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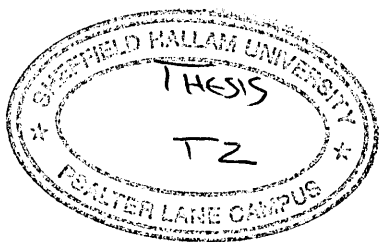
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**The Cinema of David Mamet:
Independent Filmmaking in Hollywood**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the cinema of David Mamet with particular reference to the five films he made between 1987 and 1997. Its objectives are: to explore Mamet's distinct approach to filmmaking; to analyse the ways in which this approach shaped the formal organisation of his films; and to account for the specific aesthetic effects produced. The central argument advanced is that Mamet's filmmaking practice, which has, to a large extent, been influenced by practices he adopted during his long standing service to American theatre, is markedly different from dominant models of filmmaking in contemporary US cinema. As a result, his films have consistently demonstrated evidence of an idiosyncratic visual style, which has attracted considerable – mostly negative – criticism.

This thesis also considers a number of institutional parameters that have impacted on Mamet's cinema. Particular emphasis has been placed on the role of independent distributors such as Orion Pictures and The Samuel Goldwyn Company who allowed the filmmaker to maintain his distinct aesthetic vision, despite his lack of success at the US box-office. Mamet's close association with the institutional apparatus of American Independent Cinema is examined throughout the thesis.

My approach to Mamet's cinema takes place within a number of critical contexts that Film Studies uses to discuss both individual films and the work of a filmmaker as a whole. These contexts include: the classical/post-classical Hollywood cinema debate; auteur criticism; performance studies; film adaptation studies; and genre criticism. I use these frameworks to examine particular aspects of Mamet's cinema and also to establish fresh critical perspectives which will enhance our understanding of some of his films. One such perspective involves the proposal that Mamet utilises the generic form of the 'con-artist film,' a film genre previously unexplored within genre studies.

This thesis challenges some of the established critical assumptions about David Mamet's cinema and bestows upon it the attention it deserves.

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INTRODUCTION

In an article entitled 'Suspicion' (1998), Sight and Sound editor-in-chief Nick James presented his reasons as to why David Mamet could not be labelled an auteur filmmaker:

My own suspicion is that despite the undoubted power and fluency of his writing and the admirable adult complexity and nuance of feeling of his films House of Games (1984) [sic], Homicide (1991) and The Spanish Prisoner (1997), Mamet is not an auteur director. I think this largely because no single image from any of his films is memorable for its own sake. Objects in scenes come readily to mind – the leaking water pistol that exposes the teaser con in House of Games; the broken holster that foretells the detective will lose his gun in Homicide; the gift book on tennis that places us comfortably in the realm of the ripping yarn in The Spanish Prisoner – yet the scenes themselves seem to revel in their visual ordinariness while the dialogue revels in portentousness. *Mamet for me remains a playwright who happens to make films*, many of which are about mistrusting what you see. (James, 1998, p 24; my italics).

James's argument highlights one of the biggest problems film critics have encountered in their engagement with Mamet's work in American cinema: how to deal with a significant number of films by a 'part-time' filmmaker who is widely considered a master in his 'full-time' job as a playwright and who is also a very successful screenwriter, novelist, cultural commentator and author of theoretical treatises on theatre and cinema. For the Sight and Sound editor, the answer to the

above question was self-evident. By 1998, when he was shooting The Winslow Boy (1999), his sixth feature film as a writer/director, David Mamet remained a part-time filmmaker who was making films sporadically while on a break from writing plays.

Had James's article been published a few years earlier, perhaps in the early 1990s, the idea that Mamet is just a "playwright who happens to make films" could, arguably, have been less problematic. The spectacular success of his acclaimed plays Glengarry Glen Ross (1984), Speed-the-Plow (1988) and Oleanna (1992) certainly overshadowed the first three films he wrote and directed: House of Games (1987), Things Change (1988) and Homicide (1991). But by 1998, the year James's article was published, David Mamet had been working for seventeen years in American cinema and his output compared favourably with any 'full-time' filmmaker in the same period. He had written twelve screenplays for major motion pictures, five screenplays for made-for-television films and five additional screenplays which he directed himself for the cinema. Specifically, in a six year period (following the triumph of the theatrical production of Oleanna in 1992) Mamet wrote three plays: No One Will Be Immune (1994), The Cryptogram (1995) and The Old Neighborhood (1997), and offered a new version of Chekhov's Uncle Vanya (1994). In the same six year period Mamet wrote seven screenplays for major motion pictures: Glengarry Glen Ross (1992), Hoffa (1992), Vanya on 42nd Street (1994), American Buffalo (1996), The Edge (1997), Wag the Dog (1997) and Ronin (1998). He also completed three screenplays for made-for-television films: The Water Engine (1992), A Life in the Theatre (1993) and Texan (1994), whilst he wrote and directed Oleanna (1994) and The Spanish Prisoner (1997).

Even if, despite all this film work, Mamet would still remain for some critics predominantly a playwright, his post-1998 career has been almost completely defined by screenwriting and/or directing. He wrote two scripts for major pictures (Hannibal [2001] and Lakeboat [2001]), one script for television (Lansky [1999]), and four screenplays which he directed for the cinema (The Winslow Boy [1999], State and Main [2000], Heist [2001] and Spartan [2004]). During the same time Mamet has written only one play (Boston Marriage [1999]). It is time, perhaps, to acknowledge that at some point in the mid-1990s David Mamet converted into a part-time playwright and a full-time screenwriter and filmmaker. In this case, James's views need to be re-assessed.

However, the argument of Sight and Sound's editor does not end there. In fact, it is part of a larger thesis which questions the "sincerity of [Mamet's] stake in his output" (hence the title of the article, 'Suspicion') and sees Mamet's work – with the prominent exception of his plays – as an "elaborate joke" (1998, p 24). As James puts it:

This is the other face of the serious moralist of lonely rectitude: the playful trickster who can give the eager secretary Susan Ricci (played by his wife Rebecca Pidgeon) the deadpan excuse for being late for work, "My troika was pursued by wolves." Perhaps Mamet the costume drama-tourist is another such elaborate joke (1998, p 24).

It is tempting to adopt this line of thought. After all, it was the same character (Susan Ricci) who, when asked by the protagonist/victim in The Spanish Prisoner (Joe Ross)

why she became involved in the elaborate con-game, responded: “‘cause money makes the mare go [and] the important thing is to enjoy yourself.” Following James then, one could indeed see Mamet’s involvement in American cinema as an elaborate joke, as a playwright’s attempt to ‘enjoy himself’ in a medium that has the additional advantage of paying much better than the theatre. If this is true, it could perhaps also explain why film criticism, especially scholarly film criticism, has treated Mamet’s cinema as a ‘joke,’ and resulted in very few serious attempts to discuss his films systematically. One has only to contrast the numerous volumes of criticism dedicated to Mamet as a playwright to the single book-length study of Mamet as a filmmaker. This was Gay Brewer’s David Mamet and Film: Illusion/Disillusion in a Wounded Land, which dates back to 1993, when Mamet had only directed three films.¹ Film criticism, then, regards David Mamet as an outsider, as a playwright who also happens to engage with the medium of cinema and whose work is, therefore, not worthy of a serious examination.

One of the reasons for such a stance regarding Mamet’s film work is that he is indeed an anomaly in American cinema. Despite a very long tradition of playwrights (and novelists) who have worked in Hollywood cinema as screenwriters, Mamet is the only major American literary figure to break into mainstream filmmaking and make a substantial number of films as both writer and director.² The absence of prior tradition and, mainly, of a previously-established ‘school of filmmaking’ within which Mamet’s work could be automatically contextualised, has resulted in difficulties for film critics in appraising ‘the cinema of David Mamet.’³ In fact, one could argue that it was because of his dramatic/literary background that Mamet’s work in the cinema has been ignored by the critical establishment. That establishment has traditionally

privileged filmmakers whose work demonstrates a rich visual flair, and films where images have become memorable for their own sake, as James's account suggests.⁴ In this respect, it is not surprising that critics have overwhelmingly ignored the formal features of Mamet's cinema, privileging instead questions of gender, ethnicity and psychoanalytic interpretations of his films, especially in the case of House of Games (which along with Homicide has been the only Mamet film to attract some attention).⁵

As academic film criticism largely disregarded his films, a number of scholars, mainly located within English and/or Drama departments of Anglo-American academic institutions, have taken upon themselves the task of critically examining Mamet's film work. These critics have occasionally discussed Mamet's films in comparison to his plays and screenplays or, less often, concentrated on individual films.⁶ Their engagement with Mamet's films has produced a considerable body of criticism that has enhanced understanding of the filmmaker's work in a much more consistent way than film criticism 'proper.' Despite the occasional references to formal questions, however,⁷ this body of work has also overwhelmingly emphasised questions of gender representation, performance, language and thematic film interpretation. It has also occupied itself with contextualising specific films within Mamet's extremely prolific, cross-media output. In other words, this body of work has covered the same aspects of Mamet's films as academic film criticism. The (major) difference is that English and Drama scholars have actually established a long, rigorous and consistent tradition of critical inquiry, as opposed to the sporadic attempts of their counterparts in Film Studies. Even so, an in-depth examination of the formal aspects of Mamet's films has remained elusive.

This thesis attempts to redress this situation by focusing on more cinematic questions. Specifically, it examines David Mamet's cinema within the context of contemporary American cinema and argues that his filmmaking practice, which to some extent has been influenced by practices he adopted during his long-standing service to American theatre, is markedly different from dominant models of filmmaking in Hollywood cinema. As a result, his films have consistently demonstrated idiosyncratic narrative structures and an unusual visual style, which have often attracted the type of negative criticism expressed in James's essay, but which have never been discussed in a systematic manner.

Although such an argument locates this thesis within the context of auteur criticism, a long standing tradition in film studies that examines the work of a filmmaker as an instance of individual expression within a pre-determined institutional framework (in this case Hollywood cinema), the present study is not limited within this context. As a matter of fact, only one chapter engages with arguments specifically pertaining to questions of film authorship (Chapter Two), whilst the remaining chapters construct a number of areas of critical inquiry within which particular aspects of Mamet's filmmaking practice are examined and individual films discussed. These areas, which have been selected because of their significance in discussions of formal properties of film, include: the classical / post-classical Hollywood cinema debate (Chapter One), film acting (Chapter Three), film adaptation, especially the adaptation of dramatic texts for the screen (Chapter Four) and film genre (Chapter Five).

Each chapter aims to expose a number of problems involved in critically approaching the above areas before it moves on to examine: (a) how Mamet's work can be

discussed within such contexts, and (b) how such discussions can facilitate greater understanding of existing problems within critical inquiry. Chapter Four, for instance, outlines some of the problems film criticism has encountered in approaching the phenomenon of film adaptation. The chapter also proposes a model of analysis for a specific corpus of American dramatic texts that have been adapted for the cinema through a discussion of the adaptation of Mamet's Oleanna. Equally, Chapter Five identifies various problems in locating a number of Mamet's films within the crime and/or film noir genres and introduces the categories of 'con-artist' and 'con-game' film. These are generic labels that can better describe such films as House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner than the noir and/or crime labels. Besides identifying the main formal characteristics of Mamet's cinema, this thesis also aims to offer fresh perspectives in a number of areas of critical inquiry within Film Studies. What follows is a brief description of each chapter and a synopsis of the arguments they advance.

Chapter One examines the extent to which Mamet's films are permeated by a classical or post-classical aesthetic, whilst at the same time questioning the validity of both these terms as descriptive labels for contemporary American films. Specifically, the chapter offers a critique of numerous arguments pertaining to the institutional and aesthetic organisation of Hollywood cinema before moving on to discuss the production practices employed for Mamet's first film, House of Games. This chapter also examines the ways in which these production practices differ from those associated with classical filmmaking. It becomes evident from such an exercise that Mamet's approach to filmmaking stands firmly outside the mode of film practice that critics like Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985) have termed classical and which,

according to their account, has held sway in American cinema even after the collapse of the studio system.

If Mamet's filmmaking is located outside the dominant mode of film practice in American cinema, one could begin to understand why narrative structure and visual style in his films come across as idiosyncratic; they do not follow the conventions of mainstream Hollywood films. The chapter then examines both the articulation of narrative and the use of film style in House of Games and provides a detailed discussion of the formal organisation of Mamet's cinema with an emphasis on the aesthetic effects such an organisation conveys. In particular, it argues that narrative in Mamet's films often breaks away from the rules of realism and verisimilitude that have characterised mainstream American filmmaking and, instead, follows a logic of its own. This arrangement can lead to instances of narrative implausibility, which have attracted the type of criticism exemplified by James's essay. The film style employed is firmly anchored to the peculiarities of the narrative to the extent that it ends up attracting attention to itself, thereby shattering the illusion of the invisibility of style that mainstream American cinema has been founded upon.

A similar effect can be detected in Mamet's second film, Things Change, which, unlike House of Games, was financed and distributed by a major (Columbia Pictures). This time the narrative is characterised by a lack of a clear psychological motivation behind the actions of both key characters, whilst the film's style supports a story that once again follows a very specific logic that relies flamboyantly upon coincidence. This automatically raises questions about the presence of a specific authorial signature in Mamet's films which are also considered in Chapter Two.

