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Cinematic Competence and Directorial Persona in Film School: A Study of Socialization and Cultural Production

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of professional socialization in cultural production, particularly in the popular arts. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a graduate program of narrative filmmaking, it asks "what is taught and what is learned in film school?" and answers those questions through an account of two critical domains in film school practice: aesthetic repertoires (including narrative and stylistic competence in cinema), and the social identity of the student director. It also considers the ideology of "talent" in the school community.

Aesthetic practice in the school extends from classical to "New" Hollywood, the former based on narrative clarity, continuous space and time, and goaloriented protagonists, the latter varying those conventions through the limited use of ambiguity as a narrative and stylistic element.

The ideal role of the director in the school and in student filmmaking is the auteur, the film artist who uses narrative and stylistic principles to express a "personal vision", and who writes, directs and edits her or his "own" films in an otherwise collective production process.

Beyond a set of tasks, the title "director" also connotes an identity--who you are as well as what you do. In coming to identify themselves as directors in the school, students cultivate "persona," or distinctive personal styles.

Through task set, vision and persona, and also through the attribution of talent as an intrapersonal trait, the film director as singular artist merges, despite the divided labor of film production and a populist aesthetic based on a large and heterogeneous commercial audience.

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CINEMATIC COMPETENCE AND DIRECTORIAL
PERSONA IN FILM SCHOOL: A STUDY OF
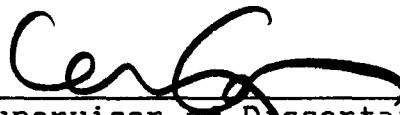SOCIALIZATION AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

LISA HELEN HENDERSON

A DISSERTATION

in

Communications and Sociology

Presented to the Faculties of the
University of Pennsylvania in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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1990

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Supervisor of Dissertation
in Communications

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in Sociology

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Love and thanks go to four friends in particular—

ABSTRACT

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IN FILM SCHOOL: A STUDY IN SOCIALIZATION
AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

LISA HENDERSON

LARRY GROSS
CHARLES BOSK

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populist aesthetic based on a large and heterogeneous
commercial audience.

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INTRODUCTION

> Getting Started: A Fable – Fred wants to make a
> movie. At thirty, he figures this may be his last
> chance. He's been to film school. (He likes to
> think of himself as the Coppola--or at least the
> Scorsese--of the eighties.) He learned a lot about
> Bergman, Godard, and semiology. He learned how to
> load an Arriflex, how to zoom smoothly without a
> motor, how to operate a double system projector, and
> how to write a budget. He also learned, degree in
> hand, that none of this knowledge had much bearing
> on a career in the film business.
> -James Monaco

Despite the skepticism of Monaco's fable, he and
other observers of the "New" Hollywood contend that since
the early 1970s films schools have been the major source
of directorial talent in U.S. fiction film (Monaco
1979:85; Schatz 1982:203-4; Pye and Myles 1979:54-60).
Eclipsing television as the means of professional entree
into the feature film industry (Schatz 1982: 204), the
leading trade schools have instructed full-time graduate
and undergraduate students in many of the principal
aspects of filmmaking, including script writing and
adaptation, casting and directing actors, camera and
sound work, editing, and production management. Not
surprisingly, given industry locales, the prominent U.S.
schools and departments are in New York City and Southern
California. [1]

From Monaco's, Schatz's or Pye and Myles' accounts,
it isn't clear what film students do or whether

there is any reliable route from school to industry (the fable claims there isn't). Rather, the value of university programs is based on the economic and critical successes of a handful of high-profile graduates, among them Francis Ford Coppola (UCLA), Martin Scorsese (NYU), George Lucas (USC) and Steven Spielberg (briefly at California State University at Long Beach), together referred to as "young Turks" or the "New Hollywood Whiz Kids" (eg. Schatz 1982:189).

Since Schatz and Monaco made their observations, a later generation of school-trained filmmakers has continued to stake both a critical and commercial claim on the horizon of American popular film culture, for example: Randal Kleiser (USC), director of Grease (1978) and The Blue Lagoon (1980); Martha Coolidge (NYU), director of Valley Girl (1983); Robert Zemeckis (USC), director of Romancing the Stone (1984), co-writer and director of Back to the Future (1985) and Back to the Future II (1989), director of Who Framed Roger Rabbit (1988); Martin Brest (NYU), director of Beverly Hills Cop (1984) and Beverly Hills Cop II (1986); Oliver Stone (NYU), writer-director of Salvador (1986), Platoon (1987), Wall Street (1988), and Born on the 4th of July (1989) (after several major screenwriting credits); Susan Seidelman (NYU), producer-director of Smithereens (1982), Desperately Seeking Susan (1985), Making Mr. Right (1987)

and <u>She-Devil</u> (1989); Jim Jarmusch (NYU), writer-director of <u>Stranger Than Paradise</u> (1985), <u>Down By Law</u> (1986) and <u>Mystery Train</u> (1989); Spike Lee (NYU), writer-director of <u>She's Gotta Have It</u> (1986), <u>School Daze</u> (1988) and <u>Do The Right Thing</u> (1989); Chris Columbus (NYU), screenwriter for <u>Young Sherlock Holmes</u> (1986), <u>Gremlins</u> (1984), and <u>The Goonies</u> (1985); Joe Minion (Columbia), screenwriter for Scorsese's <u>After Hours</u> (1985); Amy Heckerling (UCLA), director of <u>Fast Times at Ridgemont High</u> (1982) and <u>Johnny Dangerously</u> (1984). According to some industry spokespeople, these successes, in combination with "the onslaught of cable and home video [and thus] Hollywood's insatiable need for more product" (Goldberg 1987:48) have transformed the industry's enduring neglect or contempt for film schools into breathless speculation about who would be (and who would manage) the next Lucas or Spielberg. Recalling his departure from film school in the late 1960s, Martin Brest comments:

> ...I sent 500 letters and resumes to everyone saying
> I'd work for nothing, and I got no responses
> whatsoever...Nobody had any interest in anybody from
> film school. That seems to have changed totally.
> These days the film schools are scoured for talent
> by the studios (in Bennetts 1987:53).

Feature director Martha Coolidge, who left film school shortly after Brest, adds:

> I never told people I went to film school, and I
> never told people I wanted to be a director, because

> I was a woman and I was told nobody would ever hire
> me. It's a whole different ball game now; film
> school is definitely considered the mainstream entry
> into the film business (in Bennetts 1987:53).

By one analogy, the major schools have become the film
industry's farm teams (Goldberg 1987: 47). [2]

These and other popular commentaries reflect and
construct an emergent legitimacy for film schools in the
U.S. film industry, a changing institutional image that
in part motivates the research reported here. However,
as a student of social life and symbolic behavior, I
shift emphasis from the biographic treatment of famous
graduates to the form and content of film school training
and experience. In brief, this is a study of what is
taught and what is learned in film school.

The Field Setting: Graduate Film and Television

In the tradition of many monographs in cultural
production (eg. Adler 1979; cf. Schudson 1984) this
research is an intensive case study of a particular
organization, a graduate program in narrative filmmaking
I refer to here as "Grad Film".

Grad Film is one department in an elite university
school of the arts established in New York City in the
late 1960s. The department offers Master of Fine Arts
degrees to about 150 students enrolled from year to year,
half of them in the first year of a three-year program.

Each year a small percentage of students with previous production experience or narrative expertise is admitted directly to second-year (based on application portfolios). Most, however, begin with the first year class.

Courses in script writing, directing actors, cinematography, production management, editing, sound recording and documentary cinema are taught by a standing faculty of 7 and a part-time faculty of about 15. Many faculty members are currently involved in narrative fiction and documentary filmmaking as writers, directors, editors, cinematographers, production managers, sound recordists, script consultants and script supervisors, and all have a variety of independent and/or freelance production credits.

The academic year 1985-86 was the last the department spent in a rundown but homey low-rise shared with a women's dormitory, several blocks from the University's main campus. At that time the building's first floor housed 4 classrooms, a screening room, and offices for faculty and an administrative staff of 3. The first-floor lounge, a large foyer just beyond the building entrance, ringed with shabby, coffee-stained furniture, served as a place for students to meet and hang out, have a cigarette during class breaks, and hold equipment as they checked out for their shoots. As

production periods approached, an unruly 2-foot stack of manilla envelopes collected in the corner of the room, envelopes containing resumes and "head-shots" sent by aspiring actors in response to the casting calls students placed in New York trade papers. The envelopes were a graphic reminder that however great the odds were against film students working as film directors, New York was home to an even larger number of actors who, by the hundreds, were willing to work without pay for experience in front of the camera, material for their "reels", and a chance of collaborating with a student who, as one actor put it, "might just be the next Martin Scorsese."

Periodically, the coffee cups and cigarette butts were collected, the old linoleum floor waxed, the furniture spruced up. Still, the lounge looked less a part of a prestigious university than a comfortable, bohemian enclave, home for days at a time to a stylish group of graduate students in their early 20s to late 30s, whose ardor for filmmaking rose with promising script reviews, good shoots or news of a festival award given to a Grad Film student, and faltered with the expense and politics of film school life. But it was sustained in the first place by membership in a ready-made community of filmmakers, membership granted to students upon their enrollment in the program.

Downstairs, some 14 editing tables were housed in
three rooms separated by a maze of narrow hallways lined
with weather-beaten steel lockers, where students kept
their footage and supplies and into which an aging
sprinkler system had leaked on a couple of occasions.
Things were falling apart but there was no point in major
repairs--soon the department would move to new quarters
and the building would be gutted. However, from
September 1985 to July 1986 Grad Film became my primary
fieldwork site, where I attended classes and screenings
in first, second and third year, participated in student
filmmaking, interviewed students and faculty and, more
informally, became a temporary and oddly specialized
member of the Grad Film community.

Filmmaking as Art and Industry

Following visits to several possible locales for
this study, my interest in Grad Film came from its
emphasis on narrative filmmaking and the felt
identification among most students and faculty with the
commercial industries (notably Hollywood and independent
fiction features). These qualities put Grad Film in a
situated rather than abstract relationship to those
industries, a relationship that enabled (indeed demanded)
that I investigate the "popular" as it is studied,
taught, produced and reproduced by members of and

aspirants to a cultural domain which, from its inception, has been poised between art and industry.

Other schools, for example those where teachers and students work in the tradition of experimental, avant-garde or otherwise non-narrative cinema, also sustain a relationship to Hollywood but a distant one, one that defines what they don't do and which is sometimes characterized by the artist's contempt for commercial production. In Grad Film conversely, the cultural backdrop to school filmmaking and school talk about film comes from the narrative traditions of classical Hollywood, the (largely European) "art" cinema, and the hybrid of "New" Hollywood, to borrow terms from Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1984).

Grad Film's orientation was apparent from the outset--from the first few occasions I spent at the school, the first student films I saw, and from preliminary interviews with several people in the school community. Still, it remains a task of this thesis to account for the dynamics of the art-industry connection in the symbolic and institutional practices characteristic of Grad Film life. Do students come to identify with commercial filmmaking? If so, how, in what terms? What kinds of films do they make? What film industry positions do they eventually hope to occupy? As members of an "art school" community, what relative weight do

they and their teachers give to aesthetic and economic
dimensions of popular cinema? Is this a relevant
opposition? How is it experienced, negotiated,
reconciled? Are students and teachers disdainful of
economic and industrial imperatives, as so many mass
culture critics (artists among them) have been in
commentaries on the degradation of art wrought by modern
cultural commodification (eg. MacDonald 1953)? What is
the school's training model? Does it resemble
established professional schools, for example in law and
medicine, or classical conservatories and art academies,
ostensibly more concerned with art _qua_ art and less so
with controlled and licensed entree into the field beyond
school?

The distinctions are partly rhetorical; professional
schools engage in theory and research as well as training
and practical applications, and schools of art inevitably
prepare students for known art worlds beyond the academy,
however uncertain their prospects may be (eg. Strauss
1970). But as rhetorical questions they reflect a broad
set of cultural definitions which mark the boundaries
between art and industry, positioning industry at the
social and cultural core and art on a small if privileged
"reservation" at the periphery (Gross 1989:113), a
reservation inhabited by that select few among the
citizenry destined to be recognized as "artists". In the

U.S., the contemporary popular film industry is a site where the art/industry relationship is problematized (Steiner 1983:1). In Grad Film, particularly in light of the evolving affinity between film schools and the film business, that relationship is framed in high relief by the neophyte status of students. With their teachers, they forge, fight and consolidate the meanings and standards of "cinema" and the at least provisional identities of aspirants to the professional film world.

In this study I chronicle these negotiations and contextualize them in the organizational setting of "school" and the cultural and historical setting of U.S. narrative filmmaking. In more theoretical terms, I aim to do two things: (1) examine the socialization of film students along the two dimensions of aesthetic practice and role identity; and (2) treat these dimensions of socialization as part of the process of cultural production and reproduction.

Socialization and the Production of Culture

In Britain and the U.S. since the late 1970s, the "production of culture" approach in contemporary cultural studies has sought to refine the concept and effect of culture and its relationship to social structure and social organization. Rather than treating culture as an a priori, overarching, and coherent system of values and

beliefs, in effect the "cement" of social structure, authors in the production of culture school have examined specific settings in complex societies in which the elements of culture are produced (Peterson 1978:10).

In practice, this approach has meant detailed accounts of institutional and group activity in the familiarly "cultural" domains of art, law, science and religion, for example the transmission of new ideas through professional networks in science (Crane 1972) or the position and power of commercial art galleries in the distribution of painting and sculpture (Bystryn 1978). The mandate has been to see how the activities of such cultural specialists generate--indeed "produce"--symbolic systems, artifacts, meanings and judgements of value, and how the authority of specialists within these discourses is ratified for and by society at large. Again, in this equation culture is not simply received, at once everywhere and nowhere, but constituted by routine (if changing) activity in particular circumstances. Moreover, social-structural arrangements such as the division of labor, assymetrical power relations, profit motives, and the distribution of resources are theorized to determine or constrain the development of cultural repertoires, whether of things, practices or meanings (eg. Gallagher 1982).

In this thesis I treat the training of cultural

producers as a crucial element in the continuing analysis
of cultural production. Precisely because culture is
anchored in the habits and practices of specific
communities and sub-groups (eg. Swidler 1986), it is
important to know who the members of those communities
are and the perspectives, skills and motives they share
in doing cultural work. And while the cultivation of
professional repertoires does not end with school,
schools are increasingly where people first encounter
those repertoires in a variety of professional fields.
This is particularly true of many art school specialties,
where students are trained less for well-identified jobs,
with routine sets of skills and requirements, than for a
vocational position as artist. As Barbara Rosenblum has
pointed out for fine-art photography, schools, rather
than apprenticeships or traineeships, have become the
principal locales of professional socialization
(1978:31).

Viewed as a newly legitimate center for the training
and socialization of personnel, the film school becomes a
part of the "art world" of U.S. narrative filmmaking
(Becker 1982), rather than standing outside it as a place
whose films, afterall, are seen by few non-departmental
audiences. This is not to blur the distinction between
schools and the professional film industries, but to
propose a certain depth in cultural practice, to ask

whether ideologies and cultural forms are purveyed beyond
professional contexts (whose films are indeed generally
seen). How do schools communicate, resist, or transform
dominant aesthetic and social standards? In other words,
how are cinematic practices and social roles not only
produced but reproduced?

In the language of British theorizing about the
production of culture, art schools are the site of
cultural mediation (Williams 1977:95-100). With this
term, Williams and other post-structuralists depart from
classical theories of structural determinism, where
cultural products are seen as the coherent ideological
reflections of dominant classes. Mediation, alternately,
suggests that multiple forces intervene (indeed
"mediate") between classes and texts in constructing
cultural repertoires. First, theorists must account for
class fractions and for other complex social groups
(Williams 1977:55-71). But the social life of cultural
texts is still more embedded than reflection hypotheses
suggest, however subtly-defined determining class
relations may be. Cultural repertoires are further
shaped, or mediated, by the life experiences of artists
and authors, by relations of aesthetic production (eg. in
commercial or non-commercial domains), by the codes and
conventions of representation, and by the processes of
consumption among different audiences--all forces defined

within but not strictly or entirely by class relations

(Wolff 1982:64-66; Ohmann 1983). In this thesis, I am

concerned with a subset of the mediations Wolff

identifies: the aesthetic codes and production relations

of narrative film through which Grad Film students are

socialized (and through which they socialize

themselves).

John VanMaanen and Edward Schein propose a broad

definition of socialization as

> the fashion [given a particular role] in which an
> individual is taught and learns what behaviors and
> perspectives are customary and desirable within the
> work setting as well as what ones are not...[T]he
> results of an organizational socialization process
> include, for instance, a readiness to select certain
> events for attention over others, a stylized stance
> toward one's routine activities, some ideas as to
> how one's various behavioral responses to recurrent
> situations are viewed by others, and so forth. In
> short, socialization entails the learning of a
> cultural perspective that can be brought to bear on
> both commonplace and unusual matters going on in the
> workplace...a perspective for interpreting one's
> experiences in a given sphere of the work world
> (1979:211-12).

Van Maanen and Schein's definition is at once distant

from and useful for an analysis of film school training.

On the one hand, the authors are concerned with settings

in which recruits develop and continue to practice their

occupational roles, for example the rookie in an urban

police department (1979:212). Students, however,

typically leave the organizations--the schools--that

train them. While the school remains a potentially long-

term setting for faculty and other employees, it is a
temporary one for students, particularly those with no
ambition to teach the specialties they've studied. Thus
the organizational role that film school students occupy
is student, rather than "director", "writer", "editor" or
"filmmaker". But this is also the value of Van Maanen
and Schein's organizational perspective: the film school
world is not only about filmmaking. It is marked by the
intersection of two "systems of relevance" (Schutz 1964:7-
10)--filmmaking and film training--incorporating the
structures and relationships of school settings. This
intersection defines the historical and analytic context
of this study, which describes Grad Film students'
"perspectives", in Van Maanen and Schein's terms, how
they acquire those perspectives in the school, and the
relationship of both to the professional milieux they
aspire to.

Social identity: Early socialization studies in the
sociology of art also emphasized "perspective". For
example, Strauss (1970) differentiated among the informal
identity characteristics students acquired in three
programs (fine art, commercial art and art education) at
the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Interviews
suggested variations in students' interpretations of
their art school experience. Some saw it as the taken-
for-granted means to a career as artist, others as a

haven in a heartless world where finally they could find a niche. A third group considered it a "moratorium" in which they could put off long-term occupational decisions, and a fourth as both vocation and avocation, where students perceived a conflict between their identities as artists and their likely ability to support themselves doing art. The final group described the school as a way of life and were as likely to be engaged by the art world as by artmaking, becoming dedicated consumers as well as creators (Strauss 1970:166-175).

For Strauss, these distinctions represented tendencies rather than absolute categories. For example, the fine art students who treated art school as a "career requirement" shared an unambivalent devotion to artmaking with other fine art students who instead saw the school as a "way of life". The difference between them was a matter of when they acquired their perspectives: the first entered the school with a commitment to fine art, the second developed that commitment after being excited by their first year in art school and converted from a commercial art orientation to a fine art one (1970:174).

In Grad Film, the range of perspectives is narrowed partly by the commitment among students that comes with entry into a graduate (versus undergraduate) program, and by the school's emphasis on becoming a film director. Not all students begin the program expecting that they

will or ought to direct, but the vast majority (90% of questionnaire respondents in 1985-86) hope to do so when they leave, eventually if not right away.

Still, like some Art Institute students, those in Grad Film experience the tensions and ambivalences of their vocational and avocational futures, describing filmmaking as their heartfelt ambition but recognizing that not only might they have to earn a living elsewhere (or in "menial" film world positions), doing so wouldn't necessarily enable them to make their own films "on the side", given the expense and complexity of film production as they had come to pursue it in school. They also see filmmaking as a business and know they must contend with the tensions generated by the often conflicting enterprises of art and industry.

Here Grad Film students resemble the commercial artists Griff described as occupying a "compromise" role between commerce and the traditional values of art (1970:156). Rather than repudiating fine art as a 19th century anachronism, or regarding themselves as fine artists who have "sold out" to commercial pressure and rewards, these compromise-role artists use their commercial assignments as vehicles for aesthetic innovation and see themselves as potentially "raising" the aesthetic standards of both their clients and the general public.

The position of student filmmaker and its tensions and competing interests are dealt with extensively in this thesis as a principle dimension of film school socialization. This position does not, however, describe the aesthetic perspectives and skills students acquire, and here we shift from the discussion of identity to the related discussion of codes and conventions in the symbolic system of narrative film.

Aesthetic repertoires: In this study I approach aesthetic codes and conventions through a discussion of communicative competence (cf. Gross 1974)--the definitions of narrative cinema that students are expected to master and the filmic codes those definitions imply; the formal and informal means of acquiring competence; and finally the evaluative criteria teachers and students use to judge student performances.

These issues locate communicative codes in social context, where the formal principles of narrative film are negotiated by actors who bring to bear a variety of practical interests and structural imperatives. In this analysis, faculty and students constitute an "interpretive community" (Fish 1980), a category usually applied to audiences and reception rather than producers and production. However, if we consider reception an activity people undertake in their position as audience members, we can see film students as constituting a

crucial audience for the work of student colleagues,

whose symbolic repertoires and vested interests they

share. And, to the extent that interpretation is always

a part of the symbolic creative process, they are

audiences for their own work as well, in ways that affect

how they carry out their work (Gross 1973:119).

Investigating how students learn to make films (the

"acquisition of narrative competence") frames aesthetic

codes and conventions as dynamic, as aspects of a social

process: here, the emphasis is on productivity rather

than product (Kingsbury 1988:170), a perspective

sometimes muted by monographs in cultural production.

For example, Barbara Rosenblum's study (1978) of the

relationship between work organization and photographic

style in news, fine art and advertising has the virtue of

systematic attention to the material artifacts of

cultural production, in this case photographs. As Janet

Wolff points out (1981:31), despite the intent to connect

the milieux of production with cultural products, to see

their groundedness in social life and social orders, too

often organizational studies in the production of culture

treat those products as unproblematic, as "simply

created," with little attention given to the form and

content of the "works themselves" (whether sermons,

movies or broadcast news). In the move to resist

disembodied analyses of cultural texts and restore

products to their contexts of production and consumption, those settings are often rigorously considered at the expense of the text. This is a sacrifice Rosenblum in many ways overcomes, though from my perspective she still misses the fluidity and contestability--indeed the ongoing constructedness--of texts and their superordinate categories, whether "photography," "film" or "cinema".

Asking "why do pictures look the way they do?" Rosenblum begins her study with a stylistic analysis of news, fine arts and advertising photographs. She finds the distinctions unproblematic since people with neither formal training nor special expertise consistently grouped together images from each domain when asked to sort an undifferentiated sample. Rosenblum then uses the descriptive, formal vocabulary of art history and criticism to define style in each category in terms of regular and predictable combinations of features, both of subject matter and its rendition. This gives her a set of formal criteria that can be compared, as a whole, to structural dimensions of the work organizations in which the photographs were made and distributed. Thus she describes her analytic task as the "association or correlation between two types of data".

> I treat one particular style of photography as a totality and treat a socioeconomic system as a totality of patterns. In short, the analysis rests on the association between totalities" (1978:9).

Several points need to be made here. First, underlying Rosenblum's analytic approach is a conception of style as the product of certain forms of activity, rather than as a set of premises that organize activity, at least in part. In an alternative definition proposed by Gross, style consists of the

> rules and guides which serve as decision premises in the processes of choosing elements, operations and orderings within a specific (expressive) code (1973:119).

In Rosenblum's definition on the other hand, style amounts to the elements and orderings themselves. The distinction is subtle but important. In Gross's terms, style is not a totality separate from the socioeconomic system in and upon which it operates, indeed it is a part of that system as a normative set of ideas about acceptable and unacceptable elements and orderings. For example, in Hollywood cinema (along with other media and genres, including television documentary), rules of continuity govern the assembly of shots. Until recently, discontinuous editing was considered a sign of incompetence, for example by the authors of standard film editing manuals (Vachani 1983). [3] Moreover, continuity conventions make themselves felt in filmmaking practice prior to editing; narrative films are typically scripted and shot "to cut," meaning that writers, directors and other producers anticipate the types of footage required

to sustain continuity well before the editing stage, or make up for them later if they appear to be missing as an editor works with the material.

　　While none of these observations undermine the value of examining the relationship between photographs and the contexts of their creation, style needs to be conceptualized as part of aesthetic production as well as a set of features of aesthetic products. Style and socioeconomic system are not separate totalities, the one an aesthetic outcome and the other a social fact (Rosenblum 1978:9). Together they constitute a dialectical system which both governs and is reproduced in day-to-day practice. This is not to suggest the system is static; it may change in light of practical action, new technologies or means of distribution etc. Nor is it to deny the value of asking why pictures look the way they do. It is instead to reinstate the symbolic order as part of the social system in which material culture is created and classified. Rosenblum approaches this reinstatement in her brief and general discussion of how journalistic, advertising and fine art photographers "learn how to see" (1978:19-41). She does not, however, compare the details of her stylistic analysis to the socialization settings she describes. In other words, she does not address photographers' own conceptions and invocations of style or genre.

A processual approach to aesthetic repertoires
(versus a formal approach to aesthetic texts) is
especially important in an analysis of school-based
filmmaking. Whereas Rosenblum is interested in the
making of photographs as cultural products (and
secondarily in the making of photographers), I am
interested in the making of filmmakers (and secondarily
in the making of films). Moreover, student films are not
as concrete or materially stable as the term "product"
conventionally suggests. They circulate in the school
setting in different and changing degrees of completion
(as students write, shoot, cut and recut) and most are
never "finished" by the professional standard of optical
printing. In other words, student films are mutable, a
quality illuminated by Henry Kingsbury's analysis of
socially and culturally situated definitions of music.
In Music, Talent and Performance, Kingsbury insightfully
compares a symphony to the Brooklyn Bridge, arguing that

> a musical work of art is not an objectively found
> datum available for formal study in some socially
> neutral fashion.
>   Perhaps significantly, such is not the case with
> some of the other art media: there is an actual Mona
> Lisa, and a very real Brooklyn Bridge, each of which
> is utterly singular, with a concrete reality that
> cannot be compromised, for example, by the
> proliferation of photographic reproductions of them
> (although their social and esthetic meanings, of
> course, are very much compromised in this fashion).
> Such is simply not the case with the Eroica symphony
> or the Well-Tempered Clavier. A given performance
> or published edition of the score may well be taken
> as "being" the Eroica, but nobody thinks that the
> Eroica is that performance or edition. However real

it is, the _Eroica_ symphony is an abstraction. The Brooklyn Bridge, however, is the Brooklyn Bridge (1988:170-1).

While the ontological status of a finished film in commercial distribution may resemble the Brooklyn Bridge more than the _Eroica_ (in terms of its concrete if not singular or semantic reality), stories apart from their tellings are abstractions, and student films-in-progress possessed of a concreteness which is indeed routinely and dramatically "compromised", in critiques and the revisions that follow. From a socialization perspective, student films are better understood as acts--processes-- than stable or objective texts, as occasions of engagement with formal premises and technical procedures which in turn engender aesthetic habits. But as Kingsbury further points out, these occasions and habits, along with "identities" and other cultural abstractions such as "the cinema", are themselves no less products--of the individual and collective work of social actors--than are Rosenblum's photographs, or the Brooklyn Bridge. In other words, "process" and "product" are rightly conflated, which returns the analysis to the metaphor of mediation and its theoretical limits.

Culture as process and product: Mediation does not resolve the dualism between society (or social structure) and culture: to wit, something mediates _between_ one thing or force and another. At the same time that mediation

refines our understanding of cultural products as
complexly determined (an understanding to which
Rosenblum, for example, substantially contributes), the
problem persists of substituting several causes for one
in an equation which remains otherwise unchanged. In
this thesis, I propose looking beyond narrowly causal
relationships between context and text and ask how so-
called mediating influences interact; in other words, as
Kingsbury (and I) suggest above, we can recast these
influences as cultural products themselves, without
necessarily sacrificing the analysis of texts per se.
For example, I can argue that the school's reward system
favors classical narration, which in turn produces
adherence to the conventions of classical narrative by
students who can ill afford indifference to available
rewards (cf. Crane 1976). In this case I am proposing a
causal relationship between two categories traditionally
described as "process" (the distribution of symbolic and
material rewards) and "product" (student films). I can
also argue, however, that films are the symbolic
artifacts around which students and faculty organize
lines of association and dissent, granting some students
the privilege of faculty sponsorship in the program.
Particularly for first-year students, who (until 1988)
had to survive probation and review for second-year
admission, such sponsorship is in many ways a more

important outcome than the particular aesthetic qualities of their films. No first-year student cut from the program (as approximately 20% were in Spring 1986) calmly accepts the decision, telling her or himself "oh well, at least I got to make a good movie." Good by whose standards? For what purposes? To be dropped from the program is to be cut off, for the time being, from making more films. A "good" film, one which faculty judge to be good, has the virtue of enabling further filmmaking at the school. Sponsorship is rhetorically founded upon the perceived qualities of a student's work or, more significantly, upon her or his "vision" and aesthetic sensibility as they are said to be expressed in films-in-progress. Structurally speaking, student films are less free-standing cultural texts than vehicles for consolidating judgements of student ability. For more advanced students who hope or expect to distribute their work beyond the school, the balance shifts; films become both cultural texts with a valuative life of their own, and bids for continued sponsorship inside and outside the school. [4] This perspective inverts the familiar causal lineage between context and text, between cultural mediators and cultural products: indeed films (ostensibly "products") mediate sponsorship ("relations of aesthetic production").

The point, finally, is not to promote one analysis

of determination over the other, the two being different though compatible. It is instead to reconceptualize the "products" of cultural production to include a variety of interests, positions and desires among producers (in this case members of the film school community) as well as the body of texts or artifacts which circulate for consumption. School reputations (and, further along in the professional cycle, celebrity and public images) also circulate, and need to be considered among the material resources and products of culture (cf. Williams 1977:93-4).

In sum, this thesis treats film school socialization as a complex form of cultural production, whose "products" are the aesthetic and social-role practices of film students and, ultimately, the establishment of the school itself in the cultural field of narrative filmmaking.

A Note On Methods

Field research and cultural production: In studying the production of culture, fieldwork in general and extended case studies in particular are useful for generating what Glaser and Strauss (1967) have called "grounded theory". With this term they refer to the discovery of theory from data "systematically obtained from social research" (1967:2), rather than theory

produced by logical induction from a priori assumptions.
In the discovery of grounded theory, researchers develop
hypotheses and analytic concepts as they collect data to
better judge the relevance of particular categories to
the substantive relationships and circumstances they are
trying to explain. This is not to suggest, as Glaser and
Strauss point out (1967:3,n.3), that a fieldworker enters
a setting a theoretical tabula rasa. She is guided by a
general perspective though does not consider the goal of
fieldwork to be the verification of a priori hypotheses.
In practice, Glaser and Strauss' distinction between such
hypotheses and guiding perspectives is difficult to
sustain. The point, however, is that even preliminary
categories which accompany one into the field are subject
to revision in light of new material. For example,
fieldworkers engage in the constant comparison of
incidents in the same category, looking for differences
where they expect similarities and similarities where
differences seem likely. This applies across and within
settings, and demands that data be jointly (rather than
sequentially) collected, coded and analysed. As
provisional interpretations are constructed, negative
instances are sought. In extended case studies,
fieldworkers usually have the time to develop and revise
grounded hypotheses and the opportunity to see over and
again the variety of relationships and activities that

engage community members. Able to distinguish between
the routine and the exceptional, they can use unusual
occurrences for what they reveal about members'
expectations and perspectives.

Entry, approval and the observer's role:
"Gaining entry" to a field site is a familiar but perhaps
misleading image since entry is not a strictly spatial
negotiation. When activities go on behind closed doors,
admission is required and entry to be taken literally.
But the distinction falls less between inside and outside
than insider and outsider. Fieldworkers need permission
to enter in a legal sense, but also more informal
invitations to participate in activities among groups and
subgroups once inside. Thus gaining entry is not a
single event but a multi-staged process as fieldworkers
meet new people in new situations (Bosk 1979:194).

I met Nina, the chairperson of Grad Film, through
her predecessor, a film director and teacher I had worked
with for a semester at the University of Pennsylvania.
After several preliminary visits to the school (and other
possible research sites) in the Fall of 1984 and Winter
of 1985, I approached Nina for permission to return the
following September for the academic year. I explained
that I would simply be around a lot, attending classes
where teachers permitted me to do so and working on films
with students interested in having a fieldworker-

production assistant along. From time to time I would request materials through the main office. I would also need to talk individually with students and faculty. Nina was characteristically easy-going about inviting me to return that Fall, adding that it might be interesting to have an outsider's perspective on the program.

Six months later I moved to New York in time for new students' orientation. The tenor and style of that occasion were typical of what had attracted me to Grad Film in the first place. In class, on shoots, in the lounge, people continuously get together to make films and to talk about films and filmmaking. Unlike other schools I had visited, the Grad Film community was dramatically public, an appealing quality for fieldwork. This is not to say that private interactions don't occur or that public ones are unmarked by silent agendas—obviously neither is true. But instruction and filmmaking in the school are distinctively collective, allowing a fieldworker access to naturally-occurring activity even as a newcomer. Arising from this quality of Grad Film life, the study that follows is based largely on material I collected as a participant observer.

I assembled a class schedule in consultation with Nina, anticipating permission to attend from individual instructors, many of whom had already heard about me

through Nina. In a program where first year students spend 27 hours a week in class and second and third year students only slightly less time, my schedule was necessarily selective. I balanced the roster among core courses in writing, editing, directing actors, camera, and production technique across each program year, though with an emphasis on the first-year class, an emphasis reflected in the curriculum and in this thesis. I also attended elective courses in documentary cinema and video. [5] Like Nina, most faculty members were willing to have me around, some of them asking questions about my project from time to time though never as an explicit condition of attendance. One instructor was unsettled about my coming to class and ambivalently granted permission from week to week. However, I was finally asked not to attend later sessions where students would screen their rough-cut films, and decided to stop going altogether since it was precisely that stage of the course that most interested me.

In deciding to withdraw, I gave up the methodological edge of comparing first year workshops. Thus where I refer to the "first year class", in fact my data come from "1B," one of two first year groups (accounting for just over half of first year students) taught by different production workshop and writing instructors, though following more or less the same

curriculum. I did interview students from the other half
of the class, "1A", and the 1A instructor who preferred I
not attend. As well, I sat in on day-long screenings of
completed student films, and talked on several occasions
with 1A students who worked as crewmembers on 1B shoots.
I did not crew 1A productions, however, because I wanted
to see films through to their screening and evaluation in
class and expected that I would not be permitted to
attend critiques.

In retrospect I believe I might have been admitted
if I'd asked again, this time a little more urgently.
The teacher in question had at one point responded to my
note of thanks for permission to join the class by
publicly saying to me:

> 'Thanks'? 'Interesting'? That's all you have to
> say? You spend three hours watching our films with
> us and you can't do better than that? Bad public
> relations.

At the time the response antagonized me and I perhaps
dropped the class (or at least hesitated to ask again) as
much out of frustration and embarrassment as the sense
that I truly wouldn't be admitted. But when I reviewed
my field journal several months later, it struck me that
the teacher was right to expect excitement rather than
polite agreeability. My relatively mild requests and
easy retreat no doubt implied a correspondingly mild
interest. What for me was a matter of acting

respectfully and honoring the professor's decision, may have been for the professor a sign of indifference, an absence of passion that made me unworthy of the privilege of joining the group once the semester was underway and alliances had been forged amid the delicate and often intimate process of class critiques.

The professor's unwillingness to have me in class might also have been connected to a broader question of fieldworker identification. Because of my age and my activities in the school, I was practically and culturally aligned with students more than teachers. This is not to say that faculty members were generally distant or guarded; as far as I could tell, neither was true, indeed many were especially generous. But over the course of the school year, my involvement with students left me less inclined to cultivate access to those occasions where faculty discussed the curriculum or the administration of the school, for example monthly faculty meetings or the newly-instituted (and primarily undergraduate) annual faculty retreat. In this thesis, my limited identification with faculty most affects the analysis of student-faculty oppositions, especially around the first-year cut (cf. Ch.5), a probationary system (since disbanded) in which about 20% of the first-year class was dropped from Grad Film at the end of the Spring Semester. On the other hand, my identification

with students enabled access to their shoots (which might have been restricted by shortages of space and other resources) and inclusion in their social lives in and out of school.

My introduction to first year was eased by everyone's status as a newcomer. As a similarly-styled 27-year old, most people initially assumed I was a first year student, an assumption I was able to change during one of the several formal opportunities new students have to introduce themselves. In the first year production workshop, comparable to a proseminar or "home-room", we spent a couple of hours early on describing our backgrounds and saying something about what had brought each of us to Grad Film and what we hoped to accomplish. This was an ideal occasion to introduce myself to a group with whom I would spend the greatest proportion of my time at the school. Nina's sponsorship had enabled me to be at Grad Film in the first place, and permission from Richard, the workshop instructor, enabled me to be in class. Thereafter no one questioned my legitimacy, in part accepting the authority of superordinates, in part reflecting a friendly interest in (or sometimes indifference to) my work.

In second and third year however, where people had already spent a good deal of time together and no introductions were necessary, it was awhile before most

people knew why I was there (though I was easily
identified as an outsider). I met advanced students a
few at a time, often introduced by those I had
interviewed several months earlier during preliminary
fieldwork. Not surprisingly, apart from students with
whom I worked directly (on assignments or crews), my
relationship to the second and third year classes as a
whole was generally more distant than in first year.

In an early methodological treatise on field
research, Buford Junker distinguishes between
participant, participant as observer, observer as
participant, and observer, characterizing the role of the
fieldworker and the extent to which her purposes are
concealed (as participant) or declared (as observer)
(1960:36). He positions these types on a continuum of
relative involvement (subjective and empathetic) and
relative detachment (objective and sympathetic). In
turn, he relates these roles to the kinds of information
accessible to fieldworkers, whether public (what
everybody knows and can talk about); confidential (what
is told in confidence, not for attribution); secret (what
is known to members of an in-group who avoid letting it
be known to any outsider); and private (what is personal
to an individual and can only be told with certain kinds
of help from others such as therapists or counsellors)
(1960:34-5). With these distinctions Junker does not

imply a prescriptive or proscriptive mapping of role and information categories, so much as two conceptual sets to be related in the assessment and interpretation of data. I would extend his rationale to include types of activities with types of information.

My general role in Grad Film is best described as observer as participant. From the outset I declared my status as a fieldworker and my interest in the practice and culture of film school--it was neither necessary, desirable nor possible to do otherwise. On different occasions that role shifted to some degree toward observer or participant. In class I was typically an observer, a note-taker seated among students in a school environment where only the volume of my note-taking was distinctive. I was included in ongoing conversations among students and faculty before getting down to business, and thereafter in chats and announcements instructors might make about film events in New York or goings-on at the school. However I rarely commented during lectures and discussions unless I was asked to. During breaks and lunch hours I usually joined individuals or groups in the lounge or at a nearby diner, though occasionally left to be on my own and recover from the low-grade stress of self-consciousness sometimes engendered by the scrutiny and scrutinizing of field work.

On student shoots however, my role shifted markedly
from observer to participant. There is always something
to do in film production and little room for onlookers
with no responsibility to tasks at hand. From the first-
year "exercise" shoot in October 1985 to my return to New
York for a thesis film shoot a year later, I was
invariably put to work on student crews, an assignment I
usually enjoyed and always appreciated despite the
exhaustion and frustration which, in filmmaking, go with
the territory.

As a crewmember, I was never asked to fill a
principal position, such as cinematographer, sound
recordist, or assistant camera, and would have declined
had I been invited. I was concerned not to occupy
positions students desired and would otherwise hold.
Eager to be useful, I offered to "cater" an early first
year shoot, an offer gratefully accepted and later
sought. Food is a crucial part of student filmmaking,
what is served and how often being one measure of a
director's decent or dismissive treatment of cast and
crew. Taking care of meals on a shoot was therefore a
much-valued form of assistance that didn't interfere
directly with filmmaking.

On three occasions I also performed small, on-camera
parts in student films, twice in first year group
exercises and once in a first year "music" film, neither

assignment carrying particular weight in a student director's standing in the program.

I worked on several shoots as a production assistant, the filmmaking equivalent of an office "gofer." As a PA, I checked out, carried and guarded equipment, bought miscellaneous supplies, assisted actors with costumes, make-up and hair, cleaned up locations after a shoot, and generally performed any number of unspecialized tasks. On an early second-year shoot I was also asked to keep a camera log and watch for specific continuity details. This assignment was well-suited to my activities as fieldworker—careful observation and note-taking, maintaining a shooting record, proximity to camera and director—and became my "specialty" in the school. I worked again as continuity director on a second-year film and as script supervisor on a third-year thesis film shoot.

The continuity position was particularly useful as productions became more complex. I was able to remain consistently on the set, close to director and camera, virtually never asked to run errands elsewhere. In preparation for continuity and script supervision, I got to know scripts and storyboards intimately, and kept a detailed log during shooting, including (for example) an account of why some takes of a shot were preferred over others and by whose designation (whether the

cinematographer's or director's). Along with these procedural advantages, I was very much a member of the crew without displacing a Grad Film student. At the same time that script and continuity were important functions, on crews already tight for personnel they were rarely the exclusive responsibility of a particular person. Moreover, no one ever vied for the position, so no one was annoyed--to my knowledge--to see it offered to a relative outsider who was less likely to need the experience for professional purposes.

Finally, doing continuity or script connected me to the film itself, made me really care what the footage looked like (did the actor indeed look left to right, as I had recorded?) not only as a sympathetic observer but as a worker invested in her own performance on the crew.

This was a level of identification hard to achieve otherwise, particularly since I had decided before fieldwork began that I would not make my own films. Short of enrolling in the program (had I been accepted), directing films would have meant exploiting already scarce resources of time and personnel and, possibly, confusing the perspectives of fieldworker and film student. I did join small groups as a full-fledged member in first-year editing assignments, and took turns at the equipment during instructional demonstrations. I

double-spliced rough-cuts, shot production stills (still photographs of the filmmaking process, taken for my purposes and theirs), loaned props and costumes, and hosted production meetings and pick-up shoots at my apartment near campus.

Such activities are not only the friendly and routine contributions of film school life. As fieldwork activities they also bear the implicit (and often conscious) mark of establishing one's interest and good faith, of earning the privilege of participation as an outsider. At Grad Film they balanced, to some degree, the indebtedness I felt toward students. But as many were eager to point out, they could not reproduce for me the experience of "making my own film," by students' standards a deeply personal experience. This was a critique of method I was willing to accept, and I used it as an opportunity to remind people that I was not a student of film but of communications and sociology, writing a dissertation for a committee of scholars and not a diary for an audience of film students, appealing though such an account would be. While I mightn't be able to describe filmmaking as a Grad Film student, I could draw upon my experience in other graduate and undergraduate film labs, and use the "deeply personal" perspective students attribute to filmmaking in my analysis of the practice and culture of film school.

In this study, then, I do not claim to have
resolved the analytic space between "subject" and
"object". But while I do not expect that film students
would describe themselves in precisely the terms I use
here, I do expect they and others in the department would
recognize their collective experience in my description.
In other words, I think the study enables and sustains a
degree of intersubjectivity among the cultural
perspectives of fieldworker and fieldwork community.

Additional data collection: Along with classroom
activities (including presentations and commentaries on
scripts and films in progress) and student productions, I
participated in a variety of related events, for example
the annual university film festival, off-campus
screenings of alumni films, the department's weekly
Director's Series, school parties, and evenings out after
the "wrap" or close of a shoot. These occasions provided
both data and an opportunity to better know people in the
department. I also interviewed students and faculty
directly, about their careers and activities prior to
Grad Film, their work in (and response to) the program,
and (for faculty) their impressions of student
performances. Interviews with faculty and advanced
students were also useful for getting at the annual cycle
of school life. Though my fieldwork period involved
intensive participation for an academic year, many of the

patterns that interested me (for example first-year
promotions and dismissals) occurred only once in my two
semesters of Grad Film. I used interviews both to
compare people's experiences in previous years and as
expressions of their attitudes toward current practices.

Many student interviews concerned film productions
in progress. I worked on 12 shoots across first, second
and third year during my fieldwork period and a return
visit to the school several months later. In most cases
I interviewed directors about their films during pre- and
post-production, and other crew members during post-
production. I used these interviews as secondary
sources, correcting and corroborating material. from
participant observation.

Several weeks into the semester, Nina and a few
students who had observed my extensive note-taking asked
why I didn't use a tape recorder, particularly for in-
class screening commentaries. I took this inquiry as a
sign that indeed taping would be acceptable and requested
permission of each class group and each instructor to
record discussions about student films. As well, before
their screenings I asked students individually if they
would mind my taping, explaining that it would be helpful
to me but that it wasn't absolutely necessary if they
preferred I didn't. In all but one case students not
only agreed but insisted I needn't ask to tape their

commentaries in the future. Thus in Ch.4 the excerpts presented are from verbatim transcripts of class commentaries in first, second and third year.

Well into second semester I also conducted a student survey to get a comprehensive picture of information that hardly required an interview, such as professional experience and training prior to Grad Film, production budgets for films made at school, financial sources, and names of principal crew members on Grad Film projects. I administered the questionnaire partly in class and partly by mail in two waves, four months apart. The response rate was 57%, more or less proportionate across first, second and third year (see Appendix C). [6]

Finally, my data include what Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest refer to as "unobtrusive measures...those that don't require the co-operation of a respondent or informant and that do not themselves contaminate the response" (1966:2). As the authors point out, these measures do not replace observations and interviews but "supplement or cross-validate them" in an analytic technique known as triangulation, where inferences drawn from one data source are confirmed (or challenged) by another. In this study, unobtrusive measures are principally documentary, for example course syllabi, written evaluations of first-year films by an outside evaluations committee, an album of alumni film

reviews, production books from student directors, and faculty memos to students and colleagues.

Analyzing field materials: As my discussion of grounded theory suggests, the analytic categories I use in this thesis were refined once out of the field though generated during the period of my research.

Though I maintained a daily, chronological journal of events and encounters throughout fieldwork, by late in the first semester I began to conceive of journal writing as a more explicitly analytic practice. As well as reporting on the day's happenings as plainly as possible, I commented separately on the redundancies which inevitably and quickly occur among field observations. What, in general, did they suggest about film school experience from a student's perspective? From a teacher's? For example, from the moment 1B students introduced their backgrounds and intentions in the first meeting of the production workshop, it was clear that the vast majority of them aspired to become film directors, an observation which recurred frequently. As I participated in student shoots, however, it was also clear that students took seriously the many other specialties involved in film production, that they respected the contributions of specialists other than the director, and moreover that they acknowledged the odds against directing films beyond graduate school. Thus

rather than simply asking: what is a film director and what does she or he do? my question became: what personal and interactional strategies do students use to balance or highlight their directorial identities among other roles and activities and in light of the professional uncertainties ahead?

Once I had formulated this question, my observations of student shoots were realigned, partly by brief retreats from the school, usually a week or so back at my home University where I and others were less dazzled by the particularities of film school life. A 5-week period of follow-up research (some 4 months after I'd left New York) also helped this realignment. I returned to participate in a thesis film shoot that had been delayed since the previous spring, and to interview several students following my preliminary data review. I also returned to the department on other occasions to attend rough- or fine-cut screenings of student films shot but not completed during my academic year in residence.

Out of the field, equipped with the principle categories generated by data collection and refined in preliminary analyses, field researchers undertake what Norman Denzin (among others) calls "analytic induction," the process of "formulating generalizations that hold across data" (1970:195). Denzin describes this process

in the following terms:

1. A rough definition of the phenomenon to be
    explained is formulated.

2. A hypothetical explanation of that phenomenon is
    formulated.

3. One case is studied in light of the hypothesis,
    with the object of determining whether or not
    the hypothesis fits the facts in that case.

4. If the hypothesis does not fit the facts, either
    the hypothesis is reformulated or the phenomenon
    to be explained is redefined so that the case is
    excluded.

5. Practical certainty may be attained after a
    small number of cases has been examined, but the
    discovery of negative cases disproves the
    explanation and requires a reformulation.

6. This procedure of examining cases, redefining
    the phenomenon, and reformulating the hypotheses
    is continued until a universal relationship is
    established, each negative case calling for a
    redefinition, or a reformulation.

Denzin's summary accounts quite closely for the

logic of my analysis and, in many instances, the

expository form of this report. In Ch.3 for example, I

move from a general definition of narrative culled from

classroom instruction, to several occasions of narrative

(in student films-in-progress and the routine

commentaries upon them), each example honing the

definition by explaining the textual and interactional

conditions under which it prevails or is partly

challenged.

As Silverman points out, induction is a form of

analysis reliant on "theoretical rather than statistical

sampling models" (1985:113). In the example of narrative
definitions, I began by selecting cases for transcription
(from among dozens of recorded critiques) which most
explicitly raised issues of narrative structure and
narration, where, for a variety of reasons, a film had
generated substantial talk in class about what worked and
what needed adjustment. A descriptive review of the full
critique transcript produced a first set of narrative and
stylistic categories and sub-categories. The process was
repeated on additional transcripts, and categories and
sub-categories added, deleted and shifted until I had an
interpretive framework which could be applied
comprehensively to subsequent critiques. This analysis
both modified and elaborated rudimentary definitions of
narrative and style, which I then compared against
additional films and evaluations in first, second and
third year, both to see where definitions had been used
"successfully" and "unsuccessfully" and what (if any)
textual or evaluative consequence was in store. (Did
students claim they would alter their films in light of
the comments? Did they indeed make those alterations?
Did faculty settle for the explanations student directors
and colleagues proposed for why a scene had been cut in a
particular way, say, contrary to their earlier advice?)

The comparative logic of analytic induction extends
to ethnographic interpretation generally. Rather than

thinking I can unproblematically separate the "real" or
"actual" events of school life from the implicit and
articulated theoretic perspectives which inform my
fieldwork, I see my task here as comparing or
triangulating local and disciplinary discourses,
simultaneously privileging students', faculty's,
fieldworker's and other scholars' insights on cinema and
social interaction to constitute this thesis as an
analytic narrative. In Schatzman and Strauss' words, I
seek to "link things up" rather than "nail things down"
(1973:9).

Conclusion and Overview

I have argued that a study of film school
socialization must address the social identities and
aesthetic repertoires students and faculty construct.
Moreover, it must frame both dimensions in the immediate
organizational context of "school" and the broader
cultural and historical contexts of professional
filmmaking and the U.S. film industry. Such an account
will enable me to draw theoretic conclusions about the
place of socialization in cultural production and
reproduction. In this thesis I therefore present a case
study of cinematic competence and directorial role in
Grad Film.

The label I give to the local category "director" is

"working artist." I use this term both to express the
tension between art and commerce which students and
faculty attribute to popular filmmaking, and to denote
film as work and as art. As work, filmmaking is
collective, organized activity in an institutional
context implying a variety of types of efficiency,
including a balance between resources (time, personnel,
technologies, materials, cash) and outcomes. As art,
filmmaking is creative, aesthetic activity whose mandates
in an ideal world are unrestricted by commerce or
practical contingency. Students acquire technical and
managerial skills but these are to be put to the service
of aesthetic vision in the medium of film, specifically
narrative film. While the activity of filmmaking is
necessarily practical and aesthetic, "working artist" and
"director" remain principally aesthetic designations.

In Ch.2 I treat "working artist" as a cultural ideal
and consider its bearing upon practical arrangements and
social relationships in Grad Film. This discussion lays
a descriptive foundation for later analyses of narrative
and stylistic competence, directorial role, and "talent"
as a cultural symbol.

In Ch.3 I analyze the commentaries and critiques
that routinely follow screenings of student works-in-
progress, to see how definitions of narrative and style
are developed and implicated in learning to make films.

Again, this is less a textual analysis intended to generate one class of "totalities," in Rosenblum's terms, than a discourse analysis which integrates the generic and stylistic premises teachers set forth, and students' interpretations or "enactments" (DiMaggio 1987:441) of those genres and premises in their work. In other words, it is an analysis of social process, of interactions among members of an interpretive community whose agendas are not entirely bound by aesthetic criteria though the task at hand is aesthetic. Drawing from other scholars' accounts of narrative modes, genres and styles in U.S. and European cinema (eg. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 1984), I then relate student filmmaking to popular film (particularly in the "New" Hollywood) in light of the historical position and cultural inheritance of a U.S. film school established in the late 1960s.

In Ch.4 I consider the "director" as a relative and emergent position in the division of labor in student filmmaking. I am interested not only in what directors do, but in the ethos of a role which consistently distinguishes individuals and individuality itself amid the soundly collective process of filmmaking as Grad Film students do it. After seeing how this role is invoked and constructed among students from the interactional ground up, I relate it to the historical and current status of directors in the professional film industry. I

suggest that as directors came more frequently to operate as "independents," they cultivated artistic personae as a resource to be marketed alongside their skill and track records in directing. Despite the industrial contexts in which popular films are produced, there is room for (and profit in) dramatizing some aspects of the romantic image of the singular artiste.

In Ch.5, I analyse the notion of "talent" relative to the first-year cut system. Drawing from Kingsbury's work in <u>Music, Talent and Performance</u>, I develop a model of "social-aesthetic mobility" in the department, where the faculty's serial attributions of a student's talent based on early and subsequent performances rank that student in relation to other students and to the cut. In this model (and, I argue, in Grad Film), the system of aesthetic differentiation is also a system of social control.

In the conclusion I summarize the major themes of this study and reconsider the theoretical relationship between professional socialization and cultural reproduction.

Notes to Introduction

1. The USC program has existed since the early 1930s. Also, the New York and California schools are "prominent" in narrative film instruction. A different group of schools leads in avant-garde, documentary, and ethnographic filmmaking (some of them in New York and California, others in Chicago, Philadelphia, Santa Fe, etc.).

2. This high-profile group's emergence from film schools has not escaped the attention of current students and school faculty, who frequently cite the familiar list of names when discussing the professional value of film-school. These success stories have become a "root myth" in film-school culture.

3. The continuity system is further discussed in Ch.3.

4. A similar relationship prevails in academic graduate school where, as they advance, students indeed attempt to publish their work as scholars as well as using it to demonstrate their current and potential ability. Films also mediate sponsorship in the professional industry to the extent that in the big leagues, a director's opportunities to make films are as good as her or his last hit at the box office. Good returns mean more contracts (cf. Faulkner and Anderson).

5. Grad Film curriculum and courses are described in Appendices A and B. Also, documentary cinema is a thriving though secondary emphasis in Grad Film and for most Grad Film students. (During my fieldwork period, 11% of eligible students were making documentary films or videos, all of them in second year.) Despite my participation in the documentary class and on one documentary production, I rarely address documentary filmmaking in this thesis.

6. First-year students are slightly overrepresented among questionnaire respondents; they make up 41% of the student population, though 50% of respondents. The figures for second and third year are 32%-28% and 27%-21%, respectively. I expect the overrepresentation occurred because I administered the questionnaire in late Spring, at which point

only first-year students routinely meet in class.
Second and third-year returns relied more heavily on
a mail distribution, which characteristically
produces fewer responses. Though I have no reason
to assume a systematic substantive bias among those
who did not answer the questionnaire, the respondent
group is not randomly constituted. In this thesis,
I therefore report relative frequencies in terms of
a population of respondents, not students.

