focusing on those crime stories that revive the styles, forms, genres and narrative preoccupations of WWII American popular culture. The principal interest of the thesis relates to the means with which these genres represent the subject of identity and its production, and, in turn, negotiate the reader's identification with the text.

This study is organized around four critical themes: I trace the shifting symbolic organization of the gender-based genre revivals of detective fiction, *film noir* and melodrama; consider the gendering function of space in these narratives; address the intensified exercise of self-referentiality in contemporary generic productions; and examine the relations of gender and genre in the revival text. These thematic interests are focused through three questions: What is the status of genre in postmodern popular culture? What is the nature of the relationship between gender and generic form in contemporary narrative productions? And, what common concerns are expressed by the discursive constructions of

rhetorical, symbolic and monetary economies in these popular representations?

The first question considers the postmodern tendency toward simulation, fragmentation and intertextuality, and queries whether genre can provide a coherent ordering function in light of these other phenomena? Can it perform a representative function, or is the notion of genre exhausted in postmodernity?

Following Julia Kristeva's theory that postmodernist social and cultural experience is informed by the confrontation of two narrative/historical forms, I argue that the organizing principles of genre not only persist in postmodernity but persist in an especially hyperbolized form, as they contrast with the equally exaggerated identity constructions of modern, linear narrative productions. Insofar as the production of identity constitutes the common objective of these two forms, questions of identification, classification and naming—of both genre or gender—are pushed to the fore.

Corresponding to this emphasis on identity and its production, the symbolic organization of each of the narrative productions under study is found to place particular emphasis on the female symbolic position. The media accounts of the Aileen Wuornos true-crime story, the feminist-inspired, female hard-boiled detective fictions, the *neo-noir* texts, and the 'new woman's' melodramas of both film and television: in all the idea prevails that femininity is an arbitrary, artificial, 'virtual' construct, although in each instance the idea of gender mutability serves the narrative purposes differently, according to the gender of the story's point-of-view and generic identification.

The second question guiding this research regards how genres are gendered.

The thesis explores the relationship between discourses on gender instability and recent transformations to the gender specificity of certain popular genres: specifically hard-boiled detective fiction, *film noir* and tv melodrama. I argue that the switch from a male to a female hero in detective fiction, and a female to a male victim in melodrama, enacted by the texts under study, has resulted from the re-negotiation of gender roles and relations attending the broad circulation of feminist ideas in social discourse and in response to the male paranoia underpinning the backlash against feminism. The change in the gender of a function not only changes the significations of the actions that these character functions enable but forces reconsideration of all binary relations: of space and time first and foremost.

In the lions's share of the narrative productions that the thesis examines the discursive interest in the destabilization of gender coherence is matched by the formal exercises of generic production. Each, in its own way, demonstrates increased self-reflexivity, both in relation to its representations of gender, and in relation to its own status as representation. Female detective fiction enacts a deconstructive parody of the gender-based generic conventions. More cynical than deconstructive, the burlesque shifts in the gender conventions executed in the *neo-film noir* detective story hyperbolize the stability of representation itself. Although less obvious, the self-reflexivity in the cinematic melodrama emerges in relation to the narrative concerns of the story under study. Disclosure plays a 'shell game' with the plotline. Is this a narrative about changing gender roles and

relations, or, is this a narrative about changing economic and technological regimes? In either case, the discursive preoccupation with signification affects a shift in the gender of the melodramatic point-of-view. Likewise, in the more self-consciously self-reflexive made-for-tv-movie the ironical distancing that otherwise has provided its female viewers with a critical purchase on the text, is now exaggerated and emotionally reconfigured, effectively shifting the gender-typical register of the television film.

The third question directing this research concerns the common discursive interests of these texts. What concerns do each express in relation to the statuses of representation, gender and the economy? How do these popular texts address changes in social and cultural life? What co-intelligible antagonisms do these narratives reveal?

Each text reveals a discursive preoccupation with the relationship between gender and space. Equating the symbolic refusal of the female subject position that Aileen Wuornos's bisexuality and female criminality represented, with the idea of placelessness, the media reconstruction of Wuornos's serial criminality focused on her present homelessness and her prior dysfunctional family life.