In particular, Chapter Two commences with a discussion of how film distributors of Mamet's films (Orion Pictures, Columbia, J&M Entertainment, The Samuel Goldwyn Company, Sony Classics, Fine Line Features and Warner) have assigned authorship credentials to the filmmaker and the forms such assignments have taken. Through an examination of specific marketing ploys (such as the film trailer and poster) that distributors routinely use to advertise films, this chapter argues that Mamet's industrial authorship in American cinema can be divided into two distinct phases. The first phase (1987-1992) is characterised by reluctance on the part of the distributors to assign authorship to Mamet for films such as House of Games, Things Change and Homicide, opting instead to advertise his films on the marketing power of the films' respective genres and stars. The second phase (1993-to date), on the other hand, is exemplified by a conscious decision on the part of the distributors to market films such as Oleanna, The Spanish Prisoner, The Winslow Boy, State and Main and Heist as 'David Mamet films.' The chapter examines the reasons behind this shift and outlines the main constitutive features of Mamet's authorship as determined by the American film distributors. It becomes evident from such a discussion that Mamet's authorial status has been established in spite of his unusual approach to filmmaking, which is exemplified by idiosyncratic narratives and an atypical use of film style. Thus, the rest of the chapter deals with the discrepancies created by an industrial auteurist approach, which produces the auteur extra-textually, and a more traditional, text-based approach, which locates the auteur through an examination of the formal organisation of his films, in this case Things Change.

If there is one characteristic that can be detected in all Mamet's films, and therefore clearly understood as part of an authorial signature, it is the style of the actors' performance. Based on a distinct approach to stage acting that was devised by Mamet and a specific group of theatre actors (The Practical Aesthetics Workshop) performance in Mamet's films conveys a predominantly anti-realist aesthetic. In particular, the actors' delivery of their lines is characterised by what seems to be a 'lack of emotion' which makes the words and phrases uttered sound monotonous and dry, but which also attracts the spectator's attention to the words themselves and to the meanings they convey. The distinctiveness of the actors' 'detached' performance once again raises questions about Mamet's filmmaking practice (in this case the transportation of his 'practical aesthetics' to the cinema) and its difference from more mainstream approaches to performance which are based on realist conventions. These questions, along with a detailed outline of Mamet's 'practical aesthetics,' are addressed in Chapter Three.

Furthermore, this chapter provides a critical context within which the screenplay is examined as the basis for the creation of the actors' performance and argues that such a context can help film criticism solve some of the problems involved in approaching film acting. Specifically, the chapter challenges dominant critical practices that regard acting as an aspect of a film's *mise en scène* arranged according to the filmmaker's vision and, instead, argues for an approach that sees the actors' performance embedded in the 'directions' already existing in the film's screenplay. Following the work of Claudia Sternberg (1997), this chapter argues that the screenplay can assume the role of a "hidden director" (Sternberg, 1997, p 2), in which case it can contain not only the details of actors' performances but also the stylistic choices the filmmaker is

invited to make. Such an approach enables the critic to discuss questions of performance in a very rigorous way, as the critic can determine whether the actors' actions on the screen follow the 'directions' of the screenplay or are based on extra-textual circumstances, in which case the critic can make specific judgements about the nature of the actors' performance. To illustrate the benefits of such an approach, a large section of Chapter Three is dedicated to a detailed examination of the actors' performance in a scene from Homicide. In particular, my discussion will demonstrate the extreme extent to which the details of actors' performance, as well as the film's visual style, were determined by the screenplay.

The emphasis on the role of the screenplay as a 'hidden director' continues in Chapter Four which deals with questions of film adaptations of dramatic texts, particularly of 'realistic' or 'well-made' plays such as Mamet's Oleanna (1992). For the purposes of this chapter, adaptation is treated as the transformation of a dramatic text into a narrative one (from play to screenplay and film) and involves the examination of both formal and institutional factors during the adaptation process. On a formal level, this chapter explores the role of narration as the mechanism that transforms dramatic action to narrative information. It also argues that there are benefits of such an approach to the problem of adaptation, especially in light of a number of film adaptations of plays which have maintained the original dialogue of the source text. On an institutional level, the chapter argues that, since the 1970s, film companies have not considered adaptations of American plays for the screen to be commercially viable projects. Financing and distribution of such films, as a result, have gradually passed to the hands of independent distributors such as the Samuel Goldwyn Company, which do not face the same commercial pressures as the majors and which

cater for different audiences. This shift has enabled a number of playwrights to get involved more readily in the adaptation process, to the extent that two of them, David Mamet and Sam Shepard, have assumed the roles of both screenwriter and director in the adaptation of their own plays. In charge of the production process, these filmmakers have avoided compromises normally associated with studio productions of adapted works, which in Mamet's case meant that: (a) his original dialogue has remained unchanged, and (b) his approach to the filmmaking process was based on the same philosophy that has been responsible for the distinct aesthetics of his previous films.

The second part of the chapter discusses the adaptation of Oleanna from an institutional and formal perspective. It highlights a number of institutional parameters that influenced the process, including: the formation of an independent production company by Mamet to produce the film, the role of the distributor (the Samuel Goldwyn Company) in the 'packaging' of the film and the few commercial attractions for such a project (the play's success on stage, the promise of titillating material, and the exploitation of the socio-political climate of political correctness in America). The chapter then proceeds to discuss Mamet's screenplay and its difference from the original play and argues that Mamet's screenwriting process consists of 'dressing up' his play with 'scene text,' that is, very specific information that would guide the actors' performance and suggest a visual style. Chapter Four, finally, examines the film's formal organisation, with particular emphasis on narration and the ways in which it transformed the source text.

The last chapter of this thesis explores questions of genre in Mamet's cinema. In particular, it introduces a generic form that has hitherto remained unexplored by genre criticism, the 'con-artist film,' and argues that Mamet's films (especially House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner) can be more constructively examined as genre films within this particular framework than other generic contexts. In this respect, the first part of the chapter establishes the con-artist film from an institutional perspective and identifies a group of films that have been marketed as such in the literature that accompanied their release in cinema (taglines, reviews from trade publications etc). Once the institutional aspect of the genre is established, the chapter moves on to approach the genre critically. Specifically, it challenges accounts that have located films like House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner within the larger crime film genre (suspense thrillers, detective and gangster films), and argues that the con-artist film has a distinct generic identity. This is primarily founded on the absence of violence that normally breaks the narrative order in the crime films. Although violence does feature in con-artist films, it is coincidental and, narratively, far less important than the failure of one character's cognitive skills in perceiving the truth behind appearances.

If there is one theme that all Mamet's films have tackled, it is deceptive appearances. Additionally, the narratives of all his films feature various confidence games that are performed by many diverse characters. These include mafia thugs, militant Jewish leaders, college professors, military school students, film directors, professional robbers and, of course, con artists. It is clear, then, that Mamet's films make good candidates for inclusion into the category of the con-artist film genre. One of the key arguments this chapter advances is that House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner

actually belong to a sub-category of the con-artist film, the ‘con-game film,’ whose main characteristic is the use of an extremely restricted narration that places both the protagonist and the spectator in the position of the victim of the con. The chapter finishes with a detailed discussion of The Spanish Prisoner as a con-game film whilst also exploring the genre’s relation to established theatre genres, particularly tragedy.

Although the thesis makes concrete references to all Mamet’s films with the exception of Spartan (2004), which at the time of writing has not yet been theatrically released in Britain, it nevertheless, mainly, focuses on the first five films he has scripted and directed and consequently covers the period 1987-1997.⁸ There are two reasons for this. First, this is the period when Mamet was also an active playwright, a fact that film criticism has found difficult to deal with in its few attempts to engage with his films. For this reason, the thesis is mainly interested in establishing the contours of Mamet’s cinema during this specific period. Second, the type of analysis of individual films carried out in each chapter is very detailed (often shot by shot), which means that only a small number of films could be approached in such a manner. However, given the consistency of Mamet’s filmmaking practice and of the aesthetic effects his films conveyed in this period, I would like to suggest that ‘the cinema of David Mamet’ discussed in the following chapters is representative of his whole output.

CHAPTER ONE

A CINEMA OF GAMES: DAVID MAMET AND THE NEW HOLLYWOOD

Film is a collaborative business: bend over. (Mamet, 1988, p xv)

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the cinema of David Mamet within the framework of contemporary American cinema and, especially, within the context of the classical/post-classical Hollywood debate, which has been recently revived following the publication of two volumes of collected essays, one in Britain and one in the United States.¹ In particular, I will examine the forces that have shaped the production of Mamet's first film as writer/director, House of Games (1987, Orion Pictures, US, 102 min), and determine the extent to which the film can be seen as an instance of classical or post-classical Hollywood filmmaking. However, in the process I shall question the validity and, ultimately, the usefulness of the above terms and I shall argue that House of Games is an American film that resists both labels.

The focus on a single film in a discussion that aspires to contribute to an understanding of an important part of Hollywood aesthetic history is not necessarily at odds with such a task. In an essay entitled 'Film History and Film Analysis: The Individual Film in the

Course of Time' (1990, pp 4-19) Tom Gunning outlined the benefits of historical film analysis and highlighted the advantages of focusing on the individual film. Specifically, Gunning proposed that a historically grounded analysis of an individual text can potentially reveal forces of contradiction not only within the text per se, but also outside it, "located within history" (1990, p 11). In this view, the individual film cannot be reduced to a closed text produced within a specific system (such as the terms classical/post-classical Hollywood imply). The film can be seen, instead, as a sufficiently open text where conflicting discourses and codes struggle for dominance and which inform the film's production and define its reception (1990, pp 12-13). As a result, any film subjected to a close historical examination can reveal an interplay of several conflicting discourses that can potentially challenge the applicability of theoretical formulations such as the classical Hollywood cinema (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985) or the less rigorously defined post-classical cinema, together with the aesthetic regimes they define. In this light, my subsequent discussion of House of Games is committed to a thorough investigation of a number of textual and, especially, extra-textual discourses, the combination and intersection of which will reveal the problems involved in prescribing classical or post-classical status to the film in question.

Before I begin my discussion, I would like to justify the selection of House of Games as my main focal point. The film makes a natural starting point as it is the directorial debut of David Mamet. More importantly though, House of Games is also an interesting example of a film that was produced in the grey area between mainstream Hollywood and American independent cinema. Produced by an independent company, Filmhaus, and

distributed by one of the “mini-majors” (Hillier, 1994, p 18) of the 1980s, Orion Pictures, this film raises direct questions about the structure of the post-studio Hollywood industry with particular reference to the thorny issue of the industry’s relationship to independent filmmaking. Secondly, the film in question marks Mamet’s transition from theatre to the medium of cinema. This transition immediately poses a set of expectations for audiences that are familiar with his previous work as a playwright and opens up new ways for an analysis of his use of style and narrative, which, as I shall argue later, present certain peculiarities. Finally, in a series of texts, Mamet himself has provided substantial information about the production background of House of Games, which constitutes valuable material for the type of analysis I propose. This information, which has been presented in the form of reminiscences and anecdotes from his experience as a first time director, is virtually non-existent for any other of his films, an absence that adds to my choice a further sense of necessity.²

The Classical/Post-classical Hollywood debate

In recent years, film historians have been increasingly involved in debates that centre on the problems of periodising Hollywood cinema. Critical terms like ‘New Hollywood’, ‘New New Hollywood’, ‘Post-Classical Hollywood’ and ‘Neo-Classical Hollywood’ have been abundantly applied to identify distinct periods in contemporary (post-1960) American cinema. These labels were mainly placed against a model of a ‘Classical Hollywood Cinema’ and emphasised both the aesthetic and institutional organisation of the cinema in question.³ This excess of appellations clearly suggests the difficulties in theorising contemporary Hollywood cinema. It seems that none of those terms can carry

sufficient exegetic power to offer a convincing account of contemporary Hollywood cinema as a distinct entity with its own aesthetic and as a new epoch in Hollywood history. On the other hand, all the above terms signify definite changes from an 'old(er)' American cinema (with the prefixes 'new', 'neo' and 'post' clearly signalling the arrival of a different type of Hollywood cinema) and point towards various levels of entry for such a discussion.⁴

Whether the above labels sought to describe formal changes, economic/industrial changes or both, it has proven extremely difficult for critics to disengage from the notion of the 'classical Hollywood cinema', both as the preceding period in Hollywood history and as a theoretical configuration that accounts for the aesthetic of a large number of films within a distinct period in Hollywood cinema.⁵ In what follows, I shall analyse the restrictions that such a concept has imposed on film historians' attempts to theorise contemporary Hollywood cinema. I shall also demonstrate the ways in which the 'classical Hollywood cinema' has determined the framework within which contemporary Hollywood cinema can be (and has been) approached. It is my intention to question the benefits it proposes and even the extent to which it is applicable in general.