CHAPTER TWO

BECOMING A "WORKING ARTIST": FILM SCHOOL AS SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

> [P]erspectives, themselves collectively developed, are organizations of ideas and actions. The actions derive their rationale from the ideas; the ideas are sustained by success in action. The whole becomes a complex of mutual expectations (Becker, Geer, Hughes and Strauss 1961:435).

In this chapter I consider "working artist" as a key element in the perspectives shared by students and faculty in Grad Film. While the interaction of ideas and actions in social life is rarely as settled as Becker et al suggest, the authors usefully point toward the processual nature of that relationship. Indeed ideas often change by virtue of complicated actions, and are contested both within and among different sub-groups in a community. Thus I treat "working artist" as an idea that reflects and manages not only actions but contradictions in the experiences of many members of the film school community, for example between familiar notions of "work" and "art". In this analysis, "working artist" is both a stable concept which generates a variety of practical arrangements and social relationships in the school, and a post-hoc rationale appealed to amid the exigencies of film school life and the distribution of financial, technological and human resources. In other words, there

is a dialectic implicit in "working artist" as cultural concept and social practice.

With the "working artist" analysis my intention is to lay a descriptive foundation for later accounts of narrative and stylistic competence, directorial role, and talent. Here, I draw from the program curriculum and from reactions of the students and faculty who work within it. To begin, I consider three related local issues, each sustaining "working artist" as a cultural ideal in the school: the instructional premise of "learning by doing," an emphasis on directorial achievement in film, and the fundamentally individual notion of filmmaker that prevails in school culture. Later, I constrast this individualism with the cooperation required to make movies as Grad Film students do it, and interpret the consequences of this contrast for student relationships. Finally, I consider the concept of "working artist" in relation to money (a pervasive force for everyone in the school community), to students' professional prospects in narrative filmmaking, and to the positions and careers of department faculty.

Working Artists

The Cast [1]

Nina   Chairperson of Grad Film and second-
and third-year editing instructor

Richard   One of two first-year production workshop
           instructors

In an industry whose professionals don't always
agree that the best way to become one of them is to go to
class, spending upwards of $10,000 a year on film school
tuition is risky, a quality both students and faculty
routinely acknowledge. At Graduate Film, the risk is
reconciled in part by the knowledge that whatever else,
as a student you'll get to make movies. You do not pay
(though you may hope) for guarantees of professional
recruitment following graduation, nor for being
"discovered" in the interim: you pay to attend a
university, in a department where there will be others
who do what you do more or less at your level. This is
not to say there aren't differences in people's abilities
and experiences as they enter and move through the
program--by local standards the differences are
substantial. But film school provides an environment, a
practical structure, an acceptable (if never luxurious)
amount of equipment and, most importantly, a group of
people with whom to work.

Applicants to Graduate Film are introduced to the
premise of film as work in the School bulletin, which
outlines the program's emphasis on "doing, on targeting
classroom and theoretical studies toward filmmaking
itself." They encounter it again as new students at the

September orientation, their first meeting as a group
just prior to the beginning of the Fall semester. In
1985, Nina welcomed them and spoke with a sense of
anticipation as she described the school as one of New
York City's "biggest production houses...turning out
almost three hundred films a year," taking into account
the three short films each student would make in their
first year, along with the more substantial second-year
project and, finally, third-year thesis films. Following
a series of questions and answers (among other things
about how little time there would be to take courses or
jobs outside the department), new students watched an
hour-long program of three award-winning films by recent
graduates. After the screening, an impressed newcomer
seated next to me remarked, "if this school can teach us
to shoot like that it's going to be great!"

Students come to Grad Film not to "know about"
cinema, its history, aesthetics or theories of narrative,
but to "do" it, to earn the title of filmmaker by virtue
of having made some films. The emphasis on practice, on
working (and the related de-emphasis on film theory per
se), permeates the curriculum and the school culture at
large. But the question remains, working at what?
Filmmaking, clearly, but with what definitions of the
enterprise, concentrating on which aspects of an
intricate and variable process?

In the same orientation meeting Nina went on to describe film as "one of the most complex artforms," later adding that "it's also a business...and that's where we get into trouble." This statement illustrates two premises that organize instruction and production in the school: on the one hand, filmmaking integrates aesthetic activity and economic constraint and it would be naive to teach or conduct the former without regard for the latter; on the other, this relationship is problematic.

As a "business," the potential financial rewards of a successful film in mainstream distribution loom large for many students and some faculty. But however much some would like to consider the school a microcosm of the professional world, few student films get that far and thus the costs of production, rarely balanced by any distribution income, are the economic constraints students face.

For Nina to cast the art/business relationship as "trouble" is to realistically acknowledge the situation and to anticipate the individual and collective distress students would experience in their attempts to match artistic ambitions and material resources. In a department where students are largely responsible for their own production costs (save for limited allotments of film stock or cash, rarely enough to finish a

project), her comment also foreshadows the faculty's anxiety about whether more money means "better" films and therefore whether Graduate Film is "a school for rich kids." Finally though, in posing film as an artform against the qualification that it is "also" a business, the comment reflects the school community's greater investment in film as art. Students acquire a broadly aesthetic perspective though they are acutely aware of practical constraints; they are artists who work in light of those constraints. Theirs is a perspective in which, for example, the director's creativity symbolically eclipses the producer's, despite the recognition of a professional producer's power (including his or her aesthetic control) and what a good producer enables. [2] For example, the following comment comes from a prominent student director about another whom she appreciates more for her abilities as co-ordinator, manager, "mover and shaker," than as director:

> ...I think she would like to see herself as the great artist, but her real ability is getting people, the best people, to do things for her...and that's not [trivial]--I'd love to have someone like that taking care of my movies" (emphasis added).

For this speaker and others, a film as an artistic achievement belongs ("my movies") to its director.

Together, film as work and film as art form the principle "working artist" which, I argue, underlies school practice. In the following discussion, I consider

its expressions and consequences in the school's social world, focussing in particular on institutional autonomy and on the instructional principle "to learn by doing".

With the term "artist" I refer to a local distinction between "art" and "business." That said, the label becomes problematic since there is a general impatience in Graduate Film with the stereotypical notion of artist as "artiste," the lone or quirky genius working unto himself, professing his disinterest in what the world at large might think of his art. Headed, ultimately, for the narrative feature industries (and in some cases for television advertising and independent documentary), that is not typically how students conduct themselves or an image they endorse. Still, while film is a business, students are not aspiring businesspeople. They are artists who must know and face the financial demands of their medium and who in many cases hope for hefty financial rewards. [3]

Curricular and institutional dimensions of "working artist": The summer before I arrived at Grad Film, the department prepared to move. For years the plan had been to house all programs in a newly renovated building for the School of the Arts, closer to the University's main campus. Construction problems had postponed the move more than once, but finally things were ready. At the old building, a low-rise structure shared by Grad Film

and a women's undergraduate dorm, equipment had been
disassembled and packed, even the theatre seats in the
department's screening room had been unbolted. Come
August however, the new building still wasn't ready.
Some departments had moved in but according to Nina, Grad
Film's floor was far from done and to go to unfinished
quarters would delay the proper start of the semester and
unduly dislocate students. So equipment was reassembled,
including some 14 newly-purchased Steenbeck editing
tables, and the screening room seats reinstalled in their
familiar place. For another year anyway, Grad Film would
remain on its own, enjoying a New York locale which, as
one instructor put it, was "a favorite location for
filmmakers all over the world," one routinely depicted in
feature films to convey a sense of the exotic in New
York's social and stylistic avant-garde. Together, the
urban environment and the department's physical
separation from the University, if only by a few blocks,
engendered a sense of aesthetic engagement and
institutional autonomy among students and faculty, a
sense of community in the school within program-year
groups if not always across them, of being of the
university though not in it.

This physical distance parallels the department's
curricular autonomy. Because they are enrolled in a
graduate-level program, students can focus their

curricular energies exclusively on filmmaking,

unencumbered by other academic requirements. Neither

they nor their filmmaking instructors need juggle the

expectations, schedules or attitudes of other academic

faculty to whom the value and considerable demands of

filmmaking mightn't be so clear. To quote Judith Adler's

study of an academic art scene,

> ...[t]he undergraduate student who is required to
> maintain a minimal level of achievement in a variety
> of academic subjects is not free to drop all other
> obligations in order to spend eight hours a day in
> the painting studios or to work around the clock
> polishing a string quartet or a theatrical
> production. His attention is constantly shifted and
> dispersed as he balances many work obligations: a
> biology exam may keep him from rehearsing for days
> to the disgust of faculty artists who regard
> exclusive and singleminded concentration, especially
> during peak periods of production, as the hallmark
> of a serious artist (1979:14-15).

While Grad Film students are technically permitted

to take classes outside the department, at least beyond

first year, virtually none do. The first-year

curriculum doesn't allow for any elective courses,

within the department or elswhere. In second year,

students are free to take electives and can do so in

other departments during first semester, when full-time

production activities don't preclude regular classroom

attendance and participation. But again, no-one does.

By then, and on into third year, students are engaged in

their own scripts and films and those of student

colleagues. Moreover, there are no formal, co-operative

ties between Grad Film and other School of the Arts

departments (generally attributed to a lack of interest

and administrative resources) whose areas of expertise,

such as design, might contribute to filmmaking or film

training.

There is a minor interest among first-year students

in film theory and history courses (as distinct from

production), particularly given the reputation of the

School's film studies department (quite separate from

Graduate Film). By second year, however, the difficulty

of taking non-departmental electives has become

apparent, and the value of making films has superceded

students' interest in talking about them among outsiders

who aren't filmmakers or even aspiring ones. Unlike

students and teachers in Grad Film, students and

teachers of "cinema studies" construct theories of

meaning as spectators, not (Grad Film students assume),

as creators faced by the practical dilemmas of cinematic

intention. Moreover, unlike some art schools, where

scholarship and art theory become bids for academic

legitimacy (Adler 1979:16-17), in a commercially-

oriented program like Grad Film, legitimacy is

established outside the academy in a "populist" industry

long known for its professed indifference to the

rarefied scrutinies of academe.

The department thus sustains a curricular

independence from the University that allows students to see themselves and cultivate their abilities and identities as specialists, as film artists rather than as students _per se,_ with other academic responsibilities. But curricular dimensions of "working artist" arise internally as well as in the relationship between the graduate film program and the University, and here the prevailing ideal is expressed in the familiar phrase, often heard in Grad Film, "to learn by doing."

Department faculty have an ambivalent relationship to the familiar conviction that art can't be taught though it can be learned. On the one hand, the talent or ability to make a "good" film is one students supposedly arrive with, not something they acquire, and no amount of directorial training or script analysis can alone create a good director or screen writer. On the other hand, faculty share a belief in the value of technique, which they distinguish from "talent" as a set of tools or practices, in narrative construction, visual "language," and the many discrete processes engaged in filmmaking. In many ways, technique is the content of their instruction and the best students are those most able to use what they are taught. The evidence of that use in turn lies in the films they make, indeed is constituted by those films, by each students' "body of

work," and thus the curriculum is built around several occasions of students making their own movies. In other words, student films are opportunities to both learn filmmaking and, hopefully, demonstrate that you have done so.

"Learn by doing" also embodies the premise that skill is acquired through practice, through routine engagement with the conceptual and technical repertoire of a particular expressive medium. For example, in virtually every course I attended instructors were quick to remind students that what seemed a lot of confusing abstraction at the moment would become clear when they started "actually" working with double soundtracks at the Steenbeck or with sync sound cameras. This, however, is not to suggest that to "learn by doing" is only useful in the technical manipulation of equipment. It is applied as well to handling stories and narrative structure, to directing actors and camera, or to the control of pace in post-production editing. It has both aesthetic and narrowly "technical" dimensions, reflected in the common phrase among students and faculty of looking for "solutions" to problems in filmmaking, be they narrative, optical or whatever else. Typically, problems are identified and solutions sought in relation to a body of convention, so that to "learn by doing" is not to reinvent narrative cinema with each productive

attempt but to become familiar and able with a known range of possibilities.

What, precisely, that body of convention contains, what is done and therefore learned, is the subject of later chapters on narrative competence and directorial role. Here, the importance of the premise "to learn by doing" lies in its consequence for the organization of instruction and social relationships in the department. What follows therefore is a comparative description of the production curriculum across the three years of the program and the status of students as "working artists" in each program-year group. As students progress from first through third year, they trade their elected and assigned identities as "students", subject to the supervisions and restrictions of teachers, for identities as "directors," who work relatively independently, if still within the school.

Over half of each first-year semester is devoted to a "production period," and all of second semester in second and third year. During these periods, students forms crews amongst themselves and jockey for preferred slots in the equipment schedule. Briefly, different kinds and grades of equipment are made available to students in different program years, and the school owns a limited number of kits or "rigs" of each kind (including camera, lighting and sound gear). Thus in

first year, there are 8 non-sync rigs for use by about

65 students in two sections referred to as 1A and 1B.

Since the sections work independently, it is more useful

to think in terms of 4 rigs for just under or over 30

students. In 1B, with 36 people in the class organized

for each production assigment in crews of three people,

there are twelve crews and thus three rotations per

production period to give each crew access to one of the

four rigs. So, a shooting period of 18 days (the mid-

section between pre-production and post-production which

together make up the half-semester "production period")

will be divided into three periods of six days apiece,

and people assigned to each six-day period as a

"first,""second", or "third-group" crew. There are four

crews in each group, with first-group crews having the

least time of the three for pre-production but most for

post-production and, conversely, third-group crews

having most time for pre-production but least for post-

production (all students meeting the same deadlines,

give or take a couple of days). In first year crews,

each of the three members directs their "own" film

(whose script they have authored or adapted) while the

others work as cinematographer and camera assistant.

For the "first film" (produced in November of first

semester), each group of three students is allotted a

rig for six consecutive days, with each student in the

group entitled to two of those days to get his or her film "in the can." The second assignment, called the "music film," is produced under similar circumstances in late January during the intersession between first and second semester, though with one day per student and thus a three-day period for each crew of three people. For the final film, regarded as by far the most crucial in a student's demonstration of his or her ability, each student has three days and therefore groups "check out" in three 9-day rotations between late March and late April.

Second-year students make only one film of their "own," but otherwise the production schedule is no less complex. In first semester, they attend classes like their first-year counterparts, in camera, production fundamentals, editing, writing and directing. Also, since they make synchronous-sound films they are required to take a sound-recording workshop. Moreover, they can take departmental electives in video production and documentary film, but are eligible for course credit in these areas only if they are working in video and/or on a documentary for their second-year projects.

Finally, second-year students "crew up" in first semester to produce a sync-sound exercise sequence, officially their maiden effort in synchronous sound. Twelve crews share three feature film script excerpts,

chosen by their editing and production instructors; in other words, students produce four versions of each scene. The majority of editing and production class time in the second half of the semester is devoted to screening rushes and cuts for each group's sequence.

In second semester, some classes continue to meet, though informally, since a rotating production schedule gets underway. Hopefully, in the summer between first and second year and during second-year's first semester, students develop original or adapted scripts for their major projects, produced during second semester. Unlike first-year students however, "shooting dates" are assigned on a first-come/first-served basis. Each student's shooting period (when they direct their own scripts, rather than work as a crewmember on someone else's) lasts one week. Students choose those periods depending on several contingenies--when they expect to complete scripts, what kinds of exterior locations they need (eg. Winter or Spring), when interior locations are available etc.

Like first-year students, what second-year "dates" represent is the availability of school equipment, considerably more complex for sync-sound (or video) production than the first year kits. Also like first-year students, they must balance substantive contingencies (location type etc.) with the equipment

schedule. But there is greater room to accommodate those contingencies in second year than in first, where "first-," "second-" and "third-group" slots are awarded by lottery. In other words, second-year dates are chosen in light of production concerns (with the greatest choice available to those who sign up earliest), whereas in first-year, production is structured around arbitrarily-assigned dates. (Among first-year students reluctant to go out "first-group" for fear of inadequate preparation, seasonal jokes begin to fly about the underground trading of assigned slots, to wit: "I have 1000 feet of Tri-X and processing for anyone willing to trade third group for first".)

The third-year curriculum is similar to second-year's to the extent that students spend the Fall semester in class and the Spring semester in production. However, each student has two or three weeks to shoot instead of one, reflecting the assumption that third year "thesis" films will be the longest, most complex projects students undertake.

From the perspective of "learning by doing," we can see in the three-year comparison of production arrangements an evolution in student status from film student to "working artist," from routine supervision and control within the curriculum to relative independence as thesis filmmakers. In effect, first-

year students make film exercises, steadily increasing

the complexity of technological and aesthetic elements

across the three assignments (for example, the addition

of sound on the music film and the subsequent addition

of dialogue on third films). In second year, there is a

combination of "exercise" (with the added complexity of

synchronous sound) and independent production. By third

year, no new elements are formally introduced though

familiar ones are refined, and production time is

devoted exclusively to independent filmmaking.

A marker of the relative independence of third year

students as "working artists" is their writing teacher's

assignment of class grades based simply on the number of

script critiques each submits on behalf of others. As

the professor put it:

> I found a way to use grades but not grade on the
> quality of writing. My justification for that is
> that they will not try any harder because I'm
> grading them on the quality of their writing. They
> want the writing to be as good as possible because
> by third year they've got thousands of dollars and
> their whole portfolio at stake in the making of
> this film--they want the film to be good (...) I
> mean the whole point is to sit down in conference
> and discuss the script at great length...I want to
> be able to talk to them as an unusually friendly
> person in the industry would talk to them, rather
> than as a teacher with a grade over their heads.

The curricular shift from first through third year

is also accompanied by the mounting vehemence against

"student films" in the rhetoric of second and third-year

students. No insult is more telling than referring to a

film as an obvious "student work." The category means
different things to different people, the hallmarks in
some cases being "double shadows on set walls" or "a
complete lack of attention to color as a design
element." Though first-year students share the
antipathy, they can rarely transcend the "student film"
category given the restrictions imposed on their
projects--black and white reversal stock, single-strand
sound tracks (with no sound mixes), no synchronous sound
at all--as several students put it, "dead giveaways" to
a student production in a narrative cinematic world
where dialogue and color prevail.

While the analytic distinction between "exercise"
and "film" holds up, no first year student regards his
or her films as mere exercises even though he or she may
acknowledge their pedagogic value in those terms. As
their production titles imply, they are "film(s) by
....." And while instructors may diminish the import of
a project to reassure nervous beginners, some also
encourage them to "print everything" they can afford, to
create a "reel" or portfolio of all their work (which
can be shown to outsiders) even though a project's value
as an exercise hardly requires an optical print (where
the soundtrack is "printed" down one side of the
celluloid strip to be "read" during projection by an
optical sensor). In everyday speech first year students

and their instructors refer to "first films" (etc.), not
"first exercises"; indeed, the names given to each first-
year project make that distinction--"first films" aren't
first at all in the order of assignments but follow the
"exercise films" produced earlier in the semester.

Film directors as working artists: What is "first"
about first films is the opportunity for each student to
direct, and thus the label aptly embodies the graduate
program's emphasis on directorial achievement. Despite
the collective manner in which filmmaking is instructed
and practiced, a student's status in the program is
overwhelmingly a function of her perceived ability as a
director, especially in first year.

This is partly a matter of definition. Students
typically write, direct and edit their own films and
thus "director" becomes a cover term akin to "auteur" in
the professional discourse of cinema, implying aesthetic
control over a film at each stage of its production.
While students and faculty distinguish among writing,
directing and editing as specific bundles of tasks and
abilities, students are expected to become capable in
each area. To claim a film as one's aesthetic
accomplishment means to have integrated these skills and
sensibilities in the realization of a personal vision,
with its narrative and visual-stylistic dimensions. So
when the first and third films by first-year students

are evaluated, an external committee comments on directing, editing, camera, and writing, and all but camera comments are directed to the same student [4].

Given a commitment to the ideal of "working artist," it follows that those areas of practice deemed "aesthetic" should be mastered to some degree by everyone, and moreover that that mastery should be acquired in the process of each person making their own movies. The significance of this set of practices becomes apparent in comparison to other programs. In fact, students and some instructors routinely make such a comparison, particularly with the graduate program at the University of Southern California. As Grad Film people see it, USC operates a "tracking" school, in which students are tracked into specific areas of filmmaking early in their graduate careers. Not all students get to make their own films. Instead they compete for five or six directorial positions on as many projects. A selected group of student scripts are produced, each with substantially bigger budgets than Grad Film thesis projects.

According to some Grad Film faculty, there has been considerable interest and talk over the past few years about remodeling the graduate program along similar lines. This plan has sparked considerable controversy, leaving faculty undecided about whether such a program

would be more realistic in terms of students' job
prospects upon graduation. A few concede the
possibility of some professional value in tracking
students. Still, they are skeptical; they worry that
although such a plan might heighten the school's profile
by commercial industry standards, with more elaborate
student productions potentially suitable for
distribution, this would sacrifice students' ability to
handle narrative. "Production values" would be enhanced
at the expense of storytelling and most students would
become craftspeople, technical specialists unable to
integrate narrative sensibility and evocative
presentation, unable to manipulate the material
resources of cinema for aesthetic and emotional effect.
What students would not become are "working artists."

This faculty response is corroborated by an
admissions philosophy in the department, where an
applicant's demonstrated interest in and ability to
handle narrative (revealed in such portfolio items as
stories and scripts) means more than even considerable
production experience. The first year of the graduate
program is regarded, for admissions purposes, as a
technical "qualifier," in Nina's words "a chance to
catch up for students who might have a lot to say and a
good story sense but have never held a camera" (and
indeed only about half of student respondents reported

film production experience prior to coming to the
graduate program). In at least some cases, students who
apply for admission directly to second year on the
grounds they don't need a "technical qualifier" are held
back when faculty aren't convinced they can handle
narrative. As faculty told one student after looking at
his production portfolio, "you can light and you can
shoot but it's not clear you can tell a story."

Current students too lament the possible shift to a
tracking model along the lines of USC. One student who
was confident that she might succeed as a director in
such a system still worried that future students would
lose the pleasure of physically using the camera, of
creating and assembling the materials that would come to
express her ideas about the world in story form. In an
altogether different context, two students mentioned to
me quite independently that despite the familiar litany
of complaints, their contentment with the program was in
its requirement that they direct their own films. Said
one of them, a third-year student:

> The good thing about it is you make five films, a
> staggering number. And you're assured, as soon as
> you enter, that you'll get to make them. (...) At
> USC and UCLA they have this lottery system, where
> you...talk about favoritism! It's rampant there!
> The people who the faculty decides are the best
> equipped to direct get to direct! People are being
> selected for certain jobs before they're even out
> of school! When I first came to school I wanted to
> write but I felt that I needed to have a wide
> background in production in order to write well--I

> needed to know what a camera could do and what the limitations of equipment were. I wanted to know all that. It never occurred to me that I would direct or shoot outside of school or do anything else. When I got here I began to think well maybe I could edit to make money while I was writing because writing is so difficult. Or maybe I could record sound. But I tried editing and tried sound work and thought it was very boring. But I found directing to be fun. That was last year, after I got to direct a longer film. This year, I've also gotten into camera work.

Importantly, this student's comments suggest the evolution of her interest in directing. Prior to coming to the university, she hadn't imagined herself as director but the program's emphasis had engendered in her the desire to control the process "from beginning to end".

Still another student described filmmaking as very "personal", later adding that she had come to Grad Film after a brief and lucrative career as a network videotape engineer precisely because she wanted to work on her own projects rather than continue as a technician on others'.

What emerges from the school community's reactions to the possibility of a tracking curriculum is a fundamentally individualized notion of "filmmaker." This is hardly surprising in light of a cultural tradition that locates creativity within "gifted" individuals (cf. Ch.5), but what makes it distinctive in

the social world of film school is its persistence

despite the vastly collective and labor-divided

production process. Unlike a more self-conscious "art"

or "experimental" film school (hypothetical locales

routinely parodied in the department), where students

may indeed attempt to perform all the operations of

filmmaking single-handedly, Grad Film students always

work in crews, at a level of technological complexity

that makes it impossible to do otherwise. Moreover, as

I have described above, even the pre- and post-

production stages of writing and editing, where students

can in theory work "alone," are made sociable by the

routine engagement of faculty and classmates as projects

evolve. Classroom script conferences and screenings of

rushes, rough cuts and fine cuts etc. all contribute to

the dramatically public shape of filmmaking in the

department. And importantly (Nina's orientation

comments notwithstanding), Grad Film is not a production

house, but a school, and thus what I (and they) refer to

as "filmmaking" is also learning to make films.

Institutionally speaking, those students who call

themselves and each other "filmmakers" are film

students, or student filmmakers, and it is this

instructional context that requires their aesthetic

accountability from stage to stage. [5] At the same

time that the belief in "working artist" moves them to

claim personal authorship for some of the films they work on (that is, their "own projects"), the actual means through which all films come into being in the school involves the joint participation of innumerable others. And finally, at the same time they compete for symbolic and material rewards at the level of authorship or "working artist," all students rely on mutual co-operation to enable the production of all films, precisely those works they will subsequently call their own.

Working artists, competition and co-operation: The last point is important because it underlies the basic structural relationship among students in the department. On the one hand, they compete amongst each other for pre-eminence as writer/directors; on the other they collaborate, ideally to the best of their abilities, on each other's behalf. In Faulkner's terms, they share the "dual interests" of individuation and integration (1983a:149).

Conceptually, these dual interests in Grad Film aren't difficult to reconcile. There is no dissonance between competition and co-operation where discrepancies in status or performance are attributed to creative ability, that is where competition at the aesthetic level isn't felt to interfere with co-operation at the practical level. But the lived situation is more

complicated than such an equation suggests, the relationship between competition and co-operation varying with the practical imperatives of different program years.

The relationship is most compelling for first year students, who (at least until 1988) were subject to the most institutionally-weighted moment of evaluation known as the "cut." As I mentioned earlier, at the end of second semester a complex review process was underway among first-year faculty and an external evaluations committee to decide which students would be dropped from the program. Approximately 20% would be asked to withdraw, a figure most people were familiar with long before October, when, in a general meeting with first-year students, Nina detailed the evaluation process and officially reminded them of their probationary status.

Though the cut occurred in late Spring, to different degrees students and faculty felt its weight from the beginning of the Fall semester. Knowing they would have to claim some profound distinctions among students come May, faculty compared early and subsequent student performances, using the several discrete assignments in a first year curriculum based on "doing" to decide whether students indeed "had what it takes" and whether they had used that talent or gift in the development of skill, or technique. Definitive

attributions of talent (and other forms of worth) came later, just prior to the cut. Had a student invested their promise and developed a consistently successful skill in manipulating the stylistic and narrative repertoires of cinema? Had an unpromising student improved? Had an initially promising student taken a downward turn? Had a student judged poor from the start sustained that judgement with current work?

These questions represent four scenarios in the relationship between talent, performance and what I call social-aesthetic mobility, whether that mobility is upward, downward, stable but poor or stable and good. In Ch. 5 I consider these categories in detail, relating talent attributions to aesthetic authority and social control in the school. Here, it is important simply to point out that the significance of a student's performance at any one point is relative to other performances by the same student and other students' performances on the same assignment. The kinds of aesthetic principles students use and resist, their responses to critiques of their work, their personae and sense of self as directors, must be interpreted in light of these social co-ordinates of aesthetic value.

In anthropological terms, first-year students on probation are engaged in a sort of extended rite of passage (VanGennep 1960), which Becker et al

characterize as

> that series of instructions, ceremonies, and ordeals
> by which those already in a special status initiate
> neophytes into their charmed circle, by which men
> turn boys into fellow men [sic], fit to be their own
> companions and successors (1961:4).

Like their neophyte counterparts in traditional

societies, first-year students endure a sense of

collective subordination in which they have no status of

any structural consequence. [6] Unlike traditional

neophytes however, living through the rite and its

rituals, participating in prescribed ways, does not

guarantee passage from probation to security; in schools

generally one can fail to achieve the new state or even

to maintain the current one [7]. This is a situation

Henry Kingsbury has described in relation to solo

recitals as rites of passage almong seniors in a music

conservatory:

> ...a recital entails the very real risk of failure,
> that is, of going from higher to lower status.
> Whereas a "rite of passage" entails progress which
> moves in terms of distinct, measured stages in a
> predetermined, fixed direction, the recital rite in
> the the "cult of the individual" entails social or
> personal "progress" which takes its meaning only
> from the flux of ongoing social process, and which
> may be either positive or negative, depending on the
> quality of the performance (1984:107). [8]

Whenever failure can occur, though particularly

where it is known that the number of aspirants exceeds

the number of admissions, the equality that usually

characterizes relationships among neophytes is infused
with a sense of competition that intensifies as the
strongest competitors emerge from the lot and the period
of judgement approaches. Thus first-year students in
Grad Film endure the contradictions of being bound by the
solidarity of collective subordination ("unions of
sympathy" in Dornbush's terms [quoted in VanMaanen and
Schein 1979:233]), the co-operation required to make
films, and the competition engendered by the cut.

One student expressed this contradiction during an
informal conversation among three or four of us visiting
an active sound stage in late September.

> ...couldn't they just say who gets to stay and why?
> I mean, if I have the money can't I stay? They need
> the money, they'll let us stay. Hopefully enough
> people will drop out. Tell your friends they don't
> really belong here, they oughta consider quitting.
> Say, "I'm going to [quit]...but you first," then
> later "well, I decided to stay afterall...you
> understand."

Her deceptive strategy to get people to quit, tongue in
cheek though it was, suggests the suppressed quality of
the competition among students. At the same time that
they are "all in it together," some would be asked to
stay and others to leave. The point was to compete
without appearing to do so (and the point of joking about
it perhaps to relieve the tension most students felt when
the issue came up).

The tension between the working artist ideal and one's subordination as student is also expressed in the following exchange between two first-year classmates on location production for the "first film," in late November:

> J: First year is bullshit, you just have to get through it.
>
> S: I disagree, I took my film very seriously.
>
> J: I took my film seriously too, but that's not first year.
>
> S: I guess it depends on what kind of film you're making.

While the first speaker distinguishes between the conditions of first-year and filmmaking per se, the second does not. What's important to S is the work you do, the films you make, in turn reproducing the "working artist" premise that underlies the program curriculum. Moreover, the final remark in the exchange is competitive, S implying that he has made a "better" first film than J. For S, his seriousness as an artist is in part the reason he was able to make a better film; and by logical complement, his film's judged superiority in turn legitimates his artistic stance in interactions with J. [9]

For second and third-year students, the tension between competition and co-operation isn't focussed by any occasion so momentous as the cut, still there is the

selective distribution of scarce resources (teaching
assistantships, production awards and school film
festival prizes among them), and moreover the symbolic
rewards of being routinely identified by peers and
superordinates as an especially "good" or "talented"
director. In an analogy to the world of professional
film, students seek "acclaim" at the same time that they
seek its material rewards. The two typically go
together, though faculty members in a position to judge
say that not every student whose work is worthy is
materially rewarded; there is simply "too little [money]
to go around". [10] But symbolic rewards matter
regardless of whether they come with by material ones.
For example, students care about the spirit in which
their films are received and discussed in class
screenings. On several occasions students mentioned to
me that the "competitive" air of their rough- or fine-cut
screening was offset by private comments after class from
student colleagues, to the effect that they had "really
liked the film" and that a lot of the discussion had been
"nitpicking." On the one hand students are impatient
with this contrast in public and private responses. On
the other, they report it with a pleasure and relief that
suggest they care very much about what others think and
are willing to say of their films, and by implication of
their ability and "talent."

For wealthier students, or even for those to whom a cash prize of $100 is negligible (given the costs of filmmaking), a "jury prize" at the school film festival still means a great deal in terms of public (if local) recognition for their work. This was expressed in one case by a student who expected (and who was expected by others) to win a school festival award and didn't. She told me afterward that she felt quite hurt, and skeptical of the school's recognition of "formally unconventional, innovative works," a category in which she included her entry film. She also expressed her disappointment to members of the faculty, some of whom had been festival judges and who, they sympathetically (and ironically) told me, agreed she had a right to be disappointed. The issue of what kinds of films and filmmakers are specially recognized and the stylistic and social consequences of that recognition are subjects of later chapters. The summary point to be made here is that students beyond first year compete for material and symbolic rewards, and thus merely surviving the cut does not resolve the tension between competition and cooperation, even though that tension may diminish in their imaginations and experience as the memory of the decision period recedes.

The tension is also diminished as students form cohesive subgroups or cliques across program years. A remarkable number of students work with the same

colleagues over several projects, particularly in second and third year but also in first. While close friendship among crewmembers does not guarantee co-operation (indeed it sometimes generates antagonism), a group's devotion to a project based on friendly respect, along with the practical familiarity that comes from working together under a variety of circumstances, enable student crews to act as "ensembles" in film production. Where the ensemble breaks down, moreover, student directors working among friends count on the same devotion to see them through the rough moments. Production is often a very intimate activity, demanding that people worth together without interruption for 13 or 14 hours, in most cases for days at a time in crowded spaces. Under these conditions the intimacy intensifies as people collectively experience the discomfort of a disorganized or problematic shoot, or the euphoria of a difficult but successful maneuver. Whatever the circumstance, in a phrase which Grad Film students speak frequently and fondly, they will "be there" for one another. To quote a third-year student about her second-year production,

> It's amazing, like Valentino Corteze says in Day for Night [1973], we come together, so intimate, then poof. But there is a kind of amazing intensity (...) On my second-year film, we had to do multiple takes of a woman ascending a staircase past a Winged Victory statue, an image from Funny Face. We couldn't get her scarf to blow and rise as she went up the stairs. We started with a fan, then a wind machine. Umpteen takes, but the wind would never

> catch it just right. On the 11th or 12th take,
> finally, the camera is rolling and the wind catches
> it just the right way. Everyone held their breath
> and when the camera stopped they just burst into
> applause. It was just great!

The camaraderie among sub-groups reconciles students to
the co-operative endeavor of filmmaking despite the
structural competition they face.

In this section I have described the "working
artist" premise and considered its consequences, for
forms of instruction (to "learn by doing") and student
relationships (the structural conflict between
competition and co-operation). In the next sections I am
still concerned with "working artist" as principle and
practice, interpreted in light of students' professional
prospects, of the positions and careers of faculty, and
of a practical domain whose significance warrants
separate treatment: money.

Working Artists and Paying Students

At the same time that students and faculty press the
importance of making one's own films, they stagger at
what it costs to do so. Film is indeed business when
individual production budgets run between $1000 and $4000
for first year, $1-8000 for second year, and upwards of
$10,000 for third year (in 1985-6). As an instructor
pointed out, per minute of running time for finished
products the costs are low by any professional standards.

As student "lab fees" however, they're astonishingly high. Add to that over $12,000 annual tuition and Grad Film becomes an overwhelming expense.

In an introductory comment at the beginning of the Fall semester, Richard, one of the principal first-year instructors, singled out cost as the one feature that made film school a questionable choice for entree into the professional industry. Otherwise, he added, school-trained filmmakers learned things systematically and had a built-in network to exploit for years afterward. School production being relatively cheap, he was referring principally to tuition costs. But for most students, the combined expense of tuition, production and living in New York City provokes anxiety from the day classes begin. School life becomes a story about money-- where to get it, how much things cost, who sells the cheapest raw stock or the cheapest props, who rents the cheapest van, where to find good restaurant jobs or cheap apartments, what's the budget, who has how much, when's the last date to register, where's the financial aid office, can you afford next semester, can you afford this semester. As an experienced student put it, "film school is a financial obsession--you just get used to skipping everything else to save money for another roll of stock."

During production periods, students live exhausted

lives for months on end as they try to balance part-time jobs with fourteen-hour shooting days. Money is at the center of student lifestyles, and talk about money focusses collective anxiety and expresses solidarity among those who suffer together. But although everyone is concerned about money, the absolute amounts vary a great deal. While some go for days or weeks after a shoot without seeing their footage because they're short two hundred dollars for the lab, others worry about pushing their thesis production budgets over the thirty or forty-thousand dollar mark. In each case, money means different things to students, the poorer among whom feel the steady comparison to others who are wealthy.

All Grad Film students have some access to cash and other material resources. Most, however, are not "rich" by middle-class standards. (Eighty percent of questionnaire respondents are from middle to upper middle-class professional families and 15% are from white-collar and blue-collar working-class families.) Students finance their work in Grad Film through a combination of government and private loans, summer and work term earnings, personal resources (savings, trusts etc.) and partial or full tuition remissions. In second and third year, 15 of about 75 students are also supported by teaching assistantships which paid them a little over $400 a month plus tuition in 1985-86.

Some students, however, are rich or at least are believed to be. I say "believed" because students couch their descriptions and assessments of others very speculatively. No student was especially willing to tell me that they just "had a lot of money." My own judgements come from questionnaire items on parents' occupations and sources of financial support, and from students' accounts of lifestyles outside the school.

The resentment prompted by students understood to be wealthy among those who aren't is again not a question of absolute value but a confluence of means and manner. To have money and spend it on films does not necessarily elicit comments about "rich kids" or unfair advantages. But in some cases, students explain others' "obnoxious" or otherwise unsolidary conduct in terms of their wealth. For example, I was regaled on a few occasions about a couple of people who had "actually hired" other students to do their "scut work," like double-splicing rough cuts for classroom projection.

The example is significant in several ways. First, double splicing (where every physical cut in the reel[s] of celluloid that make up the working print of a film is taped on both sides, so it won't come apart in projection) is a ritual task among film students that signifies completion, of a rough cut if not a final. To answer the question "have you finished?" by saying "yeah,

but I still have to double splice" implies exhausted
resignation to a manual task that must be done and done
carefully but which requires no aesthetic attention
whatsoever. Among film school war stories, staying up
all night to double-splice hundreds of cuts is routine.
An analogy in a regular academic setting would be typing
an essay; papers must be submitted typewritten but it
hardly matters whether the writer actually does the
typing. If you don't know how to type, better to find
someone who does. Unlike typing papers however, all
students in Grad Film know how to double splice--it isn't
a matter of expertise.

For one student to hire another to double splice for
them undermines this ritual of completion by imposing a
division of labour where none usually exists. What the
"employer" in this case may regard as efficiency (better
to pay someone to do routine tasks than devote your own
time), others regard as arrogance. Double splicing is
not, afterall, something students trade off on, though
under unusual pressure they do pitch in. (On the spring
"Marathon Day," the first year class' final chance to
screen their third films, three or four students whose
films were done descended to the basement to each take
over a segment of double splicing for another student
desperately trying to finish while he still had an
audience). But those who hire are never among the hired

on later occasions, and "employees" do the work precisely because they need the money. Hiring to double splice is therefore more than a matter of efficiency. It is a reminder that some students have more than enough money and others too little.

My point in developing this example is to suggest that while students see wealth as enabling certain positions or kinds of conduct among other students, they don't always regard money itself as the problem. Those students who spend as much on their films but who do not hire people to double splice (or otherwise distinguish themselves) do not become the targets of resentment, at least not openly. Still, students and faculty constantly ask the question, does more money make better films?

The answer is a modified yes, to the extent that more money can improve a film in the hands of an already "talented" filmmaker, but rich or extravagant students don't necessarily make good movies. Improvements come in the form of higher shooting ratios (ie. of footage shot to footage used, ideally giving an editor a greater choice of material or the director an opportunity to retake until he or she is confident the shot has worked), longer production periods (using rental equipment), or potentially "better" crewmembers. In one case a student explained that one of the department's "best" cinematographers was more willing to work for a director

who could afford to rent the highest-grade, professional-quality lenses which in turn would favorably show off his camera work. Added resources don't guarantee improvements, however, and while filmmaking in the school is by definition costly, some of the "best" films are some of the least expensive in their league. A thesis film made the year before I arrived but known and showed to current students is a good example. With only two characters shot in three or four adjacent locations, it is routinely cited as a film that makes the most of story, performance, dialogue and existing environments, and relies least on such expenses as large casts, costumes, specially constructed sets, or technical requirements beyond the capacity of school equipment (which would mean renting extra gear).

This is not to say that faculty and students are skeptical about elaborate productions. Some of the biggest projects I participated in (in one case a sound stage musical with a cast and crew of 60 people) generated the greatest enthusiasm since they most nearly approximated the collective image of "real" (vs. student) filmmaking. Under these circumstances students with less money are critical of the department as a "playground for rich kids," where faculty lament financial differences at the same time they laud expensive productions. Costly films widely regarded as good elicit comments about

"what's possible if you just have they money" (true, for example, of the musical mentioned above). But as one student also put it, "a big, expensive mess is still a mess."

Recognizing that to make any film is expensive and that the stakes are especially high for first-year students facing the cut, faculty attempt to limit first-year production expenses in order to minimize the advantages of wealthier students and, as they see it, maximize everyone's concentration on narrative elements, visually expressed, over audio production values. In a memo addressed to all first-year students just prior to their final production period, Nina reminded them that 9-12 minutes was the running time limit for third-films and that mixed sound tracks would not be accepted. Because the school did not at that time operate its own post-production mixing facilities, mixing in a commercial studio would "force some of you into an expense that is beyond your financial resources." As well, she explained, multi-track sound production would cut into editing time at a point where editing structure counted more than smooth soundtracks in their development as filmmakers.

Beyond first year, there are fewer controls in place over the kinds of films students make and thus over the money they spend. Although students are officially

required to have scripts and budgets approved by the
writing and production management instructors before
their shooting dates are confirmed, in most cases they
spend more money than they planned and many find
themselves unable to finish their films. Like many
professional projects, some also begin production
knowingthey don't have the money for post-production
(including lab fees).

For second- and certainly for third-year students,
it is much more difficult to treat films as "learning"
exercises precisely because the investment has been so
great. The price goes up with color and synchronous-
sound and, typically, with a longer running time than
first-year projects. Moreover, students use multiple
sound tracks and plan studio mixes (until recently, in
rented facilities) on the way to an optical print. While
it may be a wised decision, to stop short of printing
because a script or film just doesn't work, to "cut your
losses" and treat a second-year project as an "exercise"
is a serious disappointment.

In some cases, students economize in second year
either by working in video (where production costs are
considerably lower and post-production expenses off-set,
at least in theory, by the availability of school editing
equipment) or by doing a camera, editing, or production
management major, where they shoot, cut or manage

production for three other directors to fulfill their requirements in lieu of making their own film. In a few cases, students choose among these options because they specifically want experience working in video or specializing in a particular area. However some do so to save what money they have for their thesis films (and still others do so for both reasons). Given the premiums placed both on working in film and on writing, directing and editing one's own project, it is not surprising that only about 20% of second-year students work in video and only 10% opt to do specialty majors.

Sometimes two students pool their resources (including the $750 cash allotment the department gave to each second-year student and the $900 to each third-year student in 1985-86) and work as co-directors on a film or video project. In the 1985 second-year class, two collaborations were underway, one in video, one in film. [11]

By third year, the ante is raised as students prepare for their thesis films, where the scripts are longer and the productions typically more involved. Of the 21 third-year students who answered a questionnaire item about their production plans, only 3 (12%) were working on editing or camera specialties and none intended to work in video. One collaborative project (a fiction film) was underway. Despite the increased costs,

fewer third-year students are willing to give up the opportunity to direct their own films.

Importantly, the percentage of third-year students who in 1985-86 reported "personal sources" (including savings, trusts and family contributions but not including loans, work term earnings, teaching assistantships or scholarships) as their sole or principal source of income is three times higher than the second-year percentage in the same period. As independent financial resources rise, the number of students who choose to direct their own films rises with them. Students who cannot afford to make thesis films drop out, leaving wealthier students to constitute the third-year class.

This interpretation--of attrition by relative wealth--is tempered by the fact that students leave the program for other reasons as well, notably when a professional opportunity arises that seems more promising than a third year in film school. Virtually no one in the program intends to teach filmmaking in a university, the only venue that requires an MFA, so there is mild regard for "completing the degree." But this doesn't mean those who stay only do so if no professional offers are forthcoming. For people who want to direct (including most of those who leave the program), thesis films are a relatively cheap opportunity. Again, by student

standards the prices are high, but in light of free
facilities, equipment, casts and crews, they are lower
than costs would be for the same films produced
independently. [12] Moreover, by third year students
are members of their own filmmaking community, a
network difficult to assemble for an individual with
little experience and no institutional base.

The financial realities of film school challenge
the working artist ideal because costs force the
reminder that students are students and their films
student films; very few can expect distribution
income, government or foundation grants, private
investment, or institutional sponsorship for their
school-produced projects. However, this is a
conclusion that few students beyond first year are
willing toaccept, as they begin to think of their
films as potentially distributable and in some cases
as they take on smaller projects and positions outside
the school (for example in independent music video
production). Instead, matters of money in film school
are regarded as analogous to matters of money in
commercial filmmaking--necessary but eminently
professional evils--as students are reminded every
time they read the trades and every time a guest
director talks about his or her most recent project at
the weekly Directors Series. To quote the last

passage from Nina's first-year memo:

> [D]o not feel that these are unreasonable limits
> that will constrict your creative talents. One
> has to learn to work within limits - that is the
> nature of the industry and an important part of
> your training.

Working artists and ownership: Regardless of how
little or how much money students spend on their
first, second and third-year films, the fact that each
pays the costs of producing them is a crucial element
in determining the ownership of those projects.
Legally (and this is not true in all film schools),
Grad Film students--not the university--control the
copyright to each film they make. But along with
retaining copyright, their financial control also
grants them ownership of the material process of
filmmaking (in contrast, say, to the program where all
students working on a film pool resources or where the
school pays the production costs for a limited number
of films). Chandra Mukerji made a similar observation
about the college-level filmmaking programs she
studied:

> Students with money, equipment, or connections to
> others who have money or equipment can sponsor a
> film. Control of resources is important because
> it determines "ownership" of a film. Except
> where resources come from an outside source not
> connected to a particular person in the school (a
> very rare occurrence), resources are linked to a
> person or persons who are accepted as the film's
> "owner(s)" (1976:79).

During my year at Grad Film, in only one case did a student other than the director (or co-director) contribute substantial funds to a project. [13] There were indeed students known and valued for their "connections"--to potential locations, equipment etc.--but this form of sponsorship never outweighed the director's financial responsibility. In other words, the student director is also the producer.

Importantly, however, a student's financial control is rarely invoked as the basis for their aesthetic authority, which is more a matter of "vision" and "intention", qualities which crew members are expected to honor and which they will claim when their directorial turn comes. Thus the financial conditions that partly enable a student director's authority among peers are recognized though unspoken, at the same time that the aesthetic authority of the position "director" is publicly championed (cf. Ch.4). Again, if an expensive film does well in local circles, students and faculty may observe that money (with the right combination of other elements) makes the critical difference. What students do not acknowledge, however, is that all of them derive their directorial authority in part through the financial control of their films (a situation whose structural implications are elaborated in Ch.4 and in the

conclusion to this thesis).

Working Artists and Film Professionals

At the same time that Grad Film faculty teach in a curriculum that encourages and rewards directorial achievement, they recognize that only a very small sub-group of graduates or former students will ever direct films beyond the university, commercially, independently or otherwise. A growing number may in some way earn a living in the film industry, but typically they won't do it as directors or as independents who write, direct, edit and produce their own films, very much the model of school practice.

The conflict between how students are trained and in what capacities they can expect to work professionally is expressed by faculty in their occasional disagreements about the department's mandate. At a variety of moments in the annual cycle of school life but particularly during the first-year cut, the discussion arises about the status of students who show no special promise as writer/directors but who may well have a professional contribution to make in film, for example as a production manager who is "creative" in the sense of "resourceful" but who is not properly regarded as an artist. In Ch.5 I argue that a student's admission to

second year was typically a matter of his or her
judged ability or potential as writer-director.
However, there are always a couple of students whose
performance at the end of first year is regarded as
"professionally" strong but artistically weak, and
whose promotion or dismissal is controversial among
those who feel the school ought to devote its
resources to the "most talented" and others who also
see it as a training program for a variety of industry
specialties. And beyond first year, the question
remains: should students be trained as directors when
most of them will never direct after their thesis
films and when those who do will likely spend years in
more "menial" industry positions before they're given
the opportunity?

In a general sense the conflict is resolved by
the "working artist" ideal, in this case with the
emphasis on film as "work." Narrative filmmaking as
it is taught and practiced at Graduate Film is not a
conceptual art but a radically material one. To have
made a "good" film is evidence not only of "vision,"
but as well of the ability to negotiate the endless
complexity of the production process, to realize that
vision. To quote a first year student:

>   You not only have to visualize the film, you have
>   to visualize the production (...) As you sit down
>   to write you're constantly thinking, can I do

this? Can I cast this character? Can I get that
location?

As Nina explained in an early interview, the
curriculum is designed to create "well-rounded
filmmakers," instructing all students in the major
aspects of film production from treatment to print,
enabling the best of them to control and integrate
those aspects as directors. Students in first, second
and third year take courses in a variety of aspects of
film production. Moreover they all work for each
other in different crew positions (eg.
cinematographer, sound recordist, assistant director,
art director etc.), giving them the opportunity to
develop "technical" or "creative" specialties which
they can in turn parlay into professional
credentials. Thus in the process of learning what the
faculty feel they need to know to become directors,
students can in theory acquire the skills and
experience they need to work as other kinds of
specialists in some sectors of the film industry.

I say some because although faculty (and
students) emphasize professionalism in a normative
sense, there is little formal attention to such
concerns as the technical requirements and credentials
for union membership, without which students are
restricted to independent productions or working as

production assistants on union projects (typically the lowest position in the crew hierarchy). A few students do take and pass the union tests that permit them to work as technicians in union "shops," which students and faculty regard as a professional accomplishment to be congratulated. Both groups celebrated one student's ability as electrician (lighting technician) by routinely mentioning his recent admission to NABET (the National Association for Broadcast Engineers and Technicians). However, Grad Film is not a "technical" school and with the exception of cinematographer (regarded as an artistic and technical position), virtually no student aspires to a strictly technical career. Finally, even in the "creative" specialties such as writing and editing, faculty continue to emphasize aesthetic principles over narrowly professional or technical processes.

An example comes from the debate that arose as the department finally began its move to the new building in the late Spring of my fieldwork year. In its new location, Grad Film would share some facilities with the undergraduate department, in particular a "state-of-the-art" computerized video editing system. The university had invested a considerable amount of money in the system, to Nina's disgust. According to her, few students would ever

have the desire or opportunity to master the system in all its operational complexity, and several small, "off-line" editing suites would have been by far the wiser investment, allowing more students to get on with the business of editing their video projects independently. "As it stands now," she added

> they ought to just hire an operator. We're here to train editors, people who can think about how to cut, not button-pushers. If students want to learn to push buttons there are other places they can go.

For students and faculty, the speculated odds (in the absence of industry or alumni statistics) against students becoming directors are challenged in part by the fact that some people do make it, and moreover that a prominent sub-group in that category attended Grad Film. Every year for the five or six years prior to my fieldwork, a student or graduate from the department won the student award for best film (usually in the dramatic category) from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the same organization that awards "Oscars" to professional industry members. [14] More importantly, each year harbors its success story in the film world beyond school, those graduates and former students (recent or distant) who "make it" commercially and/or critically.

The living testimony of successful alumnae/i,

often encountered in the Directors Series, reaffirms the faith that indeed students can overcome the odds. For students and faculty the program's directorial emphasis is sustained in the belief not that most students will become directors but that some students can, with the right combination of talent and other qualities. No student in the department ever suggested to me that even most if not all of them will get to direct. However, all those I interviewed or who answered questionnaires told me they expected to eventually become directors (or writers/directors/producers). On the one hand they concede that the select group will be small; on the other, each believes that eventually he or she will be among the chosen.

I do not interpret such a belief as collective naivete so much as a strategy for surviving precisely the odds it denies. In a program whose emphases and rewards center around film directors, to claim from the start that one does not aspire to become a director is a pre-emptive admission either of failure or marginality. For first-year students particularly, a perceived lack of desire ("initiative," "obsession") to become directors (read artists) could figure in their being cut (again, an issue further discussed in Ch. 5). Moreover, a belief in the idea that you will

become a director, however circuitous or lengthy the route may be, reconciles students to the investment of time and money in an industry where the institutional connection between school as a training ground and the professional world remains emergent and unstable, where recent and occasional contracts between schools and distributors are celebrated (eg. Goldberg 1987:47) but the absence of extensive or regular industry ties and investments is unremarkable. In other words, it is a belief that enables students to take a costly pre-professional step despite the absence of any known route from graduate to filmmaker, any certified position as "director" (what Adler calls "occupatioinal non-entity" [1979:140]), and despite the skeptical treatment they can still expect as "film school types" in some industry sectors.

From a sociological perspective, the situation of film students therefore raises comparative questions about the strategies other professional students (for example in law) may use to negotiate their increasingly ambiguous position in a changing professional marketplace.

Working Artists and Teachers

While students battle the uncertainties of film
school as a means of professional entree, for faculty
the school represents a different set of conflicts or
tensions, different not only from those experienced by
students but also varying among themselves, depending
on their full-time or part-time status and on their
own film training. [15]

Though only one of six full-time faculty in Grad
Film attended film school, virtually all of them are
quick to affirm the value of school training in
cultivating "well-rounded filmmakers". As Richard (a
non-school-trained professor) described it,

> any graduating third-year student in Grad Film knows
> more about film than any faculty member here. We
> [the faculty] are specialists whose training came
> from practice in the industry, whereas students are
> trained by the specialists in all areas of
> filmmaking.

The former chairperson, who went from editor to director
in the studio system of classical Hollywood, commented:

> School takes time and money, but on the set you have
> to teach yourself, you have to learn from watching
> others work. There's no guarantee you'll get an
> explanation for why the director or cinematographer
> did this or that, things are too busy for anyone to
> teach you. At school, you study all parts of the
> process whether you want to or not. You get to see
> what you and others do, and you get to talk about
> it.

Still other faculty members said that film school was the
"wave of the future...I'm not sure we've got it right

yet, but we're working on it"; or, referring to the illustrious careers of some Grad Film alumni/ae, "I don't know what it is, but we're doing something right."

These comments suggest that faculty feel the school (and with it, their instruction) can work for students, but together they also point toward the tensions implicit in their own University appointments. In a department where well-rounded filmmakers and working artists are related ideals, as these and earlier comments imply, what is the position of faculty members who are in many cases "former professionals" (in the words of one), whose major professional credits precede their teaching careers?

While film school is a potential means of entree for students, for faculty (particularly those who teach full time) it becomes an occasion of withdrawal or partial retreat from professional filmmaking. Nina expressed this position, having gone from part-time editing instructor, to full-time faculty member and later to chairperson.

> I came in 1970 as a part-time teacher. In 1972 I became full-time, and this is my fifth year in the chair.
>
> LH: What prompted you to come and what prompted you to stay?
>
> Well, each time I made the wrong choice [laughter]! What prompted me to come was quite accidental. They needed an editing teacher, the chair called a friend of mine, he didn't want to do it, he recommended me. I talked to the chair, he said full-time, I wasn't ready for full-time. It was a two year

school then—give me one class, get somebody else to take the other—that's what they did. By that time I think I'd had it with the editing profession, what was happening out there [in NYC]. In '72 I couldn't take the full-time. I was in the middle of something so I hung around another half year, but I knew if they got somebody else I couldn't get it full-time.

LH: Why was it the wrong choice?

I should have gone into features each time, which I didn't do. I don't know if I should have—I could have. Then when I took the chair, I'd just written a script, I should've gone on to making a movie.