This discursive coordination of gender stability and social security appears in some manner, in all of the crime narratives the study considers. In female detective fiction the relationship between space and gender emphasizes their mutually determining relationship and uses the parodic appropriation of the male subject position to deconstruct it. In the *film noir* and *neo-film noir* universes, the

narrative space is tempered by the frisson produced by the instability of the female subject position. And, in the melodramatic productions of cinema and television, the relationship between gender and space is narrativized in relationship to increasing economic globalization. From 1990 until 1994, popular cultural representations of “woman” in popular culture used the feminine symbolic term as a barometer of diminishing material and moral values.

Each of the chapters traces discourses on the economy, representation and gender, against shifting interests in feminism or representations of feminism. Chapter one prepares a ground for these studies. Sketching a general, recent history of feminism in relation to geo-political change, it explains the emergence of identity politics in relation to changing representational and historical forms, and argues the transformative possibilities of genre repetition and gender parody.

Chapter two introduces a textual analysis of the media’s treatment of Aileen Wuornos—the “lesbian, hitchhiking, serial-killing prostitute”—as exemplary of the discursive treatment of women’s crime stories during the period covered by this thesis. I argue that the reporting of Wuornos’s multiple social transgressions, perhaps even more than her crimes themselves, worked to displace the more “sympathetic” representation of feminist issues that had held sway in the media in the early eighties. The crime story’s focus on the normative definitions (and their limits) of female sexuality, articulated around the subjects of attempted rape, violent revenge and women on the run, obscured prior debates about women’s social, legal and reproductive victimization. Overall, the story posed the problem

of gender stability as a larger question of spatial definition. Specifically, it linked women's sexual transgression to the dissolution of the public/private division.

My study of the feminist appropriation of the male genre of detective fiction focuses on the structuring function of space in popular narrative. Analyzing a selection of works from the series of female hard-boiled detective fictions written by Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky, chapter three provides a more historically specific feminist frame within which to consider the Wuornos case. The chapter considers the themes prevalent in female detective fiction in relation to feminist discourse on identity, domesticity, social policy and global economic changes. The detective novels this chapter discusses use parody to denaturalize the gendered presumptions of earlier texts in the hard-boiled tradition, specifically as regards women's social position. Embodying both masculine and feminine social positions, the female detective considers the intensification of symbolic associations in postmodernity to promote arbitrary and potentially subversive identifications. Finally, the genre engages the contradictory aspect of this doubled social relation to deconstruct the gendering of spatial relations.

Where chapters two and three consider the role that feminist discourse plays in the disarticulation of the concepts of home and family, chapter four presumes a post-feminist moment in social discourse where the conceptual coherence of these combined terms is exhausted. Most strikingly, in the *neo-noir* film the previous ambiguity of the female sign has disappeared. There is no dualism between good and bad women: all women are bad and all are to blame for just

about everything. The possibilities for continued family life in this textual universe lie with the male figure, here placed in the feminine position.

Chapter five discusses the tabloid-tv-movie representation of the Tonya Harding/Nancy Kerrigan skating competition as it portrays the event as a violent struggle between different classes of women and different kinds of feminism, and links this to the state of the American economy. Comparing Harding and Kerrigan as lower and working class, 'do me' and 'victim' feminists, this representation of women's crime absurdly laid the blame for the shift in America's economic conditions on the overarching ambitions and competitive excesses of women.

A number of conclusions relating to the discursive construction of femininity in the popular culture of the 1990's can be drawn from these observations. First and foremost, insofar as each of the crime narratives studied by the thesis appraises the relationship between historically changing social relations and spatial organization by referring to the conceptual stability of the gender-sex association, it can be assumed that the correspondence between gender coherence and social form is especially evident in the social discourse of the early 1990s. Furthermore, since the intelligibility of the sex-gender connection is addressed in these narratives giving priority to the *female* sex-gender affiliation, the central importance of the concept of *femininity* to the representation of social organization and practice can be inferred.