Questions of Classicism in Hollywood Cinema

Setting aside some early and largely evaluative uses, the first serious theoretical application of the term 'classical' to Hollywood cinema was made by French film critic, André Bazin.⁶ As early as the 1950s, Bazin argued that by 1939 Hollywood cinema had reached "a well-balanced state of maturity" that had the characteristics of a classical art

(1967, pp 29-30).⁷ This maturity, which Bazin located in both content and form of several celebrated films, was seen as a product of a common form of cinematic language consolidated in the years between 1920 and 1939 and based on the concept of continuity editing.⁸ However, the French critic noted that in the early in 1940s there emerged new forms which could better accommodate the subject matter that revolutionized Hollywood cinema (1967, pp 29-30).⁹ These new forms aimed towards a more faithful reproduction of reality, an objective that Bazin saw as inherent in the medium's recording capacity. In this respect, the classical system's over-reliance on continuity editing was somewhat loosened by the possibilities that techniques such as deep-focus cinematography or the long take offered with regard to the manipulation of time and space. Although the result was not so much a new aesthetic as a realisation of the co-existence of contradictory aesthetics, for Bazin it signified the end of classical filmmaking, an argument he reiterated in his essay 'The Evolution of the Western' (1971, pp 149-157).¹⁰

Bazin used this argument to introduce a more important thesis in his writings, namely that the evolution of cinema had a predestined trajectory and that the cinema's final objective was the complete and total imitation of reality. At the same time, however, he also offered a specific framework within which questions regarding the periodisation of cinema, and in particular of Hollywood cinema, could be tackled. This framework privileged important aesthetic determinants, which, as Peter Krämer has argued, explained questions of evolution in cinema "in terms of an internal logic of artistic developments inevitably moving through a series of stages" (1998, p 291). These developments progressed towards the realisation of cinema's potential ability to represent

reality in a total way. Consequently, the classicism Bazin refers to was seen as one intermediate stage in the aesthetic history of the medium, which as early as in 1939 had given way to a new aesthetic regime.

One of the major principles underlying Bazin's account of Hollywood cinema was the idea that film history is first and foremost the study of cinema as an art form. This view essentially de-emphasised economic, cultural and technological determinants by rendering them subordinate to a linear development of a specific property (recording capacity) that the medium of cinema possesses. However, when the introduction of semiotics in film theory and criticism helped shift the focus from cinema as art to cinema as a signifying practice (and highlighted questions about the history of the production of meaning) the significance of the above determinants was re-instated. This "revisionist" (Belton, 1998, p 231) view of aesthetic film history was ready to "understand any use of cinematic form in its historical specificity and complexity" (Allen and Gomery, 1985, p 79). In other words, it was ready to consider the contribution of a number of institutional, technological, economic and stylistic parameters, which in various combinations were seen to be responsible for the production of meaning in films.

Under this banner Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson formulated another argument that saw a considerably broader period in Hollywood history informed by the classical aesthetic in their study, The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (1985). In particular, the authors proposed the examination of Hollywood cinema in terms of a mode of film practice, "with its own cinematic style and

industrial conditions of existence” (1985, p xiii), emphasising therefore the confluence of stylistic and economic/industrial determinants in the creation of a ‘group style’. This time, the term ‘classical’ was employed to account for the distinct aesthetic qualities and historical functions conveyed by a specific institutional and stylistic configuration, a mode of film practice, which gained dominance in American cinema between 1917 and 1960. Consequently, Hollywood films of the period in question were seen as particular instances within the above configuration; individual expressions of a group style that emerged through the close relationship between a set of stylistic norms and a specific mode of film production, and asserted qualities of elegance, unity, coherence, harmony and rule-governed craftsmanship as well as its historical role as the ‘mainstream’ style (1985, p 4).

It is obvious from the above definition that the authors sought to assign canonical status to a consistent use of film narrative and style in Hollywood cinema.¹¹ The undisputed global success of American films throughout the 20th century lends considerable credence to this argument and justifies Borwell, Staiger and Thompson’s proposal: classical equals mainstream. On the other hand though, the authors also used the term classical to highlight a coherent aesthetic tradition created by the consistent use of film style and argued that American cinema (1917-1960) was characterised by a high degree of regulated uniformity which was the product of a specific mode of film practice. This suggests that the classicism of Hollywood cinema is grounded on a particular arrangement between style and mode of production, an arrangement nevertheless that is a product of certain methodological and conceptual distinctions the authors made. As I

shall argue, some of these methodological choices are to a great extent responsible for the critics' inability to theorise contemporary American cinema.

One such choice is the examination of style as a set of norms which, in Henry Jenkins's words, constitute "relatively flexible, common-sense assumptions artists bring to bear on the productions of artworks" (1995, p 102). Within this context, Hollywood style is seen as a rule-governed, though highly flexible, paradigm that offered filmmakers a variety of options in the filmmaking process. However, these options, which were geared towards a specific disposition of filmic devices on the screen, did not exclude the likelihood of transgression. In fact, the very definition of norm includes the possibility of violation, since as Gunning argued "norms run a gamut, from a strictly binding validity to a regulative potentiality which allows the possibility of infraction" (1990, p 15). Based on the premise of norms and their paradigmatic organisation, Bordwell et al. attempted to discuss style historically and put forward the argument that Hollywood style has functioned as an aesthetic system that remained remarkably stable throughout the 1917-1960 period. This was despite the introduction of new devices or changes in the use of the existing stylistic techniques.¹² The system's stability was mainly seen as an effect of the endurance of specific principles of narrative structure (causal coherence, continuity, verisimilitude etc) as the basic organisational elements in the process of film construction (1985, p 6). This, according to the authors, demanded a specific use of style that drew little or no attention to narration in order to allow the spectator to concentrate on the story itself. In this light, the options available to filmmakers performed particular ideological/signifying functions (they were used to narrate certain kinds of stories in a

very specific manner). The appropriation of new techniques and devices by the system, moreover, was geared towards the same objective, namely, to maintain this particular narrative mode. For this reason, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson attached the term 'classical' to the above modes of narrative and narration.¹³

The second important methodological assumption was the emphasis the authors placed on the mode of film production as a tool for an understanding of Hollywood's industrial conditions of existence, and its conceptual distinction from the economic structure of the industry. The theoretical separation between the mode and the industry and the focus on the former enabled the authors to stress the significance of specific production practices, which were seen as instrumental for the particular use of film style noted above.¹⁴ In particular, Staiger's emphasis on the 'mode of production' as distinct from the 'industry,' "the economic structure and conduct of the particular companies which produced, distributed and exhibited the films" (Bordwell et al, 1985, p 89) served specifically to isolate production as a set of practices pertaining to the construction of films. In this manner, 'external' determinants such as distribution, marketing and exhibition were seen as irrelevant to the process of production and were therefore marginalised. Free from such determinants, the mode of film practice was consequently defined only through the ways stylistic norms interact with production practices.¹⁵

This opens debate on the nature of the above interaction, which constitutes the most significant methodological assumption that the authors made. Specifically, Bordwell et al rejected the neo-Marxist thesis of the determination of the economic over the discursive

and instead adopted a position that acknowledges multiple determinations in the process of socio-political formation (Cowie, 1998, p 180). This position allowed the authors to defend an argument that advocates the prevalence of ideological/signifying practices in the formation of the mode of film practice. In this light, production practices were seen as adopted not only on the basis of their efficiency in a “serial manufacturing” system, but even more so on the basis of their support of the ideological function of style (Bordwell et al., 1985, p 89). This is an argument that places primary emphasis on style and, in a sense, subordinates the economic and ideological imperatives of a capitalist enterprise to the narrower ideological functions of Hollywood style. This specific systemic arrangement, on the one hand, imposed regulative constraints on individual filmmaking but, on the other hand, entailed a distinct, unified system, which the authors termed Classical Hollywood Cinema.

Studies of contemporary American cinema find it difficult to disengage from this argument, especially because of the analytical tools it proposes. This difficulty manifests itself clearly in the rather reluctant application of the term ‘post-classical,’ for the post-1960 period, a term that as Krämer argued has not achieved “an obligatory reference point status” (1998, p 289).¹⁶ The situation gets even more complicated as Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson assert that the year 1960 does not qualify the end of classicism in Hollywood cinema. In the preface to their study, the authors argue that norms, the mode of production and the technology they employ are subject to change through time, leaving though some *fundamental aspects* unaltered (1985, p xiv – my italics), a position that essentially denies the possibility of (a systemic) change in American cinema.

According to the authors, the strength of the (Classical Hollywood) system is founded on the continued dominance of specific norms (spectacle, verisimilitude, continuity) as the basic conventions of narrative construction. These norms, which as the authors suggest have persisted in the post-1960 period, continue to dictate the use of stylistic devices, the application of technology and the adoption of new production practices (1985, p 367). For that reason, it is not surprising that, in the penultimate chapter of the book, Bordwell recognises changes in the post-1960 Hollywood cinema, but argues that they have not affected the mode of production substantially (Bordwell et al., 1985, pp 368-70), whilst “the classical style remains the dominant model for feature filmmaking” (1985, p 370). This is a statement that Thompson, by and large, reiterates in her most recent study of contemporary Hollywood cinema.¹⁷

Post-Classicism and the New Hollywood

If one accepts that the term ‘classical Hollywood cinema’ implies a coherent aesthetic tradition which can be established through the use of the above methodological tools, it would be interesting to ask what ‘post-classical Hollywood cinema’ could mean.

Following similar neologisms such as postmodernism, post-feminism and post-colonialism, one could point out that post-classicism implies the emergence of a new discourse, which attempts to account for specific phenomena that cannot be adequately explained by the previous, established discourse (in this case, the discourse of classicism). On the other hand though, due to the vast appeal and solidity of classicism, post-classicism does not carry a substantial exegetic power in itself (in the same way that post-colonialism does). As a result, the formation of the post-classical discourse is

characterised by the co-existence of several basic tenets of classicism alongside the new elements that the prefix 'post' suggests. Within this framework, post-classical Hollywood cinema can possibly be seen as a distinct aesthetic tradition created by an amalgamation of old and new practices. The distinctiveness of this new aesthetic tradition, however, would always be compromised by the degree of its association with the classical aesthetic. In other words, post-classicism cannot start where classicism ends; rather it extends and, therefore, becomes a part of the classical aesthetic.

With these questions in mind, one could argue that in Film Studies the term 'post-classical Hollywood,' unlike its 'classical' predecessor, performs very different functions. It does not set out to explain Hollywood cinema as a system, it does not imply specific aesthetic qualities (at least not in the ways the term classical does) and it does not signal a different era in Hollywood history. Besides insinuating that an indefinite period in Hollywood history cannot be labelled classical but is, in one way or another, associated with a classical one, the term 'post-classical' has little to say about American cinema. Not surprisingly, then, studies of American cinema within a post-classical framework tend to emphasise not only breaks but also continuities with the classical era. As a result, they are restricted within the boundaries of the methodologies upon which classicism was formulated. This is revealed in all the studies that propose a discussion of contemporary Hollywood in terms of a post-classical aesthetic and examine the blockbuster film.¹⁸ In fact, as it appears, this increasingly broad category of films is the main one to have attracted sustained discussions that raise the issue of post-classicism in direct ways. Although blockbusters have been made throughout the history of Hollywood

cinema, critical attention to the changing conditions of their production, distribution and exhibition after World War II pointed towards the uneasy relationship of these films with notions of classical Hollywood cinema. Starting from Bazin's account of the 'superwestern' of the 1940s to the now standard critical approaches of the action-adventure film within a new media landscape, the blockbuster film has certainly been in the vanguard of critiques of classicism.¹⁹

Although Bazin's view of the 'superwestern' privileged formal and thematic concerns, more recent arguments extended their critique to include social, economic, industrial and technological parameters, therefore offering more comprehensive and more historically grounded discussions. In this light, issues such as the conglomeration of the film industry and its gradual assimilation into a vast horizontally and vertically integrated entertainment industry; the proliferation of distribution outlets; the changes in patterns of consumption; the predominance of the package system of production; the shifts in the constitution of audiences; and the changes in film companies' business conduct were, then, seen to be reflected in certain stylistic and narrative patterns associated with this group of films. These patterns include: loose narrative structure, narrative as a showcase for special effects, increasing emphasis on spectacle, characters as plot functions, and genre hybridity.²⁰ The blockbuster film, the various arguments propose, has gradually become an expression, or even a celebration, of a conglomerated media industry, which attempts to entice a very large, increasingly young audience to a specific kind of entertainment that can be reiterated ad-infinitum through the multiple distribution channels that the same industry controls (Schatz, 1993, p 23 and 33). For these reasons,

certain pillars of the classical aesthetic, such as cause and effect narrative logic, psychological character motivation and clear-cut generic frameworks have lost the impelling force the proponents of classical Hollywood had assigned them and were sacrificed to a group style that increasingly foregrounds narrative fragments rather than narrative structure in order to encourage spin-offs and tie-ins in various ancillary markets.²¹ This tendency has been consolidated in the post-1975 period when blockbuster films such as Jaws (1975) and Star Wars (1977) arguably ushered Hollywood 'once again' into a new phase.²²

One, and probably the biggest, implication of the above argument in terms of a discussion of post-classical Hollywood cinema is the increasing difficulty to locate "the movie itself", which as Thomas Schatz argued "has been reduced and stylised to a point, where ... it scarcely even qualifies as a narrative" (1993, p 33). Although there are film critics who disagree with such a position,²³ the above position clearly suggests that the different treatment of narrative in the blockbuster film signals a break from the classicism associated with the studio period. Schatz goes as far as to argue that the loss of narrative integrity in the blockbuster film is the product of the recent tendencies in Hollywood industry that favour horizontal integration, in the same way that the old forms of coherent narrative were products of the vertically integrated studio system (1993, p 34). However, Schatz does not use the actual term 'post-classical Hollywood' to label this kind of filmmaking. Although he stresses departures and breaks from the classicism of the past, his emphasis on industrial, economic and technological parameters and their effects on questions of style reflect an economic determinism (compared to the stylistic

overdetermination of The Classical Hollywood Cinema) and, consequently, he indirectly questions the applicability of the term post-classical.