Nina's comment suggests less of a calculated career move into the academy, as a place where one's training or work necessarily or even hopefully take one, than accepting an opportunity for employment at an inhospitable moment in the professional field outside the school. Other full-time faculty members expressed similar routes out of filmmaking and into film teaching, for example one who had worked closely as script supervisor for several prominent U.S. directors and whose next move "ought to have been as director, but I was a woman in an industry where basically women didn't direct, so I knew that wasn't going anywhere." Discovering a "talent for teaching film" in a variety of community arts projects, she finally decided to combine that ability with her professional experience and seek a University position.

Both of the cases above reflect the distance between school and industry for faculty as filmmakers, that is as

working artists. In part this is a matter of expectation: unlike traditional academic faculty, whose training and socialization presume they will teach for a living, no Grad Film faculty member who learned filmmaking outside the academy began their career expecting to teach, despite the fact that teaching is indeed a major source of steady employment for artists in the U.S. (Adler 1979:10). The teachers quoted lament the conditions under which they left freelance film production (the first as editor, the second as script supervisor) and imply that teaching is what one does instead of filmmaking. And though both went on to describe their deep commitments to and pleasures in teaching, they also expressed their frustration in not working "creatively" on their own projects.

Even for those full-time faculty who never recollected their departures from freelance work negatively, to teach is to severely limit resources of time and energy for making films. On the one hand, art schools in general and Grad Film in particular can provide job security, a resource virtually absent elsewhere in the freelance world of art-making. But teaching positions are not easily contained "sidelines" which enable a professor to proceed with her or his own work when the instruction is done. While some artists (for example in theatre) may hope or expect that a

teaching appointment will provide access to the costly equipment, resources and personnel that only a university, college or commercial industry can supply (cf. Adler 1979:5), this is in fact not the case in Grad Film or many other film schools, where equipment is both in short supply and relatively low-tech by professional or commercial standards. Finally, while full-time art school positions are precious and competitive resources in the unstable economy of filmmaking, in the absence of certification requirements for success as an artist (if not, increasingly, as an art teacher) they do not necessarily promise status or rewards outside the academy. To quote Adler,

> [a]s long as "anyone who makes it is an artist"...university-based artists will not be able to extend their influence far beyond their own professional segment and will not, like university law and medical faculty, become the governing elites of their wider occupations...[And] as long as the highest incomes and honors go to those people who rise to the top in the cultural marketplace, regardless of whether they are affiliated with large organizations, any bureaucratically defined and protected professional status will be qualified by this other hierarchy of market success; and the professionalized academic art establishment will be widely suspected by its own members to consist of those people who have failed to reach the highest rungs of commercial achievement (1979:10, emphasis added).

Thus the full-time faculty at Grad Film are in a perplexing position relative to the image of filmmaker as working artist that underwrites their own curriculum. In Adler's terms, "they fear that the 'COMPOSER-professor'

[here, the FILMMAKER-professor] will be transformed by academia into a 'composer-PROFESSOR,' and ultimately into a mere 'professor'" (1979:14). And unlike the "distinguished" professor of chamber music performance Henry Kingsbury describes in his account of conservatory training (1988:85-110), Grad Film faculty are not part of an elite pedagogic lineage which itself attracts students to the department. This is apparent from student questionnaire responses, where no-one chose "faculty reputations" as a reason to apply to Grad Film. Students were frequently attracted by the school's reputation at large, generated not by teachers but by prominent graduates whose status, as Adler reminds us, comes from success in the cultural marketplace beyond the school. Unless they attended the same university for undergraduate degrees or summer film school (and few did), before they arrive students don't know who Grad Film faculty are, though they indeed know about prominent alumni/ae. Faculty status is itself a partial function of those alumni, whose critical and commercial accomplishments, as I suggested in the introduction, are what legitimate the department and schools generally in industry eyes.

These conditions place film school faculty in a different position than their counterparts in traditional academic disciplines. Where scholars too must write and

publish as well as teach, those activities typically take place within the academy, where the resources to do so are more or less available. And while it is true that some university art schools and departments support their faculty's own work, it is not yet true of Grad Film or other elite, commercially-oriented film departments that faculty produce films entirely inside university walls, particularly the kinds of films--independent fiction features--their students ultimately aspire to make.

Nina, who had half-seriously described her move to full-time teaching as a "mistake," went on to say that "if I don't do something I'll go bananas. I cannot do this forever." Sometime after I left the school she and an outside co-producer received a government arts grant to begin production on an educational documentary, a faculty project remarkable in part for its rarity among full-time faculty. The grant is a reminder that despite the potential availability of limited equipment and a crew (of students) willing and able to work for less than scale, the costs of filmmaking exceed the resources that universities, sometimes thought by outsiders to be artistic "havens", can or do provide.

The conflicts between teaching and filmmaking are diminished for the approximately 15 part-time faculty members, who (like Nina prior to 1972) maintain a variety of activities and contacts outside the university and

three of whom themselves attended Grad Film (and thus do
not experience the school as a withdrawal from previous
activity). Indeed they cannot support themselves
financially on their university appointments alone. In
1985-86, part-time faculty had recently optioned feature
scripts, produced commissioned and independent
documentaries, shot features and television commercials,
and recorded sound for a variety of productions in New
York. Unlike full-time faculty, many were professionally
represented by agents in New York and elsewhere.

In general, part-time faculty express a greater
sense of integration between film teaching and
filmmaking. For example, the following remarks come from
Murray, a screenwriting instructor who, since graduating
from the department himself, has taught both
undergraduates and graduates on and off at the same
university, as well as "optioning" (ie. selling) his own
scripts.

> I don't know if [teaching] has any direct impact on
> my work, but it's a constant set of fresh problems
> to talk about, problems I don't have to get sunk
> into. I can mull them over and give my input and
> then I don't have to worry anymore. Very easy, and
> it's a lot of new problems, so it's stimulating. I
> can't imagine it's hurting my writing. (...) Even if
> a [student] script is lousy, figuring out why it's
> lousy and what to say about it is stimulating. (...)
> The most fun are scripts like Rachel's, which are
> pretty good to begin with, so I can just go over it
> the way I would on a professional level with a
> friend, or with my own work. The difference with my
> own work is that I would probably brood about it,
> live with it, whereas with Rachel I make notes, we

come to class, we talk about it, I have a good time, then she broods about it, and I don't! So, that's very refreshing.

Part-time instructors' routine freelance activity dramatizes the idea of a professional faculty. For example, in response to student complaints about camera class cancellations, Nina responded that "if you're going to have pros for teachers, sometimes they won't be there, they're working". In this instance, the instructor who'd cancelled class at the last moment invited students to join him on a nearby soundstage, where he was director of photography for a television commercial. Here, the value of observing professional work in progress off-set somewhat the loss of classroom instruction. The sense of the "real thing," the feel of a working environment appealed to students, all of them newcomers to the program if not entirely so to filmmaking.

Unlike full-time faculty, it is also easier for part-time instructors to negotiate leaves of absence from the university for extended freelance work, as the first-year camera instructor did the following semester to shoot an independent feature. Part-time contracts and renewals are informally negotiated within the department and depend as much on the availability of instructors given their professional commitments, as the availability of positions.

What then becomes of the relationship between full-time faculty and students, where the demands of "working artist" upon each group appear contradictory? In part students recognize that the positions their teachers hold inside the academy and outside the industry are a function of industrial uncertainty, not necessarily ability or creativity. As one student remarked about a professor, "she has a lot of talent and believe me, I know, I've been taught by people without it." What's important here is the student's perception of what the teacher understands about narrative cinema, and moreover the teacher's ability to convey that understanding to the student's benefit, in other words to teach. However there is also no shortage of occasions where students angrily dismiss the negative or even benign opinions of teachers who "no longer make films themselves" and whose professional track records before teaching are less rather than more illustrious by industry standards.

Such dismissals partly reflect the artistic aspirations (or pretentions) of some students; as potential artists, they are at pains to distinguish themselves and declare aesthetic independence from their instruction and instructors. In a school where "working" is celebrated, and an industry where the practical value of film school is a film to show when you leave, teachers are reminders of the odds against most students becoming

(and remaining) filmmakers. Teachers, afterall, become teachers "instead," or so goes the perception among some students. While many Grad Film students may come to teach (the one occupation where their MFA degree is increasingly necessary if not sufficient), the overwhelming majority do not so envision themselves, at least not from the outset. Film teachers, moreover, do not yet generate market opportunities for film students. They may sponsor or select some students (and not others) for professional and semi-professional projects when industry representatives approach the school, but in this capacity they serve as gate-keepers to rather than originators of those opportunities. In other words, their power is very much defined by and within the school as organization and community.

Faculty thus emphasize the "art" in working artist, appealing to a conservatory tradition rather than grooming students in the "peripheries" and non-artistic dimensions of professional life. This is evident in the minimal emphasis on craft union membership, in a writing teacher's attention to story structure versus script layout--"which anyone can learn in two minutes"--or in Nina's attention to thematically motivated cutting versus her summary treatment of editing room practice (and her impatience with the prospect of students learning to operate a computerized editing system). As a full-time

faculty member exclaimed early in the fall semester,
"with new facilities Grad Film could become the cutting
edge, the site of research in film art", implying a
purity of purpose very much aligned with the traditional
image of the conservatory (cf. Adler 1979:17). Richard
echoed this stance in explaining why students couldn't
make mock television commercials in the department.
"Julliard," he reminded them, "doesn't give you a degree
for writing jingles."

If such a conservatory culture can be established
around filmmaking, faculty will come to occupy a broadly
legitimate professional position as teachers of film, in
an industry which still treats those not currently
"working" with some skepticism. Indeed, though I have
argued that institutional connections between schools and
the industry are unstable, their emergence is clear, for
example in prestigious, corporately-sponsored festivals
and competitions and museum-hosted awards ceremonies and,
more recently, in talk of cable distribution contracts
(eg. Goldberg 1987:47), both for student films. [16]
Closer to the centre of the industrial system, teachers
and school administrators may assume a role akin to
"producers", of personnel if not movies.

But the faculty's cultivation of aesthetic (versus
narrowly professional) habits is not only about
legitimacy. It is also about their own artistic

backgrounds and desires; it preserves teaching as a creative endeavor. "It's a lot more creative than some of the films I've had to cut" Nina told me. And as Ilona, a first-year writing instructor added,

> sometimes I must go beyond those little basics, beyond students' films, and teach what interests me, what matters to me and to my work. That is the only way I can continue to teach.

In this chapter I have described the social and cultural milieu in which Grad Film students acquire an aesthetic identity as film directors, as "working artists." In the next chapter, I am concerned with aesthetic repertoires, the narrative and stylistic approaches students learn and use, and the position of those repertoires in the film world beyond school.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. "Cast" names are pseudonyms. From chapter to chapter, I add pseudonyms and positions to the list for those faculty I quote or refer to more than once. Student names are also pseudonyms, though are too numerous to include in the cast. Where significant, I do identify a student's program year. Throughout this thesis I avoid the generic male pronoun by alternating between "he" and "she", "his" and "hers" in non-specific references. Finally, some textual indicators: an ellipsis in quoted interview or conversational material indicates pauses and unfinished sentences. An ellipsis in parentheses indicates material drawn from a different point in the same conversation. Comments in square brackets are mine.

2. The division of labour between producer and director is not always clear, especially since these roles are often assumed by the same person in student and professional filmmaking. For the purposes of this example, a director controls aesthetic dimensions of a film in light of his or her "personal vision," while a producer controls economic aspects. A producer's aesthetic control can occur in a variety of forms, from the recruitment of major production personnel (including the director, art director, writer etc. where these positions are filled by different individuals) to budgetary control over a production at all its stages, in either case with consequences for what a director (as artist) can do.

3. While the terms "artist," "director," and "filmmaker" are not synonymous, they are functional equivalents in parts of this analysis.

4. An important exception here is cinematography. With the exception of the music film, first-year students are not permitted to shoot their own movies. Moreover, in a school that regards film as a principally visual medium, all students are required to gain experience with 16mm motion picture cameras, so on each first-year project no student shoots more than one film. The situation changes dramatically by second year, at which point a select group of "camera stars" has emerged. The domain and significance of cinematographers is further discussed in Ch.4.

5. To quote Pierre Bourdieu on art school, "...[it]
    tends to encourage the conscious reflection of
    patterns of thought, perception or expression which
    have already been mastered unconsciously by
    formulating explicitly the principles of the
    creative grammar, for example the laws of harmony
    and counterpoint or the rules of pictorial
    composition, and by providing the verbal and
    conceptual material essential in order to give a
    name to differences previously experienced in a
    purely intuitive way" (1968:602). In part the
    point of public participation in the department is
    the ongoing, collective comparison of narrative and
    otherwise aesthetic intentions (spoken by student
    directors) and outcomes (the scripts they present
    or the films they screen as works in progress).
    This is the process through which the "creative
    grammar" is "explicitly formulated" (in Bourdieu's
    terms) and it is as students that Grad Film
    filmmakers are required to participate in this
    process. As part of acquiring narrative
    competence, this issue is further discussed in
    Appendix B.

6. Following VanGennep, Victor Turner describes the
    position of neophytes as "interstructural": "If our
    basic model of society is that of a "structure of
    positions," we must regard the period of margin or
    'liminality' as an interstructural situation"
    (1967[1964]:93).

7. In the case of some traditional rites of passage,
    neophytes can also fail to achieve the new status.
    Unlike the "cut" however, it is not a structural
    imperative that a certain percentage will fail.

8. Kingsbury 1984 is a dissertation, subsequently
    published as a book in 1988. In most instances I
    refer to the book, and to the dissertation only
    where I use material excluded from the revised
    edition.

9. On the same occasion, the second speaker went on to
    remark about a more advanced student, "...he may be
    a nice guy...but what's that got to do with film?
    I don't care if the guy's a total asshole if his
    films are good." Again this speaker rhetorically
    underscores the film as the object (and enterprise)
    of value in the school.

10. This raises questions about how available funds are divided, for example why five substantial monetary awards are considered more appropriate than, say, twice as many at half the amount. It may be partly a matter of efficiency, the sense that you can accomplish something with $1,000, finish a film perhaps, that you can't accomplish with $500. Another interpretation comes from Bette Kauffman (personal communication), who suggests that to offer fewer awards at greater amounts reproduces the ideology of "real talent" as a scarce resource, as a special endowment only a few individuals can claim (cf. Ch.5). Understanding the logic of awards distribution would requires further research on the contractual terms of outside donations.

11. A collaborative production doesn't necessarily undermine the individualized conception of director or "filmmaker" in Grad Film. In a sense, what is "individualized" is the role, not necessarily the person (though it is true that most films are directed by a single individual). While two people can share the role, more than one role doesn't typically share the aesthetic credit. That is, it remains for the director (or co-directors) to account for a film as an aesthetic and communicative object. In only one screening across virtually hundreds I attended in first, second and third-year did anyone other than the director take questions and criticisms from the class following projection. In that case the director was accompanied by "his" editor (an uncommon instance of divided labor and personnel in second-year direction and editing).

12. Actors who participate in student productions are typically recruited by classified advertisements ("casting calls") in local trade papers (Backstage and Show Biz). Remarkably, a first-year student in pre-production for a five-minute, black-and-white, 16mm film that will never be printed and probably never seen outside of class can receive as many as 100 responses for a secondary role, out of which he or she may audition 10. Actors participate in student films (often under trying circumstances and always for free) to get experience working in front of a camera and in some cases to add to their "reel," their film or videotape performance portfolio. Even those actors who are members of the Screen Actors Guild can legally waive fees for student productions unless a film makes money

beyond costs. If it does, SAG actors are supposed to be the first to receive payment for their work (a condition stipulated in the Guild's release form).

13. In this instance, the contribution came from a close friend of the director. Outsiders may also contribute, but the general point is that student directors (or co-directors) are responsible for the costs of the films they direct. Beyond the first-year exercise, films are not group projects whose expenses are shared by all or most participants.

14. Ideally, Student Academy Award winners are wined and dined in Los Angeles by potential agents willing to represent them. In some cases this happens, in fewer does anything professional come of it.

15. "Full-time" and "part-time" refer to an instructor's institutional status, not necessarily the amount of time they spend working with students.

16. Corporate support of university programs (including Grad Film and its parent arts school) is hardly novel. What is significant in terms of Grad Film's status in the film industry is that of late, these corporations (some of them communications conglomerates) sponsor specific contests and public occasions for showcasing and awarding student films.

CHAPTER THREE:
NARRATIVE AND STYLISTIC COMPETENCE IN CINEMA

Introduction

In this chapter I am interested in what students are expected to know about cinematic narrative, how they formally come to know it and moreover how they put what they know into practice. The phrase "cinematic narrative" refers to stories, but not only to story structure. What makes a narrative "cinematic" are indeed specific material elements—images, sounds, relations among them. Thus I address story and style in separate but related sections of the chapter, drawing principally from course content and faculty and student responses to student scripts and films, but also from the student production process and occasionally from student and faculty interviews. This is less a formal analysis of film texts than a discourse analysis of the narrative and stylistic premises that generate code arrangements, premises that are both spoken and implied in class and in routine commentaries on student work. As I mentioned earlier in my discussion of Rosenblum's work on photography, I treat style as a quality of films and as a set of structuring ideas which can potentially produce a range, if not an infinite one, of formal characteristics.

Late in the chapter, I compare my account of

cinematic narrative in student filmmaking with others'
accounts of narrative and stylistic changes in the U.S.
commercial cinema. I suggest that in the school, an
implicit tension between convention and innovation is
resolved in favor of the "New" Hollywood.

A methodological comment is called for to begin
this analysis. Both narrational and stylistic
dimensions of student films-in-progress are represented
in this chapter through prose, particularly narrative
synopses, plot summaries and scene descriptions. While
I make no claim to an uninvested or otherwise innocent
approach to constructing these accounts, I can describe
the general strategies I used. Extended plot summaries
are structured by a modified Proppian rule of describing
the sequence of actions undertaken by the heroes or
protagonists (Propp 1968; cf. Radway 1984:133; Wright
1975:25). This is not to say that other characters or
character groups in a film go unmentioned; to the extent
they interact with the hero (in proximity or at a
distance) they too are described. Scene descriptions
take into account the principal elements within the
frame, their relative placement in stasis and motion
and, where necessary, the nature of the transition
between shots (eg. cut, dissolve etc.)

The density and volume of a particular summary or
scene description depends on the analytic purpose it

serves in the chapter. Where readers need to understand the narrative development of an entire film, that is what I describe. If I refer more narrowly to a particular scene, I describe that scene alone. My test of adequacy for these summaries was to ask whether the description was sufficiently detailed for readers to understand the references to a film or script that appear in faculty and student responses (extensively quoted or paraphrased from classroom screening commentaries), and whether character actions or stylistic features beyond those I describe for any one film-in-progress challenge my analysis of the film or the response. When I could answer "yes" to the first question and "no" to the second, I considered the summary adequate.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1984) has argued that no story exists apart from a telling, however terse or elaborated, and all tellings and "re-tellings" have their conscious and tacit motives. This is equally true of my prose accounts, whose motives are the requirements of evidence. Though I applied the structuring rules and tests of adequacy consistently, they are still partly subject to less-than-codified judgements. To therefore acknowledge their constructedness, I have indented, single-spaced and titled them "narrative synopsis", "plot summary" or "scene description" as they occur in

this text.

Finally, my emphases on narrative and style are important since there are other competencies that Grad Film students acquire. An example is technical competence, usually referring to the use and control of filmmaking equipment.[1] But as I argued in Chapter 2, students aspire to become and faculty aspire to train writer/directors, working artists whose expressive domain is "story film." In Nina's summary, the point is "to come up with a story and shoot it evocatively"--a phrase that suggests a multitude of tasks and procedures but which highlights "visual" narrative as the motive and pleasure behind them. To a limited extent I deal elsewhere with other forms of competence, particularly in Ch.4, where I treat technical ability as a means through which individuals are integrated as crew members in film production. Here I am interested in what constitutes a story, how film stories ought to be told and how students do in fact tell them. In the coda to this chapter, I consider how the working artist role is embodied in the set of symbolic practices together referred to as cinematic narrative.

There are no rules but don't break them.
                              (Nina)

This oft-repeated (and fondly regarded) maxim seizes upon a basic tension in the teaching and learning

of filmmaking in Grad Film, a tension echoed in many discussions of art education in a variety of media and a variety of venues; what is (or ought to be) the relationship between creativity and technique? Between innovation and convention?

While theoreticians of aesthetics and communication engage this question without necessarily expecting to resolve it, Grad Film faculty encounter it as a practical imperative and sometimes as a source of pedagogic and political discomfort (to different degrees of self-consciousness). On the one hand, they impart to students a traditional stock of knowledge about narrative structure, say, or visual depiction. Moreover, they cultivate among students a specialized vernacular that will allow them to not only make but speak distinctions in aspects of structure or aspects of depiction. On the other hand, they are reluctant to have such stock offerings interpreted as rules or aesthetics strictures. They are reluctant in part because they genuinely do not want to limit students' aesthetic aspirations, their interest and desire to not only master but refine familiar forms and sometimes generate something novel, something different. But they are also reluctant to appear to be imposing such limitations, to be accused of evolving a signature style which it is incumbent upon students to reproduce.

Narrative competence is thus a balance between skill and context. For example, some of the aesthetic leniency that faculty espouse in response to my general questions about art pedagogy is lost when students challenge faculty instructions about how their films or scripts ought to be changed, say in the interest of "narrative clarity". And when a student's manner of treating aesthetic advice counts toward her or his status in the program, the stakes rise in the relationship between premise and practice.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the stakes are especially high for first-year students facing the cut. Not surprisingly, a distinction emerges between first and subsequent program years in the extent to which faculty find it necessary to be explicit about circumscribed notions of film narrative. Because first year is regarded as a narrative primer (as well as a technical qualifier) and because students in first-year are officially "on probation," particular narrative tenets and demands are purveyed by faculty and endured by students. For example, early on in the Fall semester a story is distinguished from a mere sequence, and students thereafter speak their anxiety about whether the series of events they have scripted indeed constitute stories (characterized by conflict, balanced exposition, etc.). "It's an emotional scenario,"

worried one student, "but I'm just not sure I've got a story here."

The student's sentiment and others like it become familiar expressions of anxiety, to me reminiscent of communications students in a graduate proseminar, wondering whether our topics could indeed be formulated as research problems. The analogy is instructive because it prompts the question of who sets forth the definitions (of "story" or "problem") and under what circumstances. In both settings, the terms and the practices they imply are contestable.

More advanced film students also worry about storyness, though less explicitly and with less concern about immediate institutional consequences. Theirs is a question of aesthetic aptness, and first-year students' one of aesthetic adherence. This is not to say that radically different standards of narrative cinema are appealed to in second and third year, but that similar standards are differently felt. As I argue, advanced students' conceptions of story film are similar but they and their teachers assume that these conceptions are known, that the first-year repertoire needn't be routinely spelled out. Conversely, it is the relatively explicit enunciation of narrative principles and aesthetic demands in first year, particularly in response to student films in progress, that often forces

a challenge to the faculty's aesthetic authority. What
faculty and students regard as instructionally necessary
is also experienced by many as aesthetically oppressive,
especially in light of the potential consequences. [2]

That said, in the body of this chapter I describe
narrative competence less problematically, in Gaye
Tuchman's terms as an "accessible craft skill." In her
study Making News (1978), Tuchman details the
significance of narrative skill in television
newsgathering as an aspect of professionalism among
network reporters, camera operators and editors. Her
interest is largely in seeing how representational forms
evolve to serve the organization of work in the highly
labor-divided, bureaucratic production of network news
(1978:105). For example, because so many different
people in discreet positions assemble a single news
program, there must be a system of convention in place
that enables newsworkers to integrate their efforts, a
consensus about how news stories are constructed both in
form and substance.

Tuchman is careful to point out that although
organizational structures and practices in many ways
determine or at least constrain forms of representation,
so too do representational systems impose themselves
upon organizational practice. Becker (1982) makes a
similar point for what he calls "art worlds," where

aesthetic conventions not only integrate "core" and "support" personnel in artistic production (artists on the one hand, printers, pigment chemists, agents etc. on the other), they also refer to, invoke, draw upon and subvert their own history. In other words, aesthetic conventions develop in light of organizational need and of symbolic traditions in whatever expressive mode.

Image practitioners, however, typically do not operate with a sociological perspective that teases out connections between "work" and "style" (though they may indeed recognize such connections in academic accounts). [3] Rather, symbolic systems themselves provide independent reasons for constructing news or fictional narratives in particular ways, though they may be underwritten by more general conceptions about the nature of narrative work. In the news case, what Tuchman calls "facticity" is the generative premise, from which follows news film's (and by implication newsworkers') "explicit refusal to give the appearance of manipulating time and space" (1978:109).

In Grad Film, the generative principles are twofold; first, that cinema is a manifestly communicative art and second, that form "serves" content, or that narrative mandates pre-empt stylistic ones. For students and faculty in the department, films are communicative events whose construction presupposes

an audience sufficiently versed in the conventions of narrative cinema to make sense, unselfconsciously, of a story--to implicitly cast depictions of people and events thematically, without conscious attention to the forms of presentation. In other words, it presupposes an audience able to understand what is happening and why without wanting or necessarily being able to articulate what in the structure of the film itself leads them to a particular set of interpretations. It follows, then, that self-consciously "artistic" reasons for doing things in a particular way, in a way that calls attention to the filmic surface, are suspect, especially where they are judged to have no organic connection to the story or, worse, where they obscure its development, even temporarily.

In the analysis that follows, I consider how these premises become norms in film school culture through a process of iteration and reiteration, particularly with reference to student work. Broadly speaking, students are inscribed and inscribe themselves within established modes of filmic narration, more precisely within a dominant mode and its variants.

David Bordwell has called this mode classical narration and has traced its historical roots to the period of Hollywood film production between 1917 and 1960 (1985:156). With co-author Janet Staiger

(Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 1985:372-77), he has
also characterized the "New" Hollywood cinema as a
configuration of styles that vary the classical mode in
specific, if minor, ways. Together, these two
narrational approaches account for most filmmaking by
Grad Film students across the three program years, and
it is in terms of Bordwell's formulations, and
Staiger's, that I discuss aspects of student films,
scripts, and commentaries.

     To say that students "inscribe themselves within"
narrational modes is to point out that as expressive
systems those modes precede their use in given
instances. In the film school case this is indeed
true. Students are not inventing forms of cinematic
storytelling any more than newsworkers are inventing
forms of news narrative. I do not mean to imply,
however, that there is no room for students to be
creative nor that the modes are static (though as
Bordwell and Staiger show, classical Hollywood narration
has been remarkably persistsent throughout cinema
history). Neither is true, though student innovations
typically occur at the level of content, (ie. what the
story is "about"), and occasionally at the level of
"intrinsic norms," by Bordwell's definition distinctive
moments or patterns within a film that do not
fundamentally challenge modal premises. This is the

level at which attributions are made, if at all, to a given student director's "style."

While the form and consistency of classical narration are partly a consequence of how the Hollywood studio system was organized (including a unionized division of labor), those are hardly the terms which frame its presentation and instruction at Grad Film. There, it is aesthetically free-standing, referenced to the seemingly autonomous history of style. Narrative standards which evolved from historically situated organizational practices do continue in many ways despite profound institutional shifts in the American movie industry since the 1960s. In this sense classical narration has perhaps acquired a measure of autonomy. Still, popular film is economically sustained by large audiences who are less rather than more specialized in interpreting cinematic codes. In the interest of keeping that audience, code changes are gradual, not radical. In other words, the relative stability of classical codes is largely attributable to their commercial context rather than aesthetic autonomy per se. It is this body of codes and their generative premises that make up the content of "narrative competence" at Grad Film, that constitute narrative as an "accessible craft skill."

While Grad Film faculty teach this brand of

narration, they care about distinguishing, at least in theory, between conventions and "rules," the former descriptive and the latter prescriptive. In Nina's words, what is important is to know the effect of particular arrangements, say between image and sound, in order to "make choices" as a filmmaker. That is not, as she was quick to point out to the class, the same as saying that "desired effect 'x' requires juxtaposition 'y'." Richard, moreover, regularly showed what he described as eminently narrative films that fall well outside the classical mode, many of them short sound films (without dialogue) from Europe, with all the stylistic distinctiveness such a heritage typically implies.

The "bottom line," as faculty and students often refer to it, is "whatever works," be it conventional, unconventional, familiar or novel. But to accept what "works" is to appeal to tacitly held standards and preferences, to intuitive judgements of aptness. Indeed, I believe this is what Nina meant when she said "there are no rules, but don't break them," later adding that editors don't start with rules, though they may indeed follow them in their "intuitive reactions to the footage." Thus "workability" is contestable, as another instructor illustrated when he insisted that it will not work to "cut from an image of something or someone to a

similar composition of the same thing," in other words
to "jump cut." The cinematic paradigm in question is
spatial and temporal continuity, whose subversion (by
this instructor's standards) could not but look bad.
Here the instructor responded to a question about
Godard's Breathless (produced in 1959 and the first
theatrical release to systematically employ jump
cutting) by calling it a "distracting, incompetent,
unpleasant film," though acknowledging that his
preferences were perhaps conservative (cf. Vachani
1984).

Narrative and cinematic competence in film school
are thus treated here as "social accomplishments"
(Tuchman, 1978:109) and their acquisition as a complex
process that draws upon a variety of instructional
activities. (Since I refer to them throughout the body
of this chapter, those activities are briefly described
in Appendix B, "What students and teachers do in class,"
focussing upon the principle areas of writing, directing
and editing.)

The Story Paradigm

New Cast Members

Jim   First-year instructor for directing
            actors

Ilona   One of two first-year writing

                    instructors

Arthur   Documentary workshop instructor and
                member of first-year evaluations
                committee

Barry   First-year editing instructor

Murray   Third-year writing instructor

Barbara   One of two first-year production
                workshop instructors

First year is for story films...like the movies you
go and see. (Richard)

The rule of the "story" is so powerful that the
image, which is said to be the major constituent of
film, vanishes behind the plot it has woven...so
that the cinema is only in theory the art of images.
                              Christian Metz (1964:45)

At Grad Film, the words "story" and "narrative" are
used interchangeably, though "story" is more common, a
key word in school culture. While all students enter the
program with more or less defined notions of what a story
is, first year is spent formalizing implicit conceptions,
distinguishing stories per se from other kinds of
sequences and other kinds of films. In part this is a
matter of saying what a story film is not. "Much as I
admire Maya Deren," said Richard, "that's for second
year, no opposition then. Here, we're making story
films."

To invoke Deren and her work as an example of what
first-year students don't do is to appeal to some
consensual notion about the difference between narrative

and "experimental" cinema. Richard went on to say that story films are about "human beings and human problems-- we're not making films about objects". [4] In fact, in the recent past a couple of students have made films "about objects," in one case a first-year final film featuring a penny, to which the writer/director ascribed some human characteristics and perspectives and which moved through time and space in pursuit of a goal. So the difference between people and things as the subject of film doesn't necessarily distinguish between narrative and non-narrative, though the treatment of an object as an object, that is as material with certain formal and textural qualities that can be rendered visually, and which, say, can move rhythmically to music, would not constitute a story. And though an "object" story film may be charming and engaging (as students and faculty described the "penny movie"), it is the exception, not the rule. In virtually all cases across the three program years (the invitation to follow Maya Deren notwithstanding), Grad films are about people in dramatic situations, moving one student to impatiently refer to melodrama and psychodrama as "school genres."

Despite this student's discontent, I think Richard and other faculty would agree, broadly, with the characterization. In an early-January faculty meeting just after first-year first films were reviewed by the

evaluations committee, Nina, Arthur and an external committee member lamented that while most students had adequately mastered technical and craft aspects of the assignment, their stories were "distant," reliant on a combination of kitch, camp, satire and movie fantastica (including extra-terrestrial characters and the like). Overall, the first-year class had failed to take on "real human feelings," to impart to their characters the emotional experiences they knew as individuals.

In a sympathetic appeal at the beginning of second semester, Jim (first-year directing instructor) raised the issue of human feeling, contrasting a technically accomplished comedy about vampires with a technically less-adept drama about a young girl contending with her alcoholic father. The second film he described as "real" and the first as "distant." "Don't worry about gimmicks, devices" he added. "Make it real. I'm not condemning any genre, magic's fine, but you have to bust your ass to make it believable." In the course of his appeal he described an earlier first film, about an eight-year-old boy whose friends all have bicycles.

> He asks his mother 'can I get a bike?' and she says no, they can't afford it. So he searches vacant lots, junk yards, collected parts and puts together a bike. At the film's end, he's triumphant, and we can all relate. It's a very simple idea that worked because we understood the character's objective, the human being wants this, needs this.

> With the concept of a character's objective, we move

toward the structural core of the story paradigm. "A story is not," to quote Richard, "a slice of life...it needs a premise, the character(s) must pursue an objective, the payoff must address that premise." For example (R is Richard, J is Jim, and "f" and "m" are women and men students):

#1

R: What is the premise of Rocky?

m: Rocky wants to go the distance with the Champ, but he's not in shape.

R: Okay, the enemy is himself, not the mafia or gangster in the traditional boxing picture.

#2

J: So what's the definition of theme?

m: The premise?

J: Okay.

m: What the author is trying to say?

J: Okay...Something leads to something else. A certain state of affairs exists at the beginning of the story. At the end, that state of affairs has changed. Through a climactic situation, a new state of affairs evolves. What about On the Waterfront?

m: Terry Malloy becomes a good person.

J: What does Terry try to do?

m: Develop a sense of self?

J: Right...and what does self-awareness lead to?

m: He testifies.

f: He becomes a leader.

f: He breaks a mob ring.

J: At the beginning of the film he's controlled by
       a mob ring. Self-awareness leads to
       independence, autonomy--the same thematic
       consideration in Rocky. (...) Something
       classical, Othello. What's Othello's problem?

m: Jealousy leads to death?

J: Of what?

m: Of the thing he loves.

J: Exactly! (...) [And the important question
       is] does what happens thematically mean
       something to you?

In both examples, a story is not an unself-conscious account of events lived or imagined, but a structured depiction organized around a particular idea, theme or premise. When faculty elicit summaries of familiar stories in these terms, they engage students in a sort of collective ascription process; a film (or play) acquires a thematic "essence" in part as an outcome of classroom discourse. But the instructional point is to encourage students to bring the same thematic coherence to their own work, to ask themselves "what is the premise?" as they develop scripts and films.

Richard's decree that a story "is not a slice of life" on the one hand urges students to treat stories as constructs, manipulable utterances subject not to the vicissitudes of lived experience but to the imperatives of authorial intention. On the other, it embodies a definition of narrative in light of which those

imperatives or choices are to be assembled. At Grad Film (and elsewhere) stories properly address "real human issues" or "people in dramatic situations" through, as he put it, a lead character's "pursuit of an objective." Drama arises when that pursuit is somehow confounded, whether by another character or group, by force of nature, by some shortcoming of the lead character or by a conspiracy of causes. This antagonism between objective and obstacle is the "conflict," the dramatic core of narrative. Without conflict there is, quite simply, no story.

In the first example above, Rocky (the protagonist boxer in the film of the same name [1976]) wants to come from behind in the world of elite boxing and take on the current heavyweight champion. Briefly, that is his objective. What he must overcome is his own lack of self-confidence, his physical and mental unreadiness, "not," to quote Richard, "the mafia [antogonists] of the traditional boxing picture." Rocky's battle with himself in preparation for the big fight generates the story's conflict.

In the second example Terry Malloy, longshoreman and protagonist in On the Waterfront, blows the whistle on the corrupt union boss, whose violent tactics he deplores, despite the mortal risk posed by becoming an informer. His objective is to end the corruption and

ultimately to stake his independence (having once
participated in the crimes himself) in defense of what he
believes is right. The conflict arises between Malloy
and the mob and in Malloy's personal struggle to build
his courage for the fight.

Importantly, as the classroom dialogue implies, the
conflict and its treatment evolve through narrative
time. Malloy becomes a good person; self-awareness leads
to Malloy's testifying and ultimately to his autonomy.
The conflict "forces the main character to respond," in
Ilona's words, which in turn forces a change in the order
of things. As Jim said (quoted above), "a certain state
of affairs exists at the beginning of the story. At the
end, that state of affairs has changed." In sum, we have
a rudimentary definition of story where a protagonist
wants or desires something (his or her objective),
encounters obstacles in pursuit of that desire (which
obstacles engender conflict) and, finally, either
overcomes the obstacles or abandons the pursuit. In the
course of events, whether the protagonist succeeds or
fails, he and his circumstances, or she and hers, change.

Structurally, such a narrative development is
assigned the familiar "beginning, middle and end," a
tripartition of Aristotelian heritage tirelessly set
forth in all classes and all three years. Roughly,
"beginning" is analogous to the early exposition of the

premise or theme, also called "history," "prologue" or "setting up" the story. Here principal characters are introduced and we learn what in their biographies and current circumstances motivates a particular desire or objective, be it to "get the girl" or, for that matter, the lost ark.

The narrative "middle" embodies most of the dramatic substance, including the conflict and its temporal subdivisions. In a bell-curve representation of narrative structure, Jim assigned to the middle the "point of attack" (where the conflict begins), the mounting crisis, and the climax, stressing that such structural labels needn't pinpoint single moments or frames but may refer to a series of moments or events or to particular realizations on the part of lead characters. The narrative "climax" is the crisis at its height, the "explosive moment of crisis," for example the gunfight at the OK corral in High Noon (1952).

At the "end," finally, the drama takes a precipitous drop. The conflict is resolved, not necessarily happily, though in some cases the seeds of a new conflict may be laid (say, where a sequel is anticipated, eg. The Godfather [1974]).

In a lecture on narrative structure and script
mechanisms, Jim proposed the following story synopsis:

> We're in the African desert, where a fever outbreak
> threatens the world. I'm a biologist working on a
> cure and I've been at it for eight years.
>
> My wife is angry at what she sees as a dangerous and
> futile pursuit and has threatened to leave if I
> don't give it up. I can stay and lose my wife or go
> and abandon the vaccine.
>
> In one scene, my wife enters and expresses the
> ultimatum. She's given me 48 hours. Which will it
> be? I inject myself with the virus and with the
> antidote. Will I live or die?
>
> Will the cure work or fail? Having taken such a
> risk, my wife realizes I have to stay. Together we
> discover the drug works.

Respectively, the four sections can be described as
exposition, point of attack, crisis, resolution. In the
first section, we are given the setting (Africa), the
circumstance (fever), the protagonist (biologist), and
his relevant biography (at work for 8 years on the
vaccine). In the second section the conflict begins,
between the protagonist's desire to find a cure and to
stay married in the process, and his wife's desire to end
the risk and hardship. In the third, this conflict comes
to a head and the wife forces her husband's decision and
action. In the final section, the conflict is happily
resolved, the protagonist's objective achieved.

This structural description conforms to what
Bordwell calls the "canonical story format" ("setting
plus characters-goal-attempts-outcome-resolution"), an

especially Western cultural form likely to include
"expository material at the outset, a state of affairs
disturbed by a complication, and some character ready to
function as a goal-oriented protagonist" (1985:35). [5]
What the description does not address however is how
these structural relationships are set in motion, and
here we shift from narrative structure to narration, from
story form to storytelling.

Cinematic Storytelling and the Classical Mode: Achieving Narrative Clarity

At Grad Film, narrative clarity is a desirable if
relative aesthetic condition that is satisfied when a
film answers, at the right moments, viewers' tacitly-
posed questions about what is happening in the story and
why. As Bordwell might put it, it is a condition
cumulatively met as an audience's serial hypotheses are
confirmed or at least addressed throughout a viewing.
It is also a condition Bordwell assigns most vigorously
to the "classical" narrational mode, with its emphasis
on causality as a unifying principle (1985:157). Such
confirmations are indeed a source of appreciative
pleasure for the viewers of classical (or "mainstream")
films, a point made by a first-year writing instructor:

> In normal, commercial movies, we follow the
> conflict, asking ourselves how does the protagonist
> overcome it? There is a linearity, a completeness
> or simplicity that has tremendous aesthetic power.
> It is a pleasure somehow to see this design and

experience the security of familiarity, to [draw
upon] our daily lives. [6]

The quote raises several issues about clarity as an
aspect of film narration. Again, we return to the
protagonist and her or his confounded objective as the
soul of a story, the source of conflict. But conflict
has become more than a static structural feature; it
drives the story through narrative time, setting up
subsidiary contentions for the beset character. It also
guides the viewer, prompting questions as story events
progress and thus prompting outcome guesses before each
implicit query is indeed resolved. Indeed the audience
is "involved", if explicitly not called upon to recognize
or articulate the formal elements of the film which draw
them in. This "clarity," along with "familiarity" in
Ilona's words, are critical elements of what Bourdieu
calls the "popular aesthetic":

> In the theatre as in the cinema, the popular
> audience delights in plots that proceed logically
> and chronologically towards a happy end, and
> "identifies" better with simply drawn situations and
> characters than with ambiguous and symbolic figures
> and actions or the enigmatic problems of the
> threatre of cruelty, not to mention the suspended
> animation of Beckettian heroes or the bland
> absurdities of Pinteresque dialogue...The desire to
> enter into the game, identifying with the
> characters' joys and sufferings, worrying about
> their fate, espousing their hopes and ideals, living
> their life, is based on a form of investment, a sort
> of deliberate "naivety", ingenuousness, good-natured
> credulity ("We're here to enjoy ourselves")
> ...(1984:32,33).

In classical (or "normal") narration, the sense of a story propelled by conflict is enhanced by what Ilona (above) calls "linearity." In fact, whether a narrative film need be strictly linear, the depiction of events and their causes uniformly chronological, was argued in class on a few occasions. Even where events in so-called "discursive" or "running" time are ordered differently than the chronology implied by the narrative (an example would be where we see a character as an adult before we see her as a child), their causal logic may remain intact. Depending on the style of a film, many (perhaps most) audiences can see a woman convict, then images of her troubled adolescence, then her crime, and not be too hard-pressed to figure that a difficult life left her no choice but to steal, which in turn led to her arrest and incarceration. In this case the depicted sequence of events is C-A-B and the biographical, "historical" or "narrative" one A-B-C (cf. Scholes 1976).

However, the bulk of films made by Grad Film students in first through third year do not invert chronology and causality in running time (ie. the duration of the film) but adhere to cause-and-effect as the means for temporally ordering and motivating sequences in a film. In Bordwell's terms (1985:158), though each segment may be sealed by a unity of time, space and action, it is causally open. Previously

dangling causal elements are resolved and new ones are
opened up, creating a series of narrative closings and
initiations which together constitute the familiar
"linearity" of classical narration. At Grad Film
moreover, the specific construction of a linear sequence
in turn depends on the character's objective and how he
or she pursues it. In other words, the "telling," with
its multitude of actions and events, is structured in
light of the "tale," in school parlance the objective in
conflict. [7]

An example comes from a first-year film titled <u>Her</u>
<u>Hair</u>

> **Synopsis:** The lead character is a bald man who
> becomes obsessed with a beautiful woman he sees on
> the street, whose hair is very long and very heavy.
> He attempts to court her, finally gets her to agree
> to dinner, and meets her at her apartment for a
> romantic evening. However he is devastated when,
> after dinner and a provocative interlude in front of
> the fireplace, she returns from the shower, head
> wrapped in a towel, to present him with a hat box
> containing her hair, which she has just cut off.
> She is callous, he is destroyed.

The protagonist's objective here is to "get the
girl," to be sexually involved with her and with her
hair, her most alluring feature. This objective is set
in motion by a literal pursuit.

> **Scene description:** Early in the film the man is
> depicted noticing the woman on the street; the
> subsequent few scenes show him following her in a
> variety of settings (jogging in the park, walking
> outside her apartment etc.), trying to get her to
> accept his invitation for dinner. After she is
> shown to refuse his last outdoor attempt, the film

dissolves to the exterior of the woman's apartment
building, where the doorman presents her with a gift
box apparently left for her. We then see her enter
her apartment, open the box and pull out a small
blow dryer. A gift card reading "from Phil,"
followed by the man's phone number, is enclosed.
The woman places the dryer on a table laden with
other expensive hair products and accessories, each
accompanied by the man's card. She smiles, picks up
the card and the telephone and dials the number.
After his many gifts and invitations, it appears
that the male character's objective is about to be
met.

To this point in the film (approximately half the
running time, several successive days of narrative time),
each attempt the man makes to engage the woman and each
refusal on her part motivates his next attempt. The
sequence is structured by the establishment of his
obsession and his initial pursuit (together called the
"opening" sequence), her refusal, his second pursuit, her
second refusal, his persistence through gifts, and her
apparent acceptance, each link in effect "causing" the
subsequent one.

The man's obsession with hair in general and her
hair in particular is established first in the opening
sequence as he looks sadly through an optician's window
at a bald mannequin, gingerly touching his own head as
though reminded of his baldness. The woman walks by
behind him and he turns to notice her hair swishing
around the corner of the building. He follows, but she
has disappeared. We encounter his obsession a second
time in a fantasy scene that occurs _after_ his next

meeting with the woman (as she jogs through the park).
In the fantasy, we see him from the waist up, naked and
sweating, surrounded by darkness, veritably drowning in
long, dark hair that engulfs his torso and moves
rhythmically in and out of frame as he reaches and
revels.

After the rough cut screening of this film in class,
the following comments were made about the depicted
sequence (R is Richard, the workshop instructor, TA the
teaching assistant, S the student director and F1, F2 and
M female and male students):

> TA: What I thought you might do is take that section
> where he's looking at the mannequin which comes
> after the park scene, right, and put it before
> the park scene and have the park scene come even
> later, which I think would set up the story
> earlier in the film. I happen to know the
> script so I knew that that's what he wanted the
> hair for [ie. sex with the woman], but when I
> was looking at your footage I was thinking that
> someone who didn't know your script at all might
> think he just wanted her hair to, you know,
> other than for some kinky...he just wanted it
> for his own head or something 'cause he keeps
> petting his bald head.
>
> R: You're saying put the fantasy between the two...
>
> TA: Yeah, because the sooner you get to the fantasy
> the sooner the audience knows for sure what he
> wants.
>
> R: How does it go now? It goes opening [including
> mannequin], park, fantasy...
>
> S: Yeah.
>
> R: And what's after the fantasy?

S: She comes home...and he's been sending her all
    the stuff.

Fl: That would be great.

F2: And if you do opening, fantasy, park, it has
    time stretch too [ie. fitting with S's intention
    to place the story over several days].

In this exchange the TA recommends a re-ordering
that would clarify the causal sequence in light of the
objective "get the woman" as opposed to "get the hair,"
a recommendation the student indeed followed. This
clarification also serves the final outcome (the
haircut) and the male character's depicted breakdown
when his desire is obstructed once and for all. (Had he
simply wanted the hair he might have eagerly received
the hatbox as a lucky and tantalizing gift.) Again,
narrative clarity in this film and others is achieved in
part through a causal, linear sequence which follows
from a character's particular objective.

The contestability of narrative clarity: As the
TA's initial comments illustrate, such clarity, in this
case the fit between earlier and subsequent events,
ultimately serves the audience; they, afterall, are the
ones who speculate about what comes next, who form and
resolve hypotheses about the story. As an audience
member who "knew the script," the TA was able to come to
correct narrative conclusions during the first half of
the film, "correct" that is in terms of what he

understood to be the student writer/director's scripted intentions. Thus in the context of screenings and the discussions that follow, clarity is not only implicitly but explicitly an outcome of interpretation as well as narration, of the audience's activity as well as the filmmaker's and as well as the film. In effect, school audiences are there to articulate many of the same interpretive moves made though not named by theatrical audiences. Narrative clarity is therefore a matter of consensus (raising questions of what is clear to whom), and as consensus it is also (and always) potentially contestable.

In screening commentaries the contestability of narrative clarity is expressed in terms of balance, or economy. Story events and progressions must be clear but not overdetermined. Causes and motivations should be depicted or represented enough to be understood, but shouldn't be "unecessarily" duplicated, extended or otherwise embellished, squandering running time on elements that make no further contribution to the advancement of the plot and risking a stylistic "heavy-handedness" that may ruffle the apparent seamlessness of the story and the film. An example follows from a first-year third film called <u>King Romeo</u>.

Plot summary: <u>King Romeo</u> opens with a street scene of two punky teenagers (a girl and a boy) joined by a third (the girl's boyfriend) who carries a tape player on his shoulder. They turn on the tape player and begin dancing to loud, heavy music, the first two often serving as audience to the third's athletic movements. Intercut in this sequence are shots of a matronly though attractive woman, primly dressed and carrying a phonograph, leaving her apartment building and walking down the street toward the teenagers. When the woman reaches their corner, she collides with the athletic dancer and falls, dropping her phonograph and a handful of flyers advertising ballroom dancing lessons. Though the first two characters discretely chide the woman, the boy is clearly taken by her, and carefully helps her up. After the woman collects herself and leaves the street corner, he joins the others, who are reading one of the loose flyers. The scene ends when the boy says goodbye, picks up a flyer and his tape player, and departs.

The next sequence begins in a spacious dance hall, where the woman is conducting class with an awkward group of beginners. She demonstrates basic steps and assists each student as they take turns duplicating her movements. The class is disrupted when the street dancer who had earlier collided with the woman enters the hall, his tape player blaring. He quickly turns it off and walks around the back of the group. The teacher, though a little nervous and distracted, continues the class. Her discomfort increases however when the boy approaches her for help with a dance step. She hesitates, recognizing a certain attraction to him, then takes his hand to dance as his partner.

Here the film cuts to a "fantasy sequence." The woman and boy stand alone together ready to dance amid darkness and mist. They are formally dressed in evening gown and black tie and begin to move as a particularly romantic standard from the 1950s plays on the sound track. They continue to dance until the song ends, at which point they embrace and kiss.

The fantasy sequence ends but the kiss does not. The film cuts back to the dance class, where surprised students look on at the boy "dipping" the teacher in full ballroom dance style, and kissing her. She stands abruptly, clearly embarrassed, and announces that class is over. The other students leave but the boy does not. He stays, turns on his tape player and dances as he had on the street

earlier that day. His music and movements could
not be more unlike the dance teacher's. He stops
dancing and invites her to try it his way but
softly she declines and tells him he'd better go
now. From distant parts of the room they gaze at
each other for a moment, then the boy lowers his
head and leaves and the film ends.

After the rough cut screening, class discussion
began with the following comments. (The excerpt is long
but specific and worthy of inclusion. Again, R is the
workshop instructor, S ["Sarah"] the student director,
and M1 and M2 two men students.)

R: Can I just go on record, publicly, I like the
    picture, everything--I said one thing to Sarah,
    I say it again. The picture, as far as I'm
    concerned should start in the dance studio. The
    boy is another student, he comes in with his
    radio. I don't think she needs the set-up in
    the street, who he is is not important, he's
    just one more new student that comes in. I
    think the beginning is long, endless, it's a
    rock video, it has nothing to do with this film.

M1: I don't necessarily agree with Richard. I think
    it's long, but I think you need to show this
    tough guy in the street and her bumping...I
    liked it.

R: Excuse me, when he walks in [to the studio] with
    that radio in those jeans he's not a tough guy
    from the street?

M1: Yeah he is...but so what?

R   ...I'm just saying, it's not as though you don't
    get that information when he walks in the door.

M1: But I think the conflict...when they're dancing
    together...I think that you need, I think that
    some guy coming off the street, coming to dance
    class, giving her a few looks and her giving him
    back a few looks is not going to pay off when
    they dance together.

R: And I'm suggesting the minute he walks in the door, you know that.

M1: I think they need to have that conflict in order for the dance thing to work.

R: You're not the only one, Barry [first year editing instructor] also said that.

S: What?

R: You said Barry argued around the same point?

S: Yeah.

R: I feel it even more firmly looking at it now [ie. as opposed to earlier, on the editing table].

S: Well, it's really long.

R: It's not a question of length, right.

(...)

M2: Sarah, what are you putting in the front, you said you're missing the first scene?

S: Right. I really want to open this film...I feel like you understand her character, sort of slowly it evolves. But I would really like one shot in her house, where she lives.

R: What are you not getting of her character? Since the film is now 20 minutes and you have to cut it to 12 I'm curious about why you're now thinking of adding more footage. What don't you get? This is a middle-age, traditional...she looks like, from the dress, from the way...what don't you know about her? What would you like to tell me that I don't already know about her? I mean in film terms she's a spinster, she's matronly, I mean all the cliches, I get it the minute I see her. What do you want to tell me?

S: I really dislike the introduction of both the characters. I fell like it opens really abruptly...I just have no idea who she is...

R: Which opening? Are you talking about the street?

S: Yeah, it doesn't work.

R: Who is she? What would you like me to know
    about her?

S: Nothing you don't find out, but...

R: No, not that I don't find out. From the first
    frame I know everything I want or need to know
    about this boy and this woman.

In his opening comment, Richard is critical about
what he considers a labored introduction to subsequent
events in the narrative. For him, the boy's character
type itself motivates his forthrightness (that is, his
sexual aggressiveness) once in studio. That type,
moreover, is established by such immediately perceptible
aspects of characterization as age (boy), dress (jeans,
denim jacket, high tops) and manner (radio playing, walk,
glance). Getting the character to the studio he sees as
unproblematic. Were the boy to arrive at the beginning
of the film no antecedent cause need be depicted; the
dance class is open to the public and he is simply
another student. As well, the woman's attraction to the
boy, her reticence, her engagement and finally her
retreat are all accounted for by the character type
"spinster," which, according to Richard, is well-
established by dress, hairstyle and occupation as soon as
we see the teacher in her studio. As a spinster she
longs for romance but also as a spinster she cannot
succumb to the attentions of a cocksure boy off the
street.

For Richard, the introductory scene tells us nothing we don't already know. The scene is redundant and thus the film's causal logic is overdetermined. As well, Richard finds the scene stylistically at odds with the rest of the film, a "rock video." Were it narratively functional, the stylistic variation might be tolerable. As it stands, style itself (according to some the street dancing is "nice to look at") is not reason enough to include in the film a scene that serves no narrative purpose.

For other speakers in the exchange however, neither the characterizations nor the motives are properly established without the introductory street scene. While the differences between the boy and the dance teacher may be apparent, what is not clear is why a street kid would attend ballroom dance classes in the first place. The first scene thus sets up the boy's attraction and curiosity and sets him apart from his own milieu. He is at once like the other teenagers but different from them in the kindness and concern he expresses toward the woman after her fall.

One student suggests that without that first scene, the later dance fantasy wouldn't "pay off," an expression frequently used in the school (and in professional script parlance) to imply a sense of meaningful connection between earlier and subsequent events in the narrative,

to make use of an audience's expectations. To paraphrase
Chekhov, don't put a gun in the first act if it isn't
going to go off by the third. The payoff comes when the
gun is fired. [8] Likewise, according to "M1," the
collision between boy and teacher pays off in the dance
fantasy sequence. Early incidents which belie their
attraction set up an inevitability that is satisfied by
their dance.

For those speakers who disagree with Richard's
judgement of the street scene's narrative redundancy, the
occurrence of these early incidents engenders a
verisimilitude in the plot progression. Even where they
may question the likelihood of the boy's interest in
ballroom dancing by external, realistic standards, it
becomes sufficiently motivated and thus sufficiently
plausible by internal, narrative ones. What for Richard
was overdetermined is for these speakers a matter of
narratively fixing plausibility. If we accept the
attraction between the teacher and the boy we can in turn
accept that the boy would venture to the dance class.