More generally, the narrative dis-articulation of 'the feminine' gender from the female sex opens up a discursive space within a popular cultural context where

broader questions of sex-gender and signification can be raised. For better or worse, many of the texts the thesis studies link changing modes of signification to shifts in gender roles and relations.

In the representation of Aileen Wuornos's case, the association made between her exceptional sex-gender identification and her serial criminality effectively links the inability of gender to contain sex to the idea that narrative form can no longer contain meaning. Likewise, in female hard-boiled detective fiction the correspondence between truth and observational phenomena is derailed through shifted gender-sex assignments. The appropriation of the male character function by a female private eye inaugurates a list of gender-based misidentifications and these then generate their own lists of misunderstandings and misconceptions about crime and social life.

Similarly, the crime in *neo-film noir* revolves around a crisis in signification that is directly tied to the disarticulation of sex and gender. Where in classical *film noir*, the dangerousness of the *femme fatale* derives from the threat her unknown, unleashed sexuality poses to the social order, the danger of the new fatal woman obtains from the fact that the female sexuality that she threatens to deploy (which by now is exceedingly familiar), has no basis in fact. If sex has become just another spectacle, what must this imply about the rest of our corporeal/material life? Along the same lines, the tabloid coverage of the Harding/Kerrigan skating competition took the idea of the construction of gender literally, framing the sporting conflict as a kind of retail competition involving different classes of production in the marketing of "Woman".



The textual emphasis on the functioning of the feminine in social organization and signification that these narrative productions reflect, parallels changing historical realities in both social life and representation within which women are often the most vulnerable participants. As David Harvey has noted, "gender relations have...become much more complicated, at the same time as resort to a female labour force had become much more widespread. By the same token, the social basis for ideologies of entrepreneurialism, paternalism, and privatism has increased" (192). Thus, even if the sex-gender link has been severed in much popular discourse, many of the narrative forms addressed by this thesis can facilitate the production of a social consensus that reinforce conservative value systems regarding the performance of gender, through more and less veiled threats to social accommodation and economic security. Other texts, more hopefully, produce discourses on femininity which are also enabling of social transformation insofar as they imagine a feminine identity produced in language and therefore open to change. Most importantly, texts like those of the feminist inspired detective fiction genre and those within the *neo-noir* universe keep alive the idea that identity is a political value.

### ***Afterthoughts on Language, Power and Virtual Reality***

A diffuse thematic paradigm providing the basic features of the 'world view' of these revival texts might look like this:

gender performance	gender difference
virtual reality	reality
paradox	analog
information oligarchy	information democracy
economy	nature
spacelessness	space
postmodernity	modernity
economic instability	economic power

What the discourse of the texts studied by this thesis might equally express of discourse itself, is quite radical: a return to what Michel Foucault has described as the concept of truth that characterized and governed classical culture's will to knowledge. Foucault claimed that the historical division that emerged in classical culture can be characterized by the separation of the idea that true discourse is precious and desirable *because* of its links to power, from the idea that truth is self-evident, objective, observable, verifiable, and has value on its own, even while it is blind to own 'prodigious machinery'. What then of the claims made by the Digital Communication's chief in the film Disclosure, that truth is something distinct from information--from that which can be verifiable and seen, like the truth of bodies, of fortunes, for example? Does this suggest that we are living in a historical period where 'truth' is determined and valued for what power it holds

(Foucault, 1971, 150-51) ?

The most palpable discourse of the cultural materials studied by this thesis is that concerned with issues of 'truth', 'the real' and the techniques of knowledge. A common concern for economic instability, especially as it makes tenable and unleashes a will to power unfettered by the restraints of propriety, which even a veiled subscription to a 'will to truth' might provide, determines the particular level and quality of narrative tension in these narratives. If nothing is to be believed but for what it represents of concrete economic gain, it is not so much that these stories's discursive preoccupation with the instability of gender roles and relations works to promote the truth of bodies, sexes and genders for their own sake, rather this preoccupation recognizes the specific economic investments in the representation of subjects as such.

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Part II: Films Cited by Title

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