This does not happen, however, in discussions of the 'high concept film' and especially in the arguments put forward by Justin Wyatt.²⁴ Post-classicism here is a term employed to illustrate a style of filmmaking "molded by [novel] economic and institutional forces" (1994, p 8). The constituent elements of this kind of filmmaking can be found in the construction of narratives as vehicles for advertising to the extent that advertising and narrative have gradually become increasingly integrated, thereby changing the look and the sound of the film (1994, p 15). An extension of this quality is the fact that several 'modules' of a high concept film can stand autonomously for the film itself, since they do not progress the narrative but, instead, convey the narrative's main ideas. For Wyatt, this suggests a tighter relationship between economics and aesthetics, echoing Schatz's above formulation. However, Wyatt is rather reluctant to use the term post-classical to designate a distinct period in Hollywood history. As he states in the opening chapter of his book High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood, the absence of a theoretical framework (such as the one presented in The Classical Hollywood Cinema) which could formalize the period after the disintegration of the studio system and the rise of television, does not allow him to generalize his argument (1994, pp 7-8). He acknowledges, instead, "important aesthetic ties" with classical cinema (1994, p 18) and proposes that this new relationship between economics and aesthetics that underline the post-classicism of the high concept film can be better understood as only one development after the classical period. Consequently, although the term has enough

exegetic power when applied to one, ever-increasing category of films, it cannot be all encompassing. Wyatt's argument does, however, refute once again stylistic determination over the economic in the creation of the high concept film.

The weakness of the term post-classical (as applied by Wyatt) to explain adequately definite tendencies in the post-studio era and to account for the totality of Hollywood films has led critics to return to a critical re-examination of the classical Hollywood cinema formulations as a potential way out of such a stalemate. Elizabeth Cowie pointed towards the possibilities for a post-classical framework that may arise from the conceptual distinction between "classical narrative" and "classical Hollywood cinema" and from the re-evaluation of the profit determinant in studio-produced Hollywood cinema (1998, pp 178-179). This methodological distinction involves the examination of conventions of narrative construction (realism, verisimilitude, causal coherence, continuity, spectacle, stars and genre) not only as such but also as a 'package' of elements that, in various combinations, constitute the foundation for the potential profitability of American films (1998, p 182). As a consequence, the persistence of some or all of the above elements after the collapse of the studio system can be better explained in terms of their economic value for the generation of profit, rather than in terms of their aesthetic value for the construction of a distinct category of filmmaking or in terms of their systemic strength. This thesis then implies that the terms classical/post-classical are empty of meaning and emphasises the continuation of a 'group style' (if this phrase is still applicable) as a package that became the cornerstone for the profitability and global domination of Hollywood cinema.²⁵ In this light, the absence from a film of

one or more of the above elements does not constitute any sort of break from a classical tradition. It demonstrates, instead, the potential power of the other elements as guarantors in recouping an investment.²⁶

In a similar fashion Richard Maltby and Ian Craven in their study Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction (1995), also took a stance against stylistic determination in Hollywood cinema and proposed the term “commercial aesthetic” by emphasising the “essentially opportunist” nature of Hollywood cinema’s economic motivation (1995, p 9 and p 35). In their view, style is shaped by the imperatives of entertainment, which are flexible (or opportunistic) enough to allow stylistic divergence within a homogeneous mode of production. The generation of audience emotion, as part of the promise of entertainment, consequently, achieves primary status in Hollywood cinema and “substitutes for Art” (1995, p 36). The essential elements for narrative construction (as illustrated by Cowie), therefore, become significant only in their ability to become affective agents for the evocation of emotions, which drives audiences in huge numbers to the theatres.

The above two counter-arguments aptly demonstrate that the motive of profit has always been the structural principle for the relatively homogeneous organization of filmic elements in Hollywood cinema, a position that de-emphasises the stylistic determinism of The Classical Hollywood Cinema and consequently removes any possibility for a periodisation based on aspects of a stylistic/aesthetic history. For the view of Hollywood cinema put forward by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson was the product of an exercise in the possibilities entailed in a historical poetics of cinema, an approach that seeks to

study “the finished work as a result of a process of construction” within an historical context (Bordwell, 1989, p 371) and which privileges the role of style as central.²⁷ As Bordwell suggests:

Historical poetics is [thus] characterized by the phenomena it studies – films’ constructional principles and effects – and the questions it asks about those phenomena – their constitution, functions, consequences and historical manifestations. Poetics does not put at the forefront of its activities phenomena such as the economic patterns of film distribution, the growth of teenage audience, or the ideology of private property. The poetician may need to investigate such matters, and indeed many others but they become relevant only in the light of more properly poetic issues (1989, p 371-2)

Such an approach essentially presupposes the existence of a hierarchy of focal points within the critical practice, the value of which is seen as relative to the role they play in the process of film construction. The post-1960 period, however, has been marked by several changes, especially in fields that could be considered peripheral to a historical poetics of pre-1960 American cinema, but which have become more central in recent decades. One could argue, therefore, that dealmaking, film distribution and marketing, film exhibition and patterns of consumption have become more instrumental in filmmaking practices in contemporary cinema²⁸ and have attracted, therefore, considerable attention in themselves; in their relation to ‘more poetic issues;’ and in their value within different historical contexts.²⁹ As a result all the above have become more

pertinent to the process of the construction of American films, which points to the need to apply fresh criteria in any discussion about modes of film practice in contemporary American Cinema.

In the final analysis though, no matter what criteria are used, the mode of film practice remains a theoretical formulation that, by its very nature, overlooks differences between films. This means that individual films are consequently approached only “as a means of constructing their shared mode of film practice” (Gunning, 1990, p 10), a process that, even though it places the film within a broad historical context, tends to erase contradictory forces that inform the realisation of films. What is at stake then is the issue of the individual film’s historical specificity, which by definition stands at odds with broad theoretical constructs such as the classical and post-classical Hollywood cinema.

House of Games: “The Best American Foreign Film”

When you buy David, you buy his mouth, you buy his words. He’s not easy but he’s worth it (Hausman, quoted in Moss, 2000, internet)

In the preface of the published script for House of Games (1988) David Mamet explains how he became a film director:

I started writing screenplays about seven years ago (The Postman Always Rings Twice) and along with most other screenwriters and other ranks, conceived a desire

to direct movies. My agent told me that the best way to break to that job was this: write an original screenplay and hope that someone wants it badly enough to bet on you as a director. Michael Hausman...liked the screenplay and gave me a chance to direct it, which I did (Mamet, 1988, p v)

The events that took place between the submission of David Mamet's script to producer Michael Hausman (circa the end of 1985) and the actual release of the film (9 Nov 1987) that the phrase "I did" connotes, constitute the main focus of this part of the chapter. For the version of House of Games that landed on (selected) American theatres on the above date was the outcome of an interplay of a large number of forces, the contributions of which, as creative agents in the making of the film, need to be assessed before one undertakes to examine the film as an instance of classical or post-classical filmmaking.³⁰

This discussion has three main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to identify creative agents whose influence on the film's production would normally go unnoticed, had one examined House of Games in order to see how it fits within a specific mode of film practice. My approach, for instance, places substantial emphasis on the role of the film's financier and distributor, Orion Pictures, an important mini-major of the 1980s that was widely considered as a "sanctuary for creative filmmakers" (Hillier, 1994, p 21; Brown, 1992, p 29). In particular, I shall examine how Orion's 'hands-off' policy to independent production encouraged the distinct aesthetic that permeates House of Games. Secondly, my approach aims to question Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's general claim that, despite changes, the mode of production has remained unaltered in the post-1960

American cinema. By providing a detailed production background of the film, my discussion will demonstrate that the making of the film took place within a mode of production that differs substantially from the mode Bordwell et al. describe in the Classical Hollywood Cinema. As a sort of preface, I cite Mamet's statement on his experience as the director of House of Games: "what a joy to be on a project that was not a collaboration" (1988, p xv), a comment that can be read as a criticism of the hierarchy entailed in the detailed division of labour which characterises the mode of production of 'classical' films. Finally, and more importantly, this approach will provide some of the key elements that exemplify 'a cinema of David Mamet,' elements that will be explored in more depth and with reference to his other films in subsequent chapters.

First-time Film Director

Prior to House of Games, Mamet had already achieved fame in Hollywood with two star vehicle scripts for big studios. The first was an adaptation of James M. Cain's novel The Postman Always Rings Twice (1934) for the Lorimar/MGM production of Bob Rafelson's same-titled film (1981) with Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange. The second script was also an adaptation, this time of Barry Reed's novel The Verdict for the Fox production of Sidney Lumet's The Verdict (1982) with Paul Newman. Mamet was nominated for an Oscar for his work on the second script in the 1982 Academy Awards.³¹ The critical and commercial success of the above films and of a string of 'off Broadway' and foreign productions of some of his plays,³² which culminated in the presentation of the Pulitzer Prize for Best American Play to Glengarry Glen Ross in 1984, provided Mamet with substantial clout which he subsequently used for achieving his objective, to

direct House of Games.

In 1985 Mamet began to work on two scripts. One was an assignment from Paramount, The Untouchables (De Palma, 1987, US), loosely based on the successful television series. The second was a screenplay based on a short story written by himself and Jonathan Katz under the working title The Tell, which later became House of Games.³³ His decision to direct the latter himself, stemmed in many ways from a wish to retain the copyright of his written work in the medium of cinema. Accustomed to authorship rights in the terrain of theatre, where he enjoyed much greater fame (and as his screenwriting reputation was growing bigger), Mamet became more sensitive on the issue of the defence of his intellectual property in Hollywood cinema.³⁴ In particular, the career of Sexual Perversity in Chicago (1974), the first adaptation of one of his early plays that hit the screens as About Last Night... (Zwick, 1986, Tristar, US), which had very little to do with the themes and the spirit of his original play, provided the spark in Mamet's desire to make the leap behind the camera.³⁵ In this respect, House of Games can be seen as the film that would eventually inaugurate a love-hate relationship between the filmmaker and mainstream Hollywood.³⁶

As his work on the script for The Untouchables continued and in the wake of creative differences with Art Linson and Brian De Palma,³⁷ Mamet's interest in directing House of Games led him to reject packages that stipulated the appointment of an already established director. These proposals mainly originated from big studios and included the complementary provisos of a big budget production and the signing of stars for the two

central roles of Margaret and Mike (Ebert, 1987, internet). The studios' reluctance to finance an expensive production headed by Mamet, who was driven by his wish to maintain control of his work as a writer, can be mainly understood as a refusal to grant a first time writer/director the final cut of the film. Mamet's persistence in the above issue, which to a certain extent can be explained by the primary role that language plays in his films (discussed in depth in Chapter Three), essentially left him with one option, namely, to produce and finance the film independently. This option generally entails certain fundamental characteristics that, by and large, shape the production of a film: small budget, unknown actors, financial insecurity and, often, no guaranteed distribution. Those features however, are often counterbalanced by the considerably higher degree of freedom a filmmaker enjoys in an independent production as opposed to studio-controlled film production. It is not surprising, then, that Mamet chose to go independent as in his opinion "good moviemaking require[d] not conspicuous expenditure but disciplined imagination" (Mamet 2000a, p 98).

Independent Film Production and Contemporary American Cinema

Independent film production has always co-existed alongside studio production in American cinema. During the studio era small production companies without a corporate relation with a distribution firm (Bordwell et al., 1985, p 317) had been producing large numbers of inexpensively made films to accompany the studio-produced pictures in the exhibition circuit.³⁸ The demand for product, at a time when cinema going was the main leisure activity for the majority of the American population, sustained the existence of a number of independent companies and ensured the smooth operation of the film industry.

During the 1940s and early 1950s, however, a cluster of socio-cultural factors including demographic shifts (especially the wave of suburbanisation), the rise of consumer culture and the consolidation of television (from the mid-1950s) as the primary entertainment medium had been gradually shaping an American society with an increasing number of leisure options. With theatre attendances declining constantly since 1946 (despite the studios' attempts to emphasise the cinema experience through the introduction of widescreen technologies in the early 1950s), it was clear that cinema-going became a secondary activity in post-war America.³⁹ All the above factors led to an industrial and economic restructuring in the American film industry, the main manifestation of which can be seen in the dissolution of the studio system, the concentration of the majors on the production of fewer but more expensive films and on the strict control of the distribution sector, and the rise of a new 'independent' production that was increasingly 'dependent' on financing from the majors. In this context, independent production became a highly mediated form of filmmaking, since the old studios – which by the late 1960s had been conglomeratised and diversified – controlled financing and distribution.

The above configuration of the American film industry continued and was further consolidated in the 1980s and 1990s, when the development of new distribution outlets (video, cable, Pay TV, satellite and, recently, the internet) propelled a staggering demand for film product. As the majors became increasingly focused on the production of a handful of blockbusters per year, it was left to independent production to sustain the majors' immense distribution pipelines, cater for the various tastes of different audiences

and generally support the film market. In the mid 1980s, especially, the demand for films generated by the exponential success of the VCR boosted an unprecedented rise in independent film production to provide the necessary diversity of product that the majors were not in a position to supply. With financing secured via the pre-selling of home video (and, in most cases, cable) rights (Hillier, 1994, p 22; Balio, 1990b, p 281), independent film production became responsible for a huge variety of films. This fed the majors' distribution apparatus, but also catered for distinct niche markets such as the art-house market or different minority markets.