Ambiguity as narrative element: Though Richard and
the student commentors disagree about the point at which
narrative clarity (again, a relative condition) is
achieved in this film, both assume it is desirable. But
while clarity as a narrational issue is virtually never
ignored in screening discussions, on rare occasions it is

questioned as the basis for cinematic storytelling. An

example comes from another first-year third film called

The Understudy.

> Plot summary: Michael, an actor and the film's
> protagonist, arrives from out of town at his
> friend's apartment building in New York City. His
> friend isn't home, but Michael is able to reach him
> by telephone and is instructed to press buzzers in
> the apartment entranceway until someone in the
> building lets him in. From there he can go to the
> fourth floor, step out onto the fire escape, and
> enter his friend's apartment through an open window.
>
> Climbing the stairs, Michael encounters a surly
> man fuming in the hallway, evidently locked out by
> his wife in the midst of a fight. Michael continues
> up the stairs but, a little unnerved, miscounts the
> floors and ends up stepping through a fifth-floor
> window, as it turns out into the wife's apartment.
> He explains his error to her then, despite her
> insistence that he stay and protect her from her
> violent husband, manages to get to the fire escape,
> climb down a flight and let himself into the
> apartment below.
>
> Shortly thereafter, however, the woman follows,
> knocking on the fourth floor window which, out of
> concern, Michael finally opens. What ensues is a
> situation Michael is afraid of and wants nothing to
> do with. The husband also comes through the open
> window and though Michael tries to explain the
> circumstances, the wife (distraught and hysterical
> throughout the sequence) tells the husband that she
> and Michael are lovers and have been for some time.
> After a brief rage, the husband says he wants to
> talk to his wife and asks Michael to leave them
> alone for a couple of minutes. Michael goes to the
> bedroom to review the script for his audition the
> following morning.
>
> From Michael's perspective in the bedroom, we
> hear the couple's discussion. As their voices rise,
> Michael leaves the bedroom to see what is going on
> and notices the couple go out the window onto the
> fire escape. He runs after them. We hear the
> sounds of a struggle (the camera remaining in the
> apartment) and then see Michael's startled face in
> close-up. The telephone rings and the woman goes
> back through the window to answer it. It is
> Michael's friend, who addresses the woman by name
> ("Eleanor") and asks what has happened, her tone of

voice suggesting something is awry. She tells him her husband is dead. Nervously, the friend asks her how, who did it? She tells him Michael did, adding that now they (Eleanor and Michael's friend) can finally be together.

In the rough cut commentary on this film, the principal question that arose was who killed the husband on the fire escape? During the death sequence the camera remains in the apartment and the struggle is never visually depicted, though it is implied through sound effects "heard" from the open window. Did Michael push the husband inadvertently? Did Eleanor deliberately? Some viewers in the class, Richard among them, inferred that Eleanor had pushed her husband and pinned the murder on Michael. To others, the death remained unclear.

The student director mentioned to the class after the screening that he planned to add a scream to the sound track, diminishing in intensity to denote the husband's fall to the ground. In his suggestions for the fine cut, Richard emphasized that the placement of the scream would be key; it should occur as Michael runs to the window to let the audience know the murder happens before he gets there. Some class members, however, felt that would be unecessarily "literal," that the scream could occur with all three characters on the fire escape and that it was precisely the ambiguity of the current ending that made the film interesting. Perhaps Michael had pushed the husband accidentally, or perhaps in a

moment of frenzy and aggravation he had pushed him deliberately, to his later horror and disbelief. Maybe Eleanor had done it. Maybe she and the friend (Michael's friend too, conveniently unable to be there for his arrival) had planned from the beginning to kill the husband and scapegoat Michael (the "understudy"). As one student, tongue-in-cheek, put it, "I mean, you could have her say on the track 'I'm going to push him now Michael, excuse me' and it would be clear but really."

The comment and the amusement it engendered were in part responses to months of faculty insistence upon clarity in student films, in this instance upon resolved and attributable plot occurrences. By late Spring narrative clarity had become the site of aesthetic agitation in 1B, faculty often reminding students (and students reminding each other) that their films would be viewed by an external committee excluded from script development, accounts of production, and the sociable reviews of films in progress. Whatever students wanted the committee to understand "had better be in their films" (repeating a familiar metaphor of containment for interpretive consensus among audiences and between director and audience). As Jim said to one student about an "open" (ie. unresolved) end to a murder story (not the one described above), "I don't want to think, I want to know."

Given this expression of the paradigm, students using ambiguity as a story element would be at risk of having their films judged unsuccessful unless they could, in effect, use the ambiguity "clearly." For example, in The Understudy, how could the scene be structured to circumvent the simple conclusion that "Eleanor did it?" How could viewers be moved to consider the possibility of pre-meditation, perhaps between Eleanor <u>and</u> the friend? In other words, how could the story's ambiguity be controlled and thus pegged as intentional, rather than as a failed attempt at classical narrative exposition?

Gross (1973:127) points out that it is incumbent on artists who deviate from aesthetic norms to demonstrate they have done so purposively, lest their departures be perceived as incompetence by prevailing standards. For first year Grad Film students facing the cut, an assessment of incompetence is enough of a threat that some students who set out to experiment with narrative ambiguity change their plans. The writer/director of <u>The Understudy</u>, however, did not. He decided not to indemnify Michael with the placement of the scream, and left the ending ambiguous. What follows are comments taken from his (otherwise very favorable) committee evaluations:

> About the writing (from Reviewer #1): The script is
> quite well worked-out in plot, but the characters
> and [their] intentions are not really clear.

Also about the writing (from Reviewer #2): Strange
tale very well done - well worked out though with
some questions...The end in general, it's in fact
not clear.

About the directing (from Reviewer #3): Confusing
moment to moment. Are husband and wife conspiring
together or is she setting him up?

General evaluation (from Reviewer #3): Confusion
clouding the black melodrama.

For this student, consistently regarded by faculty

and peers as an accomplished writer, cinematographer,

director and editor, in other words whose aesthetic

mobility was stable and good (cf. Ch.5), a judgement of

failed ambiguity at the end of his final film did not

pose a threat to his standing in the program. Other

students, those less confident about their position, are

less inclined to "break the rules" (even when faculty

insist there aren't any). While faculty may admire,

indeed prefer, unconventional films as theatre-goers (eg.

from the European "art cinema" repertoire, as distinct

from Hollywood), as teachers they treat these films as

exceptions. Classical narrational approaches become the

norm or ground against which some students may

distinguish themselves through occasional departures but

of which all students must demonstrate their mastery at

levels appropriate to their program year. In art school

circles the familiar expression is "learn the rules

before you break them." Thus first-year students

particularly are inscribed and inscribe themselves within

the classical narrational mode and its emphasis on narrative clarity. They and their films are subject to this emphasis both as it is declared (eg. Richard's recommendation above that the scream denote the villain) and as it is implied by the general division of norms and innovations that distinguishes between classical and other approaches.

This division may be felt with particular vigor in the department, but it did not originate there. It echoes characterizations in the practical, popular and critical worlds of commercial film beyond the school, characterizations with which, to greater or lesser degrees, students enter the program. What changes however are the stakes. The familiar division between dominant and subordinate forms of narrative (sometimes expressed in the juxtaposition of "movies" and "films" or "Hollywood" and "Europe") is now part of the cultural material with which students wrought their vested (if potential) identities as filmmakers. Moreover, as faculty and students engage this distinction they reproduce it, regardless of where their engagement might fall in the spectrum of adherence and resistance or self-consciousness and transparency. In Grad Film, narrative clarity is never disenfranchised.

Beyond first year however, clarity can and often does assume a different cast. Second-year and thesis

films are typically longer and, at least in theory, allow

for a more gradual development of characters and events.

While the screening commentaries on these films remain

dense with suggestions for clarifying particular moments

(eg. using voice-over or close-ups to indicate

characters' reactions, or longer takes to make sure we

know what someone is doing etc.), there is also an

occasional preference for delaying clarity, for holding

off on the precise depiction, resolution or significance

of events within and between scenes. For example, a

third-year student commenting on his second year film

resisted a fellow student's suggestion that a hit song by

a gay-identified band on his soundtrack was simply

misleading. In a story about a teenage boy uncertain of

his sexual identity, the song occurs over a transitional

sequence where the boy anxiously leaves his home and runs

through the streets of his New Jersey town. During the

scene, the lyrics "run away, run away" are repeated on

the track, leading some viewers to infer that the

character is indeed running away but to no specified

place, and others (presumably those familiar with the

song and the band) to infer he is going to a gay bar. In

fact the boy arrives at a straight strip club to which

his estranged father had invited him earlier that day,

temporarily resolving his anxiety (and the audience's

query) in a familiar and, according to the director,

"patently heterosexual" venue. As he commented,

> ...I kind of like it when you're not very sure. One
> of my favorite shots is when he gets to the club and
> you see his father for the first time, and he's
> putting the money in the woman's mouth and
> everything. I like that because I think that <u>then</u>
> you know for sure where he is and what he's doing
> there.

Here the student plays off a principle of delayed
gratification, the sense of toying with though ultimately
fulfilling the audience's expectations based on familiar
patterns of narrative exposition (cf. Meyer 1956:56-60).
The question "where is the boy going" isn't answered
until he gets there, though it is expressly answered in
the first shot of the club scene, as the student director
describes. With the boy's arrival at the strip club, we
not only know where he is (a straight bar) and thus where
he isn't (a gay one), we know for the time being how he
has decided to handle his homosexual longings,
represented in his attraction to his mother's boyfriend.
In other words, we know both his action and its thematic
significance. Though clarity on each level may have been
briefly postponed, it is soon restored.

"Everything is confusing, which is good, but don't make
<u>everything</u> confusing." (Student comment on <u>A Century of
Progress</u>)

Ambiguity, competence and the "New" Hollywood
cinema: In another second-year example, the post-
ponement is considerably more entrenched, indeed

ambiguity of a frightening sort becomes the subject of

the film. Titled <u>A Century of Progress,</u> this film

provides a useful example because of the detailed

consideration it inspired about how to control the

ambiguity, a consideration missing in the commentary on

<u>The Understudy</u>.

> **Narrative synopsis:** <u>A Century of Progress</u> is set in
> a slightly indistinguishable period in the past (or
> possibly the future), though aspects of set design
> and musical style suggest America in the 1940s. The
> lead character is a man named Laurel, a marginal
> type whose apartment becomes the site of interest
> and apprehension for a variety of people who share
> no apparent motive or circumstance. In effect they
> each converge on the apartment at different though
> overlapping moments and it is not until late in the
> film that their connection becomes purposive. Among
> the people to arrive at the apartment are an
> ethereal young woman named Rachel whom Laurel
> assumes is answering a sublet advertisement but who
> declares herself to have dreamed about Laurel's
> bedroom and come in search of it, and who rambles
> something incomprehensible about how nice it would
> be if only the water that makes up 86% of the human
> body were pure; two plumbers, responding to an
> unspecified water emergency but not the minor
> plumbing problems Laurel has reported; and two
> burly, unfriendly government agents looking for
> something or someone at the apartment though it is
> never clear to us, to them or to Laurel what that
> something might be. At the end of the film however,
> Laurel (and with him the audience) discovers the
> miracle other characters had sought but not found;
> the water running through his apartment pipes has
> the power to restore life.
>
> **Plot summary:** The film opens with a shadowy
> warehouse scene of a man, suspended upside down on a
> rope over some ceiling pipes, being lowered head-
> first by another man into a drum of water. A third
> character, the second's partner in torture, is
> seated nearby, rifling through a briefcase and
> occasionally casting a sinister glance toward the
> drum and the victim. At the end of the scene, the
> victim finally starts to mouth something the other

two rush to write down.

From there we cut to the interior of Laurel's apartment, where Laurel, seated on his bed, tunes his radio then rises to go to the kitchen, taking with him the empty water bottle from his bird's cage.

In the kitchen Laurel is unable to draw water from the faucet; when he opens the tap the sink begins to shake and the ceiling lights sway. He closes the tap, the rumble ends and the telephone rings. It is the landlord, to whom Laurel insists he will pay his rent shortly, but couldn't he do something about the plumbing? Meanwhile we hear a knock at the door, which Laurel answers with phone in hand. Rachel is the first to arrive and the two begin their conversation at cross purposes. While Rachel is in the bedroom, Laurel returns to the hall to investigate a loud banging at the door, which he opens to discover the two plumbers mounting an "Emergency" sign. They enter and look around, insisting there's trouble in the place but not knowing for sure what it is or where to look. Figuring they've been sent by his landlord, Laurel tries to assure them that despite the leaky radiators it's nothing serious, but the plumbers will have nothing of it. They move through the apartment, the older of the two speaking with a sense of foreboding about the unnamed crisis.

The plumbers leave and, shortly afterward, so does Laurel. Rachel remains in the apartment and we see her calmly step from behind the bedroom door to gaze out a window. After a moment she reclines on the floor, though her tranquility ends when two men (whom we recognize as the "bad guys" from the opening scene) storm through the apartment door and into the bedroom.

The film cuts to an interior factory location, where Laurel is working at a large steel machine. The two men (the "agents") arrive and consult with Laurel's foreman, who proceeds to berate and threaten Laurel, evidently informed by the agents that he is involved in some enemy conspiracy. The agents take Laurel away, and we cut to a rising freight elevator with Laurel and the agents as its passengers. Laurel anxiously asks what is going on but is told by one of the men that they aren't the ones who do the talking. The elevator stops and Laurel is pulled into the warehouse depicted in the opening scene. He is blindfolded and strapped into a chair, hands behind his back, and is soon joined by the original victim, frightened and exhausted

after the torture he's endured. Laurel feigns an
air of authority and demands the victim tell him
what he knows. Finally, the man explains that it's
not the tenant they want (what's his name? Laurel?),
it's the apartment. He doesn't know why but the
apartment is critical.

Perceptibly rattled by new information not
spelled out on screen, the agents return to release
Laurel, telling him should find a public shelter
since his apartment is "being controlled." Dazed,
Laurel goes home despite the injunction. He
discovers his apartment gassed and bundles of
dynamite mounted on the walls. The only things
remaining are his bird, dead in its cage, and a
small dish he had placed under a radiator (when
Rachel arrived) to catch the drips. Laurel gazes
sadly at the bird, then puts down the cage and picks
up the dish. Stepping away, he trips and spills
some of the water, which lands on the bird.
Miraculously, the bird begins to flutter its wings.
Laurel's stare and surprise intensify as he realizes
the water's power and understands, at last, why he
and his apartment have been under seige. In the
final scene (scripted though not shot until after
the rough cut was presented in class) the apartment
explodes, killing Laurel though setting free the
resurrected bird, which flies away through a hole
blown open in the brick wall.

In the rough-cut commentary on A Century of Progress

from the third-year editing class, the principal concern

among some viewers was that they didn't understand, from

moment to moment and scene to scene, what was going on.

Who are these people? What are the connections among

them? Why have they descended on the apartment?

One student suggested that while it's okay to leave

things dangling for a bit, now and again a few details

could be resolved. When Laurel talks to the victim in

the warehouse, for example, we could find out more about

why the government intelligence agents are so desperate

to get to the apartment. As it stands, we discover
there's been a mistake--it's the apartment they need, not
the tenant--but still it remains unclear <u>what</u> about the
apartment is so threatening and so alluring. According
to this student, with so little information the scene
"does nothing for the story" and therefore "isn't worth
anything." His comment, however, met with protest from
other class members, one of whom responded that "there's
just not that much to say because it all remains a
mystery. All you have to know is that it has something
to do with water."

Nina identified the problem in terms of a narrative
and stylistic discontinuity between the opening torture
scene in the warehouse and the subsequent several scenes
in Laurel's apartment. Were the director to drop the
warehouse scene, he would have (as she put it)

> a Kafkaesque story that starts funny and slowly
> builds. You get at us, not knowing, but it begins
> to build, detail for detail, even if we don't really
> understand until the end.

According to her, the torture scene at the head of the
film--dark, serious, and ominous--evokes both a mood and
a set of questions that are baffled by the "slapstick"
quality of the following scenes in the apartment, as each
caricatured entry amplifies the narrative non-sequitur.
Moreover it is some four scenes <u>after</u> the current opening
before we reencounter the two agents at Laurel's place

and thus before any common element is provided to connect the torture sequence with the rest of the film to that point. Instead of building on the unknown, in effect we "start over" once in Laurel's apartment, confused by what has gone before.

In response to Nina, the director asked if cutting the opening scene by half its running time might help. Instead of prompting unanswerable questions with roughly two-and-a-half minutes of "pure evil," with a brief scene perhaps he could suggest impending danger and impart this ominous sensibility to subsequent events in the apartment. In the director's words, we would watch those events knowing "there are bad guys on the loose with some kind of information."

The discussion continued, a couple of students recommending smaller adjustments to connect the first two scenes, for example inserting a close-up where one of the agents in the warehouse circles an address in a notebook after the victim "talks," then cutting to an exterior close-up of that address before the first scene in Laurel's apartment. Both additional shots (the circling, the exterior) could be easily "cheated" or "picked up" without the original sets and actors (long since disbanded) and together they would suggest if not depict a spatial continuity between the two scenes.

The commentary ended with the director resolved to

shorten the opening scene (despite Nina's skepticism about leaving it in at all) and use sound effects and voice/over, only partly in place in the rough cut, to distinguish, connect, and reinforce particular locations and occurrences (for example stylized radio announcements about economic reconstruction and the "miracles of the future right outside your door" on the track as Laurel tunes his radio).

Whereas the narrative issue in The Understudy was how to complicate the simple conclusion that Eleanor had killed her husband and evoke additional questions and possibilities in viewers' imaginations, the issue in A Century of Progress is how not to prompt questions based on causal linearity, and move the audience to at first accept an unexplained and inexplicable series of events and later anticipate a gradual revelation that never gets ahead of Laurel's incidental discoveries. In both instances, ambiguity is employed as a narrative mechanism and must be placed so as not to be construed by the audience as failed clarity.

In A Century of Progress, the struggle to understand why something occurs at the moment it does is to "miss the point," as the director would claim, and to eclipse the sensibility that this is simply and frighteningly a world out of control where the only person who ultimately comprehends the wonder before him is mindlessly

destroyed. But for even a part of the audience to "miss the point" always implicates the film and the filmmaker. From the perspective of narrative competence in film school, judgements are indeed made about whether particular incongruities between intentions and interpretations ought to be attributed to inflexible frames of reference on the audience's part or to incomplete or mishandled material on the filmmaker's. Sometimes the harshest critics are accused, openly or secretly, of a blinding lack of interpretive subtlety. But though "sophisticated" viewing is valued in the department, Grad Film remains a school of production, not criticism, and the burden of narrative proof (when questions arise and depending on who raises them) typically returns to the student director.

In A Century of Progress, the ambiguous relationship between the opening torture sequence and the rest of the film was finally resolved (months later, as the student finished the film) with a close-up of one of the agent's hands (or those of a stand-in) writing down "Laurel, 6F" on a piece of paper, inserted after the victim "talks" and implying that this is what he has said. Though it is several scenes before the agents arrive at the apartment, the connection is made immediately, since when Laurel opens his apartment door to admit Rachel (the first visitor) we clearly see "6F" marked on its exterior.

When I asked the student if and how he finally addressed Nina's criticism (in a conversation many months after his rough cut screening), he described the insert as "a cheap trick that worked," implying both a resignation to some of the demands of clarity as the audience had defined them, and a satisfaction in having met those demands so efficiently.

It is important however that while most of the editing class agreed that A Century of Progress needed adjustments, even substantial ones, only a few people questioned the legitimacy of ambiguity as an intentional and pivotal structural feature (recall "everything is confusing, and that's good..."). What is the relationship, then, between the "clear" or controlled use of ambiguity and more traditional definitions of narrative clarity based on known causes? Where does A Century of Progress fit in a curriculum organized, as I have argued, around the classical narrational mode?

An explanation comes, I think, from David Bordwell and Janet Staiger's description of the "New Hollywood cinema" (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 1985:372-77). Relative to the title of this movement (which they and others date from the late '60s), Bordwell and Staiger's account is skeptical, their premise being that there is little to distinguish the forms of production, the technological innovations or the directors routinely

grouped as "New" Hollywood from their classical and early

independent counterparts. They concede stylistic

variations from the traditional Hollywood mode, among

them "unmotivated protagonists, picaresque journey

structures, and a self-consciousness that slipped into

pastiche, parody, or the 'pathos of failure'" (Elsaesser

1975, quoted in Bordwell et al 1985:373). Importantly

however, they do not attribute these variations to any

disaffection on the part of New Hollywood filmmakers

(Cimino, Scorsese, Coppola, dePalma and Spielberg among

them) so much as a reprise in the history of Hollywood's

stylistic co-optation:

> [A]s the 'old Hollywood' had incorporated and
> refunctionalized devices from German Expressionism
> and Soviet montage, the 'New' Hollywood has
> selectively borrowed from the international art
> cinema" (1985:373).

In the "art cinema" category, Bordwell and Staiger

include such European directors as Fellini, Bergman,

Truffaut, Visconti and Bertolucci. In structural and

narrational terms, they characterize it as employing

> a looser, more tenuous linkage of events than we
> find in the classical film...and depict[ing]
> psychologically ambivalent or confused characters.
> Whereas characters in the Hollywood film have clear-
> cut traits and objectives, the characters of the art
> cinema lack precise desires and goals" (1985:373).

Moreover, "manipulations of story order [that] remain

anchored to character subjectivity" (1985:374) enhance

the art film's realism. Finally, this realism is

reconciled to art film's authorial intrusiveness (evident
in patterned deviations from the classical canon) by an
unfettered use of narrative ambiguity.

> The art film is nonclassical in that it emphasizes
> unplugged gaps and unresolved issues. But these
> very deviations get placed, resituated as realism
> (in life, things happen this way) or authorial
> commentary (the ambiguity is symbolic). Thus the
> art film solicits a particular viewing procedure.
> Whenever confronted with a problem in causation,
> temporality, or space, we first seek realistic
> motivation. (Is a character's mental state causing
> the uncertainty? Is life just leaving loose ends?)
> If we are thwarted, we seek narrational reasons.
> (What is being 'said' here? What significance
> justifies the violation of the norm?) Ideally, the
> film hesitates, suggesting all at once character
> subjectivity, life's untidiness, and author's
> vision. Uncertainties persist, but are understood
> as such, as obvious uncertainties. Whereas the
> classical film solicits a univocal reading, the
> slogan of the art cinema might be, 'when in doubt,
> read for maximum ambiguity' (1985:374).

Bordwell and Staiger continue their discussion of
"New" Hollywood's stylistic assimilation with an analysis
of Francis Ford Coppola's The Conversation (1974)
(1985:375-77). Their purpose is to demonstrate that as
an example of "New" Hollywood filmmaking, The
Conversation makes extensive use of art cinematic devices
and qualities without escaping (or sacrificing) the genre
framework of the classical detective vehicle. Harry, an
audio surveillance specialist and the film's protagonist,
"must uncover clues to reveal the truth," all the while
subjecting himself to untold dangers.

The film's causal impetus, as the authors point out,

derives from the genre conventions of investigation,
threat and evasion maneuvers. But amid this classical
field The Conversation cultivates an art cinematic
subtext of the psychically troubled protagonist. Though
Harry's actions are structurally motivated by the
exigencies of detection, he is not the incisive, forward-
moving character reminiscent, say, of Sam Spade. Rather,
he personifies the art cinema's "failed protagonist".
Unlike Spade, who might have prevented the murder (the
threat of which Harry sets out to investigate), Harry
cannot. Despite his technical sophistication, his angst
and indecisiveness keep him from solving the mystery on
time (1985:376).

Harry's mental states are revealed through his
"behavior, speech, dreams and, chiefly, through [his]
dissection of the audio tape" (1985:376), mechanisms that
shift the film's narrational strategies from objectivity
to character subjectivity (in turn traded for authorial
commentary). But despite these shifts, in good classical
fashion "a puzzle and solution remain firmly at the
centre of the story" (1985:377). Though Harry is unable
to stop the murder, we do finally discover who is killing
whom in a late reversal of the expectations set up by
Harry's analyses. The emphasis in the recorded phrase
"he'd kill us if he could" shifts from "kill" to "us"--
"he'd kill us if he could"--revealing that the speakers

whose conversation produced this phrase are the imminent perpetrators, not the victims.

I have selected from Bordwell and Staiger's study of "New" Hollywood's appropriations from art cinema in order to apply some of the same criteria and comparisons to A Century of Progress, the exemplary non-classical Grad film of my fieldwork year. Like Harry, Laurel is an uncertain and ultimately failed protagonist. A character of no particular ambition, he moves from scene to scene not by his own determination but as the subject of others' actions. In his conversation with the victim, where he pretends to government authority, he is able to at least find out that his apartment is important in some unspecified way. But he is ultimately unable to use thisinformation. Moreover, he discovers the miracle of the water accidentally, just in time to be detonated--a fate he saw coming in the dynamite set to blow up his apartment but which he had neither the energy, capacity nor reason to escape. Unlike Harry, Laurel's shortcomings are not only psychologically cast by the character type "marginal." This is also a social definition; Laurel is finally innocent (if cynnical and unimaginative), an unseeing pawn in an authoritarian world. Like Harry, however, he shares little with the classical protagonist driven by a clear objective, inventively surmounting the obstacles which in turn

propel the story.

Narrationally, A Century of Progress exploits character subjectivity to the extent that once Laurel appears (in the second scene) he is never absent. The film follows him intimately, the audience coming to understand only what Laurel understands and only when he understands it. Particularly in the first half of the film, the sequence of events is episodic and incidental, if not leisurely; no traceable causal logic binds each scene to the next. Finally, however, the mystery is revealed, though not by virtue of Laurel's diligence, and seemingly unrelated occurrences are retroactively connected. Like The Conversation, the story is built around a puzzle and a solution.

Setting aside the pitfalls of comparing a student film with a big-budget feature, what I want to suggest with the juxtaposition of The Conversation and A Century of Progress is that the process of stylistic bricolage or co-optation from the international art cinema that Bordwell and Staiger attribute to "New" Hollywood occurs as well in the instructional context of Graduate Film. More simply, I could state that alongside the hearty reproduction of the classical mode, there are narrational tendencies in the department roughly akin to the "New" Hollywood cinema, not surprising given the affinities of a style and a school both born in the late '60s. But

while such a characterization is correct, it is also incomplete, overlooking as it does the relationship, indeed the tension in Grad Film, between classical principles and patterned departures.

To refer to "New" Hollywood as a singular, coherent narrational mode is to miss this aesthetic struggle. Though Bordwell and Staiger portray the professional co-optation as fairly peaceful, aesthetically less radical thus less threatening (and less romantic) than popular critics have suggested, in Grad Film such departures are often the turf on which some students battle to differentiate themselves as filmmakers, both from run-of-the-mill peers and from narrative oughts. As the content of a school curriculum, classical narration and its emphasis on unencumbered clarity constitute the core, what is basic, the rules students must learn before breaking them, before venturing into historically more recent and (arguably) stylistically more complex forms.

Classical principles are also smoothly formalized and thus easily taught in a university, a bureaucratic organization with a mandate to recruit and educate optimum cohorts. But that is not to say that such principles limit faculty repertoires. In many cases, both in the films they make (or edit, write, direct etc.) and the films they show (from "New" Hollywood and from art cinema) these principles are slightly or robustly

subverted. [9] The same is true of many of the student

films they admire.   While A Century of Progress is

narrationally atypical by Grad Film standards, neither it

nor its director are marginal.   Again, the student who

wrote, directed and edited the film is regarded by many

faculty members and other students as "genuinely

talented," a "star" in the program and a potential star

in the industry (however unstable such judgements may

be).   The same was sometimes said for the director of The

Understudy.   To the extent, then, that their limited uses

of narrative ambiguity are judged unconventional by

classical standards (and to the degree they're judged

successful) there is room granted to creativity in the

school's reward system ("doing something new"), alongside

its emphasis on virtuosity ("refining skill"), an

emphasis it shares with academic art in general and with

any organization whose aesthetic domain, like narrative

film, is in part commercially defined (Becker 1984:289).

Style and Competence

Narrational modes do not describe (though they may

predict) the look and sound of a film and here we shift

from a discussion of narrative to a related discussion of

style.   In this discussion, a similar dynamic between

convention (or tradition) and innovation arises, one that

juxtaposes the stylistic transparency of classical cinema

with the stylistic self-consciousness of art film. The
familiar hybrid is "New" Hollywood, where style is
foregrounded rather than suppressed but again, is neither
indifferent to nor compromises the story.

In both screening commentaries and conversations on
the set (where students construct, through visual and
auditory signifiers, a story already seen to exist)
students and faculty uphold the integrity and pre-
eminence of narrative. Their respect for stylistic
innovation at the service of narrative is reminiscent of
that held by the Book-of-the-Month Club editors whose
practices Radway (1988) has studied. According to
Radway, BOMC editors

> [are] not interested solely in the refined,
> distanced contemplation of the aesthetic signifier
> but [are] searching for a way to attend both to the
> particularities of individual words and to the
> larger, more utilitarian work they can do in telling
> a story about coherently formed, interesting
> individuals (1988:531). [10]

In Grad Film, this balance between story and style
is marked by two principles that generate a variety of
stylistic arrangements: the thematic motivation of style
and the visual rendering of themes. The first refers to
the story as stylistic touchstone; a look or effect must
serve the story, both in terms of advancing the plot and
creating an atmosphere or mood. As I suggested earlier,
thematically-motivated style resists self-consciously
"artistic" reasons for doing things, for including in a

film elements deemed void of narrative function,

regardless of how pretty or otherwise appealing they may

be (recall Richard's dismissal of the opening street

sequence in <u>King Romeo</u> as "a rock video that has nothing

to do with this film"). It is a principle which moves

students at all levels to constantly seek out others

better able to judge whether a particular piece of

footage belongs in a scene. "Be brutal" they tell each

other, "I shot it and I love it but that's not a good

enough reason to keep it."

The second principle, rendering themes visually, is

underwritten by a conception of film as fundamentally a

visual medium, regardless of the extent to which dialogue

and music may also shape a story. For example, it is

always preferable to "show" the audience what you want

them to know rather than "tell" them (say, in dialogue

or, as a stylistic "last resort," voice-over monologue).

These two principles are mutually supportive. While

story generates style, it is best to start in the first

instance with an idea amenable to visual rendering. In

all three years though particularly in first (where

synchronous sound is prohibited), students are cautioned

against working up scripts that are either "talky" or

about mental states difficult to "externalize"--to

represent through visually perceptible treatments such as

characters' activities, art direction, composition and

editing. In several cases during 1B pre-production for
first and third films, Richard either rejected or
required revisions on those synopses and treatments he
did not consider sufficiently "visual," for example a
story about a hospitalized AIDS patient and his
relationship to a woman friend. According to Richard,
this treatment (for a silent film) begged questions about
what these characters could be given to do (as opposed to
say) in the hospital setting and thus whether their
relationship would be revealed by or could sustain an
explicitly visual exercise.

"You don't light the set then write a story around the
lighting."
     (Jim, quoting an Italian cinematographer)

     Motivating Style Thematically: Historically, that
style should "serve" the narrative is a relationship most
rigorously exploited by the classical mode. Consider
Bordwell's summary (in which "fabula" is roughly the
story though not the profilmic event and "syuzhet" the
plot or actual arrangement of fabula items, though not
the entire film text):

          -On the whole, classical narration treats film
          technique as a vehicle for the syuzhet's
          transmission of fabula information;

          -in classical narration, style typically encourages
          the spectator to construct a coherent, consistent
          time and space for the fabula action...implying
          denotative clarity and only rare attempts to
          disorient the spectator (usually conveying

disorienting story moments which are resolved or
clarified shortly thereafter);

-classical style consists of a strictly limited
number of technical devices organized into a stable
paradigm and ranked probabilistically according to
syuzhet demands...Thus the "invisibility" of
Hollywood style relies on highly codified devices
<u>and</u> their codified function in context. (A central
technical device in this instance would be classical
continuity editing.) (1985:162-4)

With each proposition, style begets narrative

clarity, in the first case as subordinate to the

narrative; in the second as constructing a spatially and

temporally continuous environment; and in the third as

embodying highly conventional (and thus unselfconsciously

interpretable) relationships between form and meaning.

In effect the first proposition states the relationship

between style and narrative, the second describes how

that relationship is implemented (the use of style to

show what characters are doing, where and when they're

doing it, and what the connections are between current,

prior and subsequent times, places and activities) and

the third suggests how particular implementations are

naturalized through expectation in the experience of

native viewers.

To different degrees these propositions are

reflected in Grad Film instruction, particularly in

explications of lighting, acting, shooting and cutting,

all aspects of what Richard and other faculty call

"visual" or "cinematic language."

Discussing the techniques of "cinematic language,"
Richard was cautious to point out the different effects
of conventional or "classical" versus unconventional or
"dramatic" uses. Under "coverage," for example, he
described the "traditional" pattern of long shot/medium
shot/close-up (LS-MS-CU) within a scene. In the long
shot and its variants (extreme long-shot etc.), we
establish the setting or location (be it Monument Valley
or the kitchen), in the medium shot we single out
particular characters and activities, and in close-ups we
isolate reactions and details. The typical production
practice, as Richard described it, is to shoot a "master"
for each scene, a long or wide-shot in which the scene's
entire activity is enacted or "covered." Thereafter
selected portions of the activity are repeated in medium
shot and close-up to be edited later in LS-MS-CU form,
which allows the filmmaker to manipulate pace and its
effects, which maximizes attention to significant
narrative details and which, through match cutting,
creates spatial and temporal continuity.

For dramatic effect, the traditional arrangement can
be inverted. Richard described Sergio Leone as
"routinely starting scenes in close-up," a technique he
called "holding the location shot," where the setting is
not revealed until the fifth or sixth shot in the scene.
Another inversion "cuts out the middle ground of

filmmaking" by dropping medium shots. Richard emphasized that "while the LS-MS-CU logic is convenient...not everyone uses it." For dramatic purposes these inversions and others may be more effective.

Richard gave similar attention to compositional techniques for "overcoming flatness" and creating a sense of depth in the two-dimensional filmic image. He distinguished between "frontal" and "diagonal" shooting, the former with the camera lens parallel to the scene to create a single plane of action, the latter with the lens oriented at an angle to create receding planes of action. According to Richard, most scenes in most films are shot diagonally, the exceptions being comedy ("the reduction of dimensionality has a 'funny feeling'") and the films of Jean-Luc Godard, "where flatness has a modern, urban, alienating effect." Generally, he explained, a sense of depth "opens up the frame and lets the audience breathe a little," whether created through an angled camera, through the placement of objects and movements across foreground and background, or through camera movement (techniques also recommended by the first-year camera instructor). Moreover, the illusion of three dimensions in two intensifies the naturalism or mimesis of the filmic image which in turns serves narrative verisimilitude.

This stylistic preference had become tenet for a

second-year student (not from Richard's class) who
commented to me that it was clear from a number of films
screened during a recent festival in New York City who
among the directors had or had not gone to film school,
the second group "making such basic errors as shooting
straight on." Another student, this time in first year
and indeed in Richard's class, also took to heart
Richard's emphasis on depth composition.

> In one of the park scenes, Peter placed the camera
> so that the paved path cut a diagonal across the
> frame, a diagonal that would be emphasized by
> Krystyna [the female lead] running from the
> rearground to middle ground and then foreground,
> where she would meet up with Ray. Her path took her
> through a flock of pidgeons that Ray (seated on a
> bench) was feeding, which flew away as she
> approached. Peter loved the pidgeons, thought the
> shot was "cool", and added that Richard would love
> the diagonal. "Yeah" I said, "Richard likes
> diagonals." Peter answered, "Richard loves
> diagonals."

In both examples (LS-MS-CU patterning and visual
depth) Richard described conventions as conventions,
characterizing different techniques and their effects
rather than rules for shooting and cutting. His
description casts conventional uses as "unnoticeable" and
departures as "dramatic" precisely because of their
relative infrequency. But whether or not techniques are
classically used, they bear an organic relationship to
theme. In Richard's terms, Leone or for that matter
Miami Vice can hold the location shot and "shock" the
audience by revealing place midway through the scene.

But here the location ought to be of some special
significance, the connection between what is happening
and where perhaps adding a twist to the plot. By
Richard's standards, to hold the location for no
particular reason would simply beg the question "where
are they?"

In the rough-cut commentary on a second-year film
called <u>Sturdy Browns</u>, issues of style/story motivation
and conventionality arose in light of several aspects of
"visual language." Briefly, the story is about the
relationship between two twin girls, 8 or 9, and their
old-worldly "Tante Elka," who, among other sensibilities
disagreeable to children, thinks they ought to wear good,
sensible shoes.

> **Scene description:** In a scene at a cluttered, musty
> shoe store, we are introduced to Vito, the store's
> youngish proprietor and a slick if sympathetic
> womanizer to whom Tante Elke is shyly attracted.
> After a brief exchange at the front desk (in which
> Vito flirts with the cashier, promising to take her
> to "nirvana") the film cuts to two medium close-ups
> where peripheral characters located in the shoe
> store pick up the dialogue in a literal and stylized
> way. "Where's nirvana," squeals the first, a woman
> clothed in gold lame, who addresses the camera
> directly as she speaks her line. "Oh Vito baby"
> drips a second woman, smoking a cigarette from a
> holder and arching her heavily made-up face toward
> Vito's as he passes in medium close-up and
> acknowledges her excitement with an intimate gaze.

According to the student director's comments
following the rough-cut screening, the scene was intended
to introduce Vito in a fairly stylized way, not unlike

the rest of the film. But despite their general appreciation, the faculty members who attended the screening (Nina and the second-year directing and production instructors) felt there was just too great a disparity of styles in the film, particularly with the occurrence of that scene. On the one hand, they agreed the director had managed to forge a "real" and touching relationship between the twins and their aunt. But precisely because that relationship was so successful the peripheral characters were intrusive (including Vito's girlfriend and the twins' mother, along with the shoe store denizens). In their campy costuming, exaggerated delivery and in the camera style used to photograph them (here referring to the direct address), they became "cartoonish." While the faculty said they understood what the student had tried to do, according to them it hadn't worked; the stylizing "interfered with rather than enhanced the story."

Given this judged effect, they recommended the student at very least cut down a couple of scenes (including the one in the shoe store), "barely indicating" them rather than paying them such extravagant attention in running time and composition. "Balanced," said one instructor, "they wouldn't be so objectionable." Said another, "let Vito do his bit at the cash register then cut it. Get rid of the

Felliniesque set-up." The reference to Fellini and the implied reference to his characteristically baroque mise-en-scene made the class laugh. At that moment, Fellini represented a known extreme, one that flaunts style for style's sake to an excessive degree by the class' standards for their own films.

One instructor did tentatively suggest that the "camp" could be salvaged if the student could edit the scenes to represent the children's perceptions of their aunt's quirky world. "As it stands now," she continued, "it's very objective, very presentational." Even here, while the proposed solution retains the caricature, this stylizing is steered by the girls' relationship to Tante Elke. Narrated objectively, the scene cannot absorb or resolve the campy elements or their self-conscious treatment. Narrated through character subjectivity on the other hand (clearly designated as such), style and story are reconciled. Still, such a stylistic shift for a scene or two would be awkward and likely judged incompatible with an otherwise objective or presentational perspective.

A final example illustrates the alliance between motivating style thematically and rendering themes visually. In the second-year editing class, students were assigned a series of storyboard exercises where they

were to take a scripted scene (in all cases Nina, the instructor, selected scenes from well-known features) and draw storyboards, from week to week emphasizing such elements as "peak moments" or whether to use camera movement or editing in assembling a scene.

With each review, Nina stressed the importance of approaching the style of a scene depending on its "dramatic underpinnings." For example, in a comparison of how scenes from The Third Man (1949) and North by Northwest (1959) had actually been shot, she contrasted the first's emotional qualities and its consequent "longer, softer lines" (referring principally to long takes, moving camera and relatively few cuts) with the "smart-alecky repartee" of the train scene from the second. The short takes and fast, back-and-forth dialogue cutting in North by Northwest would be "completely inappropriate for the delicate emotion of The Third Man."

Importantly, Nina's comments presume that emotional and other story qualities come before stylistic ones. The North by Northwest scene is not described as smart-alecky because it is structured with short takes around repartee dialogue, rather it was structured that way because smart-aleckyness was the quality Hitchcock aimed to achieve. Though we see only the finished product, her interpretation of the style/story relationship treats

story qualities as essential and assigns them to directorial intention; editing structure she assigns to stylistic consequence.

This is hardly a matter of phenomenological oversight on Nina's part (earlier she had expressed the wish to see the footage from which particular directors and editors made their selections, to better understand the editing process). It is an attempt to encourage students (who can indeed marshall their intentions, if never perfectly) to begin with the dramatic qualities they want to communicate, to avoid the "willy-nilly" use of cutting and camera movement, in other words to motivate style thematically.

Nina invoked the priority of narrative in later discussions of student work. For example, she described a second-year sync-sound dialogue exercise as having "missed the boat" by shooting speakers in one-shots. "The scene is about a relationship," she implored "so you need to show the actors together, in two-shots." But her ranking of story and image is also an appeal to really use visual style, that is to "give it some narrative work", to express relationships and actions among characters and settings not only through what is said (however critical "good" dialogue may be) but also through what is shown and how. Finally, along with getting students to control particular intentions on

particular occasions, Nina's ranking also re-enfranchises

intention generally (an issue discussed further in the

final section of this chapter).

> In the November 1984 issue, American Film published
> the last Truffaut interview with Hitchcock. Among
> other things, Truffaut asked Hitchcock whether he
> was in favor of the teaching of cinema in
> universities. "Only on the condition that they
> teach cinema since the era of Melies and that the
> students learn to make silent films, because there
> is no better form of training," was Hitchcock's
> reply. That has been our message to you for the
> past semester, and should be seriously considered as
> you begin to work on your third and final film. The
> better you understand the camera and its image the
> better your films will be in the future - when you
> do add dialogue. (From Nina's memo to all first-
> year students, February 1986)

Rendering Themes Visually: The Grad Film curriculum

is built around the idea that film is a quintessentially

visual medium. With an appeal to the popular authority

of Truffaut and Hitchcock, Nina's memo reminded first-

year students of this core premise, in part addressing

the familiar impatience a few had felt with restrictions

against using of synchronous sound. The challenge in

first year is to construct a coherent, evocative

narrative first with no sound and later with little, but

also to cultivate a visual sensibility, not only a set of

skills but an overall stance, a "way of seeing". [19]

First-year students become able to imagine how

visual objects and events before them might be

transformed by light and movement in a two-dimensional

frame, or how spatial relations can be exaggerated or confounded compositionally. As Rosenblum (1978:33) has suggested for students of photography, light becomes sublime, a source of spoken pleasure, the object of subtle and devoted attention. Students constantly notice shifts in environmental light values whether or not they're shooting and point them out to each other in ways that call attention to their heightened sensitivity in distinguishing light qualities. Leaving a location with members of a crew late one evening, I remember our rapture with all things reflective, with the glistening contrasts of moonlight on wrought iron grillwork and the shades of blue in a clear, black sky. "We sure are film students" said one contentedly, referring to their sensitivity and expressing her delight in the idea that "this is what I do." But through a variety of activities the sensibility is harnessed and channeled into skill, into controlling the technical and conventional means of "cinema," a word many faculty and students use to denote the material and symbolic (versus strictly "narrative") properties of films.

To acquire visual skill in Grad Film is to develop a repertoire of increasing elemental and technological complexity for the cinematic manipulation of space and time. [11] Earlier I described LS-MS-CU patterning and visual depth as conventional aspects of that repertoire

routinely practiced in editing and cinematography. Other
production areas in which a visual repertoire is
cultivated are mise-en-scene and directing actors. Most
(though not all) faculty stress relationships between
technique and dramatic effect rather than stylistic
prescription, particularly beyond first year. For
example, where first-year students are concerned with
"proper" exposures, appealing to a standardized technical
definition in which a range of greys are visible amid
blacks and whites in the positive image, second- and
third-year students concentrate on relations of intensity
among light sources in a scene. In fact, "exposure" or
"contrast" and "relations of intensity" express similar
qualities or concerns, but at different levels of
subtlety and control. Given the limitations of first-
year lighting kits (which students are required to use)
and the demands of first-year schedules (which allow
little re-scheduling or re-shooting), students collect
their rushes from the lab hoping they're neither over-
nor underexposed, sometimes grateful for particularly
nice footage or serendipitous effects.

With more time, equipment and expertise at their
disposal, advanced students make finer distinctions in
manipulating natural and artificial light for dramatic
and aesthetic ends, treating different areas of the frame
separately and often attending to background qualities as

much as foreground, especially where the background may
reveal objects or activities of some importance to the
story. What would perhaps be two or three shots in a
first-year film becomes a single shot of greater planar
complexity in second or third year. For example, the
following note comes from a second-year sync-sound
exercise shoot:

> For two days Lea (cinematographer) and Michael
> (director) had taken considerable pains with
> lighting, certainly more than anything I'd done or
> seen on first-year shoots. Despite time running out
> they spent hours on some set-ups, blocking
> carefully, mounting hair lights (used to distinguish
> an actor's head from background) from inside closets
> (in turn creating some time-consuming mic-placement
> problems), and carefully modelling background
> objects to keep even that area of the frame in
> focus. I was about Kate's (female lead) height so
> did a lot of duty as stand-in, tiring under the
> precision of their lighting and having to stay still
> as they placed, measured and adjusted lamps for
> hours at a time. Set-up #10 was particularly
> tricky, since Kate and Anthony (the male lead) would
> be standing at the fireplace, a fairly tight two-
> shot in front of a huge, framed mirror over the
> mantlepiece. Lea and Michael had to be sure no
> light sources were reflected or intensified by the
> glass. They also modeled the far wall (which would
> appear as background in the shot, reflected in the
> mirror) to give the image depth and focus, as
> Michael put it "a rich look to get at the elegance
> of the setting." As Julie (sound recordist)
> commented about the scene, here was all this
> sinister stuff going on in these wealthy, formal
> surroundings. So it took forever to light the shot
> even before the actors were in place, at which point
> adding still more lights became incredibly time
> consuming. So many sources were used, and their
> intensities had to be carefully controlled to not
> overexpose the shot. Michael knew what he wanted,
> but it was fairly elaborate and both he and Lea
> spent a lot of time working out how to get it.

In second-year editing, Nina bemoaned what she called "formulaic" editing patterns in American films, and instead encouraged students to recognize that formal relationships, for example between cutting, camera movement and activity in the frame, have consequences for theme and mood. "There are no mechanical principles" she insisted, "but you must be aware of these relationships, the difference they can make."

Nina's comment treats these relationships as resources, ways of showing rather than telling an audience the meaning and significance of current actions in the film. On a thesis film shoot for example, the cinematographer cautioned the director that through the lens a scripted slow dolly-in to the lead female character as she changed clothing might imply a more lascivious quality than the director intended. Conventionally speaking, to dolly-in from medium shot to close-up is to heighten attention toward a subject, in this scene undue attention to the woman's partial undressing. As the cinematographer put it, "it isn't a girlie film." The director agreed and the camera stayed in medium shot. In this case a particular implication is avoided rather than constructed, still it points out the semantic consequences of style, the visual rendering of themes. For Nina, this principle is achieved beautifully in the work of Jean Renoir, a scene from whose film Grand

<u>Illusion</u> (1937) she used in the second-year editing class
for an analysis of cutting versus camera movement.
According to her,

> Renoir was a master of the moving camera...using it
> to reveal objects or expressions of particular
> significance...When push comes to shove, he cuts,
> but in either case, when ideas change, there is some
> structural change.

To render themes visually is re-stated in the local
expression "show versus tell," which abstracts a variety
of cinematic relationships and techniques. Typically it
refers to the dangers of "talkiness," of relying on
expository dialogue to tell a story. Talkiness is
thought to suppress visual means of narrative
development, in most cases an unsubtle, second-rate bid
for clarity--"when in doubt let the characters say it on
the track." In first year, as Nina's memo reminds us,
students work without sync sound. In the 1B production
workshop, their first assignment is the "photo-roman,"
where pairs of students develop stories in a series of 40-
60 color slides. The exercise film and first film are
both silent and third films are non-sync, making dialogue
possible but difficult, "sparse in the best instances,"
according to Richard, Nina and Barbara, the other first-
year workshop instructor. As Richard instructed his
students preparing to write third-film scripts, "no
backstories," no stories that must be elaborately set up

and which can't be visually "planted,"

> no characters sitting under a tree for five minutes
> talking about what happened to them when they were
> seven years old.

After their year of strict visual instruction, Nina sighed about the long dialogue scripts second-year students submitted, which she interpreted both as an enthusiastic response to finally using sync equipment and an alignment with the commercial industry where dialogue prevails. By second year the issue is not so much avoiding dialogue (the preparatory group assignment being a sync-sound dialgoue scene) as striking a balance between speech and non-verbal expressive modes and moreover of using dialogue to develop qualities and relationships among characters as well as to state "what's happening." Still, dialogue instruction remains subordinate to visual rendering. [12]

In the third-year writing class conferences (which principally address story structure), if Murray judged a student's dialogue especially poor he was unequivocal, in one case going over in detail a script "riddled with cliche, unintended laugh lines and heavy verbal exposition." To develop students' sensitivity to dialogue, Murray wanted them to actively listen to conversations in public places and write down how people speak, to overcome the cadences of literary characters (after which students often style their dialogue scripts)

and work instead with naturalistic speech patterns [13].

In one class session devoted to dialogue issues, Murray showed two feature films based on the same story, The Awful Truth (1937) and its remake Let's Do It Again (1954), a comparison designed to illustrate that "plot structure and writing aren't the same thing, there's execution too." "The stories are virtually identical," he added, "though in fact the films look and feel very different." The first he considered infinitely superior to the second in every respect, particularly the repartee between Irene Dunn and Carey Grant, "brilliantly written, brilliantly delivered." He pointed out however that such a dialogue style, ridiculous though very funny in the tradition of screwball comedy, could not or would not be produced today. Despite its deftness and expository efficiency, it was too stylized, too distant from how people routinely talk. In Grad Film, students aspire to contemporary rather than historical renderings of structurally classical narratives.

In a program devoted to believability as a measure of value in story films, to "tell" without "showing" is not only unsubtle, it can fail as a means of clarifying the narrative. For example, in the absence of visual cues to a character's stated nervousness or discomfort (say, in facial expressions, gestures and cinematography), the statement alone is unconvincing.

To "show" rather than "tell" also has an evolutionary quality. Ideally, the sensibilities of films and characters are cultivated, an aggregate process involving a variety of creative dimensions. To construct a social and visual environment that will sustain an audience's belief in particular characters and events is to integrate setting type, mise-en-scene, dialogue, action and composition through narrative and filmic time. For example, a second year film (described earlier) ends when a teenage boy, troubled throughout the film by his sexual attraction to men, rides away in long shot on the back of his (straight) friend's dirt bike, the two of them talking unself-consciously about the upcoming high school prom. According to Nina, the scene failed:

> It's a question of a confused young man at a certain stage in life where he may be gay...so it's too pat, too easy, that resolution. Verbally it does certain things for you but on no other level, emotionally, visually or <u>any</u> level does it resolve itself. And it works very well until then, you know (...) but the end is too easy, too figured out. There's absolutely no play off of the kid's emotional conflict. At this point it's not a question of whether he passes or not, that's not the dilemma you've set up. If you want to <u>get</u> to that you have to work towards it, you can't just throw it at me and say, you know, this is it. It works until that point then it sort of gets thrown away.

Though first-year films must also use what they establish, students are constrained by short running-times to strong and efficient introductions which, they

are cautioned, are better "shown" than "told." For
example, for a third film called The Rail, the following
rough cut discussion ensued about the opening scene (R is
Richard, the workshop instructor, P is Peter, the student
director, and F1 and F2 are two women students):

R: What are you going to do about that bar scene?
     Really it's a long, slow beginning for such a
     glorious movie that picks up speed, I mean
     really. The first two scenes are talky and
     static and deadly and then the picture really
     gets off, you know?

P: Well, I'm not going to do much about them. I
     can't cut 'em down because I've got to stick to
     the script, and...

F1: We don't see her mouth saying those things,
     can't we...

P: Yeah we do...

F1: Sometimes but a lot of those--is a long pan
     over [characters seated at the bar].

P: Just the establishing shot, the first
     establishing shot, we pan over. Basically in
     the first scene you learn everything you need
     to know.

F2: We learn more than we need to know though.

P: She likes George [the bartender], she's a
     waitress, he likes her, her husband's sterile,
     he's unemployed, he's a drunk.

F2: We don't need to know all of that though Peter
     and you tell us much more of it than we need to
     know...

P: Well how would you change it? I mean that's
     the footage I have with the dialogue.

R: I'd have to look at the footage but my instinct
     is to tell you that I, as an audience member...

P: I'm not being defensive, I just don't see any

way around it.

F2: I mean I just, for whatever it's worth I think
that you are telling us a great deal more than
we need to know. I think by virtue of the fact
that she's talking to George we begin to get
the picture. The second scene, after the
husband's drunk, is telling us a lot more than
the set-up when she's alone with George and
then the husband comes in, for example. I
think if you looked at it there's ways of
massively hauling out big chunks.

R: The point is to study the footage.

P: Well, yeah...we're talking four minutes for the
first two scenes...two minutes for the first
scene, two minutes for the second.

R: How long's the picture? If I were to tell you
four-minute talky, static opening in a twelve-
minute film...that's not a great proportion.

Much like the debate about narrative clarity in

King Romeo, here the question of redundancy arises, of

overdetermining narrative clarity. But the debate is

also stylistic, about dialogue versus visual depiction,

or "showing" versus "telling." According to Peter, he

needs the dialogue to set up character biographies and

relationships and motivate subsequent events. And

whether or not it is visually "static" he is reluctant

to shorten the scene because he needs a minimum amount

of picture time to take characters through their

speeches.

For other speakers, however, story information is

amply conveyed by the characters' appearances and

conduct and by the nature of the setting. According to

them, Peter has succeeded in the "showing" (despite pacing problems relative to the rest of the film) but has compromised his success with belabored verbal exposition. The dialogue is redundant and the scene "talky". [14]

Since all dialogue in first-year films is "cheat sync" (recorded with non-sync equipment after the image is shot and edited until it more or less fits with what characters appear to say), both problems could be overcome by shortening the scene, in some places running the compacted dialogue (itself simple to cut unnoticeably on the track) over shots where speakers do not face the camera, at least not in close-up. We could then hear the cut dialogue without watching characters physically utter the words, a technique that would release Peter from the script and the rough cut. Though Peter ultimately tightened the scene, however, he did not lose any appreciable quantity of opening dialogue or running time—partly a matter of anxious attention to narrative clarity in a film on its way to the evaluation committee, and partly a confident devotion to the dialogue itself.

Continuity—the persistence of classical style: Despite the relative openness of visual stylistic instruction in Grad Film (where teachers emphasize premises over rules), many features of classical style

endure, for example specific intensity ratios of key light to fill and back light, and continuity editing, a collection of techniques for maintaining spatial and temporal continuity within and across scenes.

As early as the first-year exercise film, students shot, cut and critiqued their work using continuity principles. Both the informality with which these principles were introduced and the students' prior familiarity and ready acceptance of them suggest their immutability by school standards, in part predicted by the emphasis on linear narrative. This is not to say that continuity rules can't be broken but that they probably won't be. Recalling Bordwell's description of the relationship between narration and style, classical cinema employs a strictly limited number of technical devices whose type and use become highly codified and "invisible" precisely because of their stability and frequency. The utility, indeed the indispensibility of continuity mechanisms for narrative filmmaking in the department protects them from aesthetic resistance and sustains them as hallmarks of narrative competence among neophyte director-editors.

One continuity technique is "match cutting," where a continuous action is constructed through multiple shots, each changing the angle and proximity of camera to subject (within conventional ranges) in order to

conceal minute differences in movement or position. For example, a greeting and embrace between two people may begin in long shot profile, with both characters appearing together in the frame as they approach one another, then cut to a medium close-up over the shoulder of one character, picking up and continuing the action precisely where the long shot left off. To achieve this continuity in editing, the sequence must have been shot "to cut," with careful attention to actors' positions in all takes of each composition. Positions need not be precisely duplicated--in production vernacular they can be "cheated"--rather they must be appear the same, so that when the close-up and long shot are later edited together the action will appear uninterrupted, "continuous."

From this description, it is clear that continuity can go wrong in several places. Positions may mismatch in the footage, making it difficult for even the most resourceful editor to "clean them up" in the cut. Lighting may mismatch, for example key light coming from frame right in the long shot and overhead in the close-up, creating a slightly disorienting shift in the edited sequence. (This is especially likely among beginners, who sometimes overlook secondary compositions until after the original lighting set-up has been taken down and who can't match it thereafter). Or, the speed of an

actor's gestures may change across LS and CU takes just enough for the difference to be perceptible when the shots are cut together.

Conversely, the unedited footage may be fine but the cut sloppy, a little too much "tail" on the first shot or "head" on the second, in which case a minute but perceptible overlap of activity occurs. As one character extends his arms to greet the other in long-shot, the final moment of extension is repeated in close-up. The obverse difficulty is too little of one or the other shot at the splice. Even four or five frames (one sixth of a second in running time) of missing arm extension will cause a noticeable discontinuity in the motion; the arm "jumps" from one point to another as it rises.

The first editing problem is easy to repair; just take apart the taped splice and trim a few frames from the tail of the first shot or the head of the second. The second problem is trickier; if it is noticed in a rough cut screening (rather than by the student while he or she edits at the flatbed), the missing few frames have typically been discarded. The student must either look through other takes of the delinquent shot and re-edit the cut, settle for a sloppy match or change the sequence altogether, for example by adding a "cutaway."

To fix discontinuities by "cutting away," a shot is

inserted between match cut shots and either the first or
second of them is trimmed. For example, if a jewel
thief is seen climbing through a window in medium wide-
shot from inside an apartment, we can "cut away" to a
close-up of the jewels she is about to steal then back
to her in medium shot, somewhat further ahead in her
action than just before the cutaway. Depending on the
cutaway's duration, several seconds of action in "real"
time can be eliminated from the already short shot with
no apparent discontinuity, thus repairing the cut. The
time passed in the cutaway enables our assumption that
'meanwhile' the thief had continued to advance toward
the jewellery box so that when we return to her, she can
be that much further ahead. Cutaways, which literally
cut away from the principal action, are routinely shot
as a way of insuring that the footage will cut despite
the possibility, for example, of mismatches in masters
(or long-shots) and close-ups. (They are also used to
break up master shots. To add a cutaway not only varies
the shot and the pace, but allows an editor to drop
chunks of action in real time and thus advance the
scene.)

Other techniques for maintaining continuity include
the "180-degree line," where adjacent shots are taken
from the same side of a 180-degree axis. For example,
to cut from a character's action in LS profile taken

from her right, to a close-up of the action staged in
the same manner and the same space but photographed from
her left, would reverse the direction of her gaze from
frame right to frame left across the splice. This
effect is exacerbated if the character is moving, say
toward frame right. Across the cut she would instantly
change direction, moving first from left to right and
then from right to left. The relative position of
character and camera can change, but to maintain spatial
continuity in a scene it must change within the 180-
degree range marked by the eyeline axis (usually within
35-40% for match cuts). However, both students and
faculty occasionally point out that Hitchcock, among
others, routinely "crossed the line." So may students,
though with track records less illustrious than
Hitchcock's they risk judgements of incompetence that he
did not. For example, the following notes comes from
location production on a third-film shoot.

> Mark (cinematographer) took Eric (director) aside
> to quietly say they'd crossed the line with masters
> and medium shots on the trail scene. It was late
> in the afternoon, we were about to lose the light,
> and Eric was pissed off. "Shit, man, we fucked
> up." Nick (AC) proposed an optical flip or
> cutaway. Mackay (lead actor) asked if it was
> really going to be that noticeable—couldn't they
> just work around it? Like the rest of us, he knew
> we didn't have time to re-take the medium shots.
> "No man, it won't be that noticeable" Eric told
> him, "but if some fucker notices, well then you
> fucked up." We didn't try to re-take the shots.

As Nick's comment suggests, where students don't have the footage they need to abide by continuity principles, they can re-shoot (at least in theory), or "flip" the footage they do have, literally turning over the celluloid and splicing one shot emulsion-side up to another emulsion-side down. Flipping reverses the direction of the action, sometimes salvaging spatial continuity within a scene. The problem with this practice however is that even so minute a difference in the distance between emulsion and projector lens can throw an image out of focus on screen. Since first-year students don't make optical prints but show (and submit for committee evaluation) their cut workprints or camera reversal, having the occasional "soft" image is a sloppy distraction. Still, it can be a lesser evil than a noticeable spatial discontinuity in the absence of other ways to structure a sequence. Though a soft focus shot is annoying, it doesn't imply the conceptual incompetence signalled by editing discontinuities.

Finally, screen direction is also maintained by "eyeline match," where the position of any character, object or event toward which another character directs his gaze must be situated in relation to that gaze across the splice. To cut from one character looking toward the upper right corner of the frame to another who appears in the next shot glancing toward the upper

left corner, would fail to imply that the first looks at the second. For such an intention, eyelines would be "mismatched." The right upward diagonal projected by the first character's gaze would suggest that the second character is spatially above him. To cut from his glance to another shot of the second character on a staircase looking downward (at a complementary angle toward lower frame left) would spatially and logically connect the two. We understand that the first character looks toward the second and the second looks back, even though the two never appear together in the frame.

Students unself-consciously incorporate these continuity mechanisms in their films and commentaries. Again, they are rarely the objects of developed criticism because they rarely pose a problem by the time rough- and fine-cuts are screened. More often, incidental remarks are made (frequently toward the end of a screening commentary) to the effect that a student "might clean up that cut in the fireplace sequence." The problem is real, but no doubt something the student had planned to fix in the fine cut. Still, continuity cutting is technique, and students spend hours getting it "right," or agonizing over getting it "wrong". For example, the following note comes from an editing session on a second-year sync sound exercise:

One evening I stopped by the third-year editing
room. Michael (a meticulous student and director of
the second-year sync-sound exercise I'd worked on)
was going over the dialogue scene on the Steenbeck,
fine-cutting in places where he felt the editing was
sloppy. He asked my opinion on a couple of cuts he
found problematic, and I sat down to go over them
with him. Together we spent half an hour or so
trimming frames to fix an overlapping jump cut,
where Anthony (male lead) runs his hand down Kate's
(female lead) shoulder. We cut from medium shot of
his hand on her shoulder to another medium shot but
with a radical change in angle and composition (we
go from his approach behind, only his hand coming
into frame, to a frontal two-shot with reflections
in the mirror). In the second shot, his hand was
slightly above its end position in shot 1. Michael
was worried that cutting out the beginning of shot 2
to bring the starting position of the hand down a
little would make the movement too fast. It did,
though after watching the new cut a few times we
decided it was still an improvement, that it
appeared more continuous than the overlap.

During my fieldwork, I was struck by my own devotion

to classical continuity, acquired no doubt as film-goer

and (in an earlier life) as film student, but

intensified by my experience in Grad Film. It was clear

that even though such a specialized crew position as

continuity director rarely exists in student filmmaking,

student films depend like any other on reasonably precise

continuity. As script supervisor I reviewed the script

and storyboard extensively in pre-production, and marked

where cuts had to match (whether through eyeline, screen

direction etc.) so that I could follow those marks when

scenes were shot out of sequence. On the set I strained

to record as many details as possible for each shot,

including idiosyncratic moments of actors' dialogue or

gestures from take to take, lest the preferred take stray
from the rehearsal, in turn requiring an adjustment in
the scene to follow (which might have already been shot,
or which might not be shot for several hours or days).

My experience is significant to an analysis of
continuity and competence because it underscores the fact
that however much it may be treated as a stylistic matter
of course, continuity is also a matter of technique (to
which my errors attest, despite care and the best laid
plans). In my production experience and in student
filmmaking generally, continuity issues arise most
prominently on the set (not in class) since that is where
the raw material needed to abide by continuity principles
is generated, where students "shoot to cut". Whether
continuity is necessary isn't at issue; how to do it is.
Its cursory classroom introduction and its relative lack
of emphasis in screening commentaries speak to the
omnipresence of continuity in definitions of cinematic
competence, not to its exclusion from those definitions
or to its "naturalness". In Grad Film, other dimensions
of style may be contestable, but classical continuity is
rarely so. An important exception, however, is
thematically motivated discontinuity, judged (where
successful) as innovative rather than incompetent.

Competence, discontinuity and "New" Hollywood: As I
mentioned early in this chapter, on one occasion Barry

denounced jump cutting, a discontinuous technique that drops action across what would otherwise be a match cut, *or which approximates a match cut but with insufficient* change in angle and proximity to conceal minor differences in movement. Recall the quote, "it will not work to cut from an image of something or someone to a similar composition of the same thing." The subsequent query from a student about the work of Godard, particularly Breathless, invoked one of the oldest style-competency debates in modern cinema.

Godard's patterned uses of a variety of discontinuities (eg. jump cutting in Breathless and stop-frame 20 years later in Every Man for Himself [cf. Vachani 1984]) have become stock examples in debates about cinematic convention and innovation, with nay-sayers accusing Godard of wild incompetence or painful indulgence, and adherents grateful for his poetic expansion of the formal repertoire. Again, Barry conceded his conservativeness in this debate, and several days later Richard reminded students that what may now appear quaint in Godard's films "would have blown you away in 1960, very radical, knocked your socks off."

Richard's comment arose during a class discussion of shot types in which he referred to jump cuts as having a peculiarly "modern, urban feeling...which you can use if you want to, say if you're Godard." Some students

responded by citing the jump cuts in <u>Breathless</u> as "just a lot of poor cuts" (aligning themselves with Barry, whether or not they first encountered the sentiment in his comments the previous week). Another protested, saying it had been Godard's purpose afterall to break with narrative convention. One student recalled a thesis film by a recent graduate, screened at September's orientation meeting, which featured a jump cut sequence. "<u>Five Out of Six</u> pushed the limits [of convention]" he claimed. "But," added the teaching assistant, "that's a different kind of jump cut."

> Scene description: In the sequence in question, two teenage boys who had accidentally shot and killed a cow try to move the corpse. In high-angle long-shot, several images of the boys sprawled in different positions across the cow's body are cut together. Since only the boys move, not the cow or the camera, the boys literally bounce around the frame in a sequence of jump cuts.

The cuts are constrained to this "montage" sequence, with its allowable spatial and temporal discontinuity. (Though contemporary montage is not typically structured through a series of jump cuts, spatial and temporal continuity are usually suspended.) The conventional narrative function of montage is to compress time, to quickly advance the plot rather than depict continuous activity. Like new lovers in television drama, whose relationship is developed in a brief sequence of shots at the beach, the market, in bed, all under a heavily-

orchestrated, major-key score, the cow scene suggests, in just a few seconds of running time, the boys' labored and futile efforts to hide the corpse which remains immovable on the wide open field.

Unlike the lovers' sequence however, the cow scene not only sets aside continuity, it expressly resists it by abruptly moving the boys without changing camera angle or proximity to the cow. Because of the frequency and coherence of this device (repeated several times but in the confines of one scene) it is interpreted as a moment of stylistic self-consciousness rather than failed continuity. It appeals to school viewers precisely because it is so successful in rendering themes visually (in a generally stylized film though less so elsewhere). The boys' urgency, their desire to hide the cow before they're caught, is visually expressed in the staccato quality of the jump cuts. Futility on the other hand is conveyed by the monumental stillness of the dead cow, graphically embellished by the unchanging camera position. Moreover the tension or counterpoint between thematic seriousness, bouncing boys and resolutely motionless animal is beguiling in an otherwise tense scenario.

The Five Out of Six example is useful in an analysis of style and competence because it evokes the principle of rendering themes visually both as craft skill (the

mastery of continuity as technique) and aesthetic mandate
(using visual style semantically, as Renoir had done).
Indeed faculty and current students appreciated the
student who made Five Out of Six for his
"inventiveness." He and the film were compared on
several occasions to another student who had graduated
the same year and who had received several awards for his
thesis film, many times in competition with Five Out of
Six. Though observers praised the second student for his
technical and narrative virtuosity and his highly
polished film, Five Out of Six was almost always
considered the greater aesthetic accomplishment. Where
the award-winning piece was described as "beautifully
crafted," Five Out of Six was "innovative," technically
well-executed but also appealingly quirky in narrative
and visual handling, graphically self-conscious (instead
of carefully "transparent") without sacrificing the
story.

To compare these two films is to return to classical
versus "New" Hollywood cinema, the latter soliciting a
viewer's conscious attention to film form with such
striking devices as jump cut sequences though never
abandoning the story or the audience. That Five Out of
Six was so often "runner up" to the other thesis film was
attributed by students and some faculty to a general
conservativeness among festival and competition juries in

several venues. For critical observers, the juries had "played it safe" with proven formulas and had failed to reward a more creative, no less successful and therefore better project.

Conclusion: In this section I have considered thematically motivated style and visually rendered themes as related premises in Grad Film definitions of stylistic competence. Like narrative clarity, they denote aesthetic conditions that ought to be met, rather than specific ways films should look. While style is constrained by narrational mode (as Bordwell has pointed out), it is still true that a variety of code arrangements, if not an infinite variety, can meet particular modal requirements. Students learn the conventions of classical style (eg. depth composition, mastershot procedures—including "coverage" and LS-MS-CU structure—three-point lighting, and spatio-temporal continuity) as an "accessible craft skill," though the stylistic premises demanded of them (thematic motivation, visual rendering) are potentially more expansive than strictly classical conventions imply.

Whether students use the expansiveness those premises offer and diverge from classical style depends on their status in the program: first-year students facing the cut are not likely to do so for fear of failing with novel attempts; highly regarded students

beyond first year do so occasionally, in limited ways
that clearly suggest the coherence and the intentionality
of their innovations (eg. the jump cut sequence in <u>Five
Out of Six</u>). To conclude this chapter I want to develop
this relationship--between style, narrative clarity, and
intention--as a critical element in Grad Film definitions
of communicative competence, a relationship closely
aligned with the department's cultivation of "working
artists".

Coda: Communicative Competence and Working Artists

I have discussed competence in terms of narrative
and stylistic repertoires--aesthetic techniques,
conventions and premises. In this analysis, I have drawn
heavily from screening commentaries, treating them as a
source of data on how the practical meanings of narrative
and style are socially constituted. But the commentaries
are also routine activities in department life, events in
which people enact and refine particular social roles as
well as symbolic practices, indeed in which those
symbolic practices become part of the ground against
which the figure--of student director--is interactionally
cast.

The commentaries represent not only an occasion of
conforming student films to aesthetic requirements, but
also of conforming intentions to outcomes: what did the

student intend to do in the film and has she or he managed to do so by the audience's standards? Through a telling if not altogether typical commentary on a first-year student's third film, in this coda I suggest that each level of competence (aesthetic repertoires and intentions) aligns with the ideal of working artist--the development and practice of repertoires with the emphasis on working, and the claim to expressive intention with the emphasis on artist. The coda thus introduces the shift from aesthetic repertoires to the director as social role (Ch.4) and again to talent as a cultural symbol in Grad Film (Ch.5).

In school screenings, after a student's rough- or fine-cut is projected, she or he faces the class from the front of the room, taking and posing questions to and from the rest of the group about how to proceed to the next stage of refinement, in editing and other aspects of post-production. Importantly, as the quoted commentaries suggest, it is always the director who accounts for the film as a technical, aesthetic and narrative artifact in this setting, regardless of the innumerable others involved in its production--a practice which emphasizes the individualism of the directorial role. Films, collective products, are dramatized in these screenings as individual ones. [15]

Directorial intention as a focal point in screening

commentaries underlies what I described earlier as a
local theory of film as communication, which presumes an
audience able to interpret stories unselfconsciously, to
say what is happening and why without recognizing the
structural aspects that evoke those interpretations. In
class screenings, however, the audience is not only
presumed but actual; students view the work of other
students and respond to it in light of who they are not,
the originators of the film.

Unlike the hypothetical audience, students acting in
their role as audience members indeed pay attention to
the how as well as the what, to distinguishing signifier
and signified in the creation of cinematic meaning. That
is, afterall, the enterprise they are engaged in as
filmmaking students--fitting the form of presentation to
the story and its message, the director's story and the
director's message, to his or her intention. Such is the
nature of expressive competence in the symbolic mode of
film as the school community defines it. A great deal of
time during the commentaries is therefore devoted to
reconstructions of "what happened," of who the characters
are to one and other, of what the conflict is. About
parts of a film, particular scenes or sequences, and
about the film as a whole, students recapitulate events
and relationships, always implying and sometimes stating
the question: "is that what you meant?"

Particularly in first-year classes, where students engage most frequently and routinely in viewing each other's work, the push from rough to fine to final cut of a particular film is to fill in moments where the story is elliptical (appealing to the structural demands of narrative clarity) and clear away elements that lend little to or confuse a viewer's understanding of the plot, even where they may be stylistically appealing, "nice to look at." Again, theme motivates style; the sequence of events and their qualities or emotional significance, as a director conceives them, should determine the form of their depiction.

Such a confident distinction between what is meant and how it ought to be presented is not so easy to make based on texts alone. But in class screenings, the distinction is evolved in light of the film and its director, who interacts with an audience, all of whom share a set of ideas about how narrative films work. Within this set of circumstances, directorial intention is discursively cast as the ought, the reason for writing, shooting and cutting in a specific way, even though aspects of a particular intention or message may not have occurred phenomenologically prior to its definition in the screening commentary. In other words, the distinction and the causal relationship between intention and outcome is at least in part engendered by

the commentary itself (cf. Smith 1984).   An example comes

from The Rail (the first-year third film discussed

earlier under "showing" versus "telling").

> Plot summary: George, Caroline and Roy all inhabit a
> small, depressed mill town. Caroline and George
> work in a bar called The Rail, he as bartender, she
> as waitress. He is a quiet, good-looking,
> contemplative man in his mid-thirties and she a
> pretty but faded woman in her late twenties.
> Caroline's husband, Roy, is mean, bitter and spent
> at the age of 45. Though married, Roy and Caroline
> never had children because, as we come to understand
> within minutes of the film's opening, Roy is
> sterile.
>   The film opens in the bar, pool-playing patrons
> in the background, Caroline and George talking, she
> languishing over a cigarette and reflecting on the
> depressions and broken promises life in the town has
> brought her and stands to bring others. George
> listens sympathetically and in the course of
> conversation asks why she never had a family.
> Caroline reluctantly alludes to some medical problem
> of Roy's, then quietly tells George that "we don't
> never do it, 'cept when he's real tanked, and since
> the mill cut back..."
>   At this point Roy enters the bar and orders a
> drink. George asks for cash, reminding Roy that his
> tab hasn't been paid. With a snarl, Roy tells
> George to take it out of Caroline's tips, and downs
> the shot in a single swallow. The scene fades to
> black.
>   Fading up, Caroline and George are closing the
> place for the night while Roy, drunk, sleeps at the
> bar. Caroline tries to rouse him and get him
> outside to the car. Roy wakes in anger, insisting
> he'll drive himself, and violently grabs the keys
> from her hands, muttering something about the
> "fuckin' doctors." Still drunk, he starts to leave
> the bar. Caroline and he struggle, Caroline
> declaring her embarrassment, but Roy has made up his
> mind. Viciously he asks her if she's embarrassed in
> front of her "lover boy," referring to George, and
> threatens her with his fist. George catches Roy's
> arm and tells him to get out, warning him angrily
> that "if there's one mark on her tomorrow..." Roy
> staggers out and Caroline rushes to catch him, but
> George steps in and tells her to let him go. Again
> the film fades to black.

We fade up on George and Caroline parked in George's pick-up--he has brought her home to the trailer park where she and Roy live. They talk briefly, say goodnight, then find themselves embraced in a passionate kiss, despite George's reluctance at first. The scene fades.

We fade up on Roy seated in the trailer at dawn the following morning. Caroline enters the trailer and is startled to discover Roy awake. He is ferocious, telling her he knows she was out all night with George. He starts to hit Caroline around the trailer, she trying to escape, he trapping and beating her. He ends the beating by handcuffing her to a chair. Roy then calls George to tell him that if he loves Caroline so much, he can come find what's left of her, on the tracks.

The film cuts to a daylight exterior scene where Roy drags Caroline kicking and screaming to the railroad tracks. He forces her down and cuffs her wrists to the rails, straddling her and putting the shaft of a revolver in his mouth. Together they will die under the steel of an oncoming train--that is were it not for George, who arrives at the tracks, skidding across the dry, dusty terrain in his pick-up with barely enough time to rescue Caroline.

George persuades Roy to drop his gun and give him the keys to the handcuffs by telling Roy that "nothing happened" between himself and Caroline, indeed nothing could happen because "I don't got nothin' to do it with. Got it shot clean off in 'Nam...I can't even pee standin' up." When Roy doesn't believe him, George unbuckles his belt and drops his trousers to prove that indeed he has no penis. Roy, sickened and pathetic, falls away from Caroline and George rushes to her side. Amid the whistle of the train fast approaching, the handcuff key breaks off in the lock. Roy pitches his gun to George, who shoots open the remaining cuff and pulls Caroline to safety. In pathetic misery on hand and knee by the tracks, Roy apologizes to George. George holds Caroline, who beats hysterically at his chest. The train whooshes by behind them and the film ends.

After the rough cut was screened, the following commentary ensued. (P is Peter, the student director, R is Richard, I is Ilona, the 1A writing instructor, F1, 2

3, 4, 5 and 6 are women students). [16]   While the class'
response to the film overall was appreciative, several
people were taken aback by the "funniness" of the final
scene at the tracks, ending an otherwise "dramatic"
film.

> F1: I'm sorry, him showing that he doesn't have
> anything is very funny...[class
> laughter]...maybe...
>
> P: It's supposed to be...
>
> F1: Okay, if it's meant to be, yeah. I don't kow if
> it's the pacing part to it, maybe something you
> can fix in the editing, but uh, it's pretty
> funny...
>
> P: Uh huh...what would you suggest?
>
> F1: I don't know, the fact that he [George] actually
> does that [lowers his trousers] to show him
> seems kind of...funny.
>
> P: Well yeah, that's the whole point, it's like a
> showdown...
>
> F2: It doesn't really fit with the mood of the film.
>
> F3: And it breaks your suspense.
>
> P: It doesn't fit?
>
> F2: Well the whole film isn't funny, I mean it's
> definitely like B-movie style but it's not,
> we're not like laughing out loud until you get
> to that point where it's just like...ridiculous!
>
> F4: What if you just go to the first shot where he's
> going to make the gesture, like I'll do this if
> you want, and stop it there. That shot between
> the legs of that guy starting to whoah! is just
> kind of...
>
> P: I wouldn't drop it for my mother...[CLASS
> laughter]
>
> F4: You wouldn't?

TA: I think you absolutely need it, I think it's a
black comedy, and that's like where it's comic
relief. Without it it's a tacky melodrama and
when you get there you realize what the
picture's all been about, I think you absolutely
need it.

F5: Oh, this is a comedy?

F6: This is a comedy, excuse me?

F5: Wait this is a serious question, is this
intentionally a comedy?

F6: Peter, did you think of this as a comedy?

F5: Is it supposed to be funny?

P: Well, let's face it, I think it's hysterical
that the guy has no dick [class laughter].

F5: Wait wait wait wait wait...is the movie supposed
to be funny?

I: No it's a melodrama...and melodrama is always
somehow exaggerated...

F6: Can he answer that please? [To Ilona, requesting
that Peter answer the question]

I: Yeah, sure.

[Background group: Part of it is...]

F5: When are we supposed to be amused, actively
amused?

P: Well yeah I mean it's either that or I have them
all killed on the tracks.

F6: No Peter...

F5: When do you as a director want me as an audience
member to be laughing and thinking it's funny?

P: Well that's a good point because I do mix a lot
of stuff up like the beating scene is certainly
not funny...

F4: But when he comes out of the trailer it's sort
of funny, he looks like a gorilla...

P: Yeah, it is. It is meant to be like a B-movie
     action picture.

F6: Action picture is not a comedy.

F5: Because I think that you need to trim a lot
     of...

P: To me there's nothing wrong with having a comedy
     in an action picture...

During the screening and the class commentary, I was

struck by some class members' apparently guilty response

to the film as comedy (to wit the early comment from the

woman designated F1, "I'm sorry but...it's funny"). Few

third films made that Spring had so engaged students or

had elicited from them such robust laughter. As we

watched the rough cut together (screened without its

dialogue--Peter "spoke" each character's speeches during

projection), I was laughing too, a response I'd

anticipated (from myself and the class) when Peter had

first told me the story over the telephone, when I read

the script, and again when I was with Peter and his crew

on location, shooting the final scene. Perhaps

unsympathetically, the scene had struck me at the time as

an Oedipal caricature. That had not, however, been my

sense of Peter's intention or the crew's reaction, all of

whom described the scene while on location as "intense"

and "cool", but never as "funny." (Crew members were

present but silent during the screening commentary.)

As the commentary continued, students and faculty

accounted for their sense of the unintended comedy of the
final scene in terms of the mood set up earlier in the
film. Particularly given the style of the beating
sequence, shot hand-held with a wide-angle lens in long
takes and described as "social realist" and "very
disturbing", the final sequence at the railroad tracks
appeared "highly stylized," and "comic"--"campy" in the
perils-of-Pauline tradition.

As the first and fourth women above suggest, this
quality was particularly true of the moment when George
reveals his injured genitalia to Roy, a low-angle medium
shot of Roy through George's legs in the immediate
foreground, where George lowers his Levis just enough to
suggest the revelation. In other words, the visual
rendering of themes in the first three quarters of the
film was "out of whack" with the visual rendering of
themes in the last quarter.

Unlike Five Out of Six, the style of The Rail (at
least at the rough-cut stage) was "inconsistent" rather
than "unconventional", in a way that made the final
sequence's effect on the audience seem "unintended."
Late in the commentary (which also took up other issues,
like the earlier discussion about the functional weight
of dialogue and action) one of the students (known for
her willingness to problematize narrative lines during
screening commentaries) returned to the issue of

intention:

> F5: Um...maybe I'm crazy, it's possible
> [laughter]...I would like permission...

> R: Let's take a vote on that! [laughter]

> F5: [With humor] This is a serious request, because
> I totally misunderstood the movie, I totally
> misunderstood. When I was like snickering and
> laughing, I was like really embarrassed, I
> though oh my God Peter's going to kill me, I'm
> going to hurt his feelings. I felt really
> guilty, I thought oh my god I'm reading this
> movie all wrong. I should be like crying and
> really upst the whole time, and if it's supposed
> to be funny and it's supposed to be a farce and
> it's supposed to be like almost a parody, I want
> you to give me permission to laugh, so I don't
> feel guilty when I watch it. Because I really
> didn't get it, I really felt like such an
> asshole the whole time.

This student's comment suggests (and other students

mentioned to me after class that she was neither "crazy"

nor alone in her response) is both the fragility and the

sacredness of intention. On the one hand, the student

judged her own response to the film as unintended from

the director's perspective; on the other, she felt bad

about that response, about suggesting to Peter that he

had failed to do what he'd set out to. Here, intention

is fragile to the extent that its expression and

interpretation are not entirely controlled by the person

thought to possess it, and sacred in that it ought to

account for why audience members respond as they do to an

expressive attempt, at least a competent or successful

one.

From the perspective of communications theory, "fragility" might be renamed "polysemy", a term which suggests the variety of meanings different social actors attribute to aesthetic objects or events, and one which carries less valuative weight than "fragility." But Grad Film students, especially first-year students facing the cut, are less interested in illustrating theory than in demonstrating themselves to be competent filmmakers, thus "fragility" aptly implies the threat they experience in unstable meanings. As an advanced student commented on the way to a location one day,

> the perfect Grad Film script is where in your first draft you figure out what you want to say, and in the second you force the audience to think in your terms.

While most students would concede that at some level there are bound to be meanings "in" or attributed to a film that the director hadn't intended, I actually heard a student speak such a perspective only once in my year at Grad Film. Other students around him at the time agreed, though dismissively so. True enough, their response implied, but so what? What counted was what the director wanted to say.

Late in the commentary, Ilona (who very much liked The Rail recast the entire film as melodrama and the final scene as absurd, appropriately so (she thought) given melodrama's generic requirements. The problem, she

insisted, was the beating sequence.

I: I am very interested listening to this
discussion concerning the genre. [Melodrama] is
a very complicated genre, and you try to
simplify it, whether it should be a kind
of...very dark, tragedy, or whether it should be
a light comedy and it is definitely the opposite
of both and this is the power of the film. It
works on the absurd in the sense that it deals
with madness. This man [Roy] is really beyond
the normal. So therefore to prepare this kind
of absurd, this kind of unbelievable violence
has to be somehow beyond the normal reaction we
have. We have to laugh, but not because it is
ridiculous in the very simple way, but because
it is absurd, because it's beyond the very
conceivable or very banal...

F6: And do you think that that's happening? [Much
questioning from the class]

F2: But Ilona I don't think that it's working on
that level.

F6: Only intellectually...

I: It is working on that level because it is so
strong and so aggressive and so violent...it has
to be built up, where we get into this kind of
cool madness, and therefore I believe that the
whole beating sequence is wrong because it is
too long and kind of realistic...

F2: Exactly.

I: ...psychologically it is not justified, because
he prepares something in a kind of cool
madness. He has this crazy idea, he knows
already, so he has no reason to beat her up so
violently, because the real idea is to handcuff
her. So, if someone is so much beyond the, uh,
the kind of reasonable then it cannot be
combined with this kind of everyday passionate,
you know, violence, and therefore I think this
has to be shortened. Then if we get into this
kind of, really inconceivable level of violence,
then we go to this kind of hilarious, or
ridiculous I don't know what, which is the
absurd again.

F2: I agree with what Ilona's saying because...

I: It has to be...really somewhere it is a very
    strange mixture of it...and therefore, the
    laughter we all had, it _is_ a kind of hysterical
    relief, and it has to be, and this is the power
    of the film.

F2: But when you spend such a long time on the
    beating, you're definitely brought away from
    that whole genre, because, I mean in the
    beginning I get this feeling of like '40s, you
    know, Humphrey Bogart, I don't know, something,
    and then when you come into the house the shot
    with the handcuffs is totally ridiculous, I like
    that, but then the beating is just, it's like
    from a different movie to me...

While Ilona attributes power to the film, she does

not expressly attribute the comedy of the final scene to

Peter's intention. Her interpretation does, however,

legitimate the audience's response in artistic and

directorial terms. What some students in the class had

seen as failed intention becomes emotional intensity, in

Ilona's authoritative commentary. She says the film

needs some technical work; Peter ought to shorten the

beating sequence. Here, Ilona invokes the familiar

premise of style at the service of narrative. Though the

final sequence is comic in terms of its stylistic homage

to the perils of Pauline melodrama, its primary function

(according to Ilona) is thematic and emotional; it

conveys Roy's psychosis and the nigh-on mythical quality

of his violence. Against this ground, the "social

realist" treatment in the first beating sequence

contradicts this thematic message, juxtaposing the
dramatic finale against an incompatible and somewhat
prosaic characterization of Roy as "merely" violent but
not crazy. To remove the beating sequence would not only
make the film stylistically more coherent, it would
sustain what for Ilona is the more compelling
characterization of Roy. Recalling editorial preferences
in the Book-of-the-Month Club, the best books (like the
best films) enable readers to <u>experience</u> an encounter
with characters (Radway 1988:531).

Not surprisingly, Peter decided to barely allude to
the beating and leave the "comedy" intact. As he
commented to me in a conversation a couple of days later
(at which point he was exhausted and somewhat tentative):

> LH: You said you were planning to cut down the
> beating scene?
>
> Yeah, I'm going to cut that down, and I'm cutting
> the end way down, and keeping strictly with telling
> the story. I'm having a problem with being very
> caught up in the visual nature of the film. I just
> need to simply, straightforwardly tell the story.
> There were some comments I did really take to heart
> and...at the time felt...I came out of the session
> yesterday feeling very bad, I can tell you. What it
> was...several people came up to me to tell me they
> really liked the film, they thought it was really
> good, but obviously it needs a cut, it needs work.
> I think that it was controversial in a way because
> the tone of the film is confusing. It is serious in
> the beginning, and sort of leads you into this
> drama, even melodrama but still, it leads you into
> it, and in fact by the time we get to the tracks the
> tone changes. I think the tone changes gradually
> but there is a...uh...disjointed tone between the
> intense violence of the beginning and the
> melodramatic violence of the end, that dragging

along the tracks and all that stuff. I personally
really like the dialogue, "I loved you" [deadpan]
and everything. To me it is melodramatic, and that
was my intent, to make it... _funny_...but I mean
dramatic but funny, in essence melodramatic, I _was_
trying to be melodramatic.

Again, having been on Peter's shoot and at his

actors' rehearsals during pre-production, I was surprised

by his (albeit strained) representation of the last scene

as comedy after it had been described that way by the

class, knowing that had not been his declared intention

or the effect he anticipated during rehearsal and

shooting. But in a communicative environment where

minimizing or closing the gap between intention and

outcome is a principle hallmark of competence, and where

students compete amongst each other for scarce symbolic

and material rewards based on their perceived competence,

better to re-cast one's intentions than acknowledge

having unintentionally created such a strong comic effect

when a highly dramatic one was planned. Particularly

since the new effect is regarded as good, accomplished as

comedy (or melodrama) if not recognized as tragedy, Peter

can say, in effect, "I meant it all along."

For Peter to suggest the comedy was intended is not

deceitful, a calculated measure to claim for himself an

achievement not rightly his (though some students'

aggressiveness in pushing him to account for his

intentions early in the screening suggests they thought

he was making just such a claim). It was to salvage his position as director at a particularly vulnerable (because public) moment, and to resolve the cognitive dissonance that arose when the class' response to his film was not what he expected.

At the level of claiming a fit between intention and outcome during the commentary, Peter left his competence intact. At the level of craft skill, however, he was not quite as successful. Though Peter was far from cut after first year, the external committee evaluations of The Rail unanimously commented on the sematic confusion between drama and humor. [17] For example:

> About the direction (from Reviewer #1): Directing is hard to judge because the intent is so unclear. Is this just parody? If so, it doesn't have the right tone. In terms of setting the shots, the results are mixed.

> Also about the direction (from Reviewer #2): Needs a style to carry off the vision. Is this a mock movie take-off on Perils of Pauline, Sun Also Rises, etc? Or a social realist dialogue drama, as it seems to begin. The audience is lost--we can't take it straight and direction hasn't given us a handle.

> About the writing (from Reviewer #1): The writing is badly mixed. The first part seems like a filmed stage play. Then, with the railroad track idea, it seems like an awkward parody.

> Also about the writing (from Reviewer #3): Movie-making not bad, but to mix a device from old movies which we cannot take seriously with serious melodrama is a bit difficult to take. All ends up being funny but not amusing.

> General evaluation (from Reviewer #1): This film has a rather garbled quality, even though there are some forceful moments.

The commentary on The Rail is a high-profile and atypically self-conscious example. Still it suggests that intention is both an a priori motive in the structuring of filmic messages and a form of currency traded and banked in the social construction and evaluation of communicative competence. Again, this is not to say that intention is "mere" performance; as the discussions of The Rail and other films suggest, students are indeed invested in their ideas, visions and images of what their work will look like and how people will respond to them. But as working artists, they must also present themselves as in control of the meaning and significance of their films. This is not despite the radically collective effort filmmaking represents in the school but because of it. To make an individual's intention the centerpiece of competence sustains the Romantic image of artistic integrity amid the highly labor-divided and commercial enterprise of narrative filmmaking. The analytic practice of invoking, reconstructing and otherwise appealing to directorial intention in the refinement of student work (that is, in the screenings and commentaries) sustains the emphasis on film as art and directors as artists. Thus there may be no garrett directors in Grad Film, but there are visionaries.

Ch.4 continues with the student director as working

artist, shifting emphasis from textual competence to the interactive drama of film production.

Notes to Chapter Three

1.   The use of equipment clearly has its stylistic
side, though is largely regarded as a technical
domain. For example, at the beginning of his first
camera class, one first-year instructor told the
class that he would "teach from a technical point
of view, instead of an artistic one. In art,
everyone has an opinion." What followed were
lectures and in-class demonstrations about how
cameras and lenses work, about focal length, f-
stops, shutter mechanisms, light measurements,
lighting set-ups, film stock sensitivity etc. Each
of these areas indeed has aesthetic consequences
though were not considered in expressly aesthetic
terms. Design issues related to camera (eg. static
and moving composition) were taken up in the
production workshop.

2.   By "potential consequences" I refer to the cut,
though it involves a complex variety of aesthetic
and extra-aesthetic judgements (cf. Ch.5).

3.   Students do recognize the relationship between
immediate production conditions and aesthetic
outcomes. For example, now and again they
expressed to me their impatience with "overly
symbolic" interpretations of particular images or
events on film, adding that a lot of what we see on
screen was happenstance, not the director's
subconscious intent. In one case, a student
couldn't believe the significance a critic
attributed to a young boy's on-screen semi-erection
in a film by Andrezej Wajda. He told me that in an
interview, Wajda dismissed a question about the boy
by saying it had been a cold shooting day. The
student concluded that "half of what you see in
movies is pure accident, just whatever happened
during production." Regardless of the exaggeration
in this statement, it (and others like it)
acknowledges the stylistic consequences of
production conditions, the relationship between
"work" and "style," if not in any specific or
systematic way. Likewise, other students on other
occasions complained, for example, that aiming for
particular "qualities" in an actor's performance
was all very well and good, but most of the time
you were happy if they just "hit their mark"
(meaning stopped at the proper point on the set to
accommodate framing, light and action). Sometimes

the limits placed on style by the conditions of
production are cast as a problem of student films,
other times as endemic to filmmaking in general.
But again, it is not a perspective self-consciously
brought to bear in class discussions of style, with
the exception of budgets. Students routinely point
out that in most cases, bigger budgets enable
images and films that smaller budgets do not.

4.   "Films about objects" was in part Richard's wry
      comment on vanguardist art school film programs.
      Though I believe such comments were intended to
      entertain students as much as convey any genuine
      skepticism, they caricature the distinction between
      narrative and non-narrative or "experimental"
      structures and styles. (They also suggest
      Richard's familiarity with a variety of genres and
      figures, and therefore his authority as a teacher
      of filmmaking.)

5.   Bordwell suggests that the canonical story format
      may be transcultural though tempers this claim
      given the limits of narratological research
      (1985:35).

6.   This description was offered in a comparison of
      narrational modes that implicitly favored less
      commercial, conventional or familiar ones.

7.   Again, Smith (1984) is critical of the investment
      of theoretical energy among narratologists in the
      distinction between a story and its telling on any
      occasion, as if there were a story apart from any
      telling (be it a fifth edition printing or a
      personal recollection). However, in accounting for
      film school practice, it makes sense to distinguish
      between scripts and films, and between stories and
      scripts, since students and faculty attribute a
      structural essence to "stories" quite apart from
      the dialogue or camera work through which they are
      expressed.

8.   A term related to "pay off" is "planting," meaning
      the strategic placement of particular objects and
      events that will be made use of as the narrative
      unfolds. For example, early in the film Blue
      Thunder (1983) the lead female character is
      depicted (for no apparent reason) as an expert if
      maniacle driver, weaving and speeding through dense
      traffic on the L.A. freeway. Later we recall her
      skill when she must deliver top secret videotapes

from the endangered hero to the proper
authorities. "Aha!" we say when she receives her
instructions, "she knows how to drive!" The
earlier driving scene is a "plant" which "pays off"
in the climactic sequence.

9.   For example, Nina commented on a first-year third
       film about a photographer with "well, it ain't Blow-
       up," implying that the film was good and the
       narrative clear though overall not as inventive (by
       student standards) as Antonioni's film (1967) (by
       the professional standards of art cinema). The
       comment provides a brief but succinct expression of
       devotion to the art cinema repertoire. It also
       provides a moment of irony, since this was the
       murder story about which Jim had said "I don't want
       to think, I want to know." As a member of the
       evaluations committee, with her reference to Blow-
       Up, Nina was in effect saying "I don't want to
       know, I want to think." Issues of evaluative
       consensus and disagreement are further discussed in
       Ch.5.

10.   In the conclusion to this thesis, I return briefly
       to the social-class implications of aesthetic
       distance versus the participatory ethos.

11.   There is also the economic implication of a visual
       curriculum: non-sync rigs are cheaper and thus a
       non-sync curriculum in first year can accommodate
       more students, whose tuition in turn supports
       smaller but more expensive second and third year
       classes. This implication is not necessarily a
       motive however, since it is not at all clear that
       the silent/non-sync program would be abandoned were
       the department to be more generously endowed or,
       for whatever reasons, if Nina were not financially
       required (by the School) to admit such a large
       first-year class.

12.   However, the department does not offer formal
       instruction in art direction or set design, an
       absence several students lamented, particularly
       those with some background or ability in these
       areas. Students with reputations as accomplished
       art directors are thus in demand since theirs is a
       skill few people have. Still, though all students
       acknowledge the importance of good art direction,
       few say they want to become art directors. Some
       expect to use those skills as a way into feature
       filmmaking, though fear being pigeonholed since art

directors spend little time on the set during
production and thus have little opportunity to
learn directing actors and camera.

13. Interestingly, Murray and other professional script
writers sometimes use sociological ethnographies as
sources of dialogue and speech patterning for
particular characters and character groups.

14. In an interview shortly after his rough cut
screening, Peter commented that the judgement of
"talkiness" might have been in part a matter of the
absent sound track. As the silent rough cut was
projected, Peter himself spoke the dialogue for
each character, a common practice (one I call
"speaking the track") among students whose dialogue
tracks aren't ready by their rough cut screening
dates. Peter's hope was that once the track was in
place, the actors' performances would be regarded
as strong enough to warrant the volume of
dialogue. In fact there was no formal opportunity
for people to collectively respond, say to a fine
cut, since Peter didn't show again until late on
the Spring marathon day, when films are screened
without discussion. He may have been right about
the anticipated effect of the track; still, the
rough cut critique of his dialogue/running time
ratio sustains the value of "showing" over
"telling."

15. Exceptions occur, if very infrequently. On one
occasion in first year, many of the class'
questions were answered by a cinematographer on
behalf of a director who seated himself reluctantly
at the front of the room against a side wall,
saying little though conveying his discomfort and
borderline unwillingness to address the class.
Some students and faculty later called his style
"prima dona," the obnoxious "artiste" who feigns
alienation and antipathy toward talking about his
work. Their impatience arises from the belief that
directors must claim credit and responsibility for
their films, that to dismiss or overly dramatize
one's endurance of the commentary is irresponsible
as a working artist, this time with the emphasis on
work and on a collective aesthetic sensibility that
sees narrative film as explicitly communicative. A
film "speaks for itself" when it is finished (and
it is finished when it speaks for itself). Until
then, the student director is obliged to talk about
it, to solicit classmates' interpretations toward

ultimately reconciling those interpretations with
his or her intentions.

16. The misogyny of <u>The Rail</u> was not mentioned during
the screening commentary in part (I expect) because
some women students' earlier resistance to sexist
content in a couple of films had ultimately been
dismissed by other students and some faculty
members. During production, one of the lead actors
on the film asked Peter if women in the class might
"get on his case for sexist violence". "A couple"
Peter resigned, though he went on to say that "deep
in their hearts they'll know this is a good film."
Suspense and heightened drama (and resistance or
indifference to feminist critiques of
representation) were the standards in Peter's
second comment. Several weeks after his screening,
however, he lamented the intensity of the violence
in the film, in retrospect calling it "gratuitous
...really not necessary for the drama."

17. Again, I return to the discussion of evaluative
consensus and disagreement among faculty in Ch.5.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIRECTORIAL ROLE AND PERSONA

In this study I am concerned with principle aspects
of socialization among film students. In the last
chapter, I considered narrative competence, its themes,
variations, and contested definitions among faculty and
students, each with different stakes in defining and/or
demonstrating competence. There, issues of socialization
focussed on aesthetic codes and styles--in Grad Film,
what kinds of movies do students learn to make and what
aesthetic values do they come to embrace and resist? How
is student work judged by others as successful or
failed? Ch. 3 ended with a shift from aesthetic
standards to role identities expressed in screening
commentaries. Specifically, I argued that students
protect their directorial reputations in part by
negotiating the appearance of "fit" between intentions
and outcomes in filmmaking. Again, this is not to say
that such fit is less than real, but that to different
degrees gaps between intentions and outcomes are actively
reconciled as student films are produced, reviewed and
critiqued.

In the current chapter I continue with the social
role of the student director, this time negotiated and

expressed in film production. As I have stressed
throughout this study, Grad Film students hope to become
directors, an aspiration that becomes concrete as they
make their own films.

The screenings described earlier are a part of
student filmmaking, but here I use the term "production"
more narrowly. In local parlance, and in filmmaking
generally, production is the period where cast and crew
assemble to actually film story sequences, to get them
"in the can." It follows "pre-production," with its
myriad arrangements for casting, rehearsal, hiring
principal crew members, location scouting, art direction,
costuming, collecting props, etc. Sensibly, it precedes
"post-production," when the film is edited, special
effects added, score composed, sound tracks mixed,
optical prints made and remade. Typically, students
begin pre-production with scripts (or drafts) they have
written or adapted. While pre- and post-production are
eminently sociable processes, the director's position in
the division of labor is most strikingly enacted during
production. Thus my discussion of directorial role in
this chapter comes principally from student shoots,
though is also informed by interviews and observations
from pre- and post-production.

By role I mean stance as well as bundle of tasks in
the division of labor. It is important to describe what

student directors do in production (as distinct from other crew members). But to claim or aspire to be a director means something more. It means to cultivate a persona, related to but not accounted for by tasks and obligations. Following Elizabeth Burns (1972:122-43), I argue that directorial role comes from both the division of labor in filmmaking (implying a set of tasks, effects, obligations, objectivities and acts) and from the less discrete qualities of persona (implying personal styles, affect, motives, subjectivities and attitudes). Here I am interested in the relationship between task performance and persona in the construction of directorial authority on student shoots. On the set, such authority is the interactional counterpart of directorial intention in narrative practice. Ultimately, a student's reputation as a director depends on judgements of both.

To set the role of director in cultural and historical perspective, what follows is an account of the popular image of the film director and a brief review of critical and institutional developments in the film industry occurring at about the time Grad Film was established. Following this historical perspective, I describe the director in film school as a relational position among others in the division of labor on student shoots. I continue with an analysis of how it is that

"director" is sustained as a highly individualized role amid collective practice (including by a group of feminist women consciously trying to change conventional crew relationships), then return to the professional industry as a determining context for film schools and student filmmakers. Like style and narrative, the director in film school finds its legacy in the "New" Hollywood.

The Image of the Film Director as Artist

In the movie The Stunt Man (1980), Peter O'Toole plays film director Eli Cross, a formidable, stylish figure first introduced swooping about in a helicopter rigged for aerial cinematography. Eli is directing an anti-war picture set during World War I though made in the wake of Vietnam. The film-within-a-film is about a lone, heroic American soldier, riddled with enemy fire and psychic confusion, trying to escape German-occupied Austria despite his love for the woman who has sheltered him. The film itself is about the production of this picture and about the enlistment of a young man, "Lucky," as stunt double for the heroic male lead.

Lucky arrives on location under suspicious circumstances following the death of the previous stunt man, Bert, in his attempt to execute a dangerous stunt. Lucky needs protection from the police for an undisclosed

crime and Eli needs a new stunt man, both to make his
movie and to persuade the sherriff that "Bert may be
stupid but he isn't dead yet." Lucky stands in for Bert,
giving himself a job and Eli a stay of arrest for Bert's
death. With drama and remorse, Eli declares to Lucky
that Bert's fate is a bloody tragedy. "But," he adds,
"there's nothing I can do about that now. I must have
this location for three more days." Thus the plot that
unfolds is organized around two questions: what did Lucky
do, and how far will Eli go to get his film in the can?

The second question, about Eli's motives and the
risks he appears willing to take (with others more than
himself), underwrites a dramatic caricature of the movie
director. Eli Cross (his name connoting religious
imagery) is an aesthetic dictator, if benevolent in his
style and wit. From his aerial wizardry in helicopter or
camera crane to his earthly but still majestic gait
around locations and screening rooms, we the audience and
other mortals in the depicted cast and crew recognize his
transcendence. He is the pre-eminent _artiste_, a man with
a vision whose purity is willed amid the damning
contingencies of film production, contingencies we see on
screen.

Like any glamorized representation of the behind-the-
scenes of filmmaking, _The Stunt Man_ permits us beguiling
glimpses of lighting set-ups, actors' rehearsals,

location caravans, boundless quantities of technical gear, script conferences, dailies screenings--select fragments which together denote the complexity and industry of production. Labor is divided among hundreds of workers whose chain of command is rarely spelled out except for one detail: everyone listens to Eli, who is sometimes cajoling and grateful, other times brutally directive.

Despite the indignities and manipulations they endure, Eli's collaborators stick by him. Sam, his friend and screenwriter, agrees to rewrite after rewrite however unceremoniously or caustically demanded. Nina, the female lead routinely subject to Eli's paternal condescensions, defends him to Lucky following a brief run-in over a scene. "Don't let the fact that Eli treats you as an equal go to your head," she tells him. "How dare you open your mouth to him that way. Do you have any idea what he's trying to say to people? He's the kindest, most dedicated..."--at which point Eli flatly dismisses her from the screening room for her minor disturbances.

Lucky is protected by Eli's baroque fascination with his experience as a soldier in Vietnam, but he too is duped when Eli adds several dangerous elements to a well-rehearsed stunt, additions Lucky discovers only as the stunt is shot. After the take, Eli explains that it was

for "that element of surprise." Still, Lucky declares to
the stunt trainer: "I think I hate the man but I can't
take my eyes off of him." "Just a crush," replies the
trainer. Whether familiars or newcomers, those who
surround Eli are swayed by his charisma and by their
belief in his artistic vision and integrity. When Eli
cuts one of Sam's scenes to replace it with one of his
own, Sam is hurt, but won over:

> When I wrote that scene my oldest son, for the first
> time in his life, shook my hand and said 'Dad, I'm
> proud'...so why is it that your vulgar, outrageous
> scene is so much more impassioned, so much more
> real?

Eli himself is given a dinner scene in which to
convey artistic intensity through talk of the anti-war
beliefs that inspired the film, and classical bitching
about post-production interference. He responds to Sam's
resignations to the "cutting room floor" by passionately
declaring "this film is my child."

Throughout The Stunt Man, we understand that for Eli
the film comes first. He wheels, deals and gambles the
safety of others to get his scenes. He is a stylish
autocrat, a manipulator deified by dialog, camera and
subordinates whose ego and purpose sustain him amid all
the studio lackeys who might be so ill-willed or stupid
to compromise his vision. He treats his producer fondly
but dismisses his concerns about time and money. He
barters with his cinematographer for more running time on

a scene, demanding ten minutes when he needs six. He reconciles himself to Bert's death, always wondering what went wrong but still recruiting Lucky to retake the stunt. Where his compatriots are moved by Eli, Eli is moved by the film.

Eli Cross reproduces the image of the romantic artist--visionary, transcendent, psychicly suspect. But a challenge to the characteristic individualism of that image is implicit in the collectivity of filmmaking. In The Stunt Man, we have a sense of the complexity of production and of the cooperation Eli must provoke. (It's "his" film, afterall, not, say, Sam's or the producer's.) That challenge, however, is more potential than real since the romantic image is in fact embellished by the enormity of the filmmaking task. No matter how delicately or forcefully Eli must negotiate the terrain of divided labor, he remains in control of the film, whose production becomes the realization of his artistic intention. The power he weilds over people, resources and daylight itself, is considerably greater than that of the lone creator introduced by the Renaissance and banished by the 19th century to the margins of sociability (cf. Gross 1989). To be sure, Eli Cross is a caricature, but a useful one for the questions he elicits about the encounter between filmmaking and the romantic image of the artist in Western cultural history.

This is an image both explicated and debunked by contemporary sociologists of art. Howard Becker (1982), Griselda Pollock (1980) and Janet Wolff (1982), among others, have argued for the social production of art, demystifying the role of the artist and calling for an analysis that places artists, their biographies, and their artwork amid broader social and economic conditions (including the history of style). In Becker's terms, the many discreet groups who together constitute an art world (artists, critics, manufacturers, collectors etc.) integrate their activities by means of convention-- standard practices in the daily business of production, distribution and consumption, and symbolic conventions in whatever expressive medium or mode. Becker's characterization challenges popular notions about the source of artistry and artists. Aesthetic works do not spring full-blown from the hearts and hands of rare and gifted individuals. They are instead the products of direct and indirect co-operation among core and support personnel, whose activities are typically overlooked by traditional theories of genius or reputation fixed upon the singular artist (Becker 1984:352-3).

Griselda Pollock sharpens the critique with an analysis of art history's traditional construction of the artist as the subject of works of art (1980:58). She examines the "mythical" relationship between madness and

genius and the assumption in much art historical writing
that artworks express the personalities (and thus the
potent psychic disorders) of artists. Pollock's case in
point is Vincent Van Gogh, widely thought to be not only
the quintessential artist but as well the quintessential
madman.

> All aspects of VG's [sic] life story and the
> stylistic features of the work culminating in VG's
> self-mutilation and suicide have provided material
> to be reworked into a complex but familiar image of
> the madness of the artist — 'sensitive, tormented,
> yet incredibly brilliant' as an advertisement for a
> limited edition of gold medals struck with
> reproductions of VG's most famous paintings in a
> Sunday Times Color Supplement aptly restated it
> (1980:64).

Pollock's interpretation of the popular and scholarly
texts surrounding Van Gogh's work reveal a

> linear, sequential narrative of his journey to
> death...the psychologistic and psycho-symbolic
> studies far outnumbering the relatively scarce
> studies of aspects of an artistic practice
> (1980:66).

She contends that the effect of art historical
mythologizing about madness and genius is to separate art
from other social and cultural domains--to construct the
artist as outsider, protect art's transcendental claims
and thus protect art history from the incursions and
deconstructions of situated historical analyses
(1980:69). In the traditional art historic model,
conditions of production are "extrinsic" to both art and
art history (1980:68).

The modern artist as marginal, mad, a being above the mundane determinations of time and place whose artwork expresses the unique insights of an exotic unconcious, is an image hard to sustain amid the irreverent constraints of commercial filmmaking. In the case of Eli Cross, that image survives by making the conflict between artistry and worldly compromise a subject of the film; it is precisely in the face of hostile conditions that Eli's fidelity to his vision becomes so striking, so clearly the mark of an artist.