This account of independent production provides the broad framework within which House of Games can be located. Produced for \$5-6 million by Filmhaus and financed and distributed by Orion Pictures,⁴⁰ perhaps the quintessential independent distributor of the 1980s, Mamet's film is a direct product of the industrio-economic zeitgeist that informed independent film production from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s.⁴¹ As such, the production of House of Games presents specific characteristics, which can potentially question its status as an instance of 'classical' (in this case mainstream) Hollywood filmmaking. The rest of this chapter will discuss these characteristics in detail.

A Filmhaus Production of a David Mamet Film

The independent producer whom Mamet approached with the script for House of Games was Michael Hausman. Until 1986, and via his company Filmhaus, Hausman had been associated with a variety of films spanning from the independently financed and released features such as Alambrista! (R.M. Young, 1977, First Run Features, US) and Heartland

(Pearce, 1980, Levitt-Pickman, US) to the independently produced but studio-distributed films such as Mikey and Nicky (E.May, 1976, Universal, US) and Places in the Heart (Benton, 1984, Columbia/Tristar, US). Hausman's credits, furthermore, extended to other areas of film production such as production manager in The Heartbreak Kid (May, 1972, Fox, US) and as second unit or assistant director in films such as Rich Kids (Young, 1979, UA, US), Hair (Forman, 1979, UA, US), Silkwood (Nichols, 1983, Fox, US) and Desert Bloom (Corr, 1986, Columbia, US).⁴²

Hausman's experience in the film production business and his knowledge of the craft of filmmaking were instrumental in Mamet's attempt as a first time director. As Mamet himself has documented in one of the essays in his collection Some Freaks (1990), Hausman was the driving force behind the organisation of the film's production. Strictly adhering to the axiom "all mistakes are made in preproduction" (1990, p 125), the producer ensured the smooth operation of the film's production by planning carefully the stage of principal photography and by developing a close working relationship with the director (1990, pp 127-8).⁴³ Hausman also received another credit in the film as a second assistant director, helping Mamet with the visual aspect of the film, an aspect to which Mamet admitted complete ignorance prior to shooting House of Games (1990, p 119). Furthermore, Hausman secured financing and distribution by making a deal with Orion Pictures who advanced the money by pre-selling the film's rights to Home Box Office (cable distribution) and to foreign distributors on an individual basis.⁴⁴

Although the role of Michael Hausman was fundamental in the above areas of the

production of House of Games, further evidence suggests that the film's mode of production was not a clear instance of the package unit system that typified Hollywood cinema from the 1950s. Even though Hausman's work in securing financing and arranging the means of production generally conforms to the formal definition of the 'package' (see Bordwell et al, 1985, p 331),⁴⁵ there are certain elements – specific to the production – that indicate transgressions from the above definition. This is especially at the level of the division of labour and the role of the director in the overall organisation of the production. Before I discuss the exact nature of those transgressions and the ways they have shaped the production of the film, I first need to address the properties of the House of Games package.

The main ingredients of the package, gathered by Hausman, included the director, his script, the organisation of production by Filmhaus (which also supplied the lower echelon workers in the film) and the total financing of the project by Orion. However, within this structure, there was a second mini-package put together by Mamet that included the more creative aspects of the production such as the actors and actresses, the music composer, the set designer and the costume designer, all previous collaborators from his work in the theatre (Mamet, 1990, p 140). This type of arrangement has not been a rare phenomenon in low budget productions, since the director is normally bestowed with the power to select the principal players provided that he or she remains within the budget. Furthermore, there has been a long-standing tradition in independent (and often studio) filmmaking, where a director has worked with the same players in film after film.⁴⁶ However, what makes House of Games interesting in this respect was that

the majority of Mamet's key collaborators had very little or, in some cases, no experience in filmmaking prior to House of Games. This was despite years of experience in theatre production, particularly in producing Mamet's plays since the 1970s.⁴⁷ Additionally, and following traditions in American theatre, some of the above players took on more than one role in the production of the film.⁴⁸

This second package, I would like to argue, functioned as an ensemble, an intricately linked group of creative units whose overall contribution to the production and aesthetics of the film (and the production and aesthetics of Mamet's next three films) surpasses any one individual contribution. In fact I would go so far as argue that the division of labour during the production of the film did not follow the strict hierarchy which has traditionally characterised the mode of production of Hollywood films. This is not to imply that there was no pecking order in the division of labour that informed House of Games, or that Mamet, as the film's director, did not have the final say in questions of frame composition or editing. Rather, my argument suggests, the creative aspect of the film's production was, more forcefully than is usual, shaped by the dynamics of a group of players, whose long time collaboration on stage under Mamet's tutelage, influenced both the nature of the division of labour in the upper ranks of the film's production and the aesthetics of the film. In this case, it is what this 'second package' has brought into the film that needs to be examined. Before that however, there is one more parameter to be explored, Orion Pictures.

The Orion Pictures factor⁴⁹

Orion Pictures belongs to a particular group of distribution companies that competed with the established powers for much of the 1980s. Along with Cannon, the De Laurentis Entertainment Group and Miramax, Orion Pictures entered the film business as a production company at a time when demand for feature films had been increasing due to the proliferation of distribution outlets, especially cable and video. The company was formed in 1978 by a group of ex-United Artists executives headed by Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin who disagreed with the policies imposed by Transamerica, United Artists' parent company (Balio, 1985, p 445).⁵⁰ Almost immediately, Orion established a distribution deal with Warner who set up a \$90 million financing arrangement for the newly-formed company (Thompson, 1987, p 56). The deal saw Orion becoming Warner's first satellite film production company in the same way that Warner's music division had a number of satellite labels (Warner/Reprise, Atlantic, Elektra and Asylum) under its orbit; labels which were autonomous in terms of management and creative decisions, but which had to use Warner's distribution apparatus to put their product in the market. The deal lasted for four years (1978-1981) and saw Orion producing twenty three films for Warner, with only two box office hits: 10 (Edwards, 1979, US) and Arthur (Gordon, 1981, US).⁵¹

When the contract with Warner expired in late 1981, Orion made the decision to venture into the distribution business. After briefly entertaining the possibility of taking over Embassy Pictures and Allied Artists, Orion finally bought Filmways, a distribution company that had emerged through a merger between American International Pictures and Filmways in 1978. With a distribution apparatus in place, Orion proceeded to make a

number of deals to raise production and marketing funds. Strictly adhering to a philosophy of minimum economic risks (Balio, 1990b, p 278), the company started pre-selling the ancillary distribution rights of its upcoming films to a number of parties. These deals included an agreement with RCA/Columbia for foreign theatrical and video rights, with HBO for pay-TV rights, with Vestron for home video rights, and agreements with individual foreign distributors, some of which were willing to buy the whole Orion roster of films (in the area of 8-12 films per year). With the receipts from theatrical distribution and the funds from pre-selling the rights of its films in all other ancillary markets, Orion accumulated substantial capital to self-finance films for theatre and television exhibition.

Very early, Orion Pictures established a reputation for making “quality films” and for being “a sanctuary for creative filmmakers” (Hillier, 1994, p 14). If one takes a look at the Orion library of titles, one will find critically acclaimed films by Woody Allen (all his films from Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy [1982] to Shadows and Fog [1992]), Milos Forman’s Amadeus (1983), Peter Yates’s The House on Carroll Street (1988), Terry Jones’s Life of Brian (1979), Francis Ford Coppola’s The Cotton Club (1984), Alan Parker’s Mississippi Burning (1988), Jonathan Demme’s Something Wild (1986) and The Silence of the Lambs (1991). One would also find Paul Verhoeven’s first American feature, Robocop (1987), Oliver Stone’s Platoon (1986) and Kevin Costner’s Oscar-ridden Dances with Wolves (1990).

In 1987 Orion Pictures demonstrated a remarkable achievement for an independent

company by capturing the largest share in the American film market, along with Paramount (Maltby and Craven, 1995, p 481). Three of its 1986 films, Platoon, Hannah and Her Sisters and Hoosiers, received 18 Academy award nominations collectively and shared six Oscars. Platoon's domestic gross surpassed the \$100 million benchmark and the company invested bigger sums in its 1987-1988 releases, especially in Ron Shelton's Bull Durham, Dennis Hopper's Colors, Mississippi Burning and Robocop. Furthermore it established a new distribution arm for the American Home Video market (Orion Home Entertainment) and ventured in the television market with the very successful series Cagney and Lacey. Additionally, Orion Classics, a semi-autonomous division Orion had set up in 1984 to distribute non-US (mainly European) films, had two big hits in Claude Berri's Jean de Florette (1986, France) and Manon Des Sources (1986, France) which together grossed \$10 million in the US box office.

Orion, however, did not manage to repeat the success of 1987. Excessive spending (by the company's standards) and a series of flops (culminating in the extremely poor \$0.459 million gross of The House on Carroll Street), brought Orion back to a 'normal' 4.2% in 1989 and 5.6% of the American film market share in 1990. The financial success of the 1990 western Dances with Wolves raised Orion's share to 8.5% in 1991 (Hillier, 1994, p 21). However, even though Orion Pictures managed to repeat the success of Costner's film in 1991 with The Silence of the Lambs, it finally went bankrupt in November 1991. Its library of titles was subsequently bought by Kirk Kerkorian, already owner of the MGM and United Artists film libraries.

This brief account of the history of Orion Pictures reveals certain interesting issues regarding the industrial/economic background of House of Games. The first important parameter is that the film was financed by a company that was considered to be friendly towards creative filmmakers and consequently thought to exercise minimum control over the creation process or, at least, less control compared to the traditional majors.⁵² As Mike Medavoy, Orion's head of worldwide production, stated in his book You're Only As Good As Your Next One, Mamet's "body of work as a playwright – Sexual Perversity in Chicago, American Buffalo and Glengarry Glen Ross – was reason enough for us to give him a shot at directing a sleight-of-hand mystery he had written called House of Games" (2002, p 169).⁵³ Secondly, it is clear that the film was produced during the 'golden age' of Orion Pictures (1986-1987), a fact that potentially reinforced the degree of freedom Mamet enjoyed during the production of the film. Finally, through the distribution deals with HBO, Columbia and various foreign distributors, Orion did not only manage to provide the full budget for the film with minimum financial risk for themselves, but also to secure exhibition both in the United States and abroad for a feature with no established director or marketable stars. With global distribution and exhibition secure, the filmmaker was in a position to make the film according to his – very specific – vision and hence avoid potential compromises in creative decisions.

All the above issues point towards a very specific institutional configuration that seems to have granted a first time film director unusual creative control. Unlike filmmakers such as Jim Jarmusch, Joel and Ethan Coen or Gus Van Sant, who retained creative control of their first films through independent financing and sometimes self-distribution

(Pierson, 1995, pp 339-340), Mamet managed to achieve this rare feat (for a \$5 million production) in the semi-independent structure of 'Orion Pictures presents a Filmhaus Production of a David Mamet film.' It is now time to examine how this creative control was translated into celluloid.

Questions of Style: KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid)

House of Games was released at the end of 1987, a year that also saw the release of such films as Fatal Attraction (Lyne, Paramount US), Broadcast News (Brooks, Fox, US), Moonstruck (Jewison, MGM, US), Ironweed (Babenco, Tristar, US), Anna (Bogayevicz, Vestron, US) and The Witches of Eastwick (Miller, Warner, US), all films with strong female leads. It tells the story of Dr Margaret Ford (Lindsay Crouse), a clinical psychologist who, in her attempt to help one of her patients, becomes involved in a series of adventures with a gang of con-artists led by Mike (Joe Mantegna). Although Margaret believes that she has been allowed access to the planning and execution of one of the gang's elaborate tricks to fleece an unsuspected businessman, she finally comes to understand that it was she who had been the 'mark' of the con all along. The film ends with Margaret's violent reaction to the realisation that she had been 'played' by the con-artists and her recognition of a surprising truth about herself.

The above narrative premise functioned as a vehicle for the articulation of a number of distinct themes, which characterised Mamet's previous work as a playwright and which include: the destiny of the lumpen proletariat in corporate America, the education of the innocent, the teacher-student relationship, the meaning of everyday transactions and the

truth behind deceitful appearances.⁵⁴ More importantly, however, and for the purposes of this chapter, the above narrative premise was mainly realised through the use of a specific set of stylistic choices whose particular combination signalled the beginning of a distinct aesthetic view that came to permeate all future Mamet films. This view can be seen as a product of an amalgamation of theoretical concepts and ideas which stem from Mamet's readings of the Aristotelian concept of narrative unity, the Eisensteinian theory of montage, the Stanislavskian notion of physical acting and the assimilation of the last to particular patterns of speech delivery. These were developed by Mamet and a group of theatre actors and practitioners, many of whom are present in the credits of House of Games.⁵⁵

Mamet's distinct aesthetic view relies on a use of film style which, as I shall argue, sits uneasily both with notions of classicism and post-classicism in American cinema. This is because, although narrative construction follows, for the most part, the basic principles of classical narrative (causal coherence, continuity and character motivation), it often departs from those principles and follows a logic of its own. These departures are mainly manifest in several clear breaks from the rules of social and/or cultural verisimilitude which immediately provide the story with a high degree of implausibility compared to a classical narrative. Equally, the film style employed to support such a narrative generally adheres to the rules of continuity and transparency, though, on several occasions, it also breaks those rules and consequently evokes a strong sense of 'constructedness' and/or artificiality. These effects are mainly conveyed through the frequent absence of realist conventions in parts of the film's *mise en scène*, including frame composition, camera

movement and editing. For this reason, although the film style is at the service of the narrative and visually supports a story that often follows a specific logic, it also comments on the narrative and in many ways breaks the spectator's engagement with the story in ways that a classical style would never do.