Here Cross illustrates a perspective on the film director central to the auteur school of American film criticism introduced by Andrew Sarris. In The American Cinema (1968), Sarris embraced the polemical lead of Francois Truffaut and other writers in the journal of the French New Wave, Cahiers du Cinema. In 1954, Truffaut published "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema", a critique of the French studio system which had rendered directors "metteurs en scene," mere executors of studio scripts typically derived from literary sources. According to Truffaut, the so-called "tradition of quality" the studios cultivated (implying the literary heritage) made it impossible to work outside fixed scenarios or explore cinema with a sense of risk, spontanaeity and improvisation, in other words to use the cinema as a means of personal expression (Truffaut 1954;

Buscombe 1973).

In his own treatise, Sarris imported the serious attention _Cahiers_ critics had given to American directors in their elucidation of _la politique des auteurs_. He called for an approach to film theory and history that would distinguish, as he put it, the "trees from the forest," that would identify stylistic continuities in

groups of films by the same director rather than treating

Hollywood movies as so many occasions of genre formulas.

Such a principle would enable the critic to cluster

directors in a valuative hierarchy that ascended (in

Sarris' case) from "Miscellany" through "Oddities, One

Shots and Newcomers" and the "Lightly Likable" to, at the

top, "The Pantheon." Of this last (or first) category,

Sarris wrote:

> These are the directors who have transcended their
> technical problems with a personal vision of the
> world. To speak any of their names is to evoke a
> self-contained world with its own laws and
> landscapes. They were also fortunate enough to find
> the proper conditions and collaborators for the full
> expression of their talent (1985[1968]:39).

In both its French and English versions, auteur

criticism became the site of considerable debate in

popular and scholarly circles, supporters hailing the

merits of critical attention to formal patterns in

cinema, detractors suspicious of the "cult of the

director," of elevating mediocre but consistent directors

over brilliant single works or any director over the

screenwriter. In an addendum written some 10 years after

The American Cinema, Sarris defended the auteur heritage

and its celebration of American filmmaking, though

conceded that a revised edition might "give greater

emphasis to the tantalizing mystery of style than the

romantic agony of the artists" (1985 [1977]:272). As his

1968 characterization of the Pantheon suggests, its

denizens, like Eli Cross, had to ply their vision amid conditions and collaborators who mightn't be so hospitable. But when they were, they enabled something great: "the full expression of the director's talent."

The Director in Hollywood

Auteurism is the cultural inheritance of contemporary film schools and their students, the broader cultural context within which they construct their school identities and careers. Though Sarris was not, as he points out (1985[1977]:273), the first to assemble a history of film around particular directors, it was '60s _auteur_ criticism that accompanied changing conditions of commercial film production in the U.S., changes with some consequence for what it meant to be a director. In the post-war shift from studio control over production and distribution to the independent "package-unit" system, directors (along with producers, actors and writers) acquired a new measure of flexibility and control in what remained an otherwise familiar division of labor (Staiger 1983:78). [1] No longer contracted by the studios for multiple productions, in the independent system directors negotiated their participation from project to project, though successive projects might have been produced at the same studio (Staiger 1983:78; Schatz 1983[1976]:172). As Janet Staiger points out, what

"independence" in fact meant was a production firm "not owned by, or which did not own, a distribution organization" (1983:68-9). Following a Supreme Court antitrust ruling in 1948, major U.S. film studios had to divest at least one branch of their operations, which until then had controlled the production, distribution and exhibition of popular motion pictures. Most studios gave up exhibition, the least profitable end of the business, and in turn diminished their production interests: without their own theatres to book, in-house production didn't pay off. By the late '50s the majors had become distribution companies, "financing independently produced films often shot on sound stages and lots rented from the studio by the independent producer" (Schatz 1983[1976]:172).

The package-unit system remained the dominant mode of production throughout the 1960s, a period identified as the beginning of the "New" Hollywood and credited with introducing the first generation of school-trained filmmakers in the U.S. (eg. Pye and Myles 1979; Schatz 1983).

During the sixties, film school enrollments climbed considerably over previous decades, so that by the 1970s advanced students and graduates were making movies, a small but profitable group coming to occupy the public image of narrative film production. As I mentioned in

Ch.1, this group included such figures as Francis Ford
Coppola, George Lucas and Martin Scorcese, the "movie
brats" (Pye and Myles 1979) enamored of filmmaking and
the directorial stance represented by Sarris and the
auteur critique. Said Scorcese of this period:

> Sarris and the politique des auteurs was like some
> fresh air. We knew Hawks's name, but we didn't know
> how good he really was--how good Rio Bravo is, how
> good The Big Sleep is (Pye and Myles: 191, quoted in
> Schatz: 204).

Importantly, Hawks, John Ford and many other
directors in Sarris' pantheon were well-ensconced in the
classical studio system. However firm an aesthetic and
administrative hand they may have wielded over their
productions (relative to other studio directors), they
were not "independents" but made the bulk of their movies
in the Hollywood studios during the classical period.
Thus the post-war era (and the pre-war independent
sector), supposedly more flexible in terms of the
projects directors took on and what they did with them,
did not generate all the notables in Sarris' canon. But
it was after the independent system was established that
he compiled his list at all. I would argue then that
changes in the role of the American commercial film
director (assisted by the French critique) prompted a
reappraisal of earlier figures in auteurist terms. This
is the industrial and cultural setting of American film
schools in the late 1960s: an increasing free-agency

among directors after the demise of classical studios and their contracts, and a spirit of canon-formation (partly designed to bolster the university film curriculum) based on individual directors and appealing to a familiar historical model of art as uniquely personal expression (that is, the model criticized by Griselda Pollock). It is a heritage well-suited to the likes of Eli Cross.

The Director in Film School

The question remains, however, whether such a heritage suits current students in Graduate Film. What is the relationship between the directorial roles students take on and popular and critical images? Are university film departments cultivating auteurs? If so where do auteurs stand amid the logistical complexity and financial compromise that students routinely face? Finally, what becomes of one's practice as director when crew assignments rotate in a reciprocal system of labor exchange, when today's director is next week's sound recordist or, more importantly, when today's sound recordist (and boom operator and second electric) is also a director?

I have referred throughout this thesis to the practical category of "working artist," implying an aesthetic role framed by collective production and financial and organizational constraint. In this section

I analyze the balance--and the tension--between "working" and "artist" in terms of "task" and "persona" in negotiating the role of the director. The auteurist legacy persists in the school, but always tempered by the situated activities of filmmaking. At the same time that the production instructor reminds students to concentrate on story quality and performance over production values, he tells them that films "are made on the phone and in the typewriter," adding "that may seem like a lot of secretarial bullshit to the creative geniuses among you." As directors on the set, students must not become technical jocks at the expense of their stories and visions, but also as directors they must yield to the tedious details of planning and record-keeping required to control their productions. Again, they continuously negotiate aesthetic, technical and administrative dimensions of their directorial roles. Some enter production (and for that matter the school) seduced by the popular image of the film director, though rarely do such typifications survive as students learn from experience the detailed, practical demands of filmmaking.

Ownership and the concentration of authority: It is important to point out, however, that despite these negotiations the director emerges as an eminently aesthetic figure, a quality which comes to suppress other

dimensions of a student director's authority, for example
their authority as producers who put up the money and who
thus control the production as an aesthetic and material
process. It is literally their property (in the
industry, a term reserved for the person or group who
owns the right to produce a particular script). But as I
mentioned in Ch.2, the rhetoric of ownership falls to
aesthetics, not to providing the cash or otherwise
materially enabling the production.

Recall, for example, the advanced student who
admired another's ability as producer and declared that
she would love to have such a person "taking care of my
movies," "hers" being those she authored and directed.
The same student had collaborated a year earlier with a
cinematography major who'd contributed half the budget
for their second-year project. But as writer, director,
art director and editor, the film was hers. "It was an
odd collaboration" she said, "but for me it worked out
well. I got to split the costs to make my film."

To point out their emphasis on aesthetic authority
is not to suggest that Grad Film students are strangers
to the importance of money in production and to the
control it enables during a shoot. As a first-year
student commented,

> it makes it a hell of a lot easier to solve
> problems...You need something? You buy it. You
> don't waste time angsting over how to do it

> makeshift, or shoot without it. You just take care
> of business.

Nor, as I discussed in Ch.2, are students or faculty

indifferent to production budgets in their appraisals of

films. In many instances, more money means a better

movie. Still, in constructing the figure of the

director, economic control is suppressed and aesthetic

authority valorized. This was true of even the most

expensive film I worked on, where one might expect

greater recognition of the director's economic control by

virtue of her obvious capital investment in the project,

well beyond the scale of most student filmmaking. On

this film, cast and crew were struck by the neat stacks

of scripts and storyboards and the personnel directories

distributed at a gracious pre-production reception, and

the custom-printed postcards we all received announcing

the film's premiere. These were small but distinctive

details in a production that was everywhere marked by

organization and material resources, whose budget

exceeded $30,000 and whose message was "real

moviemaking." But while the resources were a critical

and eminently visible element in establishing the

project's "seriousness", the director's economic

investment remained tied to her aesthetic authority: cast

and crew consistently lauded her "professionalism,"

denoting control over the material processes of

filmmaking but again, at the service of the film.

The shoot was not merely a big production by student standards, but one likely to produce a good movie. "She really gets it together," remarked a lead actor during production. "You get experience in front of the camera but you also get something you can show. It'll work, and it will look good." Indeed, the project stood in contrast to another whose budget was similarly impressive but whose director was not regarded as aesthetically accomplished or organized and whose shoot, rumor had it, was at risk of being closed down by the faculty as "dangerously out of control" (it involved animal wrangling and several exterior stunts). In this instance the message was "money being poured into a disaster" whereas the message of the first was "money invested in an aesthetically worthwhile and well-organized production."

Like Michael Cimino's Heaven's Gate (1980), the unsuccessful film was proof that money couldn't solve all the problems of filmmaking. But as proof, it further suppressed the ways in which control over money (regardless of the size of the budget) enhances the director's authority. In most student filmmaking, the suppression is still more efficient because conditions are not so sumptuous; they do not stand as such a clear indication of capital. Thus the director's aesthetic

position and authority are valorized, but underwritten in the division of labor by his or her economic control as producer.

Directing as work--the division of labor in student filmmaking: Like any role in divided labor, "director" is a relational category; in practical terms, it depends for its definition on other positions and other "task sets" in the ensemble activity of film production (Hughes 1971:312). Thus to talk about directing it makes sense to first describe those tasks and positions in the detailed division of labor. However, a formal description fails to account for the relations of production in student filmmaking. Simply put, those relations change. They are contingent upon the complexity of the film and thus of the shoot, which in turn change as students advance from first through third year.

As students advance, they become both more specialized in directorial and non-directorial aspects of production and more familiar as friends and crew members. Subject to this greater specialization and familiarity (with each other's skills and styles of working), many aspects of the conventional division of labor are adjusted. Which are and which are not, and why this should be true for some tasks and not others are

questions that reveal an ethos of labor division on
student shoots, an ethos related to but not accounted for
by technical, professional or instructional categories
(for example based on equipment, unionization or what
teachers tell students they ought to do). But even given
these generic conditions, labor divisions are not static,
a point made by Eliot Friedson:

> In and of themselves, the concrete work activities
> of the division of labor are interactive and
> emergent in character. Individuals and groups are
> engaged in a continuous process of conspiracy,
> evasion, negotiation and conflict in the course of
> coping with the varying circumstances and situations
> of their work, in some sense shaping the terms,
> conditions and content of their work no matter what
> the formal mode of organization being used to
> justify, control or conceptualize their activities.
> It is that ultimate reality which is responsible for
> blurring the edges and unbalancing the symmetry of
> both formal plans and concepts (1976:310).

Following Friedson, I take a structural and
processual perspective in my account of labor division on
student shoots, rather than a uniquely formal one. I
proceed from first through third year because the core
positions and activities of first year crews reveal many
relationships that continue in second and third year,
particularly "loose hierarchies" among creative,
technical and administrative personnel. [2] Though the
writer-director may control ideas for the film at the
level of story, she or he depends on a crew to produce
the raw footage that will later become the movie. Thus
while crews are hierarchically organized, high-status

members are interdependent. This is a situation Faulkner
and Anderson have observed in the freelance organization
of the commercial film industry, where the unit of
employment is the "project".

> Coordination through the formal strictures of rules,
> hierarchy, and performance audits is relaxed. The
> project is designed using discretion formulas, in
> which the control of everyone will be high--but not
> at the expense of one another. Thus, power is
> diffused in uneven ways; those having power are
> responsive to the expertise needed to guide the
> solutions at hand and attentive to the availability
> of people with proved capabilities and performances
> (1987:881).

From student film to student film, variable
relationships of status, expertise and familiarity among
crew members re-define conventional work roles based on
crew position. However, less experienced students also
appeal to conventional divisions and hierarchies in the
absence of the track records and shared expertise that
might warrant (and enable) abandoning them. In the next
section then, I describe the division of labor on student
shoots in some detail, to get at conventional task sets
and lines of authority, but also at how and why the
creative-technical hierarchy is "loose" rather than
fixed. As Chandra Mukerji has pointed out in her own
study of student filmmaking, the "authority to know" is
claimed by and attributed to students during production
based not only on their crew positions but also their
specialized knowledge, their general reputations as

filmmakers, and their access to resources (usually money or equipment) (1976:73-75). Following the division of labor account, I explain how the creative authority of the student director is practically and ritually sustained amid the collective and often collaborative process of student film production.

First year: In the first year of Grad Film, the number and type of assignments, the amount of available equipment (cameras, accessories and lights) (cf. Mukerji 1976:68), the number of students and the requirement that each direct her or his "own" film mean that core crews are relatively small. To accommodate 70 students on each of three assignments in an 8-month academic year (only part of which is devoted to production), crews must be small so that several can shoot simultaneously; the more students per crew, the fewer crews that can shoot in any one period and thus the longer it will take to get all films made given a set number of days per student. Add to the equation the number of rigs available and it becomes clear that curriculum and institutional resources affect crew size, which in turn affects the distribution of tasks during production. For example, each first-year "exercise" film—the first opportunity students have to work together on a motion-picture project—has 4 crew members, while "first," "second" and "third" films have three. Core crews for first through third films include

a director, a cinematographer or "DP" (director of photography), and a camera assistant ("AC"). On the earlier exercise film the position of production manager is added, with particular consequence for who does what during pre-production (e.g. getting municipal permits for exterior shoots on public property). In the absence of production managers on subsequent first-year films, those pre-production arrangements are taken over by the director.

My general point is that in first year, curricular administration determines crew size, which in turn influences the degree of task differentiation (cf. Friedson 1976). The content of that differentiation, precisely how work is divided, is another matter. For example, that directors pick up those tasks that would otherwise be handled by the production manager if in fact such an individual were present, reflects the director's ownership of the project and thus her responsibility for the many details of production not specifically assigned to another crew member. Still, it is important to remember that in first year everyone must direct and everyone must shoot. Thus by force of rotation in a 3-member crew, everyone will also take their turn as camera assistant.

The director of photography (DP): In all program years the most prestigious and authoritative production

position (other than director) is DP, a position worth elaborating here for its blend of narrowly technical and broadly aesthetic demands. Again, Grad Film trains artists, a mandate that favors aesthetic sensibility over technical control (however much technique is valued), which in turn ranks specialties in the division of labor from "creative" to "technical". These categories account for most crew members, though "creative" positions also demand technique, since designers are also executors in student filmmaking. Thus with the exception of the director, no purely "creative" positions exist and the relevant distinction falls between technical (usually meaning those who handle equipment) and creative-technical (those also vested with the authority to make and declare decisions which affect the look and sound of a film).

The DP places high on both counts, responsible technically for what are regarded (by those less able) as somewhat mysterious optical and sensitometric processes, and aesthetically as the person who comes between director and film at the crucial moment of visual recording. No students are officially permitted to shoot their own movies (though advanced students may major in camera by shooting three others). Thus on each film directing and shooting are done by different people. However controlling a director may be, students regard

the DP as the primary link between directorial "vision" and what appears on screen. Art direction, editing, casting and performance, also major contributors to the look of a film, are all more-or-less subject to the director's final approval. But no matter how often a shot is run through, in the transcription to film it is the DP at the viewfinder. [3]

In choosing DPs in first through third year (whether by joining a particular group of three or, later, recruiting specific individuals), student directors place a premium on technical competence, visual sensibility and getting along. By each director's standards, a good DP can control optics and sensitometry, is skilled at operating a static or moving camera, and has a compatible "visual sensibility." This last category is the least specific: in some cases it means a style independent of but congruent with the director's image of each shot and what the film overall should evoke. In others, it means a sensitivity to instruction, an ability to interpret storyboards and spoken descriptions on the set.

Precisely what will be required of any DP is a relational matter. Some directors storyboard every frame and constantly check compositions and camera movements through the lens before each take. Here, the DP must be able to execute direction--know how to get what is wanted. Other directors have a general idea of

composition (eg. medium two-shot reverse angle) but expect the DP will style it in details of framing and contrast. Here the DP has more latitude, whether by virtue of the director's trust or uncertainty. Still, these are imperfect categories and the DP interprets direction in all instances, if to different degrees.

In all cases as well, a difference arises between what the director imagines and what appears on film (partly a function of how it is shot, partly of other contingencies). As a meticulous director said to me about his highly-regarded cinematographer in second year, "some stuff doesn't look anything like I thought it would, but it's great, I like what Stephen did." Between shooting and workprint, and despite checks and re-checks, test rolls, hours devoted to lighting, and Polaroids used to estimate contrast, exposed footage remains a little mysterious, even to the DP.

> On day 3 of Pete's shoot we were out in a huge field
> on Long Island from 7:00 am to dusk, near some
> railroad tracks for the final scenes of The Rail.
> Sean (DP) was a little worried about exposures. The
> day was brilliant, not a cloud, and we were
> surrounded by wide-open fields for acres. Sean had
> spoken with Derek (the first-year camera
> instructor), who told him to keep the polarizing
> filter in at all times. I knew that Peter had had
> exposure problems on his first film last November
> (which Sean had not shot) and so had really gotten
> on Sean's case about control. Sean's work on other
> films had been technically good, but he didn't seem
> too confident here. Things were going smoothly, but
> still Sean was leaving some decisions up to Peter,
> very cautious about his responsibility. At one
> point Peter asked him if they needed safety takes

(where a shot is re-taken for "safety"), and later
if they needed to bracket (also re-taking a shot,
first slightly under then again slightly over
measured exposures, to be sure that at least one
take will cut with another shot made earlier in the
day). "Are we cool?" Peter asked. "If you think
we're cool, we're cool" said Sean. "Exposures are
everything" Peter reminded him, a little ominously.
"Readin' em right off the map" Sean answered,
meaning that all technical measures for guaging
light, compensating for the filter and setting the
aperture had been followed, but you can't know for
sure what things look like until the footage is back
from the lab. All day long, Sean's implicit message
was "I'm doing everything I can" rather than the
more confident "everything's fine." (First year
third film)

On more advanced shoots, while the crew awaits the

dailies and wonders "what do they look like?"

experienced DPs ask "did it work--do they look like I

imagined?" As a technical and creative position, the

DP's accomplishments, like the director's, are marked by

intentionality.

On the second evening of Pamela's (director) shoot,
we took a break on the sound stage to screen the
first set of dailies. The familiar sense of
anticipation was heightened by Scott's reputation as
DP--a lot of people considered him the best in the
school, and the resources on this film were
considerable for making his work look good--skilled
assistants, enough lamps and a proper ceiling grid,
a good camera with top quality prime lenses, and
beautiful sets, costumes and make-up. As the
dailies were projected, the crew oohed and ahhed
like we were at a fireworks display. Everything was
sharp (a relief to Nancy, the AC), the light soft
and rich in tones of pink and yellow, the
compositions elegant, the moving camera smooth.
When the projector was turned off, Pamela was truly
delighted with what Scott and the crew had done.
"He said he would make it look like New York, New
York [1977] and he did!" (Thesis film)

In first-year, DPs operate cameras and, in many cases, control framing and other aspects of shot design. During pre-production some DPs take it upon themselves to consult with camera instructors about which lenses and filters to use given the director's desired effect and the shooting conditions they expect. In other cases, the director alone or director and DP together meet with their instructor for camera advisement. Most directors prepare a storyboard (a sequence of drawings corresponding to the shots in the film) which the DP reviews before the shoot to anticipate strategies and problems in cinematography. The DP may also accompany his or her director to locations during pre-production to better plan for camera work. Finally, just before production, the DP checks out the camera, making sure it works optimally and that all peripheral gear (lenses, filters, matte box, etc.) is in place.

In production, the DP works with the director placing the camera and framing and rehearsing each shot, then operates the camera when the rehearsed shot is "taken." He or she may also be principally responsible for lighting, though here too students distinguish between lighting design--deciding which lights and accessories to use for particular effects, how to place and adjust them, how to set lenses and camera in relation to light placements--and actual set-up--mounting

lampheads on stands, taping small lamps to strategic spots on walls and mouldings, adjusting "barn doors" or other accessories used to control how and with what intensity light falls on the scene. A first year DP does both, working with the director in design and with both director and AC on set-up. Because lighting is time-consuming and because time is invariably of the essence in first-year filmmaking, anyone who can be recruited to set-ups will be. During the set-up, students place lights, check their effects through the lens, measure and adjust their intensity, make new placements, all the while subject to the judgements of director and DP. In first year, the DP's work ends when the principal shoot and any re-shoots or "pick-ups" are over. In later years, the DP may also deal with the lab in post-production and oversee optical printing. However, few first year students optically print their films, and the director acts as liaison to the lab.

The potential range of DP activities therefore extends from pre-production design, consultation and trouble-shooting, through lighting, composition and camera operation on the set. Minimally, the DP operates the camera on most shots during production (leaving earlier tasks to the director), though even here the DP's latitude depends on the director's sense of the DP's ability. If the director believes through hearsay or

experience that the DP is a skilled camera operator, knows the script or at least the story, and moreover is capable of interpreting storyboards or spoken instructions in light of narrative and mood, the freedom granted the DP is substantial, the director accepting lighting and framing suggestions and checking shots through the lens only occasionally (when they're tricky) or at the DP's request. The following comment comes from a second-year director:

> There are times when I was aware Stephen's choices wouldn't be the same as mine, but I liked that. I used to have this idea that camera positions should be locked down all the time, and only move on a dolly or something. It took me a long time to learn that that wasn't the right thing to do. Once I got the idea in my head to use locked-down camera, when I watched films I realized how rarely they're used, how even in big-budget, well-thought-out productions the camera's adjustinig all the time but it's invisible to the eye (...) Now I notice that not only is adjusting okay, it can be really effective sometimes. I noticed the other day, in a shot where Rory hits the sink with his hammer, the frame has to adjust like that, it's WHAP. You're not really aware because there's so much motion in the frame but the adjustment emphasizes the bang. That's something where I was aware of letting Stephen do his thing. I thought it would loosen me up a little bit. You know, I would have my vision and having Stephen mediate between me and it would make it a bit less, precious, kind of? Less repressive.

If, on the other hand, the director regards her DP as incompetent, she will intervene frequently, set up each shot, rehearse it many times, and constantly remind the DP of a variety of details before the film is exposed.

Our first set-up of the day was a dolly-shot [moving camera] of Woody at the window. We spent well over an hour lighting, Neil (AC) pushing the wheelchair dolly that carried Gwen, the DP. Laurie (director) had said earlier that Gwen was "frankly working out better than I'd expected." On Gwen's shoot a couple of days ago, there had been "no storyboards, no focus, no sense of direction" which made Laurie nervous, knowing that Gwen would shortly be DP on her film. "But she takes direction better than she gives it," Laurie added. This gloss described quite well Laurie's style with Gwen. First, everything was storyboarded, and shooting pretty much followed the boards. Laurie let Gwen take the shots, but usually checked framing and asked her a lot of questions before and after each take. Do you see his shadow before he enters frame? Is the aperture set? Focus? Were the pedestrians in the shot? Are you sure? Neil, Laurie and Gwen rehearsed the dolly 10 or 12 times before they took it, practicing the wheelchair movement and the pan (with Laurie holding the camera on a couple of runs-through to check out the image). The shot was long, so Laurie couldn't afford a lot of takes. Neil coached Gwen through the maneuver, warning her to keep her elbows off the armrests so that vibrations from the moving chair wouldn't be transmitted to the hand-held camera. Finally they took it, though Laurie debriefed Gwen after each of two takes about details of the image. There hadn't been any egregious camera errors are far as we knew, but Gwen's earlier performance as director and her apparent "lack of motivation" on this shoot (to quote Laurie) meant Laurie wasn't taking any chances and would remain strict with her instructions. (First-year third film.)

In this instance, in order to maintain aesthetic control of the film, the director defined the DP's role as narrowly technical—not because she was unwilling to collaborate with the DP in general, but because she feared the particular person shooting her film was barely competent.

The camera assistant (AC): AC is a technical position whose formal responsibilities are limited but

crucial. In pre-production the AC may be asked to assist the DP in checking out camera and lighting equipment. In production, she or he is responsible for cleaning, loading and unloading the camera; cleaning and changing lenses from shot to shot; taking and reporting light measurements and setting the aperture (following the DPs instructions for selected exposure); tape-measuring the distance between subject and lens and adjusting the focus ring; "racking" (shifting) focus during the shot when necessary; labelling cans of exposed footage; keeping track of camera peripherals; and, on some shoots, preparing a camera report for the lab. During lighting set-ups the AC typically helps the DP and director assemble and place lights.

Despite best laid plans, brilliant performances, co-operative weather and an otherwise ideal shoot (a purely hypothetical scenario in student filmmaking), a mis-loaded camera or sloppy focus measurement can leave footage virtually unusable. Thus a certain intensity surrounds the AC in the performance of his or her duties. Guarded space at the location is set aside for the "camera department" (on first-year shoots meaning the camera case and bag of raw stock), free of coffee and cigarettes and from which no one not specifically assigned should move equipment or accessories. As well, AC duties—especially camera loading—are consistently

performed by the AC, suggesting a division of control and
responsibility as well as labor. If one person manages a
task set there is presumably less chance of the error
that comes with variation; moreover, if the film is mis-
loaded or the image "soft" (out of focus), people know
who to blame. Consistency in AC task performance thus
protects the film partly as a mechanism of social
control, one person working "for" someone else and
mistakes being unambiguously attributable.

> On Roll #5, after a few takes of shot #10, Jeff (DP)
> noticed the camera sounded funny while rolling.
> Rather than waste time and footage by continuing to
> shoot and hoping nothing was wrong, Peter (director)
> asked him to open it up and take a look. Totally
> jammed. "Agh, spaghetti!" moaned Jeff. Thirty feet
> or so of stock was looping back on itself inside the
> camera body. "Todd, baby" said Peter to the AC, the
> one who'd mis-loaded the roll. At Peter's request,
> Jeff broke off the unspooled stock, re-threaded the
> camera, closed it up and ran in a few feet. We set
> up to re-shoot shot #10. I was impressed that Peter
> didn't get angrier, but at that point what else
> could he have done? It was late afternoon and we
> needed to keep going before the light was gone.
> Still, the message was clear when Peter asked Jeff
> (not Todd) to re-load--a reassignment of tasks that
> reflected Peter's skepticism about Todd's ability,
> if only temporarily. (We did shoot another roll
> before we wrapped that afternoon, which Todd
> loaded.) (First-year first film.)
>
> During a lunch break, we talked about what we'd
> heard from other sync-sound exercise groups.
> Evidently one of the Gaslight crews had had a great
> shoot, very well organized, good actors, everyone
> was happy. Until, that is, the footage came back
> from the lab looking like so much black leader. The
> AC had loaded the stock backwards in the mag
> (removable film cartridge on sync camera) for both
> rolls--emulsion in and mylar out. Of course,
> nothing had been exposed and there was no image on
> the processed celluloid. "What's more," added Kate,

"the DP didn't notice, which is surprising since you can see those four frames of stock at the aperture plate before you mount the magazine." Both the AC and the DP on that shoot had reputations as technically competent camera people (though they were new to this equipment). I pointed out that was probably a good thing, imagining what it would have done to the esteem of someone already thought incompetent. "That's true" said Michael, "if it had been a couple other people I can think of, it would have been awful. At least when Barry and Ira do it you know it wasn't just carelessness. It's kind of funny, almost." Judy (AC), also known for her technical competence, returned to the living room to load our camera, jokingly taking the full mag around for everyone to inspect. "It's not on me" she warned (though in fact there were no loading problems). (Second year sync-sound exercise.)

Finally, on first-year third films (many of which have non-sync sound tracks recorded on location), the AC may also be the recordist. Unless she is needed to rack focus during a camera take, she is free to tape sound. More often, students record a "guide track" during the shot (without regard for camera noise or other interferences), then play it back later to help actors approximate their lines and delivery for a controlled sound recording when camerawork is done.

The director: The title "director" comes from directing actors and camera, however the person "director" is responsible for much more. As I described earlier, first-year directors do whatever is not delegated, by convention or instruction, to someone else. They are the authors of their scripts and storyboards and the editors of their films. They also

manage their own productions, scouting and confirming locations, hiring vehicles, getting permits, collecting props and costumes, buying stock and other production materials, catering for cast and crew, scheduling shoot days, negotiating overtime with proprietors, keeping shot logs, borrowing or otherwise raising money. They list their casting calls in trade papers, conduct auditions, cast their films and rehearse their actors.

In production, directors block actors' movements and run through dialogue, set and/or approve lighting and rehearse camera movement, all the time making judgements and adjustments depending on how clear they are about what they want and whether practical arrangements conform to their desires.

Occasionally first-year directors operate the camera on difficult shots or where time running out forces a compromise they would rather shoot than explain. Again, on the set or location, the director is superordinate in a hierarchy that descends from "creative" to "technical" personnel, in first year from director to DP to AC. Under most conditions, he or she can take over subordinate tasks. Under very few can subordinates take over his or hers. Under no conditions, in first through third year, can anyone else direct actors. [4]

The production assistant ("PA"): The core duties of DP, AC and director don't include a variety of humble

tasks involved in the production of any film. Equipment must be lugged around and guarded in public places, sometimes for hours as a complicated scene is put together. Meals must be set up and taken down. Locations must be rearranged for shooting then restored. Last-minute supplies (batteries, sash cord for roping off street corners, audio tapes, cigarettes, aspirin) must be bought, parking meters plugged, overlooked items fetched from the car, passersby prevented from entering frame. Since not all first-year students shoot during the same period, directors in production sometimes recruit other students as production assistants (PAs) assigned the scut work. Such arrangements are reciprocal, the director returning the favor when roles reverse. When PAs aren't available (or when extra crew members can't be accommodated, for example in overloaded vans going to distant locations), menial work becomes a "tag game" in one student's words, based less on hierarchies and more on whomever isn't needed for core tasks at hand. However, given the position of his or her duties in the shooting sequence, this usually means the AC. The most time-consuming element in production is setting up each shot, a complex process of placing lights, blocking actors and camera, ordering cues. While the AC can be (and usually is) helpful in these procedures, she or he can also be spared in the event of chores off the set.

My account suggests that directors know what they
want and that both the translation of desired image to
instruction and the execution of those instructions are
unproblematic. This is true of some shoots and many
moments on most, though there remains an inevitable gap
between directorial visions and their execution by
someone else, however agreeable those differences may
turn out to be by the director's standards. But more
significant for student filmmaking is what becomes of
labor divisions under rocky conditions of production.
When time runs out (as the sun threatens to set or a
proprietor threatens to close down a restaurant before
the last scene is shot), hierarchies are softened. ACs
offer coverage suggestions. Production assistants
operate sound equipment, change lenses and help place
lights. Partly this is a function of all students being
more-or-less skilled at first-year technical and
directorial tasks despite the subordinate positions they
occupy on a particular shoot. Still, the bounds can be
overstepped, for example by the PA who tells the crew to
hustle as they lose the light. In emergencies, tasks may
be reassigned but chains of command are less flexible.

Such inflexibility is antagonizing when a director
(for whatever reasons) is unprepared for the shoot,
uncertain about how he or she plans to cover the action
and thus how it ought to be blocked and lit, or about the

qualities he or she wants from actors. A shoot can be excruciatingly slow as DP, actors and assistants defer by force of convention to an equivocal or disorganized director.

If the equivocation lasts, crew members exit their roles through both helpfulness and impatience and address the director as friend or fellow student. Discussions ensue about how to shoot and how to organize the hours that remain, sometimes resolving the crisis, other times deepening the antagonism and making it more difficult to right the balance of expectation and ensemble activity. Especially in first year, where many students feel the weight of the cut with every lost shot, unplanned inversions in the chain of command signal a loss of control. At these moments the reassurance and productive value of familiar divisions become apparent, however hierarchical and potentially exploitative those divisions may seem.

> Compared to the actors on the other two shoots that week, Agatha and Tim were pretty unco-operative, almost always suggesting alternate ways of doing things with every instruction from Klaus (the director). They argued a lot about the schedule, threatening not to return to the shoot the following night (though this was truer of Agatha than Tim) and had personalities the rest of us found abrasive--Tim who took himself very seriously, spending a lot of time going through method exercises between takes, and Agatha the "style maven", in Jeff's (AC) words, whose personality was perilously close to that of her character. Klaus' style with actors' crises on the set was fairly mild-mannered, to the point where Peter (DP) took him aside a couple of times and told

> him not to let his actors push him around like
> that. Once I was even moved to softly say "one
> director on the set", which I don't think the actors
> heard but which Peter repeated in full voice. We
> were all impatient with the time taken up by actors
> not following instructions as we worked late into
> the night and were about to lose the location. (It
> was Jose's apartment--a friend of Klaus's. Jose had
> already come home expecting us to be out by then.
> He was good-humored about it but still, it was
> late.) As Jeff (AC) said to me, "if Klaus would
> just act like a director..."

As Becker points out, conventions (in filmmaking like any

other domain) limit but also enable activity (1982:42).

Beyond first year: Two related categories that

distinguish production in second and third year (as some

of the descriptions above suggest) are complexity and

specialization. Despite rhetorical appeals from faculty

to second-year students to "contain" their projects,

tradition has it that films are longer and otherwise more

elaborate than first-year third films. This is partly

accounted for by the move to color and synchronous sound

(or professional-format video), bringing more gear and

new technical positions onto the set. It is also a

matter of students trying to make films that meet the

standards of festivals and other channels of distribution

outside the school. By second year they are building

"reels" and resolutely attempting to leave behind film

school "assignments."

With more complex productions come finer labor

divisions and a greater number of core crew members.

Moreover, the number of core positions precludes closed rotations. Unlike first year, where voluntary groups of three trade off on three principal crew positions until each person's film is shot, second and third year directors recruit specific individuals, the composition of crews changing from film to film. Again, participation is reciprocal, students promising each other particular services or a certain number of production days in return for those they request as directors. Ideally the same people fill principal crew positions for the duration of the shoot (a week to 10 days in second year, 2-3 weeks in third). Short of insurrection the DP does not change, though sound may be recorded, film loaded or electrical tasks performed by different people in the course of production. Personnel is interchangeable on strictly "technical" positions, which aren't marked by creative intention so much as skill in achieving requested effects. People of comparable skill can therefore substitute for each other without directly affecting the look or sound of the film.

With greater need and opportunity, second and third year students specialize in non-directorial tasks and skills. All advanced students must either direct their own film or shoot, edit or manage three others to fulfill their degree requirements. As I mentioned in Ch. 2, a fairly small group (about 10% of second and third-year

class members) opts out of directing for financial and
other reasons, but all who direct also cultivate other
abilities by habit and design. From film to film,
reputations emerge for the "best" art director, sound
recordist, gaffer (head electrician), assistant director
or production manager, etc. Many individuals are lauded
more generally as "technically competent" and therefore
good to have around in whatever capacity.

In assembling a crew, directors draw from first-year
experiences both as crew members and viewers. They opt
to work with particular individuals either because
they've done so before and know them to be skilled and
otherwise compatible, or because they've seen their work
on other films and like what they see (this is especially
true of DPs).

In second year, the initial sync-sound exercise
(where voluntary crews of four produce an assigned script
excerpt) serves as a showcase for work in color
cinematography and sound. Several directors vying for a
particular second-year DP told me they'd decided they
wanted him after what they'd seen in the exercise
screening. The same was true for other directors and
DPs, and for sound recordists. The exercise gives
directors who haven't decided who should shoot or record
their films the opportunity to see the work and hear a DP
or sound technician talk about it in the screening

commentaries. Moreover it gives cinematographers (especially camera majors) and recordists the chance to show directors what they can do. With earlier work in first year, these occasions contribute to a student's portfolio, building their school reputations which in turn figure in whether or not directors recruit them, whether or not they accept and, if they do, their technical and/or creative authority during the shoot.

On second and third year productions, core crews include the following positions (those inconsistently filled from project to project are set in square brackets):

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Director
Production Manager (PM)
Assistant Director (AD)
Director of Photography (DP)
Assistant Camera (AC)
Gaffer
Electric(s)
Sound Recordist (SOUND)
Boom (Mic) Operator (BOOM)
[Art Director] (ART)
[Costume Designer]
[Make-up]
[Property Master] (PROPS)
[Script Supervisor] (SCRIPT)
Craft Services (CATERING)
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Broadly, crew members can again be grouped in terms of technical, creative (or creative-technical) and administrative function, with chains of command operating within and only sometimes across these groups. In commercial filmmaking, each department typically involves several individuals--department directors, assistant

directors, assistants etc. On advanced Grad Film productions, where departments other than camera and lighting exist at all, they are usually occupied by one person. Art direction in particular may or may not be specialized depending on the complexity of the film. If it is shot on location with a relatively small cast, the art director (perhaps with one assistant) may be responsible for set dressing, props and costumes--aspects of design related to photography but not immediately involving the camera. On the other hand, a sound stage musical thesis film I worked on had a set department of three, including a designer, head set builder and assistant; a costume designer (who was also the seamstress); a property master/set dresser; a hairdresser; and a make-up designer and assistant.

With the specialized expansion of advanced crews, the "tag game" quality of first year shoots diminishes. People work within their set of tasks defined by convention and assignment. However, the absence of union regulations and the variable distribution of expertise enable crew members to occasionally cross departments, for example when problems in one delay production, leaving people in others with little to do. If set construction is behind schedule, the assistant director might help paint set pieces to speed things up (assuming she knows how), since there is nothing to assistant-

direct until the set is ready.

Lighting and camera crews, however, rarely trade tasks with other departments because there is virtually always lighting or camera blocking to do, even if the shooting order is rearranged to accommodate delays. Moreover, when lighting and blocking are behind schedule, the DP and gaffer do not recruit outsiders to assist them. Lighting and camera (activities supervised by the DP) become a closed ensemble, whose members are neither available for other tasks nor especially welcoming of unassigned assistants. Theirs is treated as the core crew (as distinct from cast) activity during production, both the most specialized and most critical, "where the action is."

In second and third year, the DP's tasks are much like those in first year, with some important expansions. "Director of photography" becomes a partly supervisory position when gaffers and second electrics join the crew, further marking the separation between design and execution. Again, this is not to say that DPs don't hang lights--in many cases they do--but rather that assistants designated to hang lights don't decide which ones or where, nor have they any camera responsibilities. With help from their second electrics, gaffers build special lighting rigs, work out circuitry to safely distribute total wattage and prevent overloads,

and position lamps and accessories for the director's
desired effect. But while the "look" ostensibly
originates with the director, instructions come from the
DP, who translates the effect in technical terms by
calling for particular pieces of equipment and how to use
them.

Thus with finer labor divisions comes a more
detailed chain of command, complicated by the relative
expertise among students as they shift position from crew
to crew. Sometimes the second electric is as
knowledgeable as the gaffer (indeed has worked as gaffer
on previous shoots). Based on his experience he might
suggest placements or other lighting solutions though it
is up to the gaffer and DP to accept such suggestions.

Given their known pool of expertise, the DP, gaffer
and assistants arrive at many solutions collaboratively,
a form of interaction characteristic of other departments
in student (and sometimes professional) filmmaking (eg.
set design and construction). While veto power is
reserved for those occupying conventionally superordinate
positions, the distribution of judgements and tasks
within departments varies according to expertise and
reputation.

> Today (the second day of a 3-week sound stage
> shoot), Scott wanted to drop pools of light in
> different areas of the frame (a lighting style
> characteristic of the whole film), rather than
> evenly flooding the scene. Part of the design was

to use "practicals" (theatrical bulbs that could be mounted in lighting fixtures that were part of the set and would appear on screen) in six industrial-style hanging lamps over the interior factory set. Stephen (second electric), a year behind Scott in the program but, like Scott, known for his lighting and cinematography expertise, was rigging the lamps from the ceiling grid, using the platform of the movable scaffold he was standing on as a guide, to make sure they were all hung at the same level. Scott watched Steve for a minute, then realized his strategy. "Is the platform a template?" he asked him. Steve quietly said "uh-huh" without interrupting what he was doing. "Clever, very clever" Scott responded, appreciative of Steve's resourcefulness. Though Scott and Stephen hadn't worked together in the past, even this minor occasion seemed to confirm Stephen's reputation for competence. Throughout the shoot, Scott (known for his precision but also for his dismissiveness on the set) solicited Steve's judgement and assistance in lighting, particularly with special effects (like a moon-lit dance number staged for the film-within-a-film) and the sophisticated equipment (eg. a programmable dimmer board) available at the newly-built sound stage. (Thesis film)

Importantly, new creative-technical and administrative positions on advanced crews release directors from many of the production chores that had been their responsibility in first year. In second and third year, directors too become more specialized, working closely with actors and camera. Like shop foremen and triage officers, their assistant directors (ADs) take over crew management on the set. They co-ordinate crew activities in the daily schedule, keep track of the "call" (who in cast and crew is needed for each day's shooting and when), figure out the most efficient order of events for each set-up, and encourage

crew members to "haul ass," to not waste precious time in the production schedule. If they're good at it, they succeed without antagonizing the crew, absolving directors of dictatorial maneuvering and the resentment such maneuvering sometimes provokes. A good AD thus becomes part of directorial strategies for managing authority. The student director is very much present on the set, not a distant supervisor absent as others execute the tasks she oversees. With an AD's administrative assistance (and the crew's general perception of her seriousness and intent), her presence becomes a creative force, rather than a managerial one.

Production managers take care of many external details, assisting with production planning, setting up the shooting schedule, scouting locations, finding the lowest rental prices for auxiliary gear, co-ordinating activities among departments, making daily trips to the lab, running innumerable errands during the shoot, and monitoring the budget.

Unlike "producers", production managers do not finance Grad films and therefore do not claim the producer's executive authority. However, the production managers most in demand are those who are both "well-organized" and who, through experience and connections, have their fingers on a variety of resources filmmakers can always use (cf. Mukerji 1976:75). Exotic locations

free-of-charge, dead birds (legally acquired for use as props) and friendly relations with the equipment rental house were some of the assets a production manager I worked with brought to a film. When a director uses resources a production manager (or other crew member) is responsible for (eg. a location), that production manager may weild some authority over the director that she or he wouldn't otherwise be able to claim.

> At the factory location, shooting was restricted to a marked-off area in the center of the floor. The lead actor was seated at a huge machine, some kind of press which he quite convincingly appeared to operate. The area was chosen by consensus between Michael (the director), Bill (the production manager) and the two factory foremen who'd come in for the day to oversee things (one of them a relative of Bill's). Michael needed to be far enough away from the windows to keep the daylight out of the shot. He also needed an area about 30 feet long to shoot the sequence between the lead character and his supervisor, positioned above and away from him on a platform. The foremen needed the crew in a contained area small enough for them to keep an eye on what was happening. Once everyone settled on the area, Michael and Stephen started to set up lights. There were no storyboards for this sequence, but as script supervisor I drew up a shot log form to record and report takes. However, Michael asked me to leave the factory floor and return to the office area. He wanted a log but Bill (PM) had asked that everyone not absolutely crucial to the shooting leave the factory floor. With the lights and cables rigged around the equipment, Bill was afraid someone might get hurt. Enough said. I returned to the office.

Script supervisors, finally, maintain the paper record (to be used in post-production) for every shot and scene, noting sound and picture take numbers, timing takes, marking preferred takes, guarding continuity in

set, light, props, action and dialogue, and "lining the script" (marking the dialogue script with each scene and shot number to indicate where in the footage speech and action are covered).

I mentioned earlier that I assumed the role of script supervisor on several productions, a role which became increasingly specialized with experience on complex shoots. Late in my fieldwork year, I worked as script supervisor on a thesis film, where my responsibilities were perceived and treated by crew members as both specific and essential. At one point, for example, the lighting crew was short an assistant during an especially complex shot, so in the spirit of co-operation I offered my help with the dimmer board: on cue I would dim the designated lamp. Both gaffer and second-electric appreciated my offer but (generously) suggested I stick with script work. They weren't worried about whether I could handle the task, so much as invested in my place in the division of labor. Said Steve, the second electric, "that's okay thanks, you have your job to do, we won't take you from it."

With heightened specialization and expertise on second- and third-year films, the director's non-directorial functions during production are supervisory and her attention is focussed upon performance and camera. Amid the work of working artist, the artist

resurfaces.

We can see in this account of labor distribution in student filmmaking the emergent character Friedson (1976) attributes to divisions of labor generally, as well as loose hierarchies among creative, administrative and technical personnel--all of them "working artists" with an investment in the "dual interests" of individuation and integration into co-operative networks (Faulkner 1983a:149). Within and across shoots, track records and current perceptions of competence either temper or entrench conventional divisions, particularly between design and execution. Workers judged competent are given fewer specific instructions by superordinates, even in design tasks. The more specialized the task and the greater the specialist's ability, the more latitude she or he can expect from higher-ups in making creative decisions during production. Where subordinates control access to much-needed resources, they acquire authority not usually ordained by their position alone. And as students become familiar over time and circumstances with classmates and their work, collaborative relationships develop, in many cases among people who will continue to work together beyond film school. Spike Lee, for example, works consistently with cinematographer Ernest Dickerson, a friend and collaborator from NYU.

Collaborative relationships in turn enable both an

aesthetic sensitivity and a devotion to particular

projects. "Sensitivity" among principle crew members,

which students describe as another's ability to

"understand what you're trying to do as director" (read

artist) is part of what makes a "good" shoot good;

devotion can salvage it when things go wrong.

Ideally, crews come to operate as ensembles, "well-

oiled machines" in many students' words, movable parts

synchronized by skill and respect for skill. Such an

ensemble quality is apparent in the advanced crew who,

after the first few set-ups, proceeds to the next with

minimal instruction from director or AD. As each shot is

taken, the next is described to the DP who in turn

assigns basic light placements to gaffer and lighting

crew. While the AD checks on actors, DP and director

consult script and storyboard and go over camera

blocking. The script supervisor is on hand to answer

questions about earlier and subsequent coverage and the

set crew assembles the new set pieces needed for the

current scene. The camera assistant checks footage

remaining in the camera and sets focus and exposure

during rehearsals, while the boom operator checks framing

with the script supervisor to anticipate microphone

placement.

Production or location managers organize lunch

shifts beginning with those actors not immediately

scheduled, while the lighting crew continues to hang and adjust lamps with actors' "stand-ins" (people, usually production assistants, of shape and size similar to actors with whom lighting effects can be approximated while actors are off the set). As scenes are rehearsed, assistants are on hand to reposition set pieces and props in preparation for the next rehearsal or for a take. As shots are taken, the "slate" used at the head of each take to identify scene, shot, take and soundtake numbers is prepared (and can be found when actors, director and camera crew are ready to shoot). At the highly routinized start of each new take, actors, camera, boom and slate are in position, sound and camera operators declare their readiness, the director instructs the recordist to roll sound, the recordist responds "sound rolling," director cues camera, DP responds "camera rolling," the slate is read to identify the take on sound tape, "sticks" (the black-and-white clapper attached to slate) are closed and the slate assistant clears the set. After a moment of calm, the director calls action and actors begin their performances.

During the take, the camera assistant makes necessary focus adjustments, the "dolly grip" (where there is one, the person who manipulates the moving camera dolly) co-ordinates dolly movements against actors and dialogue (practiced in rehearsal), the boom operator

repositions the microphone if and when camera and actors
move, and the script supervisor times the shot and notes
details of the performance for continuity purposes. When
the shot is complete or if something goes wrong, the
director calls cut and camera and sound stop rolling. To
quote a third-year director:

> [My thesis film crew] is largely the same as last
> year's crew. A little different, but they're mostly
> people I'ved worked with before, people I like
> working with, who'll be there for me, who I can
> trust. You're in charge, I don't have to worry.
> People I can really rely on. It's the best thing
> about making movies.
>
> LH: Oh yeah? I've heard some horror stories about
> production.
>
> Yeah, but that's where the backstage story comes
> from [referring to her thesis film script]. It can
> be the ideal communal situation. I can't think of
> any other experience where diverse people come
> together, everyone's energy focussed on one thing,
> doing a good job, a certain selflessness in the best
> situations. Some shoots are used and abused by some
> directors. But when it clicks, it's an amazing
> situation. It's friendship, but amplified, bigger.
> You get involved to the point where you're willing
> to give and give and give.

From routines and loose hierarchies based on skill and
familiarity, a successful crew draw its "working
consensus" (Goffman 1959, quoted in Mukerji 1976:67).

Distinguishing Individual and Group

Amid such resolutely collective and often
collaborative activity, how do directors sustain their
authority? In this section I argue that such authority,

though bestowed by convention and reputation, must be
ratified in interaction. Robert Faulkner has made a
similar argument for orchestra conductors:

> The system of authority in the orchestra...is more
> than a pattern of static roles and statuses. It is
> a network of interacting human beings, each
> transmitting information to the other, sifting their
> transactions through an evaluative screen of beliefs
> and standards, and appraising the meaning and
> credibility of conductor directives (1983b:81).

As non-directing crew members, students come to the
set or location prepared to act as subordinates in a
familiar hierarchy that situates directors at the crest.
Whether they remain willing workers depends to a large
extent on their perception of the director's aesthetic
and administrative control. The normative standard
implicit in their co-operation is that they are there to
produce footage which conforms, as closely as possible,
to the director's "vision," much like orchestral
musicians assemble to perform a conductor's
interpretation of a symphony (Faulkner 1983b:81). This
standard, however, suggests that indeed a particular
director _has_ a vision, an element in the social equation
which needs to be continuously demonstrated.

Like the student (in the last chapter) who claimed
narrative competence by reconciling his intention to the
class's reading of his rough cut, directors must also
present themselves as in control of their films on the
set. According to students and faculty, they must "know

what they want and know how to get it," a gloss which returns to directing as a matter of intention and craft skill. Moreover they must communicate that certainty to others, most of whom judge the current director's performance in light of their experience not only with other directors (again analogous to orchestras and conductors) but as directors themselves.

The multitude of directorial experiences and aspirations on any student set is potentially volatile. For students to cultivate directorial (and other creative) roles is to acquire habits of visualization and a confidence about those images which may, given some personalities and an absence of restraint, come to compete with the deference typically paid to the official director on a shoot. Students are wary of this possibility (some among them having earned reputations as competitive rather than co-operative crew-members) and for the most part hold themselves in check by the knowledge that their directorial turn will come and moreover by the rigors which hierarchical group activity imposes upon participants.

As ensembles, the best student film crews respond to those rigors much like a successful corps de ballet, whose performances must be precisely integrated but whose members ultimately desire to become soloists. At the same time that ballet masters encourage excellence

<u>through</u> competitiveness among dancers, that

competitiveness is kept from become disruptive by an

explicit collectivity value-orientation, where dancers

dance together "for the good of the company" or the "good

of the performance" (Forsyth and Kolenda 1970:248). With

a similar <u>esprit de corps</u>, film crews work together "for

the good of the film."

It it is up to directors (with their ADs and,

sometimes, PMs) to bring into line crew members who fail

to respect group rigors (ie. the chain of command, the

ethos of camaraderie). If they don't, other students

hold them as well as resistant subordinates responsible

for breakdowns in efficiency and morale. Such

attributions usually return to whether or not the

director knew what she wanted for the film. As one first-

year student complained to me about a second-year

director (whose shoot she had just PA'd),

> [i]t was impossible, unbelievably inefficient. Liz
> [the director] didn't have the slightest idea what
> she wanted, didn't know what to tell people. And
> when Bob [DP] kept giving Sherry [AC] a hard time,
> things really fell apart. Sherry was doing fine,
> Bob had no reason to treat her like that, but Liz
> just wouldn't step in. She let Bob take over the
> whole shoot. I think about Rhonda's film on the
> other hand, everyone worked so hard but it was for a
> <u>reason</u>. That's going to be a great film. But
> really, with Liz it was completely unprofessional.
> You want to learn something on second-year shoots
> but this was agony. You have to know what you want,
> and you have to get organized.

"Knowing what you want" in production is partly a

matter of work done in pre-production. Revised scripts, full storyboards or shot lists, and shooting orders (shots grouped by location and lighting set-up, not story or scene sequence) are signs of procedural organization but also of a clear conception of the final film. Beyond first year, as productions expand, such preparations are routine. In first year however, some students begin their shoots without story boards or shot lists, hoping to cover action and dialogue with a conventional balance of wide shots, medium shots and close-ups from a variety of standard angles. Although directors without boards or shot lists are not necessarily regarded by their crews as "visionless," they sacrifice the authority such materials convey.

> I left the set and ran into Joan (AC) downstairs, having a cigarette. She declared herself "guiltily impatient" with the shoot, which was why she'd left for a minute. "We're never going to get through everything before we have to get out of here [referring to the location]. Eve [the director] really should have done storyboards. We can work it out shot to shot, but we just don't have time." (First year first film)

The missing authority of preparedness can be partly made up for by a decisive interactive style on the set, but typically preparation and decisiveness go together. The director who deliberates from shot to shot about how to compose, how to move and what kind of attitude actors' performances should suggest gradually erodes his or her authority among crew members. Bound by friendship and

the conventional deference paid to directors, crews

become frustrated and impatient; they neither have their

instructions nor are free to proceed independently.

Still, not all well-prepared directors are similarly

regarded. One's plans may be intact at the start of the

shoot though confounded by practical contingency or the

will of others. Those directors described as the most

authoritative, indeed the most "talented" have not only

planned ahead, they concede as little as possible once on

the set. They appear to know what they want and how to

get it. As one student said of another,

> "[H]e doesn't twist arms, but he doesn't back down
> either. It's word for word like the script. He
> takes a line and works with the actor until he gets
> it. He knows, really knows, the sound, the tension,
> and knows what to say to get it from his actors. He
> communicates well, really zeroes in. Other
> directors take three times as long, if they get it
> at all.

What is at stake in this comment is not the calibre

of the director's presumed intention but rather that he

has one, that it is specific, that he appears unwilling

to settle for anything else and moreover that he needn't

settle--he can get what he wants, in this case from his

actors. A technique of the director referred to is to

verbally interpret each actor's performance of a scene

and contrast it with the desired interpretation where the

performance falls short. Rather than requesting that she

"do" this, "move" that, "look" there, he requests an

emotional effect, in turn leaving it up to the actor and her technique to produce that effect though making detailed adjustments on some occasions. Such an approach (a variant of the Stanislavski method Jim taught and which, in this case, followed considerable rehearsal in pre-production) is believed to give actors the greatest latitude but also to reflect an understanding of the story that goes beyond merely covering the action. Whether or not the approach produces the desired performance, it dramatizes for cast and crew the director's certainty in broadly aesthetic (versus narrowly mechanical) terms.

Students routinely use "not conceding" as a standard by which to measure their own and others' performances as directors, "sticking to their guns" amid constraints.

> Eve requested a rehearsal of the master shot. She was worried about having enough light for full-body shots of the two leads. She and Jason [DP] were shooting a dark and shadowy dance sequence with "sun guns", hand-held 750-watt torches that run on battery power for mobility. Jason pointed out that if they flooded the sun guns [bringing the lamphead forward in the socket to cast the most diffuse light], they'd throw light on the walls as the dancers moved around the room, which Eve had already said she didn't want. She and Jason went back and forth, he insisting they couldn't get full-body shots without the walls, she insisting they were crucial. After much discussion, Jason finally conceded, but said it would take some experimentation, which was iffy with only 20 minutes worth of power in the sun gun battery packs. Still, the two of them flooded the lamps to different degrees and started taking reflective light readings off the walls, to guage how bright they were likely to appear in the image.

If the director is well-prepared, not conceding is a moral victory; she has asserted her intention despite the momentary inhospitality of production. However, not conceding must in turn be balanced by a realistic regard for resources. The director who persists with a design which, it appears, can't be had given the available time, skill, materials and good fortune, may jeopardize the remaining shooting schedule and be thought foolhardy by cast and crew. But like any risky decision, when it works (as Eve's, above, did) the well-prepared student is lauded for her steadiness (and the ill-prepared one for her luck). As long as successes outweigh sacrifices on this and previous occasions, persistence is a virtue, evidence of far-sightedness or vision.

Complications on a shoot are therefore potentially valuable for enhancing directorial authority. They show that a director can not only succeed but succeed at something difficult. By contrast, the uncomplicated, smoothly-run shoot is often regarded as "ordinary," "easy," a mark of the director's lack of ambition and intensity, an absence of devotion to the image and to the hard work of filmmaking.

Here filmmaking shares a heroic quality with any profession or activity that is perceived (by insiders and outsiders) to be risky (cf. Bosk 1979:122). Like Eli Cross, students continuously set aside obstacles to "get

their shots." Valued possessions in a parent's apartment become mere props, threatened by lighting accessories quickly (and loosely) suspended above them. Students try the limits of hospitality in borrowed or rented locations, risking the anger of their hosts. They promise to be out by 4:00, at which point they nickle-and-dime proprietors for "just a little while longer," knowing full well there's another three hours' work ahead and counting on not being bodily thrown out or obstructed however impatient proprietors become. They expect unpaid actors (who are paid to be waiters) to cancel restaurant shifts at the last minute when the shooting schedule is rearranged to accommodate delays. They promise not to shoot exteriors in freezing rain then look askance when flu-ridden cast members observe that water and temperatures are falling.

Such tactics don't mean students are evil or reckless so much as determined to shoot their films. Moreover, students who capitulate to internal or external complications, particularly where concessions are judged (by faculty and other students) to have "cost" the film itself, "may not have what it takes" to make films. In the words of one faculty member about several students cut after first year, "they just didn't want to do the work."

In any profession, aspirants are expected to make

sacrifices to accomplish their goals and demonstrate

their devotion. One hardly need be in medicine, law or

the military to know about call schedules, long nights in

the library researching cases, or boot camp. But in

filmmaking, students must at some point be willing to

sacrifice not only their own comfort and resources but

others' as well, the burden here being the ill-will or

resentment of comrades in a circumstance which in fact

demands their enduring cooperation. What is preserved,

ostensibly, is "the film itself," and with it the student

director's aesthetic motive and intention. Thus

directors must find ways of demonstrating their

appreciation to sustain the hard work of cast and crew,

an issue that arose in conversation with an advanced

student:

> We talked about different directors, Judy mentioning
> a greater egalitarianism she had experienced with
> women directors, giving the example of Rhonda's
> respect for her advice and their "intuitive"
> assistance toward each other during Rhonda's shoot.
> Rhonda would turn to Judy, who would motion a change
> in blocking or her agreement with what Rhonda had
> staged, then she'd take the shot. Here Judy
> contrasted Rhonda with Christopher, whom she
> described as demanding but not abusive and not
> particularly interested in her directorial
> suggestions. On the demanding and abusive side,
> there's Robert, who "won't tolerate directorial
> interference on the set but who had the nerve to ask
> people to write dialogue for him every night"
> (having shot a late script revision). In terms of
> the relationship between collaboration, demands and
> abuse, Judy used the term "compensation." "We can
> put each other through 18-hour days, location
> changes, indecision etc., but it's the attitude that
> can make or break a shoot for the crew, how

friendly, appreciative, considerate directors are.
You compensate." This explained very well for me
the difference between the third-film shoot last
November and the music-film shoot in January, the
latter being more physically demanding but so much
more friendly, everyone much more genuinely
appreciative of each other.

Last November's shoot had the image but not really
the substance of compensation. Brian in particular
had been appreciative, but it just didn't wash. The
first day of his shoot had gone fairly well--he'd
been very up for the shoot and managed, I thought,
to get us up too. But with a good first day he got
ambitious for the second. He was under the
impression that we'd done "60 or 70" shots in a
short day Thursday, and could therefore do exterior
pick-ups and 90 shots on Friday. Wrong. We'd done
about 35 Thursday, since several on the shot list
had been combined. We had taken maybe 50, given
multiple takes on some shots, but had not finished
60 separate scenes, let alone 70. So the 90 shots
he'd planned for Friday were just too many,
especially since they were all interiors and would
require light set-ups (unlike Thursday's). As Jeff
(DP) remarked (with a sigh) in the car Friday
morning, "he may have planned 90, but he's not going
to get 90." So with miserable weather, Brian's
overkill, and our captivity on location some 90
miles out of the city, we were not a happy lot.
    When we left the location later that night, Brian
said, very breathily and, I think, genuinely,
"thanks everybody, you did a really terrific job - I
think we've shot a beautiful film here. Thanks for
working so hard." This kind of grateful remark is
characteristic of student directors after a wrap,
and is usually followed by "no problem, way to go,
glad you got what you wanted" etc. from cast and
crew. But some of us were mad and all of us
exhausted and nobody said anything. You could feel
the silence. Nora (a lead actor) was particularly
worried. Brian had promised to have her back at her
door on the Upper West Side by 10:30. She had a
modelling job Saturday morning at 8:00, and had to
get up at 6:30. As it turned out, she got back at
4:30, and anticipated looking like shit on a job
she'd already been paid for. While Brian's
appreciation seemed sincere, it was too little too
late. We had done pretty well under duress but
couldn't bring ourselves to act like it had been
easy or agreeable. His thanks at that point

couldn't compensate for the antagonisms of disorganization and dismissive treatment since early that day. (First-year first film)

In the second of these two scenarios, the "teamwork" theme in the director's thanks contradicted the felt absence of collaboration during the shoot. The crew had not been inspired by a collective sense of Brian's vision or control, thus for him to invoke that sensibility after the fact became a moment of irony no doubt as painful for him as it was for others. In contrast, Judy's reference to "compensation" draws together the threads of rank, devotion and etiquette in the dynamic relationship between director and crew. At their best, working relationships during production involve all three: respect for the director's position in the conventional hierarchy of filmmaking (rank), a belief in the director's aesthetic vision (devotion), and a directorial style which trades on both these qualities without overtly invoking the first, that is, without "pulling rank" (etiquette). This is not to suggest that a director's friendliness is "mere" etiquette, so much polite façade, but to acknowledge that feelings and expressions of solidarity don't necessarily set aside rank. The junior assistant professor, for example, may unselfconsciously call her boss "Jim" instead of "Dean Jones," but that doesn't change their relative positions in the university hierarchy (cf. Goffman 1983:11). In

the third-film shoot described above, Brian had indeed

pulled rank, and his late attempts at etiquette failed to

"compensate", to restore the equilibrium.

A high-profile occasion where directors assert their

control directly is with actors or other crewmembers who

fail to suspend their own directorial roles for whatever

position they currently occupy. "Some people just can't

keep a lid on their directorial suggestions" a thesis

film director told me about another student who had been

boom operator on an earlier shoot.

> She's organized and that would make her a good AD,
> but I just don't want her on the set. On [the last
> film] she talked right to the actors, didn't even go
> through me!

With this report other students party to the

conversation were outraged by the disrespect and "lack of

professionalism" implicit in such an act. On the few

occasions when I witnessed such breaches I was struck by

my own and others' sense of their impropriety. The

guilty student could recover by acting a little surprised

at him or herself, as though the comment had "slipped

out," in effect taking a stance that conveyed deference

to the chain of command even where their actions had not--

in Goffman's terms "managing impressions" among peers

(1959:250). Repeat offenders are taken aside by

director, production manager or AD and reminded of the

rule of "one director on the set". On subsequent shoots,

they're either not recruited or, like the woman above,
hired for production positions away from the camera
(running lab errands, location management etc.). On more
advanced shoots, that such reprisals should fall to the
production manager or AD further relieves directors of
managerial responsibility and the hostility it may
provoke. In other words, the etiquette of directing is
easier to sustain, and with it the image of magnanimity
which Brian (in the third-film note above) hadn't quite
managed.

Other kinds of directorial breaches are not so clear-
cut. In the fluid division of technical and creative
labor among key crew members, what constitutes a step out
of bounds by non-directors varies considerably among
shoots and personalities. This is particularly true, as
my earlier description of the DP role suggests, in
relationships between director and cinematographer, whose
aesthetic intimacy during production blurs the lines of
subordinate and superordinate. Still, this collaborative
relationship is not spared the antagonisms of rank,
however differently they may be handled. Several student
directors described to me their frustration when DPs
claim a sort of technical mysticism, when they imply that
directors don't know what they're doing (ie. don't
understand enough about cinematography to realize their
plans are difficult or impossible) or when directors

compromise their vision to soothe a "prima-dona" DP.

During post-production on a thesis film, a director

wondered aloud whether she'd work again with a talented

but tempermental cinematographer, since

> I can now see all the shots I was talked out of on
> the set, shots I really wish I had. If I hadn't
> thought about it beforehand it would be one thing,
> but I did have the foresight, I saw the problem
> coming but just didn't stick to my guns when we
> shot. Scott says we don't need x and to keep him
> happy I agree.

This comment is strikingly similar to one from a

student director in Mukerji's study, not surprising given

the closeness in tasks and status of director and

cinematographer on student (and professional) sets:

> He's a good cinematographer...He has good ideas, but
> he was in my way. He is trying to direct, which I
> won't stand...He was trying to set up the shots,
> everything how he liked it, which is not the way
> that I liked it (1976:79).

This is not to say that crew members are prohibited from

contributing on the set. Again, most directors recognize

the creative ability of other students who occupy high or

relatively low-level technical positions on the current

shoot. For example the director quoted above went on to

praise the dolly-grip, himself a highly-regarded director

who, she told me, "has respect for my vision. He really

mediated between Scott and me, very soft-spoken, very

helpful." In an earlier interview she described him as a

talented director, someone whose "certainty you could see

when you watched him work--he really knows what he

wants." She welcomed his comments as a fellow director and appreciated his manner, always suggestive, never peremptory.

Like the attending surgeon who serves as a colleague's first assistant (Bosk 1979:124), the grip paid homage to the director by assisting her in a low-rung technical position on the crew despite his own reputation as a talented filmmaker. He also paid homage to the role authority of the director, which role he (unlike the DP) plans to eventually occupy full-time. By contrast, the director described the DP (a camera major) as "more interested in images than story or sensibility." At the same time that she admired his cinematography, she lamented his apparent subjugation of story to image and, implicitly, of director to DP.

Despite his imperiousness, even Scott acknowledged the director's authority on the set. On one occasion, the grip proposed a framing change to Scott, who responded "good idea, suggest it." In this exchange, he served as gatekeeper between the grip and the director (the proposal might have died right there if Scott had said "no, I don't think so"), still he did not claim the authority to use or refuse the idea. Moreover, he remained deferent to the director in recommending the grip "suggest" (rather than insist upon) the change, implicitly reminding the grip that the director had the

final say.

In another competitive relationship between DP and director, the DP was ultimately fired for, as the story goes, failing to co-operate with the director's instructions. This story travelled quickly through Grad Film, many students commenting that it came as no surprise since both people are strong-minded directors, the DP perhaps unwilling to curb his vision of the director's film and the director unwilling to give the DP some creative latitude, in other words to collaborate. It is a situation that bears an implicit double-standard, one director Bob Rafelson (whose credits include Five Easy Pieces and The King of Marvin Gardens) has commented on about his own work:

> Collaboration's fine, sure. But I have a double standard about this: while I think it applies to me that I should be left alone, I don't think it necessarily applies to those who work for me (quoted in Faulkner 1983a:163, emphasis added).

In the dramatization of directorial authority, intention may be hard to track as an absolute quality of the film but it remains an absolute quality of the role, particularly when directors and other crew members are in conflict on the set. It is a quality honored even when directors are unsure about how to proceed, especially when such uncertainty lasts the entire shoot.

Particularly in first year, with fixed rotations among crew members and a relative absence of

specialization, students relax about making performance and camera suggestions to the director. Still, they remain circumspect, rarely enacting a suggestion without the director's approval.

For example, one first-year third film I worked on was virtually shot by committee. With dwindling time and mounting frustration, the DP and AC proposed ways of consolidating action in a single shot, thus limiting the need for multiple (and time-consuming) light and camera set-ups. Such consolidations are familiar for covering the action quickly though are usually decisions for the director, who best knows the script and storyboard. Onthis occasion there were no boards, leaving the palette open for collective if polite interpretation. The conversations around each shot proceeded judiciously, DP and AC modifying their comments to the director with "would it work if..." or "what do you think about..."

Even where directors are clearly unprepared, crew members grant them the decorum of authority, which they in turn claim by not settling (or appearing not to settle) until they're happy with a proposal or a shot. If they have no preconceived image, their directorial judgement will enable them to "recognize" a good take when they see it, a strategy which not only adopts but reproduces the image of directorial authority for themselves and others. Legend has it that that's how

Billy Wilder worked, taking shots over and over, offering

his actors little more direction than "again," then

stopping, at last, after 75 or 80 takes.

Finally, students express the superordinance of

their directorial selves in talk about filmmaking. They

refer possessively to crews and crew members--"my crew,"

"my DP" etc. In a conversation about the apparent

caprice of the first-year cut, a second year director

lamented to me on several occasions that the committee

"cut my entire crew--my DP, my gaffer," claiming

ownership of a group of people quite apart from a

particular shoot. The alternative phrasing might have

been "they cut the best cinematographer in our class,"

but indeed the loss was phrased in terms of this

director's films.

Reflecting upon their shoots, students acknowledge

the pleasure of collective activity partly in terms of

the "high" that comes from successfully marshalling a

group around their own visions, tailoring the pool of

skill and energy in light of their intentions. "I'll

miss not having Barbara and Joshua to control anymore"

remarked a director about her third-film actors. Like

Eli Cross, students claim directorial authority by virtue

of collective activity, not in spite of it.

Directorial Authority and Individuality

At the end of Ch.3 I interpreted class screenings and commentaries as enactments of filmmaking as an individual accomplishment despite the robustly collective nature of Grad Film production. Here, we return to the individualizing perspective with the legitimation of directorial authority on the set. To point out this authority is not to describe the process but to appeal (with the school community) to a cultural definition that locates creativity within individuals and products rather than groups and social process. This is not to deny the collectivity of film production (which no one at Grad Film would do) but to observe what is valorized and what is not, what endures as an element of students' reputations or standing and what does not. Except through hearsay about extraordinary cases (good or bad), faculty and the school community at large are rarely aware of the conditions of production for a given student film. And even among those familiar with a shoot, what remains important is the final product.

For students, a good film from a good shoot will earn someone a solid reputation as a good director. Where a bad shoot produces a decent film, a student's reputation is salvaged in light of the overall aesthetic accomplishment (though this depends on how well-liked the director is and what about the shoot went wrong). A bad

film from a bad shoot produces war stories among students

in which the film "could only have been bad" given

production conditions, in turn attributed to a director's

inability to control the process and, usually, to a poor

idea or undeveloped script. A bad or mediocre film from

a good shoot is generally forgettable; during production

students appreciate things running smoothly but that

doesn't count for much if the movie is poor (and can't

even be attributed to a problematic shoot).

> A swiftness took over as soon as we got in the
> restaurant to shoot (the manager hadn't shown up so
> not only were we cut from 5 to 2 hours, we didn't
> get in until 3:15, so we had an hour and three
> quarters). We quickly shifted tables, everyone
> doing there own job, little overlap. I was moving
> tables and setting up lights on stands. Jeff
> [director] was worried but seemed pretty calm
> throughout. He spoke his directions very softly,
> would sit down with the actors to go through
> movements for a set of shots etc. We were running
> out of time and daylight (through the two glass
> walls of the restaurant), but we got everything in.
> A speedy wrap and a huge sigh of relief when we left
> the place (location restored) and got out on the
> street. "Very well organized, Jeff" Peter told
> him. During the shoot, Klaus said to me that "Jeff
> really has it together but his visual style is 'TV'"
> (implying straight, over-the-shoulder dialogue
> framing and cutting, though the film was silent).
> Klaus was suggesting that the shoot was controlled
> but the film nothing special, which reminded me that
> the difficulties we'd all recently endured on
> Brian's shoot would eventually be forgotten as long
> as other people liked the film. (First year first
> film)

"Good" films endure in the culture of film school,

as sacred objects whose source remains the director, the

working artist. (This was especially true for first-year

students in 1985-86, who correctly saw surviving the cut
as mostly a matter of the films they made.) As students
advance, however, with more opportunities to work on
their own and others' films, the added professional value
of a close network of skilled comrades becomes apparent.
Still, as several student directors' comments have
suggested, they recruit crewmembers who are both the most
competent and the most compatible (and sometimes those
who can provide much-needed resources, like professional-
calibre equipment). Crewmembers, conversely, may
sacrifice empathy to work with a director with a track
record, someone who has made good or otherwise high-
profile films. They'll knowingly suffer the abuses of
some in that directorial group, in exchange for what they
expect to learn about filmmaking and, later, for a credit
on a potentially distributable film.

In Relations in Public, Erving Goffman claims that
in complex, secular society,

...rituals performed to stand-ins for supernatural
entities are everywhere in decay, as are extensive
ceremonial agendas involving long strings of obligatory
rites. What remains are brief rituals one individual
performs for and to another, attesting to civility and
good will on the performer's part and to the recipient's
possession of a small patrimony of sacredness. What
remains, in brief, are interpersonal rituals (1971:63).

In interpersonal rituals, what is sacred is "face,"
"the positive social value a person effectively claims
for himself" (Goffman 1967:5). Henry Kingsbury (again,

commenting on the conservatory solo recital) further

quotes Goffman in developing the relationship between

ritual and the sacredness of face:

> I use the term <u>ritual</u> because I am dealing with acts
> through whose symbolic component the actor shows how
> worthy he is of respect or how worthy he feels
> others are of it...One's face...is a sacred thing,
> and the expressive order required to sustain it is
> therefore a ritual one (Goffman 1967:19, quoted in
> Kingsbury 1988:118).

Kingsbury is critical, rightfully I think, of Goffman's

conception of "face" as an individual preserve and thus

of the function of ritual as the maintenance of

specifically individual or interpersonal relationships.

In his ritual analysis of the solo recital, Kingsbury

reorients Goffman's notion of the sacred individual in

line with Durkheim's "cult of the individual":

> Goffman's face-saving "ritual" confirms the "sacred"
> character of the concrete, individual self. By
> contrast, a solo recital ritually reinforces
> abstract and collective ideas of individualism. The
> latter follows quite directly from Durkheim's
> contention that both collective and anonymous
> representations are expressed and strengthened in
> ritual action (Durkheim 1915:245-55). A senior
> recital in the conservatory, then, is a "ritual"
> pertaining to a "sacred" individual in the sense of
> Durkheim's formulation as well as Goffman's
> (1984:102).

Kingsbury's explication of the recital as ritual can

be usefully applied to the culture of film school

embodied in production (as well as screenings and

commentaries). On shoots, students not only sustain

their membership in the role category "director," "worthy

of respect," each student making her film, displaying her
competence and judging the performance of others.
Together, students also enact "the conceptual split
between the individual and the collectivity" (Kingsbury
1985:102).

In production, the object of ritual, the sacred, is
not only a particular director but individuality itself,
directorial authority vested with individual creativity.
We see this object in both the ephemeral and routine
encounters during a shoot, encounters I have described
above. We see it in the functional and ritual slate
.sequence at the head of every take, with its hushed
request for action as the director's exclusive preserve.
Likewise we see it as each scene is completed or
interrupted, in the director's call to stop rolling
camera and sound. The only other crew members who may
"cut" a take are the camera operator (usually the DP) if
a technical problem arises that makes the take unusable,
or the camera assistant if the film rolls out. No one
other than the director may call cut based on a judgement
of performance. Even actors with performance problems do
not cut the camera. If, for example, they botch a line
or gesture, the director may encourage them to recompose
and continue or she may call cut. A cut call from anyone
else under other circumstances would shock director and
crew and, most likely, land the speaker off the set.

These and other breaches in the chain of command remind participants of who may properly (and publicly) claim to control the production. Such declarations are particularly salient for student directors, perforce unsure of themselves as they aspire to conventional directorial authority rather than define its terms. They fear not only appearing out of control, but indeed that they have neither the born talent nor the skill to inspire or assuage others into honoring their vision.

Limited challenges to the individual/collective split: While I was at Grad Film, a group of second-year feminist women decided to take on the traditional and hierarchical division of labor as begetting exclusive and in many instances alienating practice. As they saw it, women students (like women in the unionized, professional industries) were both implicitly and directly barred from certain craft specialties in film production. Particularly in cinematography, they felt a "boys' club" had evolved that made it extremely difficult for women to get the early experience they would need to compete for positions as cinematographers on more advanced films. Predicting from rough calculations, they were probably right. In 1985-86, just over one third of the second-year class was women, and just under one-third of second year films were shot by women. However, 80% of the films shot <u>by</u> women cinematographers were also shot <u>for</u> women

directors within this self-identified feminist group (one of them a camera major); women shot very few films indeed for other male or female directors. Therefore, had they not worked together with a consciously articulated politics of gender, fewer second-year films would have been shot by women.

In other areas of production as well, these women banded together to create more collaborative working arrangements, each taking a variety of crew positions on behalf of the others in the group. For the division of labor during film production, their new arrangements succeeded, for example enabling more women who wanted to to shoot movies. However, they were neither willing nor able to give up the exchange value of directorial intention, still affiliating amongst each other on the basis of the perceived quality of personal vision. So to be a woman and a feminist but a "lousy director" in terms of what kinds of stories you want to tell and how well you're able to realize them is to be left out, even among the populists. Best of all to be a group-oriented woman and a good director, next best to be a good ol' boy and a good director, next best again to be a group-oriented woman and a mediocre director and, in the group's terms, downright bad, at least conceptually, to be a good ol' boy and a mediocre director, about whom one cannot even say "well, but he is talented."

Despite the skepticism these women could expect from some sectors of the school community, about feminist harpies, ghettoization, and a conspiracy of incompetence, their solidarity enabled them to reorganize the division of labor and make films in this new order. Still, in the school at large they competed (as working artists) in a reward system that valorizes personal vision. To say so is not to trivialize their reorganization or the differences they managed, but to observe the limits of solidarity in individualized domains. The structural order, in this case the gendered division of labor in the production of film, is open to challenge through practical action. However, action is itself bound by the implicit respect paid to other parts of the structural configuration, here, the distribution of aesthetic value and prestige in the culture of Grad Film. [5] By third year (as I came to know through later conversations with Judy, a woman from the group), many of the alliances formed among the women in second year had since broken down. Judy had herself recruited a male cinematographer (though "not a charter member of the boy's club") to shoot her thesis film because she "knew he would do a good job and be easy to work with." She continued:

> Collaboration is good, but when you're spending ten
> or fifteen thousand dollars to just get your film in
> the can, it's hard to experiment.

(Importantly, many of the second-year women had shot

videotape, where the costs of experimentation weren't so high.) Judy was not suggesting that a cinematographer from the woman's group could not do a good job (though they had fewer chances to shoot and thus got less practice than the "star"--male--cinematographers in the school). She had "simply" decided to extract herself from the difficulties of unconventional arrangements, in this case where non-directors on the crew were given considerable creative latitude, sometimes at the expense of time and efficiency as decisions are negotiated on the set. As Judy prepared to leave Grad Film with her thesis project as her professional calling card, the enabling value of conventional practices outweighed the value of structural challenges, though in theory they remained appealing. To make films is hard work: to challenge an inhospitable system may make the work impossible, as the fate of some professional feminist media collectives suggests (eg. Baehr and Spindler-Brown 1987:125-27).

Conclusion: Return to Hollywood

I argued earlier that the use of narrative ambiguity in Grad Film aligns stylistically with "New" Hollywood and its limited co-optation of devices from the European art cinema. So, I would say, does Grad Film's exaltation of the director reproduce the position of the director in "New" Hollywood. The auteurist perspective

introduced to the U.S. by Andrew Sarris in the late 1960s
(when Grad Film opened) rewrote American cinema history
in terms of directorial achievement, a perspective which,
I suggest, found acceptance (or at least engagement) amid
the changing institutional role of the Hollywood
director, as the independent package-unit system
superceded classical studio production. We can update
this institutional perspective with Bordwell and
Staiger's observation that

> recent years have witnessed only a continuation of
> the package-unit system. What is currently called
> 'clout' is the power of the worker's perceived value
> to determine his or her share of the next project.
> Gone are long-term option contracts which controlled
> profit-share increases. Some top talent, the
> 'superstars,' even determine whether or not a
> project is financed - something which seldom
> happened during the earlier periods. One writer-
> producer described the comparative status of these
> top talents: 'If Robert Redford and Sydney Pollack
> want to shoot "Telephone Pole," they can go to any
> studio for financing. Or if Barbra Streisand wants
> to film herself atop the Wailing Wall shouting,
> "Look, Ma! Top of the World!" who would say no?'
> Exhibitors book by stars, and stars who are popular
> find financing. So do directors (1985:368).

Here the authors suggest a relationship between
economic position and cultural image. As film directors
have historically come to participate in contemporary
rearrangements of the Hollywood star system, they
consolidate their economic power (or "clout") and their
cultural identity as artists. This is true for the
select few who manage to succeed in this system (indeed
only a handful of Director's Guild members are thus

recognized and paid [cf. Faulkner and Anderson 1987]),
whose successes in turn set the pace for newcomers and
other aspirants, however improbable their future elite
membership may be.

To make this observation (of co-occurring economic
and cultural power) is not to explain why some directors
become stars and others do not, or why only some films
generate the returns that permit their directors control
over subsequent projects. But it is to suggest a
dialectical relationship between the mode of cinematic
production and different types of cultural and economic
value. It is only within a system that confers some
measure of institutional independence upon directors that
they can distinguish themselves and profit from that
distinction. In turn they become "figures" in the
popular culture of film, a position which may encourage
at least some audiences, investors, and industry
executives to partake of their work.

The exchange value of reputation based on "clout"
lasts as long as the profits from the most recent release
(or two) (Bordwell et al 1985:369). But reputation is
not only an outcome of profit, it is itself something to
be marketed. And in the "New" Hollywood, reputation
among directors is packaged for trade as artistic
persona. In this respect it borrows (again, selectively)

from the European art cinema,

> which has created a complicated set of processes
> (criticism, film festivals, retrospectives) to fix
> 'Bergman' or 'Fellini' as trademarks no less vivid
> than 'Picasso' (Bordwell et al 1985:78).

Interestingly, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson connect the exchange value of persona to the familiar assertion that "New" Hollywood directors have emerged largely from U.S. film schools. They are skeptical of Pye and Myles' contention (1979:58) that modern film schools have imbued their students and graduates with a unified vision of their craft, requiring them to write, direct, shoot and edit. They point out that this knowledge is itself a "sparse sampling of all the crafts that contribute to a top-budget professional motion picture" and suggest that the alleged "versatility" of film school graduates is better understood as a mechanism used by publicity agents to "promote New Hollywood films as creations of a single artistic vision" (Bordwell et al 1985:372).

The authors are clearly correct about the insufficiency of writing, directing, shooting and editing to professional filmmaking. However, as my description of the division of labor points out, students do learn a variety of other skills as the complexity of their films increases. What is important about the emphasis on writing, directing, cinematography and editing is not

whether they're enough to make a film but whether they're enough to make an <u>auteur</u> or, in the parlance of this study, a "working artist." What they share is the regard paid them as the principle "creative" elements or processes in filmmaking.

These observations do not challenge so much as realign Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's point. Where they attribute the ideology of "vision" to publicists, I have observed it among film students and faculty. In Grad Film, writing, directing, cinematography and editing are not merely things you have to do to get a film made, they are the loci of vision, the space where directorial intention resides and in light of which directorial authority is refined. Together, vision and authority are aspects of "persona," a quality of the directorial role that projects an artistic essence historically reserved for the garett painter or poet.

To socialize students as "working artists" is to enable them to compete as independents who begin their professional careers by raising comparatively low production budgets, making films, and negotiating distribution contracts. This order of events generally describes both the early path taken by "New" Hollywood directors (Pye and Myles 1979:58) and, more recently, by precisely those film school graduates who've made names for themselves and in turn for their <u>alma mater</u>. Again,

as Bordwell et al remind us, it is not quite a matter of
learning everything that goes into professional
filmmaking. Rather, it is a matter of developing a
persona, an identity that students will exploit as a
resource in an industry gradually but increasingly
supportive of and reliant on such figures as economic
imperatives and conditions of production continue to
change in the mainstream of narrative filmmaking.

I found the trade value of persona reframed as
professional strategy in open-ended responses to my
questionnaire item on how students expect to reach their
professional goals after film school (cf. Appendix C,
question 30). Among those who hoped to become directors
or writer-directors (virtually all of them, with the
exception of a handful of cinematographers), responses
were typically to look for specialized production work in
commercials or low-budget features while developing
scripts for independent projects and circulating a "reel"
of school films among potential if unknown
"connections." As well (and often without mentioning
specific plans) students would, in a word, "hustle." For
example:

> **From first year:**
>
> Prayer, perseverence, pain and pressure, not
> necessarily in that order.
>
> SHEER BRUTE FORCE (naive but determined).

RAMBO!

A miracle, the will of myself and of God,
determination, smarts, education, self-discipline,
contacts, talent and being at the right place at the
right time.

DO IT OR DIE!

Lying, cheating, stealing, pimping, prostitution,
ass-kissing, graft, nepotism, love, hate, death,
life, birth, fucking, getting fucked, sleeping
around, conniving, dishing, fucking up others, rape,
speed, drugs, manipulation, luck, mass hysteria,
local upheavals and, last but not least, hard work
and T-A-L-E-N-T.

Through achieving a standard of excellence in all of
my projects.

Achievement through continuous assault.
Translation: keep trying, keep fighting, keep
writing in the evening.

Luck-->hard work-->talent-->connections.

Do it.

Win the Student Academy Award. Sell some scripts.
Get work in the business.

From second year:

Hard work, stubborness, perseverance, and a lot of
bullshit.

Hustle my ass off.

Sell myself to producers.

Portfolio connections and fast talking.

By working now and making a name for myself.

Hard work, networking, being in the right place at
the right time, having my scripts ready, plotting my
course and going for it!

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Contacts made working on small projects and at
school. Gradually spreading reputation. Luck.
Marrying wealth.

By doing it myself.

From third year:

Just do it.

Finishing screenplays, flushing all resources and
connections, a great reel of work to show, energy,
enthusiasm, attitude, just being a swell guy.

Work work work and a litle luck.

By being good at it.

Predictably, a greater proportion of third-year students

(though not second) over first had specific plans for

developing their careers (though "specific" could mean

"showing my reel" as distinct from "luck and hard work"--

showing a reel to whom etc. was never elaborated).

I read "persona" in these responses at several

levels. First, there is their glibness and humor which

convey a certain forthrightness--the sense that

filmmaking isn't a vocation for shrinking violets or the

weak at heart. Secondly, there is the personal

confidence implicit in statements about "achieving a

standard of excellence" and the belief that merit,

finally, will prevail (examples of which appear in all

program years).

On the other hand, most comments also acknowledge

the speculative quality of the professional environment

for which students are preparing themselves. In the
absence of codified routes from film student to
filmmaker, they rely on a variety of personal attributes—
perseverance, determination, discipline—to bolster their
abilities as filmmakers in a world which they correctly
perceive as competitive and unpredictable. Their
position as novices in an uncertain market is analogous
to the Romantic filmmaker-artist amid the complexities
and obstacles of commercial production. Like Eli Cross,
buoyed by his vision and message, students sustain
themselves in part through a strategic shift from object
to subject, from what a director must do to who a
director must be.

In Grad Film, textual, interactional and
institutional practice align under the ideology of
individualism—of the protagonist as agent of meaning in
narrative, of the director as agent of meaning in cinema,
and of the self as agent of opportunity and success in
the business of filmmaking. In the next chapter, I
consider a quality the Grad Film community regards as
fundamental to the artistic individual: talent.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Independent production occurred during the classical and pre-classical eras but did not dominate the industry until the 1950s (cf. Staiger 1983).

2. In student filmmaking, "production" positions (here described as "administrative") are service-oriented rather than executive, since the student director (as I have ponted out) is also the producer. In other words, the executive authority usually claimed by the producer in professional filmmaking here falls to the student director. Also, in describing basic crew positions in first-year (director of photography, assistant camera, production assistant, and director) I often contrast the accounts with examples from second and third year.

3. This relationship may change if more students shoot videotape, where lab time does not intervene and the image is available to the director as soon as it is shot.

4. I observed one exception to this rule in the making of a sound-stage musical where much of the actors' performance time was spent dancing. Here, the choreographer was the principal designer of movement during production numbers, though she worked closely with the director and DP in blocking the movement for the camera.

5. This relationship, between the women's practical action in reorganizing the division of labor and their continued respect for the department's reward system, is an example of what Giddens (1984:25) calls the duality of structure, in which structural orders are both the medium and outcome of action. I reconsider the duality of structure in the conclusion to this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE

TALENT AND THE CUT: AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

In this chapter I deal in detail with the "cut," a system of promotion and dismissal where 10-20% of first-year students are dropped from Grad Film at the end of the Spring semester. As an institutional practice, the cut was abandoned (at least on a trial basis) after the 1987-88 academic year. But during my fieldwork period (1985-86) it figured trenchantly in the lives and work of students and faculty. [1] I consider it here because of its structural significance in the school community at that time, but also because it exposed, or organized in particularly high relief, the various meanings of "talent" as a powerful if contested symbol at the center of Grad Film culture.

Following Henry Kingsbury (1988), I argue that although we are accustomed to thinking of talent as the irreducible, inherent and somewhat mystical quality of individuals, to be "talented" is an eminently social designation, one that arises and is sustained by serial judgements and attributions from one person or group to another. Such attributions, moreover, are contextually loaded; they reflect the aesthetic and moral commitments of the people who make them and the systems of honor and

reward within which they are made. The cut is one such system.

In liberal humanist thought, talent has historically been conceived as a democratic resource, one genetically or even divinely ordained, in either case indifferent to class position or privilege (eg. Sennett and Cobb 1973:53-58). But in meritocratic systems talent has clearly acquired the power to stratify. In this chapter I ask--how? What are the dynamics of a hierarchy of talent or ability? In addressing this question, I look less to say what talent is in any essential sense (resolving what some teachers and critics claim to be unresolvable) but to portray it as cultural practice. In Grad Film, especially for first-year students and faculty, it was a practice deeply embedded in the cut and its social relations.

The Cut System

In a Fall meeting with first-year students, Nina explained the cut as a matter of money and numbers. Tuition from a large first-year class supports the much more expensive second- and third-year curriculum, where staff, equipment and facilities can in theory handle just over half the students enrolled in first year. Overall enrollments are set by the school of the arts, not by the department.

As I described in Ch.2, at the end of the Spring semester, first-year third films (like first-year first films a semester earlier) are reviewed by an external evaluations committee, "external" meaning made up of personnel who do not teach first-year students. In 1986 this committee included two members of the Grad Film faculty and a filmmaker/teacher from outside the university. Each committee member awards each third film a point grade from 1 to 10. Similar grades are awarded to every film by writing, production, camera, editing and directing instructors for their respective specialties. Each group's totals (the external committee's and the part-time faculty's) accounts for 25% of first-year students' final grades. The other 50% is contributed by 1A and 1B workshop instructors, who grade their own students on final films and overall performance in first year (including improvement over earlier projects). [2]

After final grades are calculated, workshop instructors meet with Nina to go over each student's standing. They arrive at a preliminary list of acceptances to second year, though faculty have a few days to reconsider before a final meeting. In 1986, Jim (the directing instructor) joined the review, the first occasion a part-time faculty member (and the only one on the committee who teaches both 1A and 1B) participated. When faculty agree on a final list, based partly on the

general performance of the first-year class and the

number of second-year enrolments, certified letters are

mailed to those students cut from the program. They are

invited to Nina's office for an explanation and, in some

cases, to appeal the decision in a variety of formal and

informal ways. [3]

While there is no lack of sentiment about the cut's

significance in department life, it raised a very

sensitive set of issues which few faculty were willing to

discuss. Though they expressed their discomfort with the

system, they were reluctant to talk about why some

students are dropped and others kept, a reluctance which

protected students from further scrutiny and themselves,

perhaps, from having to justify a loaded set of decisions

to a relative outsider preparing to write about their

activity. In one person's words, the cut is "public

information no one wants to talk about." Faculty

anticipated the sadness and anger spring decisions would

provoke and knew they were subject to accusations of

unfairness. No matter how much the system was formalized

(in the interest, said Nina, of "depersonalizing the

process"), it remains dependent upon a set of comparative

judgements of student performance, judgements student

critics routinely called "political," "biased,"

"subjective," or "capricious."

Neither the form of evaluation nor the criticism

distinguish Grad Film from other advanced university

programs, whether in the arts, professions, or

traditional disciplines. But while teachers in all

schools assess and rank students' abilities, and while

all graduate programs reserve the right to recommend or

require that "failing" students withdraw, Grad Film

faculty knew as they made their decisions that 15-20% of

first-year students had to fail. Thus they were in an

especially powerful position over students, one that no

one claimed to want but which they protected while the

system was in place. Moreover, unlike attending surgeons

reviewing the performance of junior residents for senior

placements (Bosk 1979:147-166), there is no external

standard of professional responsibility--for example the

protection of surgical patients--to which Grad Film

faculty can appeal in making, explaining and defending

their decisions. As a second-year student put it,

> if you can't build a building, or if you can't cut
> people open properly, they have to throw you out.
> But no one's going to get hurt by someone else
> making a bad film.

Sociologically speaking, this claim is arguable.

While filmmaking and surgery may occupy disparate

positions on a scale of "essential" activity by cultural

standards, both involve the distribution of resources and

the creation and sustenance of a legitimate professional

domain. Unlike surgery, one doesn't need a license to

practice filmmaking. But the absence of external controls does not mean indifference to internal ones. What it does do is raise the political ante for faculty who bear the burden of their judgements and their critics without the (at least) rhetorical refuge external standards provide. This was particularly true for production workshop instructors, whose 50% contribution could indeed shift the balance in a first-year student's standing from borderline to promoted or dismissed. In many ways, workshop instructors are in the best position to judge a student's overall achievement and promise. But it is precisely the power their position bestowed upon them that raised questions in students' minds about their decisions and the criteria and sensibilities that guided them.

As subordinates in the cut, students stand to suffer most (at least immediately) but needn't be guarded about their position. They are not the decision-makers but those about whom decisions are made, and are therefore more willing to talk about the system and its "sacrifices." With this term they refer not to all students asked to withdraw but to those who, for whatever reasons, they feel were unfairly dismissed. While students talk to each other about the cut system, they are most critical of particular cuts; in other words, their criticisms often leave the system itself intact.

They discuss the recent past, for example second-year
students reflecting upon first-year cuts the previous
Spring. Such discussions usually occur among students
who indeed survived the cut. On some occasions however,
they include students who were cut the previous year and
are thus no longer enrolled in the department, but who
were asked by current second-year directors to join their
crews. In most cases remaining directors were critical
of the cut precisely because the committee dismissed
students with whom they enjoyed working and, in many
cases, whose first-year films they admire. Current first-
year students also complained about cut policies and
procedures, but did not openly speculate about who would
get dropped. In part this reflected their deference to
the pain of being judged talentless or otherwise unable,
and their fear for their own status in a system notorious
among students for its "surprises."

My account of the cut and its implications for
talent as a cultural symbol therefore come from the
structure of the system itself, from occasional faculty
comments, from a small number of more directed but still
circumspect faculty interviews, and from undirected
conversations among students. I did not attend the
review meetings where faculty negotiate promotions and
dismissals. [4]

Talent and Performance

Though most first-year students are aware of the
economic basis of the cut, for them it figures less as a
budget issue than as the close of a period of aesthetic
and academic probation. Indeed, faculty describe first-
year as a technical and narrative-skills qualifier for
students with "interesting" college backgrounds but
little or no prior experience in film. Many of these
students take admission to the program itself as an early
judgement of artistic "talent" or potential. As one told
me,

> ...when I applied, I didn't know what my chances
> were. I didn't have a portfolio, but I'd written a
> feature script so I submitted that. I thought if I
> get admitted, I'll have some security about having
> talent. A sort of affirmation, they must think I'm
> capable of something.

Admission, however, turns out to be a preliminary and
tenuous endorsement for first-year students, who remain
novices subject to (and often reminded of) the structural
possibility of dismissal.

In 1B, Richard told students early on that their
standing in the first-year program would depend upon
"creativity" and "performance," later rephrasing these
terms in a conversation with me as "talent" and
"progress." The second criterion--performance--he
described as "improvement, the measurement between the
first and third films...though it's also a matter of

showing up in class, talking, making deadlines etc." The

first, "talent," he defined less precisely (if

classically) as a quality hard to specify but, with

experience, possible to recognize in a student's work;

the "it" in Richard's statement "she's got it."

Performance and creativity connote the "working

artist" ideal at the center of Grad Film culture and

practice, "performance" aligned with film as work and

"creativity" or "talent" with film as art. Moreover, the

dialectic of work and art in working artist resurfaces in

first-year definitions and valuations of talent, a

quality perceived as necessary but not sufficient to

success in filmmaking, yet essential in some measure to

being spared the cut.

Though the terms are Richard's, other faculty also

use the distinction between creativity and performance

in discussing student films. Someone is creative (a

quality of the person) by virtue of something they do:

importantly, talent or creativity are cast as interior

dispositions which cannot be observed but which are

attributed to individuals based on their observable

performances (Kingsbury 1988:68). For example, comparing

a number of first films and first-year students, Richard

recalled being struck by details that made him think a

student director possessed that special impetus for

connecting human emotion and cinematic expression. Even

where the film overall is unsuccessful, he could

recognize a student's "talent" on the strength of those

details:

> [The film] was primitive but there were good things
> in it. See that's what I'm talking about. It was
> incredible, it wasn't believable, it all happened
> too fast. But there were three or four things in
> it, I remember saying to myself, ah, there it is,
> you know, that thing, that talent, you know, it was
> there, even though the film was a failure.
>
> LH: The character went over the edge awfully
> quickly...
>
> Yeah, it was all wrong...but in the film you see
> something that in a [other student] film, right now,
> I would say I don't see anything, or [other
> student], I don't see anything, I don't see the
> three things in a [first student] film I'd said okay
> there it is, the framing, the light, the
> composition, the cuts...something.

In each student's case, Richard's perceptions

followed their first film, a moment when faculty look

less for cultivated skill than, in his terms, "the raw

material of talent." Newcomers are not expected to be

accomplished but to distinguish themselves as having what

it takes to be taught, a kind of aesthetic capital to

invest in the development of cinematic skill. The value

of a film that "fails" but for a few fleeting moments of

framing lies not in the text itself but in the text as

index of something more enduring within the student.

Talent attributed to a person (versus success attributed

to a film) stands to return on the investment, to

produce, under the right conditions, more good work. As

Richard said earlier about the student whose first film

he admired,

> What do I think about [her] third film? Nice...when
> I say nice, now you think--what will she do in
> second and third year, that's what I would say.
> Yeah, I think she's original. She'll make a better
> film in second year than most, would be my guess.
> I'd be surprised if she didn't.

And as Barbara said to another student (now graduated

from the program) "you have a unique talent that's still

there, it's in you, it isn't the kind of thing that goes

away." Her comment followed a screening of the student's

third film, made some 5 years earlier. It not only

underscores the personal and interior qualities of talent

("it's in you"), it invokes the stability of talent

attributions once made, coming as it did from Barbara,

someone unfamiliar with the student's work beyond his

first year of Grad Film, which he had completed several

years earlier. [5]

Echoing (or presaging) Barbara's remark, Richard had

commented on Stephen Spielberg's student film Amblin' in

similar terms. "Here we can see," he told the class

after a Fall screening, "everything we see in the later

Spielberg, the talent, the visual imagination." Again,

what Richard admires about Spielberg's current work is

retroactively projected on his early work and attributed

to a continuous, intrapersonal trait of the director.

Despite the ease with which Richard and other

faculty attribute talent to relative newcomers, their initial impressions can be turned around by subsequent performances. This is not to say that early declarations of talent are fickle after all, but that what ultimately counts is the development of one's talent toward a skilled performance (in this case a film) that does not fail but for a few striking details. Thus third films are the most heavily weighted in a first-year student's final standing. They are believed to reflect a student's talent or creativity and his "performance" or progress toward mastering the techniques of story and cinema. While the absolute value of "talent" exceeds the value of mere "competence," competence or skill is required to externalize talent as an individual trait. Implicit in the claim that "filmmaking can be learned but not taught" is the idea that talent enables mastery, and mastery in turn is evidence of talent. Third films are thus the proper indices of talent and mastery.

Third films also mark the end of a period of training or apprenticeship (from entry into the program to the temporal and symbolic close of first year) in which students and faculty continuously interact to produce estimates of talent. Despite the appeal to films as the final arbiters of talent and performance, from an interactionist perspective they are necessary but not sufficient. The presence of a student film and its

director do not constitute "talent"; this also requires a declaration by an authoritative second party. In Henry Kingsbury's terms, the act of attribution "retroactively transforms a succession of social events into the manifestation of intrapersonal traits of an individual" (1988:71). To matter, talent must be ascribed by one person to another.

Talent, Performance and Aesthetic Mobility

The processual and serial qualities of talent attribution set up the occasion for figure-ground comparisons and what I introduced in Ch.2 as aesthetic and social mobility in Grad Film. Broadly speaking, four scenarios and two outcomes were likely within the first-year system. On the one hand, students could be judged promising after their first films but failed after their third; or they could be regarded as poor or mediocre after their first film and failed after their third. In the first case, aesthetic mobility was downward; in the second it was stable but poor. In both cases, students stood to get cut, though other factors could intervene.

On the other hand, by faculty standards students could do poorly on their first films and well on their third, or follow good first films with impressive final efforts. In the first of these scenarios, mobility is upward; in the second, stable but accomplished. Students

were likely to be promoted in both, though again, not
disregarding other factors.

In effect I am proposing a descriptive model of
judgements and status in which each of four scenarios
realigns the meaning and import of "talent" as a cultural
category related to social roles and practices. I do not
suggest with this model that all faculty agreed on all
occasions about what constitutes "film talent," and
consider the absence of consensus and the politics of
these judgements later in this chapter. But I do want to
suggest a predictability of outcomes based on the
relationship between early and subsequent assessments.

**The first scenario: a "poor" or "mediocre" showing
on first and third films (stable and poor):** To declare a
student's third film "failed" in light of a similar
declaration about their first film is to suggest that no
particular or nascent ability was developed because there
was nothing to develop. In retrospect, the third film
performance becomes "predictable" even where faculty were
reluctant to anticipate a failure before third-film
production began.

In some instances, this scenario underscores the
qualitative difference between judgements of failure
after first and third films. Where faculty will happily
concede that the director of a poor first film may "pull
it out of the bag" later on, when later arrives and

nothing has changed they settle on a judgement of "no

talent." But while instructors (and consequences) may be

unequivocal, like all judgements of value the verdict is

conventional rather than absolute. It is debateable how

many opportunities a person needs to learn how to co-

ordinate the expressive and material elements of

filmmaking. In Grad Film however, it is agreed that

judgements will be levied after third films. Thus "no

talent" might be more precisely expressed in the

following terms: "as far as we can tell at this point in

this program, Student A has failed to demonstrate what

those of us in a position of authority regard as

'talent,' relative to earlier performances by the same

student and other students' performances on the same

assignment under comparable conditions."

While Grad Film instructors might agree with the

qualified paraphrasal, they are unlikely to couch their

decisions to students or each other in those terms. The

structural imperatives of the cut demand (and elicit) a

correspondingly decisive stance from faculty, at least

toward those who are dropped, if not (in all cases)

toward those who are kept. Moreover, the professed

nature of talent itself as a durable, interior and

somewhat mystical quality of the individual is hard to

reconcile to a such relativist (and hyperrational)

stance; in a familiar phrase, "you either have it or you

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don't." For example, Richard described a student finally

dismissed from the program as not only making a "bad

film" but as failing to understand that and why it hadn't

worked.

> Her story was quite good, I thought it was one of
> the better scripts in the class, but it's a perfect
> example of someone who missed the boat on every
> count, the casting of the woman is completely wrong,
> and she didn't shoot the biggest scene in her
> picture, where the little girl brings the woman
> home. She gave it up not because she couldn't get
> it done, which she couldn't, she didn't understand
> that if you don't get it done you don't have a
> film. It's not for her, I can tell you that
> filmmaking is not for her...She doesn't have it, she
> doesn't have that thing Kathryn has, or Oscar has,
> or Sofia has, who is very talented...

In this case, not only could Richard find nothing in

either first or third film to indicate "talent," in her

responses to their critique the student failed to

acknowledge the problems and thus failed to reflect at

least an understanding of narrative structure if not the

ability to use it. Faculty are unequivocal about

dismissing such a student and the case raised little

discussion. By artistic standards (judged, importantly,

through textual performance in the film and social

performance in the commentaries), there was no

controversy.

The second scenario: a "good" first film and a

"poor" third film (downward aesthetic mobility): If the

principal function of a "good first film" is to reveal a

measure of talent, the student who succeeds here and does

poorly on their third film becomes guilty of failing to invest his or her talent under the terms and conditions of the graduate program (to persist with the financial metaphor), to use their talent toward the development of narrative and stylistic skill. In this scenario, faculty dismiss their initial judgements of promise as either speculative, or disappointed by students who are indeed talented but unwilling to "listen" or "do the work," to meet the logistical demands of filmmaking (eg. re-shooting or re-cutting) in the interest of successful narrative films. After a favorable response to early efforts, they "coast" on their laurels, dangerously indifferent to faculty advisement and authority. As Jim commented about a student who got cut:

> We told him that 4 minutes worth of sort-of-funny vignettes wouldn't fly as a third film but Dorrie isn't interested in the work of filmmaking, in getting out there and getting it together and just doing the work. He was probably feeling smug after first semester. His film had been good, his directing class grade an A, but he'd just decided to coast despite our warnings about what he was—or wasn't—producing.

On a separate occasion, Richard made a similar comment about the same student:

> In his heart he's not interested in the, uh, the problems of filmmaking, getting locations and actors. He's a guy who says 'I want to make films this weekend, from the back of the car,' and not be bothered, but with some talent. Not like Lauren, who finds these two wonderful kids, where you see real effort, or Sarah's fabulous film.

In this scenario students are guilty of not only an aesthetic failure but a moral one as well, a smugness and a "waste" of born talent, of a cultural "gift" (Kingsbury 1988:76). Their artistic motives are insincere ("his heart's not interested..."). According to faculty, they may well have it in them to make films, but not at the school. They are "dismissive" of their principal audience--their teachers; they don't appear to want what faculty feel they have to offer. They have upset the balance between individual trait and civic responsibility in squandering the resources of talent and sponsorship.

Describing one such student, Richard conceded that had the student been enormously talented, perhaps then he should (and would) have been promoted.

> I had one guy who was pretty intelligent, very intelligent, never showed a rough cut, never showed a fine cut, always came late on Marathon Day, always late, always behind schedule, film's twice as long as prescrbed--but interesting, not uninteresting--it was a big problem. Everyone said he was talented, but the performance was nil. Not just never showing up, never meeting dates, everything twice as long...and he thought his films were terribly interesting and other people thought they were mildly interesting, including me, so he got cut, and then put up a big to-do about it, and thought he was more talented than a lot of people in the class, and I said that's true...you're right, you are more talented than a lot of people, except they woke up at 4:00 in the morning and came and cut...That wasn't an issue, people much less talented than him went on to second year. Other people in the school would kill me if I said that, they say it's a school only for talented people, I never thought that. I mean if he was <u>really</u> Orson Welles...okay, then I'd be hard-pressed to say, I mean if he was <u>really</u> <u>that</u> <u>talented</u>, but he wasn't.

Though Richard regarded the student as "more talented" than others from the same class admitted to second year, he remained within the normal range of talent in Richard's experience. The comment ranks gradations of talent against personal authority: "enormous talent," beyond Richard's range to date and thus presumably "rare," ought to be mined when discovered regardless of the student's stance. "Moderate" talent (though it may exceed the endowment of others more favorably treated) accompanied by "attitude" or "laziness" is not worth the struggle.

Here we leave the relative value of talent (relative, that is, to how hard a student is perceived to be willing to work) and return to an absolute conception of "real" talent as a scarce resource, a conception which valorizes and thus distinguishes those thought to possess it, and relegates the untalented or less so to the periphery in systems of honor and reward. As a teacher of anything, though with particular force in "aesthetic" or "creative" domains, you work with what is "already there." Again, filmmaking can be "learned though not taught." Scarce material and institutional resources (such as production awards, distributed in Grad Film without regard for financial need) are best invested in those most likely to pay off.

The third scenario: a "poor" or "mediocre" first film and a successful third (upward aesthetic mobility): Where Scenario 2 represents aesthetic and moral compromise, the third scenario represents aesthetic and moral success. Students to whom faculty initially attribute limited or moderate talent have since "taken instruction [and instructors] seriously." According to faculty, they use advisement and screening commentaries not as a showcase for what they believe is already good, but as a source of advice for how to improve their scripts and films. Unlike Group 2 students, they indeed "do the work," re-writing, shooting or cutting according to peer and faculty suggestions and thus demonstrating their interest in and deference to others' opinions. They may not be the most talented directors in the program, but they ought to remain in the school. For example, Jim described one student's third film as

> a quantum leap in storytelling...she struck out last
> semester but came in with [third film] this
> Spring...actually getting at some feeling, the
> character's fear--not flawlessly mind you, but it
> was real, and a real improvement over the mindless
> devices of [first film].

Here the student recovered from skepticism by engaging "human feeling," a critical quality in Grad Film definitions of "story" and precisely the feature missing (by several instructors' standards) from her first film.