This paradoxical (for an American film) relation between narrative and style has its roots in Mamet's view of realism as a discourse that should seek to "express" rather than to "convince" (1990, p 64). For Mamet, style should be used in order to serve the aesthetic integrity of the film, which is not necessarily constructed according to external standards of realism and verisimilitude. What is at stake, as Mamet – via Stanislavsky – suggests, is the importance of the 'Scenic Truth,' which alone promotes the 'Idea' of the film and which is not susceptible to pre-constructed notions of verisimilitude. As he writes:

In devotion to the Scenic Truth the artist gives him – or herself a choice. In discarding the armor of realism he or she accepts the responsibility of making every choice in light of specific meaning – of making every choice assertive rather than protective. For, in this age, to make a 'realistic' choice, to assert that such and such a choice was made because it is, in fact, *as it is in life*, is to say no more than that the choice was made in such a way to avoid any potential criticism. (1994a, p 202 original italics)

In theatre, therefore, Scenic Truth is determined in accordance with the ideas put forward by the play and which promote the play's meaning. Any other aspects of the *mise-en*

scène that do not advance the above ideas are immediately dismissed as irrelevant whether or not they conform to unspecified standards of 'reality.' Mamet continues:

The important difference between realism and truth, Scenic Truth, is the difference between acceptability and necessity, which is the difference between entertainment and art. (1994a, p 202)

What Mamet seems to object to here is the use of a film style that does not 'respect' the central idea of the film as it is put forward by the written text, which explains the filmmaker's stern opposition to any changes made to his scripts. As Joe Mantegna has stated in an interview: "he [Mamet] has painstakingly, specifically created his dialogue to get whatever impact he expects to get out of it. ... 99 times out of 100 I've done everything he's written as written" (quoted in Kane, 1991, p 23). More importantly, however, Mamet's above objection stands as a powerful critique of a stylistically determined mode of film practice such as the classical Hollywood cinema. Given the fact that the classical Hollywood cinema favours a specific use of film style which serves a particularly constructed narrative, and a mode of production that has traditionally treated the screenplay as work-in-progress and excluded the screenwriter from the stages of film production and post-production, it is obvious that Mamet's approach to filmmaking stands firmly outside such a mode of film practice. This is the reason why Mamet's style strikes critics as artificial and unnatural, despite the fact that it visually supports a narrative that often is contrived and implausible.

This aesthetic view, which has characterised Mamet's work in American theatre, lies at the core of his use of style not only in House of Games but also in his subsequent films. Unlike theatre, however, the medium of cinema does not only depend upon acting, design and direction/*mise en scène* (the three main determinants that reinforce the importance of the Scenic Truth in theatre [Mamet, 1994a, p 203]) for the creation of meaning. Elements such as cinematography and, especially, editing are equally important in the ways they contribute to the process of film construction, from the lines of the screenplay to the images and dialogue on the celluloid. For Mamet, it is a particular form of film editing that defines Scenic Truth in films, since editing is the mechanism that creates scenes in cinema.

Influenced by Sergei Eisenstein's theories of montage, Mamet perceived editing as the sole agent of narration, as a mechanism endowed with powers which can drain "narration" from the shot and instead transfer it to the juxtaposition of shots.⁵⁶ Empty of such information, the shot becomes "uninflected" and, consequently, purely dramatic since it introduces only the necessary information that advances the meaning of the scene. The juxtaposition of two such uninflected shots creates in the spectator's mind an idea, "a building block" or "a beat" as Mamet himself has suggested (1992a, p 14 and 30) which helps the spectator understand the meaning of the scene. The same question (the meaning of the scene) should be, according to Mamet, the main starting point for every filmmaker (1992, p 3). Mamet offers a brief illustration of this theory in an extract from his book On Directing Film where he discusses a scene from House of Games (Appendix I, Scene 23):⁵⁷

In House of Games, when the two guys are fighting about a gun in the doorway and we cut away to a shot of the sidekick, the professor character, looking on, *then* you hear the gunshot. That's pretty good filmmaking. It wasn't great filmmaking, maybe, but it was a lot better than television. Right? It gives us the idea. They're fighting; you cut to the guy looking. The idea is *what's going to happen* and *we can't do anything about it*. It conveys the idea of *helplessness*, which is what the beat is about. The protagonist is helpless: we get it without following her around. We put the *protagonist* in the same position as the *audience* – through the cut – by making the viewer create the idea himself, in his own mind (sic) as Eisenstein told us. (1992a, pp 31-32 original italics)

It is obvious from the above account that the technique which enables the filmmaker to achieve this objective is the cut rather than the dissolve, the fade or any other editing signifier. Indeed, House of Games contains only two dissolves (which clearly signal the passage of time – Scenes 8 and 35), while the rest of the film is edited entirely through cuts. A firm believer in detailed storyboarding, Mamet spent most of the pre-production time with the storyboarding artist and the cinematographer in developing a definitive version of the shotlist – “remember all mistakes are made in preproduction” – so that the film would “cut together well” (1990, pp 121-124). It is important however to note that the above approach to editing does not negate the idea of continuity editing since its main function, indeed its only function, is to promote dramatic action.⁵⁸

Mamet developed this approach to filmmaking out of necessity, to rectify his total ignorance about the visual aspect of the film (1990, p 119) and out of respect for the audience who comes to the cinema to see drama, “to be piqued, to be misled, to be disappointed at times, so that it can, be fulfilled” (Mamet, 1998a, p 37). As he stated in an essay entitled ‘A First Time Film Director’:

I’m not going to be John Ford or Akira Kurosawa, but I do know the meaning of each of the sequences, having written them, and if I can reduce the meaning of each of the sequences to a series of shots, each of them clean and uninflected (i.e. not necessitating further narration), then the movie will ‘work’; the audience will understand the story through the medium of pictures and the movie will be as good or bad as the story I wrote (1990, p 120).

The fundamental principle behind the above approach, which, largely, justifies Mamet’s use of style, is to “keep it simple” so that the audience can concentrate on the story.⁵⁹ It is time to examine how House of Games established the Mamet canon in American Cinema.

A House full of Games or “That’s What You Thought You Saw”⁶⁰

The plot in House of Games is activated by Dr Margaret Ford’s decision to help one of her patients, Billy Hahn, deal with a \$25,000 debt to a gambler who has threatened to kill him. In their only (on screen) session [Scene 4], which serves to help Billy fight his addiction to gambling, Billy challenges both the validity of psychoanalysis as a method

of therapeutic intervention and the abilities of Margaret as an expert within the field. Billy's direct accusations that psychoanalysis is a con game and that Margaret "do[esn]'t do nothing" immediately puts into question the content of the three (short) opening scenes where Margaret is portrayed as a successful professional who helps people either through her book [Scene 1] or through therapy [Scene 2] and whose work is recognised by senior colleagues [Scene 3]. More importantly, though, Billy's double indictment instigates Margaret's subsequent actions, as an attempt to prove that her profession and its representatives can, indeed, offer solutions to concrete problems, and sets up the foundations for the story, which for Mamet is "the essential progression of incidents that occur to the hero in pursuit of his (sic) one goal." (1992a, p xv)

This (generic) goal however, seems to be achieved very early in the course of the narrative. After her session with Billy and the subsequent reflection on the notes she took, the psychologist goes to 'House of Games,' a pool hall with a back room that functions as a joint for card playing, to confront the man who threatened to kill her client. As it turns out, Mike is not as 'tough' as Billy had implied (and more importantly as Margaret has imagined him)⁶¹ and he is willing to forget Billy's debt provided that Margaret would help him beat one of his opponents in a card game-in-progress. Margaret accepts his offer and joins him in the back room where some serious money is at stake in a game of poker. During the previous scene however [Scene 7], the spectator finds out that Billy owes Mike just \$800, a piece of information that Margaret, rather implausibly, misses. This consequently implies that there are other latent reasons for Margaret's direct involvement with Mike and his company, reasons that have to do with her compulsive,

and not clearly motivated, character.

The following 'poker game scene' [Scene 8], to which I shall entirely confine my analysis of Mamet's use of film style, is the most important narrative segment in House of Games for a number of reasons. First, it is by far the longest scene of the film (approximately twelve minutes, which is double the length of the second longest scene of the film [Scene 7]). It is the scene that introduces the other key players for the rest of the narrative (George aka the man from Vegas and Joey aka the professor), implies new goals for the heroine (the possibility of romance with Mike) and, to a certain extent, re-emphasises Margaret's ability as a proficient psychologist, an ability that was challenged earlier by Billy. This narrative segment also leads to the fulfilment of Margaret's goal to save Billy, since in the subsequent scene [Scene 9] Mike tears up the \$800 I.O.U. sheet. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the significance of the scene lies in the manner in which it foreshadows the central 'idea' of the film, the notion of the set up, and how narration and the use of style reinforce this idea, first within the diegesis (a set up for the main character) and second extra-diegetically in the spectator's comprehension of the narrative (a set up for the spectator). This scene, furthermore, is also significant in the ways in which it breaks the rules of cultural verisimilitude and demonstrates clearly the very specific logic Mamet's story follows,⁶² as well as in the ways in which it discards the armor of realism and shows how Mamet's stylistic choices are assertive rather than protective.⁶³ For all the above reasons, I propose, that this specific scene is a blueprint for understanding the rest of the film as the events depicted in this scene are replicated in a much more elaborate way throughout the rest of the film.⁶⁴

Whereas the spectator expects that Margaret will be instrumental to Mike's objective to beat the man from Vegas and consequently to achieve her goal (to protect her client), the composition of the shots and, especially, the editing pattern suggest – after a point – a potential disruption of their joint project. At the beginning of the sequence, therefore, the man from Vegas (slightly out of focus) is strictly framed in the centre of the background between Margaret and Mike, whose respective positions in the shot are at the two edges of the frame [shots 6 and 8, fig 1]. These two shots are connected with a reverse medium shot of Mike, Margaret and two other poker players looking at the man from Vegas as he collects the pot from the centre the table [shot 7, fig 2]. In the process, the juxtaposition of the above shots creates the idea of *entrapment* and the spectators form certain expectations regarding the prospective winner(s) of the game.

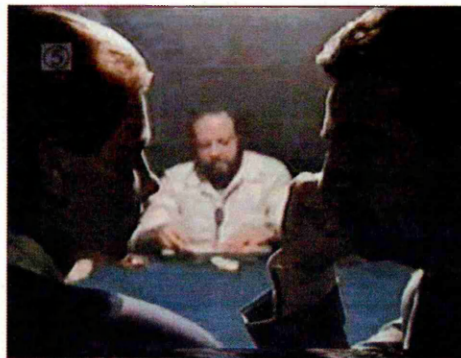


Figure 1

Scene 8, Shots 6 and 8



Figure 2

Scene 8, Shot 7

ENTRAPMENT

Further on into the scene and just before the outcome of the big hand, composition and editing perform a similar function, which this time points towards other things to come. In particular, twelve shots [shots 60-71] and their specific juxtaposition suggest that the odds for Mike and Margaret are not as auspicious as in the previous sub-segment. This time, Margaret and Mike are positioned together in a single frame [shots 60, 62, 64, 68 and 70, fig 3], which is alternated with two other principal framings, a medium shot of the man from Vegas, Joey and the two other players [shots 61, 63 67, 69 and 71, fig 4] and a close up of the man from Vegas with Joey in the background [shot 65, fig 5]. The compositional isolation of Mike and Margaret from the other players juxtaposed with the central position of the man from Vegas (who is now spatially ‘supported’ by the other present characters) shifts the balance to his favour and prepares the spectator for a narrative surprise which is revealed in the following four shots: the revelation of Mike’s cards [shot 72 like fig 3], his antagonist’s cool reaction [shot 73 like fig 5], a close up of

his 'club flush' cards [shot 74] and his final triumph [shot 75 like fig 4].



Figure 3

Scene 8, Shots 60, 62, 64, 68 and 70



Figure 4

Scene 8, Shots 61, 63, 67, 69 and 71



Figure 5

Scene 8, Shot 65

THE ISOLATION OF THE COUPLE VS THE TOGETHERNESS OF THE MALE GROUP. THE MAN FROM VEGAS IN CONTROL OF THE GAME

Thus *the isolation of the 'couple' against the togetherness of the 'male group'* presages Mike and Margaret's *defeat*. When it becomes clear that the man from Vegas wins the hand, the first subsequent shot is a medium close up of Mike and Margaret from a slightly different angle with Margaret occupying the centre of the frame and Mike occupying the left edge [shot 76, fig 6]. Slowly, Mike leans backwards and ends up off-screen leaving Margaret alone in the frame, totally isolated from the rest of the card players. The relation of this shot to the previous group of shots foregrounds Margaret's *responsibility for their defeat*, a building block that stands at odds with what the spectator has previously witnessed, namely, Margaret following Mike's instructions and catching his opponent's tell [shots 53 and 54].

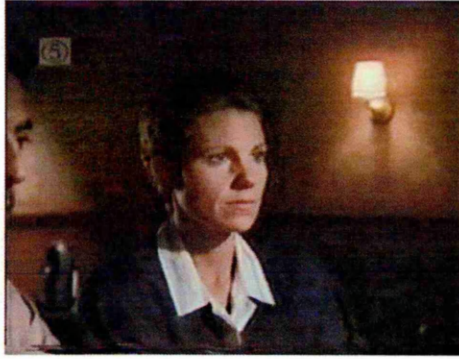


Figure 6

Scene 8, Shot 76

MARGARET'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEFEAT

If the juxtaposition of the above shots foreshadowed the outcome of the last round, two subsequent shots of two card-players [shots 80 and 81, figs 7 and 8] who are peripheral to the story seem to create an idea that ends up informing the rest of the film. Even though the narrative value of both these minor characters is too insignificant to suggest that those two shots connote a particular idea,⁶⁵ the equal duration of the shots (2.5 seconds each) and, especially, the highly stylised nature of the compositions,⁶⁶ along with the break they introduce to the pattern of the scene, provide them with an added value for the spectator's understanding of the truth of the scene. The two shots, I suggest, imply the idea of *a set up*, of *a constructed reality* that Margaret is shortly to discover, and which the spectator is invited to discover at that exact moment.⁶⁷



Figure 7

Scene 8, Shot 80



Figure 8

Scene 8, Shot 81

SET UP/ARTIFICIALITY/CONSTRUCTEDNESS

In light of discovering the true meaning of the above scene as *a set up to con Margaret out of her money* and not as a trap to trick the man from Vegas (as both the main character and the spectator originally thought), one can begin to understand Mamet's use of style in House of Games as a means to support visually an idea, namely, that the development of the narrative does not occur through the actions of a psychologically-

motivated protagonist who wishes to achieve a goal. In other words, film style is used to negate the unfolding of a 'classical' narrative and to imply the existence of a second, more powerful, and up to that point, latent narrative agent whose goals, at the last instance, frame the actions of the main protagonist. This narrative agent is eventually concretely personified in the characters of the con men (and in particular the character of Mike [scene 32]) and derives its power to surprise the spectator from the film's strict adherence to the rules of restricted narration.

The use of restricted narration allows the unfolding of narrative events as understood only by one specific character and consequently ties the spectator's access to narrative information to that character's (usually limited) viewpoint. As a result, the spectator comes to understand the distribution of narrative information only as pertaining to the goal of the main character, which in the case of House of Games turns out to imply an extremely limited perspective on the narrative world. This limited perspective is emphasised as the organising principle of the film's narration from the very beginning. From the first shot until the very last, the camera is tied to Margaret's viewpoint as the narrative moves from one incident to another. For Mamet, and irrespectively of the specific aesthetic effects it creates, restricted narration was the only choice. As he writes in On Directing Film:

Now you don't go establishing things. Make the audience wonder what's going on "*by putting them in the same position as the protagonist.*" As long as the protagonist wants something the audience will want something. As long as the

protagonist is clearly going out and attempting to get something, the audience will wonder whether or not he (sic) is going to succeed. (1992a, p 14 original italics)

Throughout the story we are firmly aligned with Margaret whose pursuit of goals (to help Billy, to write a second book, to flee the scene of a crime and finally to avenge herself on Mike) triggers a series of narrative incidents presented through her perspective. This pattern of narration, though, is also instrumental in presenting infinite possibilities for narrative surprises, since the heroine's (and to a certain extent the spectator's) limited perspective on events fails to capture larger forces at work. In the poker game scene, therefore, the shock from the final revelation that it was Margaret who was the actual mark of the con depends entirely on the withholding of information that such a mode of narration implies. Consequently, narration in House of Games denies the inclusion of the spectator in the setting up of the con(s) which latently structure(s) the film's plot, and becomes complicit in the creation of an illusion where the heroine believes that she controls her actions, while the spectator believes he/she controls the unfolding of the narrative.

This pattern of restricted narration is interrupted twice and only for a few seconds. The first instance of omniscient narration occurs after the revelation that the poker game was actually a set up. In the subsequent scene Mike reveals to Margaret some 'tricks of the trade' before he calls a taxi for her. When a fascinated Margaret gets in the taxi and leaves, the camera remains with Mike for a few seconds. In the next three shots, Mike walks under the light of a streetlamp and performs a little trick with a coin before he

heads back to 'House of Games' [Scene 9, shots 32-34]. The highly-theatrical *mise en scène* (dark surroundings with backlighting bathing Mike's body and framing him in the form of a silhouette) and the absence of any on-screen audience, clearly suggest that Mike's trick is solely for the eyes of the film's audience and it functions as a type of warning to remind the audience that despite appearances he is (and always will be) a trickster. At this point, the spectator is for the first time more privileged than Margaret in the distribution of narrative knowledge and to a certain degree can anticipate more future narrative surprises. Margaret, on the other hand, believes that she has proven herself equal to the con-men (by exposing the poker game scam) and because of that she has no reason to expect that the con-men would attempt to swindle her again.

Towards the end of the film the pattern of restricted narration is broken once more but this time with very different effects. In her second outing with Mike and his friends (this time under the narrative premise that she wishes to write a book about con-artists), Margaret gets involved in a different scam (this time pretending to be Mike's wife) whereby they lose \$80,000 that Mike had borrowed from the mob. Margaret, who at this point believes that she has killed a policeman, volunteers to give Mike her own money. This is when the narration becomes omniscient for the second time. As Margaret approaches the taxi where Mike and Joey wait for her to hand them her money, the film cuts to a shot of the two con men. Just before Margaret opens the door Mike utters: "Funny how things happen sometimes," a phrase that seems to have an ambiguous meaning. Although the film's narration encourages the spectator to interpret the above statement within the context of the narrative information until that point (that the con

men really lost the borrowed money and, for that reason, their life depends on Margaret's willingness to replace the lost money with her own savings), Mike's remark can be easily interpreted in other ways. The rather emotionless delivery of the line by Mike coupled with the knowledge the spectator has from the previous omniscient moment, might suggest that the con men succeeded in taking more money from Margaret than originally anticipated (in the poker game sequence).

It is only in the third scene from the end [Scene 32] that the spectator, along with Margaret, discovers that every single event was part of an elaborate set up to con her out of her money. One can argue, therefore, that the second instance of omniscient narration was, at best, ambiguous (and at worst unreliable), and for that reason its effect stands at odds with the actual function of omniscient narration in film, as a mechanism that privileges the spectator through the distribution of narrative knowledge that is not accessible to the main character. In this light, the film's narration becomes part of the con-game. Indeed, it becomes the con-game itself, by asking us for our trust in the unfolding of the story, only to cheat us by:

- (a) making us believe that Margaret's perspective is adequate
- (b) denying us access to the con-men's perspectives
- (c) providing us with ambiguous information in the two instances when we think that we are privileged.

Despite the above tricks, the film's narration does not entirely prevent the spectator from anticipating the course of narrative events. As I demonstrated earlier, it provides the spectator with opportunities to question the 'truth' of particular pieces of narrative information (for instance the idea that Margaret was responsible for Mike's defeat in the poker game scene). More importantly, though, narration also compromises substantially the level of the spectator's alignment with the main protagonist and, consequently, invites them to be more aware of the real nature of the narrative events than Margaret. Therefore, although the camera follows Margaret from the very beginning of the film to the very end (with the exception of the two omniscient moments), on very few occasions does the narration provide the spectator with what Murray Smith calls "perceptual alignment" with and "subjective access" to the protagonist (most often materialised through the use of optical point of view). Narration privileges instead "spatial attachment", which Smith defines as "the capacity of the narration to restrict itself to the actions of a single character or to move more freely among the spatio-temporal paths of two or more characters" (1994, p 41). The privileging of spatial attachment to the character of Margaret over perceptual alignment with her clearly suggests the narration's intentions to keep the spectator's degree of engagement with the heroine to a relatively low level. As a matter of fact, in the published script of House of Games (1988), Mamet prescribes only fifteen uses of point of view structures for the whole film (five of them clearly marked as Margaret's point of view shots), a surprisingly low number given the film's rigorous adherence to restricted narration. On the other hand, terms such as *cut-ins*, *inserts* and *angles* are abundant in the screenplay and signal the foregrounding of narrative information only for the eyes of the spectator, despite Margaret's physical

presence in every scene. In other words, narration and film style attempt to position the spectator as a relatively detached from the main protagonist observer, even though we are spatially attached to Margaret from the very beginning.

The actual reasons behind this strategy have to do with questions of allegiance and with the fact that the spectator would be uncomfortable allied with a protagonist that, by the end of the film, (a) commits a murder and (b) realises that she is a driven thief, actions that are morally reprehensible. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I would also like to emphasise that by keeping the extent of alignment with the main character at a relatively low level, the film's narration ensures a degree of distance between the spectator and the character (irrespective of the moral judgments that the spectator is called to make). Narration in House of Games, then, invites the spectator to assume a more critical standpoint from which he/she witnesses the narrative events and even to anticipate some of the twists and turns in the plot. Returning again to the poker game sequence as an example (a sequence made of 134 shots), one can notice only two point of view shots attributed to Margaret. On the other hand, the scene is full of cut-ins and inserts, shots that are not filtered by Margaret's perspective but "deployed with such stilted emphasis" that, as Virginia Wright Wexman suggests, "[they] seem hyperbolic" (1993, p 208). If one adds the absence of clear establishing shots, the use of unmotivated camera movement, as well as the pattern of editing I discussed earlier, one can safely argue that narration – restricted as it is – does indeed offer the spectator a variety of clues with regard to what Mamet calls 'scenic truth,' before the protagonist discovers it.

If the ways in which narration foregrounds the general idea of the set up are somewhat subtle and perhaps identifiable only by a cine-literate spectator,⁶⁸ the actors' performance seems to foreground this idea in a much more noticeable manner. In particular, the mode of dialogue delivery in House of Games is so markedly different from the mode of dialogue delivery in the average contemporary Hollywood film that it is impossible for it to go unnoticed. At the core of such a mode is the actors' particular manner of uttering the words of the script, which many critics have described as "emotionless" or "flat" for want of a better description.⁶⁹ Whether emotionless, flat or something else, such a mode of delivery seems to allow Mamet's words to maintain their inherent sonic force, as if the importance lies with the words uttered and not with how they are uttered. This distinct mode of dialogue delivery has its roots in Constantine Stanislavsky's 'system' and in the ways in which Mamet interpreted it and attempted to transport it to the medium of cinema.

According to Mamet, Stanislavsky's 'system' strived "to *free* the actor from extraneous considerations and permit him or her to turn his or her concentration to the objective, which [was] not 'this performance' but the *meaning* of the play" (1994a, p 203 original italics). Like the other Stanislavskian concept of the 'scenic truth,' which needs to be foregrounded by stylistic choices that do not necessarily conform to dominant conventions of realism, the 'system' was seen by Mamet as an approach to acting that starts, again, from the meaning of the play and not from such external notions as how the actor interprets the character that other Stanislavsky-influenced approaches such as the 'method' preached.⁷⁰ However, Stanislavsky's emphasis on the written text as a guide for

the actor's performance in the theatre is in direct contrast to the ways in which Hollywood cinema has traditionally dealt with questions of performance. As Maltby and Craven argued, acting in American cinema has traditionally relied on notions of 'sincerity,' 'truth' and 'transparency' (1995, p 247) and consequently has never had any particular consideration about central ideas and scenic truths that any screenplay might suggest.⁷¹ This necessarily means that any attempt to transport Stanislavsky's system (in the ways Mamet understood it) to the American cinema would go against a long-standing tradition of acting based on predominantly realist conventions. This explains why acting in House of Games and in other Mamet films strikes one immediately as artificial (even though, as I shall discuss in Chapter Three, Mamet considers this type of acting the only true approach to performance).

On the other hand though, and since the central idea of the story revolves around a set up and the artificial world that Margaret inhabits, one could argue that the (seeming) artificiality of acting complements perfectly the story of the film as well as Mamet's often clichéd and stereotypical language.⁷² As a matter of fact, the film is so full of clichéd proverbs, unfinished sentences and instances of alliteration that a more 'mainstream' approach to acting might have destroyed the film's convincing unity of form and content.⁷³ But since the acting style in House of Games differs so substantially from the realism of mainstream acting, it draws attention to itself despite its organic unity with the film's narrative structure and style.

The importance of acting in House of Games is also charged by the choice of actors who,

as I mentioned earlier, were in their vast majority close collaborators of Mamet from his work on the American stage. Joe Mantegna, Mike Nussbaum, J.T. Walsh and especially William H. Macy,⁷⁴ had previously participated in the majority of Mamet's theatre productions and along with the playwright/director had worked to devise an approach to stage acting that also came to inform performances in House of Games and at least in the three next films Mamet wrote and directed.⁷⁵ To return to a point I made earlier, their collective contribution to the aesthetics of the film surpasses their more 'narrow' individual role as actors in a film production and promotes them to an integral part of the style of the film.⁷⁶

Conclusion

As this initial discussion of House of Games has demonstrated, there are a number of issues that point towards a rather awkward relationship between the film in question and the theoretical frameworks that the labels 'classical' and 'post-classical' Hollywood cinema imply.

The film's independent status, primarily exemplified by the financier/distributor's 'hands-off' approach to creative decisions during the production process, allowed the filmmaker to transport his distinct dramatic approach from theatre to the medium of cinema and therefore maintain his idiosyncratic 'voice,' which had made him one of the most important contemporary American playwrights. In terms of production practices, this creative freedom manifested mainly in the way the division of labour was arranged at the top echelon of the production crew. This is where a number of creative players were

allowed a much more significant input in the production process, to the extent that the term 'collaborative business' (a term that normally – and ironically – designates a strictly hierarchical and detailed division of labour in Hollywood cinema) was put into question. For that reason, the film's mode of production can be seen as different from the production mode that, according to Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, exemplifies classical (American) cinema.