The fourth scenario: a "good" first film and a
"good" third film (stable and accomplished): Where
Scenario 1 denotes clear aesthetic failure, Scenario 4
denotes clear aesthetic success. Moreover, unlike
Scenario 3, stable successes are treated both as "bigger"
and as the products of considerable talent, not labored
revision. This is not to say that students whose
position is stable and good don't work at their films,
but that comparable efforts yield better movies by
prevailing narrative and stylistic standards. Their
final films are not flawless, but "compelling." As
Ilona commented about one student:

> [His third film] is really a magnificent film, a
> tremendous sensibility, a tremendous feeling despite
> some technical problems with the story (...) True,
> he is very young and sometimes arrogant, but he has
> something to say about the human condition and
> tremendous talent to say it on film.

Students in this category may have indeed resisted
faculty advice on occasion (though are also described as
"really knowing how to listen") but still their films
succeed. Like the student director on the set,
successful insistence on doing things their way is
treated in retrospect as vision. Resistance that
produces "failures" is mere recalcitrance.

My comparison of outcomes in Scenarios 1 through 4
does not attempt to resolve the question of what
constitutes film talent. Rather, it suggests the

structure and dynamics of talent attribution, a loose system of socio-aesthetic mobility in which faculty control or manage talent among first-year students. Not surprisingly, by late Spring the largest group (about half) of 1B students in 1985-86 were positioned in Scenario 3 (upward mobility), where their principal teachers perceived them to have adequate talent and seriousness to improve as filmmakers. Though faculty evaluations of their work varied somewhat, their status in the school was neither spectacular nor controversial. They were spared the cut, but also the designation "truly talented," at least at that point. In contrast to the faculty commitment required to drop or champion a student, the commitment implicit in this scenario is low. [6]

Scenario 3 locates the practical notions (which many faculty members expressed at different points) that most students can improve, that few are likely to be overwhelming talents anyway, and that as a teacher one inevitably encounters a "competent" majority while seeking that "talented" few. But in critical terms, the third scenario also reconciles the ideology of rare talent to the bureaucratic requirements of maintaining an optimum cohort, of subsidizing second and third-year programs with first-year enrolments.

In this equation, enrolments are a function of

economic and other dimensions of organizational stability, and the value of "pure" talent is at once suppressed and reified. It is suppressed because faculty and administrators use (and acknowledge) an organizational rationale for admitting and promoting a certain number of students, a number that doesn't necessarily reflect or accommodate their assessments (or students') of who is "genuinely talented" and thus most worthy of the school's resources by the talent standard. Talent is also reified, however, precisely because people believe that organizational mandates are at some level incommensurable with talent's aesthetic and moral values; a more-or-less able group of students whose numbers in the program are acknowledged to be bureaucratically set becomes the ideological background against which "gifted" students distinguish themselves. In other words, even if all students were "good", in the competitive, meritocratic context of the school (and especially the cut) it is virtually inconceivable that a select few won't be regarded as better than that, as "talented".

The tension between rational organizational demands and the rarification of talent is reproduced in faculty debates about which students ought to be promoted and about what, afterall, Grad Film trains its students to become. For example, in a mid-year conversation (just

after the external evaluations committee had reviewed

first films), Richard compared the talent standard to

what he considered students' realistic prospects in the

film industry. Importantly, Richard's comments here

follow those quoted earlier (in Scenario 2) about the

"talented" student dismissed for his apparent

indifference to the performance requirements of the

program. As Richard said about the student, had he been

"extraordinarily talented," "Orson Welles," perhaps he

would have been promoted despite his recalcitrance. On

the one hand, this comment sustains the value of "real"

talent (ie. Orson Welles') as a rare and precious trait.

On the other, it routinizes more modest degrees of talent

by appraising their worth relative to other qualities,

like deference to rules. As Richard went on to say:

> If you want to just put people ahead in this school
> who are more talented than other people we could
> stop right now after the first film and I'll tell
> you who should go on and who shouldn't. I don't
> need any more (...) Now, let's say Helen [whose
> first film had "categorically failed"] makes a
> decent third film, works like a horse, shows up on
> everyone's shoot, makes every deadline. Should she
> go on to second year and work eventually as a script
> consultant, a production manager? Yes. My answer
> is yes, she should have the chance to go through
> training to work in New York as a script
> consultant. But a lot of people would disagree with
> that. They would say the most talented students
> should go on. My answer is Grad Film's not training
> directors. 95% are not going to direct.
>
> LH: Do other faculty then have a different
> conception of what kind of talent is required to
> work in the crafts?

No, they wouldn't recognize that we're training
craftspeople. They would say this is a school where
we're training writer-directors, which in effect, it
in a way is. That's the philosophy of the teaching,
everyone makes a film, everyone cuts a film, it's
not a tracking school yet where you become a
production manager. So in terms of the premise of
the school, they're right, it is a school for
writer/directors. But the truth of the matter is
most people who graduate will work in the crafts, so
why shouldn't Helen work in the crafts? I had a
student just like her last year, very hard-working,
not one tenth the talent of this guy who got cut,
not one tenth the talent, ordinary, but she's in
school, second year.

Here Richard suggests that notwithstanding the

manifest goals of the program--to train writer/directors--

most students won't direct and therefore talent (meaning,

importantly, students' promise as directors or auteurs)

need not be the only criterion for promotion. Richard

doesn't dismiss the significance of talent; even as a

reliable, organized and willing crew member who aspires

to become a production manager rather than a director,

Helen would still have to come up with an at least

"decent" third film to make it into second year. But in

pointing to filmmaking's more prosaic tasks and moreover

to the dreary likelihood that few graduates will get to

direct, Richard also reconciles some of Grad Film's

bureaucratic demands (eg. enrolment requirements) to its

investment in the mystical quality called talent. True,

his comments imply, most students promoted to second year

aren't "exceptionally" talented (ie. those finally

positioned in Scenario 3). But most filmmaking jobs,

including the ones students are likely to find beyond
school, don't require exceptional talent as
writer/director. Among "working artists" are a greater
number of artistic workers.

Shifting emphasis from art to work doesn't change
the fact that directorial talent is valorized once
"found"--to wit Richard's remark about the exceptions
he'd make for a new Orson Welles. Nor does the shift
diminish talent's ideological power (including the pain
of being thought untalented) for the majority of Grad
Film students, who indeed aspire to become
writer/directors and who thus conform to the program's
manifest goals. As a confident third-year student once
said to me, "how do people who know they're not going to
direct get up in the morning?"

Talent and Aesthetics

In first year, when students inhabit a manifestly
competitive system, they also feel the pressure to
conform to stylistic and narrative basics (cf. Ch.3). The
early maxim--there are no rules, but don't break them--
gives way to that other art school truism--learn the
rules before you break them. In the absence of a
favorable track record, to challenge the popular
aesthetic of narrative clarity and function over form is
a risk indeed. For example, among 1B students, only one

kept ambiguous elements in his third film despite
Richard's and others' recommendations to resolve them.
Importantly, he was a student whose first film had been
widely judged "accomplished" and could thus afford a
reading (from the external committee) of unintentional
ambiguity on his final film, which was also, otherwise,
"accomplished." In other words, he stood to occupy the
fourth scenario—stable and accomplished—in attributions
of talent.

A consequence of the narrowly-defined first-year
repertoire is that student films are narrationally and
stylistically very similar, thus judgements of talent
don't distinguish between the traditional and non-
traditional (or the "merely conventional" and the
"innovative", in the vernacular of art criticism.) To be
sure, a student may be dismissed for apparent disinterest
in narrative film. As an instructor said to me about a
student dropped the previous year,

> as far as I was concerned, he didn't want to do
> narrative, he wanted to make experimental films, so
> what was he doing here? He can go to Cal Arts.

In this statement, the instructor treats definitions
of narrative as stable or transparent, and adherence to
convention as a practical rather than an evaluative or
political matter—some schools for some types of
filmmaking, other schools for others. But in most cases,
students who get cut indeed make films that teachers and

others identify as "narrative." Thus judgements of their

films as poor or mediocre are harder to pin down and are

by no means consensual among the many faculty members who

ultimately have to evaluate first-year films. In 1986

for example, The Rail was one of the strongest third

films by Richard's, Jim's and Ilona's standards, though

was not particularly successful according to members of

the external committee. To compare their comments once

again:

Jim: Real film talent.

Richard: Wonderful film...real film talent...

Ilona: Magnificent film, tremendous sensibility,
          tremendous feeling...

Reviewer: Directing is hard to judge, because the
          intent is so unclear. Is this just
          parody? If so, it doesn't have the
          right tone. In terms of setting the
          shots, the results are mixed...The film
          has a rather garbled quality, even
          though there are some forceful moments.

Reviewer: Movie-making not bad, but to mix a
          conventional device we cannot take
          seriously with serious melodrama is a bit
          difficult to take. All ends up being
          funny but not amusing.

Reviewer: Characterization is lacking, everything is
          flagged to audience attention, so nothing
          is a surprise. What were you trying
          to create for the audience?

Though Richard, Jim and Ilona didn't necessarily disagree

with the reviewers' technical appraisal, they also didn't

constrain their assessments to technical details. In

their view, those details were corrigible errors which

couldn't obscure the fundamental and "extraordinary" accomplishment of the film's feeling and expressiveness. Importantly Peter, the student director, was promoted to second year.

A student's status in the program is thus partly a matter of the power and authority of the person or people who sponsor (or denounce) their work, a blend of aesthetic appraisal and social influence (cf. Mulkay and Chaplin 1982). Moreover, as Kingsbury points out,

> [a]n assessment of talent is not something that is
> ever proved or disproved. Rather, it is validated
> with reference to the same social process in which
> it first arose (1988:75).

Analytically speaking, students offer up performances to faculty, who return estimates of talent which grant students different measures of validity in the school. Subsequent successful performances by highly-ranked students in turn grant faculty their own artistic legitimacy, if not as filmmakers, as teachers with a certain critical acumen--their own talent for recognizing artistic promise. Faculty are thus cautious with whole-hearted endorsements; a history of investments that don't pay off (for whatever reason) can indeed undermine the reputation and standing of the broker.

But while students recognize the absence of consensus in faculty judgements of their work and ability, while they recognize (with Kingsbury, and their

teachers) that such appraisals are never absolute, and while they understand the bureaucratic context in which faculty judge and inevitably distinguish among them, such insight doesn't, perforce, soften the designation "no talent." As a former student cut the previous year commented to me,

> [I]t was humiliating. I was so sad for so long. It took me a long time even to decide that maybe I could keep working on scripts even if I wasn't at the school.

Like the social class mobility to which this account figuratively corresponds, to not ascend the socio-aesthetic ladder is experienced first as a failure of -personal ability and mettle, no matter how savvy a student's institutional or political perspective (cf. Sennett and Cobb 1972:53-118). [7] Still, faculty judgements are by definition political (which is not to say arbitrary). With consequences for the distribution of resources, they are a means of "hierarchically ranking [aesthetic] and social skill" (Kingsbury 1988:82). [8]

In the first-year cut system, we can see economic imperative and social structure partly transformed by and into the cultural symbol "talent." Again, I say partly because other components of filmmaking (as Scenarios 1-4 suggest) and other systems of training (eg. where a smaller number of "the best" students are recruited and immediately tracked into specialties) are not overlooked

in Grad Film. But it is precisely the demand to justify the cut that prompted faculty to distinguish so categorically between the "talented" and the "untalented". The cut, analogous to readmission procedures elsewhere (eg. from MA to PhD program within the same school), impels first-year students to work within established canons of narrative film. They correctly and anxiously perceive their futures as dependent upon judgements of ability which are framed by existing narrative and stylistic standards. Faculty are thus their aesthetic as well as social superordinates, and the system of aesthetic differentiation a system of social control.

Talent and Persona

> Sony v. Universal Studios: Was it right, the Judge asked Tatum [of Universal], for the government to tell people how to watch television programs inside their own homes? Tatum launched into a response on the theme of balancing privacy rights against a creator's right to control his work. Did that include the right to tell a viewer when he must see it, the Judge asked. Tatum tried to explain that filmmaking was an unusually complicated and fragile enterprise that could not be sustained without generous legal protection. After all, he said, retreating into what must have seemed to him like uncontroversial territory, "there are more intangible elements involved in the making of films than there are in the typical manufacturing kind of business—things called talent."
>   "Well," Judge Ferguson said, "it takes just as much talent to get your shoes shined."
>   "It's a different kind of talent," Tatum said diplomatically (Lardner 1987:57). [10]

From the above passage, I assume Lardner, its author, to be sympathetic to Tatum and his surprise at Judge Ferguson's equation of filmmaking and sitting for a shoe shine. Lardner calls Tatum's commonsensical appeal to a different kind of talent (his "retreat into uncontroversial territory") "diplomatic." From this passage, what are we to think of Judge Ferguson? Is he a philistine blind to the subtleties of artistic work, or a critic who may indeed grant those subtleties but not, by mere force of tradition or cultural habit, at the expense of other subtleties or the people who manifest them?

The passage offers a caricature of the time-worn question "what is talent", a glimpse at talent's contestability. It is telling that the dispute arises between Tatum the producer and Ferguson the judge, not between Tatum the producer and Lardner the writer, both of them insiders to the conventionally "expressive" domains of moviemaking and literary journalism and thus perhaps least likely to query the essence of talent. For them talent is real, however intangible, and ought to be protected.

Of course, what the defendants in <u>Sony v. Universal</u> sought to protect was the not the work itself from the interventions of non-artists, but the art world's right to control profits generated by artistic works, specifically the rights of Universal Pictures to guard

the profits of film distribution and telecast against the
financial incursions of home video recording. In Tatum's
appeal, and in Grad Film, talent has exchange value; it
is a commodity, if a delicate one. But again, as an
internal quality, talent cannot be exploited, or traded
upon, unless it is externalized, whether by films or by
other qualities of the individual that can be observed
and which connote talent. Drawing from Ch.4, I call
these qualities "persona".

Persona is an embodied externalization of talent or
"vision". Unlike films themselves, it externalizes
talent but not apart from the body of the individual
deemed talented. In other words, an outside evaluations
committee with no knowledge of a particular student can
look to her film and declare that here lies the work of a
talented or promising director. Such an attribution
partially constitutes the student director's talent. But
those who interact with her as well her films may have
another performance to go on--the dimensions of personal
style or "presentation of self" (Goffman 1959) which seem
testimony to a judgement of talent. "Here," says the
observer, "is a talented person." (Importantly, as
student directors remain in the school and build their
repertoires of films and shoots, their personae may
indeed come to circulate independently of themselves,
transformed to image, or reputation. As I pointed out in

Ch.4, this has its analogy in professional filmmaking,
the period of "New" Hollywood having brought with it a
market value for persona.)

The trade value of persona among student filmmakers
is partly the attraction of other students. A director's
ability to recruit, organize and co-ordinate a crew of
classmates is a critical resource, and in the best
instances what students believe underlies it is talent or
vision; the director not only enlists her crews, she
inspires them with her certainty or sense of purpose.

This is particularly true where crew members, or
others, admire a director's earlier films. As several
students on an advanced shoot said, they were happy to be
there because they stood to learn a great deal from such
a talented director. In many instances this comment came
from new students who, they told me, had never seen the
(more advanced) student director's earlier films.
However, they knew by reputation that here was someone
worth working for. They also expected the film itself
would be good (whether or not they'd read the script) in
part because of the director's style on the set--calm,
certain, never quick to compromise. The director's
persona, or presentation of self (of which skill in
interactions with cast and crew is an element) is a
commodity to the extent that it can be traded for work
and effort from crew members. To be sure, all students

work for and with each other--such is the nature of film
school filmmaking. Some shoots, however, are preferred,
and attract the "best and brightest" among student
collaborators.

Everyone at Grad Film will agree that "talent" alone
will not get you through a film or through film school
(money helps, and so do organization, stamina and
persistence). But when successes occur they become
evidence of talent, in faculty and student discourse.
Recalling the epigrams of persona from the previous
chapter, it is determination based on the belief in one's
own T-A-L-E-N-T, whether tentative or assured, that
enables a director to surmount the complexities,
obstacles and "fragility" (per Tatum) of filmmaking. As
the story goes, Werner Herzog stole his first 16mm
camera. Said a first-year student, "sometimes that's
what you have to do." Prosaically, a stolen camera is a
production tool. But the act of stealing, whether real
or lore, symbolizes obsession and risk--the lengths one
will go to do what one must, a single-minded response to
a "calling" rather than an anti-social crime. In the
student's reverent (and very romantic) statement, it is
part of Herzog's allure, an expression of his commitment
as a young filmmaker. Like the cut, and the first year
of Grad Film that precedes it, the theft is an
initiation, a right of passage that amplifies talent as a

moral imperative.

By the same token, to cultivate persona in the perceived absence of talent, to act like a "big-shot director" when it is not clear to others that your "film talent" is established, is regarded, with some skepticism or bemusement, as a caricature, as play.

> Throughout the day, Brad was characteristically effusive toward the actors: "Beautiful Lynn beautiful," "Denny, great, perfect man, just what I wanted," (to both) "I love the chemistry, ooh, it works, make it show, make it show." Jeff (AC) cast a couple of impatient, conspiratorial glances my way amid Brad's hyperbole. (First year third film)

Despite such skeptical occasions, the director's role remains available to be dramatized (and directorial persona cultivated) by all students in Grad Film precisely because each makes her or his "own" film, and because a compelling (if small) group goes on to do so in the professional industries. The payoff is real, if not likely, and expressions of devotion and seriousness help consolidate students' identities as aspiring directors, particularly amid the first-year threat of dismissal.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. Despite the cut system ending shortly a year or so after I left Grad Film, in many sections of the chapter I refer to it in the present tense, especially where I describe general social processes which are not likely to have disappeared with the cut.

2. Note that each student is graded on camera work for whichever film they shot, but not their own. Thus on each evaluation form for a particular student director, comments under "Camera" refer to a different student whose name is included at the head of the sheet.

3. Some students have been permitted to re-do their third film (with an altogether different story and script) and with the new work reapply for second-year admission. Very few students (and none I spoke with) had actually done so, however, because it was not always an option, because it is expensive to produce even a short film outside the school, and because (I am told) being dropped generates an ill-feeling that leaves most students unwilling to struggle for readmission.

4. As a fieldworker, my relative identification with students in the program no doubt constrained the extent to which some faculty members were willing to talk to me about promotions and dismissals—a constraint reflected, I believe, in this chapter. With more time and a different set of fieldworker identifications, I would seek deeper explanations from faculty about their decisions to cut (or support) students I had worked with and further insights on the politics of talent.

5. In behavioral science this is sometimes known as a "halo effect," where early success favorably conditions expectations for and evaluations of future performances.

6. Thanks to Henry Kingsbury (personal communication) for encouraging me to consider the distribution of students across the 4 scenarios.

7. In fact, the socio-aesthetic model I propose bears more than a figurative correspondence to social class. As Sennett and Cobb point out, talent and

comparable "badges of ability" are primary means of legitimizing authority in class society (1973:195, quoted in Kingsbury 1988:187, n.12). In the conclusion to this thesis, I return to artmaking as petit-bourgeois activity.

8. In Kingsbury's analysis, talent links the political and the musical. It is in keeping with his general point, however, to substitute aesthetic.

9. Since the cut was disbanded, fewer first-year students are admitted to the program and the revenue formerly generated by a large first-year class is made up for in overall tuition increases. This policy decision was evidently made to be fairer to students but also, I expect, to relieve faculty (who remain from year to year) of the burden of problematic and draining decisions and the tensions they inevitably produce. Still, questions certainly arise about whether the patterns I describe remain in place in the cut's absence. Without having returned to the school as a fieldworker, I expect that general relationships (in a system of "social-aesthetic mobility") persist, though the categorical (and sometimes antagonistic) terms and idioms in which students and faculty articulate their power relationships have changed. Though it is no longer the case that faculty must cut a number of students after first year, they may still fail some, recommending they withdraw from the program. Talent attributions would still need to be analysed in this relational context.

10. Thanks to Pamela Sankar for first pointing out Lardner's passage.

CONCLUSION

I began this thesis with an interest in symbolic behavior and social life, asking the descriptive questions "what is taught and what is learned in film school?" I have since attempted to answer those questions with an account of two critical, intersecting domains in film school practice: aesthetic repertoires (including narrative and stylistic competence in cinema), and the social identity of the student director.

I have framed both dimensions in the context of student filmmaking and the evaluation of student performances. These emphases have come at the expense of others, for example the cultivation of technical competence with filmmaking equipment (cf. Mukerji 1978), department-University relations (cf. Adler 1979), the career histories of program graduates, or the position of Grad Film itself in the professional milieux of narrative cinema. But my focus on students making films (on "working artists," in the language of this study) nonetheless suggests the multiply-determined nature of aesthetic practice and the significance of socialization in cultural production and reproduction. In conclusion, I return to these theoretical issues through a summary of the principal themes of this thesis.

Summary

Working artist: I haved used the gloss "working artist" to evoke a range of qualities and oppositions which inflect the process of student filmmaking and the analysis of film school socialization--among them industry and art, practice and identity, collective and individual, co-operation and competition, aesthetic repertoires and aesthetic intentions, skill and talent, performance and persona--the terms in each pair respectively aligning with "work" and with "art". "Working artist" approximates the local title "director" (or sometimes "filmmaker") though for analytic purposes it better signifies the cultural resources and tensions which enable and constrain that title and the ways people use it in Grad Film. It also keeps the analysis focussed on social life, rather than textual rules, to convey the dynamic quality of culture <u>as produced</u>. Thus narrative and stylistic codes in cinema are contextualized, in this thesis, in a discussion of symbolic competence and how students acquire it.

Aesthetic repertoires and communicative competence: Students learn to make films across several occasions of increasing narrative, stylistic and technical complexity. In the process, they stake claims to their identities and independence as working artists, in part through the tension they experience between cinematic

"oughts" and the desire (indeed the mandate) to resist them. Drawing from the work of film scholars and historians, I have argued that the range of aesthetic practice in Grad Film extends from classical to "New" Hollywood. First-year students particularly (though by no means only) adhere to classical narrative, where psychologically credible protagonists encounter a series of obstacles in pursuit of well-defined objectives. In the end, the pursuit is resolved (if not happily) and the character somehow transformed. Classical narration, the story in motion, follows a pattern of hermeneutic openings and closings; from first exposition to final resolution, new questions continuously arise as old ones are settled.

In the "New" Hollywood, authorial voice ruptures the transparency of classical codes, though not at the expense of the story or the audience's participatory identification with characters and events. Clarity as the cardinal virtue of narrative is selectively undermined and ambiguity becomes a strategic narrative element, reflecting the ambivalences of psychically and morally compromised protagonists. Still, stories are resolved and loose ends tied up.

Stylistically, students master the continuity code of classical Hollywood cinema—fundamental techniques for handling space and time. They are not inclined to resist

classical continuity except on specific and identifiably "controlled" occasions (eg. discontinuous editing in _Five Out of Six_) which committees, panels and other vested audiences will assume are intentional. They also learn the "basics" of three-point lighting, composition-in-depth, and LS-MS-CU coverage within a scene. Beyond these basics, however, they explore a stylistic range framed by the tenets of relative clarity, of function over form, and of film as an expressly visual medium despite the contributions and constraints of other symbolic modes (eg. verbal, musical).

In Grad Film, the acquisition of narrative competence is a manifestly public process where students and faculty constantly review student projects in both organized and informal encounters. I have concentrated on routine readings and screenings of student work-in-progress, and the commentaries that follow. As official social occasions, these commentaries suppress some antipathies among participants while heightening others, in ways only partly accounted for here (eg. first-year students' growing impatience with the literalizing demands of narrative clarity, and the competitiveness of student, and faculty, interactions). Still, they reveal cinematic narrative as an acquired "craft skill" and as an eminently communicative art in Grad Film.

In the commentaries, student directors encounter a

self-conscious audience equipped (and willing) to articulate interpretations of films-in-progress. The audience implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) demands the director's and the film's accountability in communicative terms, triangulating their understandings with the director's intentions and the film's formal properties. Given this communicative standard, during the review most students are impatient with unresponsive student colleagues, attributing to them either inability or pretension--the caricature artiste who dismissively implies that "the work speaks for itself" or, maddeningly, that she or he "doesn't care what people get out of it." While the Grad Film community privileges directorial intention (and with it the director as the agent of meaning), they also honor and protect the audience, both the group of colleagues assembled in the screening room at that moment, and the ontological "audience" always present in the communicative abstraction and industrial practice of "narrative cinema".

Social identity: I have reported throughout this thesis that the overwhelming majority of Grad Film students aspire to become directors and moreover that the program itself cultivates writer/directors, requiring each student to make five of his or her "own" films in the course of three years. (Alternately, students can

major in cinematography, editing or production

management, though remarkably few do.)

In Grad Film, "director" refers not only to a set of

tasks, skills and responsibilities in the divided labor

of film production, but also to an identity--who you are

as well as what you do. On the set, student directors

marshall the efforts and creative resources of cast and

crew. In class, they account for their work in light of

their aesthetic intentions. Both occasions, they say,

are underwritten by "personal vision," a distinctive

perspective or message and the capacity to transform and

present it through the symbolic and material resources of

cinema.

In some venues this "transformation of vision" is

virtually private; individuals single-handedly control as

many moments as possible in the complex, technical

process of filmmaking, "untrammeled" by others' motives

or limitations. By contrast, Grad Film production (like

all commercial filmmaking) requires collective work in a

loose hierarchy of creative, administrative and technical

positions. But despite the division of labor, the

director is valorized as the film's originator. Indeed I

have argued that it is precisely amid the rigors of

collective production that Grad Film students distinguish

their directorial authority; from the ground of divided

labor the figure of the singular artist emerges.

Student films emerge from the same ground, though importantly faculty judge those films as principally the work of their directors. Against a horizon of narrative and stylistic expectations, they compare different student performances on the same assignment and the same student's performance from project to project, guaging students' "talent" and "commitment" in a system of meritocratic individualism (cf. Newman 1988:75-80).

In first year, the continuous process of evaluation characteristic of any school was (until 1988) marked by an especially loaded moment of judgement known as the "cut". While students and faculty (among others) regard talent as an irreducible, intrapersonal trait, the cut and comparable moments remind us that it is also a commodity externalized by films and directorial personae and traded and banked in a system of socio-aesthetic mobility. Like other commodities, talent stratifies, empowering those who (ostensibly) control the greatest shares. But unlike other commodities, talent is always personal, particularly for neophytes who precariously await conferment from their aesthetic and social superordinates, and who experience a judgement of "no talent" as a measure of who they are, though it has been levied against what they do.

Socialization and Cultural Reproduction

By "cultural reproduction" I mean a historical and specific process through which dominant conditions and practices are adopted and adapted across related cultural domains (in this case film schools and film industries) and thus are perpetuated in some version, particularly by and among people who actively aspire to trade one domain for the other, to leave the school and enter the field. In light of this definition, how do aesthetic repertoires and social identity figure in an analysis of cultural reproduction? What do they produce and what do they reproduce?

In Grad Film, students (with faculty) produce films and judgements of films. The department enables student production and provides a milieu in which students come to identify themselves as working artists. Their repertoires are by no means unconstrained, however, particularly at the moments of "boundary passage" (like the cut), where students with a great deal at stake respond in a more or less custodial fashion, adhering to classical tenets of narrative and style. [1] Where they voice their resistance (like newcomers in such other professions as police work, nursing and sales) they express "components of the valued subcultural ethos that characterizes their particular occupation--autonomy, pragmatism, and the concern for personal style"

(VanMaanen and Schein 1979:238). In other words, the aesthetic limits on their work imposed by the curriculum and by instruction create the conditions for students to socially distinguish themselves as emergent artists, though such distinctions will be regarded by others as legitimate (or not) to the extent that students appear to have "learned the rules" before they break (or complain about) them. In these terms, the school is the site of "structuration", Giddens' term for the making of social structure through social interaction. Students use the aesthetic and technical conditions of school filmmaking to do their work, and in so doing reaffirm (or "reproduce") the value and legitimacy of the school as a socializing locale.

Students' artistic identities may be provisional, however, precisely because that locale is itself emergent in the professional field. Schooling may turn the key and open up film worlds beyond the university, but it is neither necessary nor sufficient for making it in those worlds. To the extent that a reliable number of graduates do "make it," however, Grad Film further consolidates its position as training ground in the professional field and thus as an institutional mediator in the production of popular culture. If it can continue to reliably produce successful filmmakers it hardly matters whether there is consensus about its curriculum

or any codified route from film school to film industry.
Indeed, for the department to succeed in a speculative
environment is in many ways more compelling than for it
to succeed in a predictable one; it sustains the art
world ethos of risk and uncertainty.

What is also reproduced (in a training context
allied with the narrative film industry) are aesthetic
ideologies, including definitions of "cinema" rooted in
classical Hollywood and its historical variants, and a
conception of the "artist" which originates in European
Romanticism (eg. Hauser 1951:163-227) though is
contradicted by the rationalizing conditions of
capitalist cultural production. Again, as aspiring
artists, student directors struggle to distinguish
themselves. But they do so on the aesthetic terrain of
industrial cinema, a terrain limited (if not defined) by
commerce and the exchange value of the popular audience.
In this struggle, aesthetic distinction (of the figure
"artist") is poised against aesthetic inclusion (of
cultural consumers), a juxtaposition which prompts some
observations about the social class character of Grad
Film training.

Directorial identity and social class--"educating
the rich to entertain the poor": This epigram was first
pointed out to me by a Grad Film student some 18 months
after I had ended my fieldwork. It had been etched in

the wall of the equipment room in the new building and aptly reflected, the student told me, her impatience and others' with the apparent trend toward "only admitting rich kids" to the program. I can't say whether her observation was accurate, whether recent admissions had indeed produced an increase in the proportion of wealthy students. Still, the epigram struck me. It made sense, I thought, of the old Grad Film as well as the new. Though it did not precisely describe either the department or the audience for popular cinema (given some students who are not from elite backgrounds and the many movie goers who are--recall it was Richard Nixon who opined "I like my movies made in Hollywood"), from my perspective it articulated a general class critique of the relationship between filmic form and social role in the department.

The contradiction occurs where the populist aesthetic of narrative cinema meets the exclusionary ethos of the _auteur_. On the one hand, narrative film is communicative, and honors an audience's desire to participate, to reject the logic of "art for art's sake" and the distancing of life and art which characterize the formalist avant-garde (cf. Bourdieu 1984:4,32-3). On the other, students claim their identities as artists, who are neither cultural functionaries nor businesspeople. They base this claim (if tentatively) on those very

rarefied, individualizing qualities called "talent" and "vision." They long to appeal to a sizeable audience, but they also long to be recognized for their distinctive aesthetic contributions, their ability to do something not everyone can. In other words, they claim for themselves a cultural position at some remove from precisely the audience their aesthetic seeks to include.

In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, they command a form and degree of "cultural capital" (1984:12) that most members of their potential audience do not. They are artworld trainees whose backgrounds are overwhelmingly in the professional classes and who are pursuing advanced degrees in a prestigious academy. [2] Thus to different degrees they construct their artistic identities as cultural elites, not necessarily the economic haute-bourgeoisie (though some are wealthy), but the artistic petit-bourgeoisie, that non-dominant though well-schooled fraction of the dominant class.

That a member of the school community graced the wall with the epigram of rich and poor (and that others sympathized) makes clear that indeed some people at Grad Film recognize a schism between popular cinematic form and artistic identity in the hierarchy of cultural value. This was also true during my fieldwork period, though not all students were so critical. On a second-year shoot, for example, crewmembers debated whether

they'd be willing to work for Steven Spielberg. That it was a debate came from this group's implicit ill-regard for Spielberg's films, the sense that they were masterful but "pure Hollywood" (like many responses to the thesis film which had so often superceded Five Out of Six in school festivals). One crewmember quoted Richard as saying that "the students who criticize Spielberg the most would probably jump at the chance to work with him." Others scoffed and for a moment no one conceded Richard's point. But then one lamented, "we might work for him, but not because we want to." Here the student constructed the distance between popular cinema (represented by Spielberg's films) and his elite identity as an aspiring artist by suggesting that the commercial feature industry is coercive; it may provide employment but for him, only at the cost of serious aesthetic compromise.

This student's aesthetic preferences fell to "New" Hollywood and the European art cinema (and he was among like thinkers on the set of A Century of Progress, the exemplary non-classical film of my fieldwork year). But even those students who embrace the popular aesthetic uphold their distinctive position as working artists, a reasonable strategy in the professional milieux they aspire to. Among those who remain in filmmaking beyond Grad Film, many will begin their careers working in

technical or "menial" positions in the film world or in non-directorial creative positions on low-budget features and music videos. Meanwhile, they will develop scripts and prospects for independent features of their own, much like their "New" Hollywood predecessors (eg. Lucas, Scorsese, Coppola), like other independents (eg. Sayles), and importantly, like recently successful school-trained directors (eg. Spike Lee, Susan Seidelman, Jim Jarmusch).

While some students in this pre-professional context (the second-year feminists, for example) are critical of whose vision makes it into distribution, most are not fundamentally critical of the reality or significance of "vision" as a legitimate basis for distinction. As working artists, Grad Film students are not the countercultural resistors of bourgeois individualism who fueled U.S. and European avant-garde cinema in the late '60s and early '70s (Vogel 1974:306), though some may selectively appropriate avant-garde aesthetics (cf. Ch.3) or oppose establishment culture in other domains. [3] On the contrary, most aspire to enter the "independent package unit system" in contemporary feature filmmaking, a volatile commercial arena which reduces economic uncertainty in part by awarding "clout" to directors with profitable track records (Hirsch 1972; Faulkner and Anderson 1987), but which also commodifies vision and

persona and circulates directorial reputations in aesthetic as well as economic terms. [4]

In this domain, like others (academic scholarship among them), identities and substantive work are critically rooted in the individualizing tendencies and rewards of their material social practice. In others words, what is reproduced in Grad Film, as in other professional training grounds, is the cultural and economic exchange value of individuation amid collective practice (cf. Faulkner 1983a). Authors are not dead, contrary to recent polemic in cultural theory. They are alive and well, sustained by the radically social construction of meaning as an individual event.

Notes to Conclusion

1. For an analysis of outcomes produced by different
    forms of organizational socialization, see VanMaanen
    and Schein (1979), esp. pp.253-54.

2. Again, 80% of questionnaire respondents are from
    upper-middle-class professional families, and 15%
    from white- and blue-collar working-class families.
    (Data are missing for 5% of respondents.)

3. With this observation I do not mean that the avant-
    garde has always denied the Romantic figure of the
    artist, which in many times and places it clearly
    has not. Moreover, one first-year student was
    indeed critical of the Romantic ideal prevailing in
    the school, a position she expressed during a
    conversation in late Spring (after she had completed
    her third film though before the cut). As she put
    it, "what you don't learn here, at least not in
    first year, is that you have to be a socialist to be
    a filmmaker. You can't do everything. You can't
    even _want_ to do everything." At that point, she
    hoped to eventually join an independent, low-budget
    production collective.

4. For a striking example of aesthetic heroizing in
    "New" Hollywood, see Gelmis (1970).

APPENDIX A

Curriculum Summary, Grad Film, 1985-86*

First Year

Required Courses: Film Editing
(Beginning)   Motion Picture Production Technique
                      Production Workshop
                      Motion Picture Camera Technique
                      Directing Actors
                      Fundamentals of Dramatic and Visual
                           Writing

Second Year

Required Courses: Film Editing
(Intermediate)   Motion Picture Production Technique
                      Motion Picture Camera Technique
                      Writing for Film
                      Sound Recording Workshop I
                      Directing Actors in Scene Studies

Elective Courses: Video Workshop/Seminar
                      Documentary Workshop/Seminar
                      Independent Study

Third Year

Required Courses: Motion Picture Production Technique
(Advanced)   Film Editing
                      Script Workshop
                      Motion Picture Camera Technique
                      Directing

Elective Courses: Video Workshop/Seminar
                      Documentary Workshop/Seminar
                      Sound Recording and Design
                      Independent Study

*1st-year courses are assigned a set number of credits
for a total of 18 per semester; 2nd and 3rd-year students
take each course for 2-6 credits, also for a semester
total of 18.

APPENDIX B

What Students and Teachers Do in Class [1]

Following the pedagogic philosophy of "learning by doing," the many activities students and faculty engage in can be roughly summarized under making films and showing them. While certain deductive strategies occupy a portion of each program year (meaning the introduction of abstract principles and general operations, for example theme, plot, bonding etc. as script mechanisms, or editing room procedures), most instruction is done by example, from the historic repertoire of narrative film, occasionally from the repertoire of Grad Film faculty, from the work of former students and from current students' work in progress.

In classes on writing, directing and editing, short and feature films are frequently screened as the clearest, most subtle or otherwise "best" examples of particular techniques. Interestingly the bulk of these films hail from directors well-inducted into the auteur tradition, among them Hitchcock, Renoir, Coppola, Spielberg, Fassbinder, Polanski, Welles, Ray, Truffaut, Kazan, Herzog, Max Ophuls and Kurosawa. In some cases, films by these directors are shown as "less traditional" examples of how to put together cinema stories. As the Nina explained, the program is

heavily weighted toward "traditional" cinema, and she therefore likes to expose students to the "less traditional" editing styles characteristic, say, of Truffaut's <u>Jules et Jim</u> (1962). The habit of screening masterful examples enables more stylistic flexibility in teaching than would the singular presentation of highly codified structural and narrational "basics." But among some students, while they appreciate another instructor's familiarity with the (usually European) repertoire of "art cinema" and his practice of screening art films in class, they are perplexed by what they see as his subsequent adherence to the most conventional narrative solutions in advising them on their own work. Whether through a disparity between first-year students' ambitions and their abilities (as the instructor sees it), or between the instructor's tastes and his interest in encouraging creativity (as some of his students see it), an occasional, low-grade tension is generated between what is shown and what students are expected to produce, especially in first year.

Nonetheless, the habit of screening and re-screening films from the auteurist canon creates for students in all three years a common cluster of cinematic reference points (to say nothing of reasserting the canon itself) and thus contributes to

the very public quality of instruction in the department. Students not only work together on their own films, they are brought together in talk and reflection by these (and other) shared exemplars. To return to the rite-of-passage interpretation of first-year experience, these films become "sacra," the sacred objects of prolonged and serial rituals (Turner 1967[1964]:102) whose example, if not emulated, ought to be broadly inspiring, a standard of reference for film school novices.

However, while student films embody many of the same narrative premises as theatrical features, they remain student films—typically short and typically sparse. So some of the most instructive screenings are of films produced by students in the department. A limited collection of award-winning thesis films circulate among first-, second- and third-year classes, and constitute second-order sacra (second-order because their reputation is largely intramural). During my fieldwork year, five thesis films were screened on several occasions and in several venues, including new students' orientation, first-year production workshop, second-year production technique and third-year writing, though in no instances were those films accompanied by their directors.

In the first-year production workshops on the
other hand, advanced students routinely show their
first-year films to current first-year students
preparing for the same assignments. In virtually all
cases student directors were available to talk a bit
about the production and answer questions, for example
about how they developed their story ideas, why they
chose one resolution over another, how they cast, how
much time they spent in rehearsal, how they handled
certain technical problems or found their locations,
how much the film cost, and finally, what general
advice they had for students about to undertake
similar projects. Which students were invited by
workshop instructors sometimes depended on who was
available and willing (often meaning who was still at
the school) though in all cases their films were
considered real accomplishments, good examples of
different techniques by the standards of the host
instructor.

Two other short "student" films to turn up in
class, without their directors, were Steven
Spielberg's Amblin', made while Spielberg was at
California State College, and Hotdogs for Gauqin by
Marty Brest (who went on to direct Beverly Hills Cop
[1984] and its sequel), made while he was a student in
New York. In each classroom venue the films, however

flawed they might be, were presented as early
indications of their directors' unusual talent.
Amblin' was screened at the beginning of the Fall
semester, which Richard introduced as evidence of
"everything you see later in Spielberg, the visual
imagination, the cleverness, the subject matter."
Throughout the screening he identified structural
features by name (eg. extreme long shot, medium shot,
pan, wipe, diagonal composition, rack focus, high-
angle shot etc.) to draw attention to unusual moments
and to reiterate the visual vocabulary, in turn
encouraging students to put a label to a look, a
routine strategy among department faculty. [2]

Though the instructor characterized Amblin' as
"head and shoulders above most film-school work," it
is an eminently "do-able" film (compared, say, to ET
[1982]) whose continuity with Spielberg's later
stardom perhaps heartens students well aware of the
odds against becoming a well-known director. The
instructor's post-hoc evaluation suggests that what
moves a career initially is "imagination," not vast
budgets for special effects. As one student commented
after the screening, "hey, I can do that," with a
wryness that acknowledged the odds and spared him
teasing about naive ambition.

An important and much-valued aspect of the Grad

Film curriculum is the Directors Series, where on most Friday nights the directors (or in some cases producers, writers and actors) of theatrical features visit the school and speak with students after a screening, usually of their most recent release. The questions vary though are typically about stylistic choices, script development, raising money and launching a career in the film industry. In many cases visiting directors are Grad Film alumni/ae and are able to chart their progress from school departure through current release(s), engendering among current students an even more immediate sense of the possibility (if not probability) of success as filmmakers.

Faculty occasionally show their own work as directors, editors, screenwriters, script supervisors or cinematographers. These occasions are few however, with the exception of the documentary and first-year camera instructors. [3] According to Richard, despite the value of showing material whose directors or other contributors are present, he rarely shows his own because it is "not narrative" and is thus "of little pedagogic value." During the second or music film assignment in the first-year production workshop, he does show a short film that illustrates ways of rhythmically cutting film to music, and

following this screening in 1985 students levied
familiar questions about form, content, execution and
resources.

Finally, and most importantly, the bulk of films
shown or scripts read are works-in-progress among
current students. Over half of the available class
time in all three years is spent in production and
virtually all work by first-year students and most by
those in second and third year is reviewed by
classmates at some or several points in its
development.

In first year, the typical progression following
the workshop instructor's approval of a treatment
includes at least a rough-cut then a fine-cut
screening, though on the third film student scripts
are also discussed in the writing class. Only the
second or "music film," considered a "breather" from
the strictures of narrative, is screened once. [4]
(It is neither reviewed by the evaluations committee
nor in most cases considered towards a first-year
student's final standing.) For the "exercise film" in
the Fall semester, selected treatments are reviewed in
class, rushes are screened in their entirety for each
group, rough cuts are presented and after revisions,
fine cuts. Earlier workshop assignments, including
the "photo-roman" (where students pair up to produce a

story told in color slides) and the "video exercise"
(a one-day, edited-in-camera video scenario) are also
presented and discussed in class, though no revisions
are required.

In the first-year editing class, the first-
semester assignment is to cut a story from prepared
footage. Students work in pairs and select from three
batches of shot film. About 18 assignments per
workshop are subsequently screened and commented upon,
roughly six versions of each of the three stories.

In first-year writing, class time is divided
between brief lectures followed by feature screenings,
and the review of selected student assignments in
weekly recitations (for example on characterization or
scripting dramatic scenarios). The last part of each
recitation is devoted to a discussion of the feature
film shown earlier that week.

Following Stanislavski, the first-year directing
instructor's premise is that "the script is where it
all comes from," thus students watch and discuss
feature films in light of how a director interprets a
script's structural features and dramatic qualities.
Most of second semester however is devoted to scene
studies, in which students rotate as directors and
performers in the "straight" performance of a script
excerpt, in improvisation exercises intended to get at

the kinds of relationships among characters the scenes embody, and in silent exercises intended to help students develop gestural and spatial (ie. "visual") codes for rendering characters' actions and qualities.

In second year editing (which Nina teaches), the first half of first semester is spent screening and discussing excerpts from feature films in light of editing problems, for example emphasizing peak moments in a scene or cutting in relation to actor and camera movement. Students are then required to draw storyboards for feature script excerpts which illustrate the editing issues discussed. After they submit their drawings, Nina shows the scripted scene as it was actually produced in its best-known feature version (eg. the dinner scene in the station guest room from <u>Stagecoach</u> [1939]). In the latter half of first semester, the class reviews selected takes and first cuts of 12 sync-sound scene exercises, produced by groups of 4 in conjunction with the second-year production technique class.

In second semester, devoted entirely to production, the editing/production class meets occasionally whenever students have selected takes or rough cuts of their second-year films to present for comment. In second-year writing, most of the fall and spring semesters are devoted to the class review of

scripts and revisions as students prepare to shoot their second-year projects. Finally, the second-year course on directing actors is composed of brief lectures and student scene studies, for which outside actors are recruited and rehearsed for in-class performances. Each student's scene is then critiqued by the class and the instructor from a directorial perspective.

A similar format is followed for third-year directing (though with a different instructor). In third-year editing however, virtually all class-time in both semesters is spent reviewing in detail rough and/or fine cuts of second-year projects, two or three of which are screened in each session, with student directors present to account for the film so far and consider advice from other students and from the instructor. [5]

In third-year writing, again time is divided between brief lectures, feature screenings, and analysis in light of particular script issues, and review of draft scripts for thesis films, in a few cases as many as three or four drafts prior to the start of a student's production period. In second semester of third year, no classes are required to meet, though indeed some do (particularly editing and writing) so that students will have an audience with

whom they can review their work in progress.

Not all instruction goes on in class; students and faculty meet frequently for individual and (on group projects) small-group advisements. Appointment sheets posted on hallway bulletin boards fill quickly during production periods with the names of students seeking advice and the official approval they need before shooting can begin. Particularly during the production of first and third films in first year, the writing, camera, directing, editing and workshop instructors are in exhausting demand, meeting with students, making suggestions and resolving crises as students enter the last stretch of each semester.

Students constantly consult each other out of class as well as in. In the old building, first, second and third-year editing rooms housed 4 or 5 editing tables apiece. Students edited together in shifts, in effect publicizing their working, even at its comparatively solitary stages, and dramatizing its publicness. Indeed it was a concern of several instructors and students that while the individual editing suites in the new building would make working conditions more comfortable, the "cross-pollination" that occurs as students witness each other working would be diminished. Still, such collective inspiration occurs among friends, crews and other

groups regardless of how work is spatially placed.

Between the nature of schools and cohorts, the
nature of film production and the ongoing, in-class
review of student work, students know and talk about
what each other is doing, though such familiarity does
fade a little among class groups as routine
supervision declines from first to third year. This
does not mean insurmountable distances set in among
students and faculty. The groups of people intimately
familiar with each other's work get smaller, evolving
as they do around personal preferences, distinct from
the combination of preference and requirement in first
year. [6]

Notes to Appendix B

1. See Appendix A for a summary of first, second and
    third-year curricula. Also, first-year data come
    almost entirely from 1B, who are taught by the
    same faculty members as 1A students in many
    areas, though who have separate writing and
    production workshop instructors.

2. Students are also introduced to the visual
    vocabulary through a screening of <u>Basic Film
    Terms</u>, an instructional primer legion among
    students of filmmaking and film aesthetics.
    Moreover, many students arrive at the school well-
    versed in the rudimentary vernacular of film
    production.

3. The first-year camera instructors (one a part-
    time faculty member, the other his temporary
    replacement in second semester) have considerable
    experience shooting television advertisements and
    thus substantial "reels" of finished
    commercials. Since 15 or 20 examples can be
    screened and commented upon in as many minutes,
    these reels are an efficient (and, by students,
    sought after) means of instruction. The
    documentary filmmaking instructor had also
    independently produced and directed several
    social and political documentaries (the focus of
    his course), which were available for screening
    and discussion with students.

4. 1A music films are each screened at least twice.

5. Second-year films are rarely finished in second
    year, especially since many students don't shoot
    until late Spring. Teaching assistants aren't
    expected to complete second-year projects until
    third year, or to shoot thesis films before their
    fourth year at the school.

6. An addendum about textbooks as a means of
    instruction in the department: in virtually all
    classes anywhere from 2-6 textbooks are
    recommended (and are available at the University
    book store). Many students purchase some books,
    though they are virtually never referred to in
    class beyond the initial introduction. In second-
    year editing, Nina distributed available copies
    of Vladimir Ninzhy's <u>Lessons with Eisenstein</u>,

describing it fondly and encouraging students to
read it, learn from it, though she did not refer
to it again. Richard also assigned Francois
Truffaut's Hitchcock to accompany a class
screening of Notorious (1946), though did not
discuss the book following the screening. Brian,
the second year production management instructor,
recommended several titles on independent
production, and distributed recent (though not
current) complimentary copies of the New York
Producer's Guide. In virtually all cases,
recommended texts are by filmmaking practitioners
(versus, say, film theorists), which aligns with
the school's emphasis on working artists. As
Steven Feld (personal communication) recently
pointed out, the tendency to assign books by
practitioners who are not also theorists connotes
a variety of other cultural values as well: the
social perception that artists don't read, the
stereotype that art means education without
books, the history of anti-intellectualism among
some filmmakers, and the pedagogical notion in
film that, like language learning, you have to
use immersion techniques that bypass traditional
knowledge media (ie. print). I agree with Feld's
suggestions, though with the exception of
immersion teaching in film (again, cultivated in
the school as "learning by doing"), I do not have
the field materials to elaborate these themes.

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire

April, 1986

Dear Grad Film Students:

I think I've been introduced to most of you by now, but for those I haven't met, I am a graduate student in communications and sociology from the University of Pennsylvania, and have been at Grad Film since September doing fieldwork for a dissertation on the practice and culture of film school.

My material so far has come from attending first, second and third-year classes, from working on student productions, and also from talking with many of you individually. However, there are some questions I'd like to ask which don't really need an interview, so I've written up the attached questionnaire, which I hope you'll have a chance to complete.

Some questions apply to all students, while others apply differently depending on whether you're in first, second, third or fourth year. With respect to question 27, I realize that for those of you about to graduate it may be difficult to recall the names of people you worked with two or three years ago. In that case, please just complete what you can.

Also, I've asked you to identify yourselves on the form, to help me interpret responses to question 27, but I will not use your name in connection with any of the questions asked.

Finally, I know many of your are currently in production and I really appreciate your finding the time to answer these questions. I wish I could offer a processing credit at DuArt or Control in exchange, however... When you complete the questionnaire, could you please return it to me in the attached envelope?

Many thanks,

Lisa Henderson

Name:
Date:
Age:
Year in Program:

1. What was your undergraduate major?

2. In what year did you graduate from college?

3. As an undergraduate did you take any courses in film production?

    In film theory and history?

    Grad Film Summer School? (If yes, please indicate year and instructor.)

4. When did you apply to Grad Film? (If you applied more than once, please indicate date of each application.)

5. When were you accepted to Grad Film and when did you begin the program?

6. Since beginning the program, have you ever left temporarily? If yes, for how long? Why?

7. Have you ever applied to other graduate filmmaking programs? If you have, where? Were you accepted?

8. If you were accepted to other graduate filmmaking programs, was Grad Film your first choice? Why? (Please number each item in order of importance.)

    School's reputation   Faculty   Location
    Financial assistance offered   Other (specify)

9. Have you ever attended another graduate filmmaking program? If you have, where? Briefly, why did you transfer?

10. Have you ever attended graduate school in any program other than filmmaking? If you have, where? What program? Degree(s) received?

11. Prior to coming to Grad Film, what full-time positions have you held, if any? (Please do not include summer jobs.)

12. For 1985-86, do you work during the school year? If
    yes, please check where appropriate.

    Part-time   Full-time   Freelance   Work-study

13. In 1985-86, did you receive financial aid? If you
    did, in what form?

14. How are you financing your work in Grad Film? Please
    number in order of importance.

    Teaching assistantship
    Tuition scholarship (full   partial)
    Other scholarship (eg. production award)
    Personal funds (savings, trusts, contributions etc.)
    Work income (during semester   summer job)
    Loans (government   private)

15. Prior to coming to Grad Film had you worked
    professionally in film or television? If you have,
    in what capacity?

16. Since coming to Grad Film, have you worked
    professionally in film or television outside the
    school? If you have, in what capacity?

17. What are/were your approximate budgets (including
    production and post-production) for the following
    projects? (Beside each film, please enter a number
    corresponding to the options given.)

    (1) Under $300   (2) $300-$500   (3) $500-$1000
    (4) $1000-$2000 (5) $2000-$3000 (6) $3000-$5000
    (7) $5000-10,000 (8) over $10,000

    First year: first film
                music film
                third film

    Second year project

    Thesis project

18. To what stage have you taken each of your projects in first, second and third year? (Beside each film please enter a number corresponding to the options given.)

    (1) cut workprint or reversal (silent)
    (2) cut workprint or reversal with unmixed track
    (3) cut workprint or reversal with mixed track
    (4) printed pic, mixed track (for double-system)
    (5) optical print
    (6) video assembly
    (7) edited video master
    (8) other (please specify)

    First year: first film
                music film
                third film

    Second year project

    Third year project (intended)

19. Have you ever entered any of your Grad Film films or videos in festivals?

20. Have you ever won any festival awards with Grad Film films or videos?

21. Are any of the films or videos you made at Grad Film in distribution?

22. Have you ever applied for any production grants for your Grad Film projects?

23. Have you ever received any production grant(s)? If you have, please list source and amount.

Question 24 to be answered by second, third and fourth-year (TAs) students only.

24. For your second-year requirements are/were you making a film or video or majoring in a specialty area?

    If you are/were making a film or video, in which medium?

    If you are/were making a film or video, is it a fictional or documentary work?

Question 25 to be answered by third and fourth-year (TAs) students only.

25. For your thesis requirements are/were you making a film or video or majoring in a specialty area?

   If you are making a film or video, in which medium?

   If you are making a film or video, is it a fictional or documentary work?

26. (To be answered by all students)

   What are your parents' occupations? (If they have retired, what occupations did they retire from?)

   Mother   Father

The following question about which students you have worked with in Grad Film is detailed and will take a few additional minutes to answer. I've asked this question because I'm interested in the extent to which the same students work together throughout the program. First-year students should answer Section I only; second-year students Sections I and II; third-year students Sections I-III; Fourth-year TAs sections I-IV.

27. Which other students at Grad Film have you worked with on your films and the films of other student directors?

I. First year (Please list names of people who worked on your film in each case.)

   First film: DP
               AC

   Music film: DP
               AC

   Third film: DP
               AC

   As a first-year student, have you worked or do you expect to work on any second- or third-year productions? If yes, with which directors and in what capacity?

II. <u>Second year</u> Principal crew members on your film or video, if you made one. (If you collaborated with another student as *co-producer/director, please indicate that under "Other principal".)*

    DP
    AC
    Sound recordist
    Boom operator
    Production manager
    Art director
    Gaffer
    Script supervisor
    Editor
    Other principal

    Other directors you have worked with (or will work with) and in what capacity?

III. <u>Third year</u> Principal crew members on your film or video, if you made or are making one. (If you collaborated with another student as co-producer/director, please indicate that under "Other Principal".)

    DP
    AC
    Sound recordist
    Boom operator
    Production manager
    Art director
    Gaffer
    Script supervisor
    Editor
    Other principal

    Other directors you have worked with (or will be working with) and in what capacity?

IV. <u>Fourth year</u> Principal crew members on your film or video. (If you collaborated with another student as co-producer/director, please indicate that under "Other principal".)

    DP
    AC
    Sound recordist
    Boom operator

Production manager
Art director
Gaffer
Script supervisor
Editor
Other principal

Other directors you have worked with or will work
with (and in what capacity)?

Questions 28-30 are for all students.   (Please use
reverse if there isn't enough space on the line.)

28. Do you intend to complete an MFA in Grad Film? If
    no, why not?

29. Ideally, in what capacity would you like to work in
    film or television (or related area) after leaving
    Grad Film?

30. Do you expect to be able to work in that capacity?
    If yes, how do you plan to achieve that position? If
    no, why not? What position do you expect to hold?

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