More importantly, though, the above industrial conditions allowed the articulation of a film style that conveyed a very different aesthetic compared to what Bordwell et al. have called "the classical aesthetic." In particular, the use of film style in House of Games conveys the ideas of constructedness and artificiality as it systematically affirms that Margaret's world is an illusion and that all her actions are mediated by the will of forces that remain unknown until the revelation scene. Furthermore, the film's narration performs a variety of functions that clearly support the above narrative pattern but with the additional provision of subtly teasing the spectator about the truth of the narrative events. Like a good confidence game where the future victim is willingly prepared to offer their confidence to the trickster, believing that they control their actions as well as the rules of the transaction, narration in House of Games places the main character and the spectator in a position of firm narrative knowledge. It does this only to undermine this process methodically and confirm visually the absolute value of an axiom already articulated by Mike within the diegesis, namely: "do not trust anyone." In this light, Joe Mantegna's view of the film as "the best American foreign film" (quoted in Forsberg, 1987; cited in Ryan, 1988, p 271) might be a more suitable label to attach to House of

CHAPTER TWO

THE AUTEUR IN THE NEW HOLLYWOOD: HAVE THINGS CHANGED?

I am not sure what an auteur is.

I don't know anything about my style as a director. I do the best I can.

(David Mamet, quoted in Romney, 1999, p 2)

Introduction

This chapter addresses questions of authorship in Mamet's cinema from two different perspectives. Firstly, the chapter is interested in questions of authorship as these arise in the textual organisation of promotional material that accompanies the release of a feature film in contemporary American cinema. The main focal point here is the film trailer as a representative sample of an increasingly large number of marketing strategies that also include film posters, television and radio spots, publicity stills, press kits, cast and crew interviews, 'behind the scenes' documentaries, 'the making of ...' featurettes and, more recently, web pages devoted to individual films.

Specifically, this chapter will discuss Mamet as an auteur by examining trailers for the films he has scripted and directed.¹ This approach commences from the position that distribution companies use film authorship as an industrial category to increase the market value of individual filmmakers, in a largely undifferentiated media marketplace. In this light, promotional material and marketing strategies become extremely significant texts in the production of the author.² This, consequently, means that authorship here is not sought in the film-text; instead, it is negotiated through

intertext, regardless of whether a filmmaker could be constructed as an auteur through more traditional, textually-determined processes.

This strand of auteur criticism, however, could potentially reveal ‘a different author,’ an author whose presence is assigned institutionally and which makes sense only in light of distributors’ attempts to market their product. For this reason, the second half of this chapter will be dedicated to a more traditional approach to questions of film authorship. This approach, which locates the author in the text, will demonstrate that there are indeed discrepancies between the ways Mamet’s ‘presence’ is utilised by distribution companies and the ways his authorship is inscribed in the text of his films.

The Film Auteur in the New Hollywood: (One of) the Context(s)

Although film history has yet to provide us with a clear demarcation between the end of ‘the Old Hollywood’ and the beginning of the ‘New Hollywood’, auteur criticism has adeptly addressed this issue. In the second edition of The Cinema Book, Pam Cook has correctly noted that “as was ever the case auteurism continues to be practiced in different ways and with different consequences” (1999, p 312), a statement that underscores the existence of different agendas in the practice of auteurism. More significantly though, it reveals the chameleon-like quality of auteur criticism to adapt to different discourses as these emerge and evolve from the study of film. It is mainly the latter attribute that has been responsible for the shaping of various auteur theories, including a particular strand, industrial auteurism, which this chapter examines. Its emergence has chronologically coincided with and been marked

by the significant scholarly attention afforded to blockbuster films, within the context of New Hollywood cinema. It follows then, that questions of authorship in contemporary Hollywood cinema were destined also to take into consideration advertising and marketing, since part of the size and scope of a blockbuster film is certainly determined by the size and scope of its marketing campaign in addition to the huge income it generates.

The production of the above discourse was, to a great extent, founded on arguments that supported the formation of a new industrial and institutional framework within which American cinema has gradually started to operate. Even if the exact date of the commencement of what has been known as 'The New Hollywood' is, as mentioned earlier, still open to debate, its key characteristics have been well-documented in a large volume of academic work mainly produced during the 1990s. These characteristics, which were outlined in the previous chapter, include: the adoption of the package-unit system of production, the dismantling of the studio system and the shift of the majors to control of financing and distribution, the rise of independent film production, the conglomeration of the film industry and the increasing significance of the talent agencies in the process of dealmaking.

Influenced in particular by one fundamental discursive element of the New Hollywood, "the disappearance of the self-contained studio, and the transitory combination of labor force and means of production" (Bordwell et al, 1985, p 332) that the adoption of the package unit system implied, auteur criticism attempted to locate and define the markings of authorial presence in Hollywood films anew. The increased visibility afforded to the talent (directors, actors, screenwriters and,

arguably, in recent years editors, directors of cinematography and production designers) as a consequence of the package unit system has gradually provided key film craftsmen with an added value. Besides their traditional roles in the production process, therefore, some film contributors have also become brand names. These can be exploited by the distributor during the marketing of the product and can, arguably, function as anchors of meaning during the reception process of their films by various audiences. If the addition of these multiple layers of meaning, which the talent has been bestowed upon, is not exactly a new phenomenon – after all, stars and film producers (such as David O. Selznick and Sam Goldwyn) had always been the major selling point of a film in the institutional apparatus of studio Hollywood – the ascendance of the director in the list marks the beginning of auteurism's interest in this area. As a result of this increased visibility of the film director in the eyes of the cinema-going public, recent auteur studies have thrown the spotlight to industrial and economic parameters that have influenced all stages of the filmmaking business. More importantly, for the purposes of this chapter, such studies have also stretched to embrace considerably less commercial filmmakers whose work sits rather uneasily within the blockbuster ethos of the New Hollywood discourse.

If, in the words of David Bordwell, the old studio practices “often [let] the filmmaker choose how to be redundant but seldom how redundant to be” (Bordwell et al, 1985, p 5) and the studio system defined the individual employee, the new institutional and economic organisation that the term New Hollywood has signified seems to be substantially more relaxed. Liberated by the constraints of studio tutelage the individual filmmaker in the New Hollywood has often indulged in personal projects, which have resulted in the development of occasionally innovative filmmaking. This

novel practice has, for some critics, helped expand the language of cinema as well as increase the box-office receipts. As Henry Jenkins has observed:

By treating filmmakers as independent contractors, the new production system places particular emphasis on the development of idiosyncratic style which helps to increase the market value of individual directors rather than treating them as interchangeable parts. ... Innovations by individual directors are soon duplicated industry-wide and become parts of intrinsic norms of specific genres (1995, p 115).

It is the filmmaker, then, that is now in a position to define (and defy) the system, especially when the identity of the old studios as brand names and trademarks of specific types of film has declined in an irrecoverable way.³ Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the newest strand of auteur criticism would examine style, solely in terms of individual expression; as an articulation of a director's idiosyncrasy that can potentially generate new norms which, in the final analysis, help conglomerate organisations accrue their profits.⁴ Equally predictable was the critical attention directed to filmmakers such as Coppola, Scorsese, De Palma, Lucas and Spielberg, mainly because of their success in both creating a personal style and, more significantly, in producing super-hits.⁵ For all these reasons, it was not coincidental that consecutive with the movie brats' explosion in American cinema, Joseph Gelmis published the first book-length study that approached the Hollywood director as a brand name, aptly titled The Film Director as Superstar (1970).

The new institutional arrangements in American cinema then allowed individual filmmakers a degree of public recognition that had normally been a prerogative of film stars only. In this light, the marketing departments of the majors began utilising film authorship as an industrial category (in the same way they have done with genres and, in the past, with studio names) in order to market successfully and promote films. It rapidly became standard practice to place the name of the director above the title (both in the marquee and in the film credits). Additionally, promotional material such as film trailers increasingly started using the filmmaker's name in an attempt to appeal to film-savvy audiences.⁶ One of the results of such a practice (significant for this chapter) was that distributors started using this marketing hook even with non-commercial, noticeably idiosyncratic filmmakers⁷ whose work could be considered 'unreleasable' had industrial authorship not become an effective marketing tool.⁸ The latest version of auteur criticism, then, attempted to theorise the underpinnings of what became known as 'industrial auteurism' and, naturally, issues of advertising and marketing assumed a more central role in the ensuing debates as those were elaborated primarily by Timothy Corrigan (1991), Jon Lewis (1995) and Justin Wyatt (1996).

Corrigan and Lewis, in particular, attempted to construct a critical argument that located questions of film authorship strictly within the new industrio-economic context of contemporary Hollywood cinema. Despite their different approaches to the area, which, interestingly, are marked by an examination of the discourses surrounding Coppola's work, they nevertheless advanced a similar argument that advocates the significance of the film director as an extra-textual agency with the power to anchor the critical reception of a film.⁹ This novel concept of the extra-

textual authorial agency is fundamentally different from the textual ones advanced in earlier phases of auteur criticism. Consequently, it produces different kinds of arguments that take into consideration the increasingly complicated relation between audiences and film-related forms of media (magazines, interviews, reports 'on location', reviews and 'the making of ...' featurette), through which a celebrity director is aggressively (self) - promoted.¹⁰ As a result, various new forms of entry to a discussion about a film's reception are created. In the process, however, this new approach to cinematic authorship also examines economic and industrial parameters in film production, distribution and even exhibition (the size of the budget, the number of screens that the film is released on, box-office figures, the salaries of the key players etc), as these influence the ways audiences consume films.

The strength of both Lewis and, especially, Corrigan's arguments stems from their understanding that the filmic text cannot be examined any more independently from the commercial and economic imperatives that characterise contemporary Hollywood cinema. These imperatives include contractual obligations of a film's key players (director and stars) to promote the film through an increasingly large number of media outlets. Through the filmmaker's engagement in public relations, audiences become familiar with the individual's background, interests, personal life, position in the film industry and, finally, comments on the film itself. This extra-textual entity consciously guides the audiences' reception of the film to such an extent that, as Corrigan argues, the film does not even need to be seen (1991, p 106). In other words, the 'industrial auteur' assumes the role of a self-explanatory label for his/her film.

The above position, however, presents some problems. Firstly, it tends to erase the differences between independent and mainstream Hollywood as it presents a homogeneous Hollywood marketing apparatus which uses the industrial category of the director as an auteur in a uniform manner. Contemporary American independent cinema, however (despite its complicated affinities with mainstream Hollywood),¹¹ clearly depends upon a variety of marketing and promotional strategies (festivals, screenings in colleges, limited releases in art-house theatre circuits). These, in many cases, tend to foreground firstly, the independent 'spirit and status' of the films – another increasingly utilised industrial category – and then any information about the film's author; and this is in a field where the notion of the director as an auteur arguably assumes a more straightforward and traditional function.¹²

The most important problem with Corrigan and (to a lesser extent) Lewis's position, however, is the proposed relationship between the auteur as a marketing strategy for the promotion of a film and as an extra-textual discursive construct that frames the film's reception. This, for Corrigan at least, is consequential, the former guarantees the latter. In fact, he clearly argues: "[the existence of an extra-textual agency] guarantee[s] a relationship between audience and movie in which an intentional and authorial agency governs, as a kind of brand name vision that precedes and succeeds the film, the way that movie is seen and received" (1991, p 102). This relationship, however, is not as straightforward as Corrigan assumes. Justin Wyatt has argued for a larger over-determination of economic factors, of which marketing is only one parameter and, for that reason, has to be examined along with others such as dealmaking, financing, distribution and exhibition (1996, p 52). These, of course, change from film to film. As a result, the construction of auteurs becomes a process

which is constantly redefined (1996, p 52) and which can influence the reception of a filmmaker's work in different ways, each time.¹³ In Wyatt's words:

In sum, economic considerations influence each step in the life cycle of the film: from the decision to greenlight a project on the basis of a marketing potential, through the choice of the director, which is related to the director's commercial status within the industry, to the advertising and promotion of film, which color the reception of the text by filmgoers. In this manner, economic forces impact both on the production and reception of the film. Of course, the extent to which such economic determinants shape the construction of both the auteur and the text varies according to factors such as methods of financing, distribution marketing and exhibition (1996, p 52).

The brand of industrial auteurism that Corrigan and Lewis have advocated can be also criticised from a different angle, one that considers the problematic nature of the relation between advertising and reception. As Janet Staiger reminds us in her seminal essay on the production of film advertising, "asking and answering questions about the production of advertising does not answer questions about its reception" (1990, p 4). This position challenges substantially the consequential and largely uncomplicated relation between advertising and reception that [Corrigan's] industrial auteurism clearly advances. For this reason, this chapter does not assume that the construction and presentation of Mamet as an auteur in the promotional material for his films signifies automatically the audiences' endorsement of the distributors' specific marketing intentions. This chapter does accept, however, that institutionally

assigned authorship *could potentially* guide an audience to a specific understanding of Mamet's films.

Despite the above critiques however, 'industrial auteurism' remains an important development in auteur criticism. This is mainly for two reasons: firstly, because, unlike earlier textually-based approaches, it examines questions of authorship within an industrio-economic context and, therefore, grounds such questions in history. Secondly, it allows the critic to explore the possibility that authorship is produced in multiple ways, in which case an institutionally assigned, intertext-based authorship can be potentially very different from a textually-determined one. As my discussion will shortly demonstrate, a cluster of institutional and economic parameters (some of which are not directly related to his films) has been responsible for the creation of two distinct articulations of Mamet's authorship in American cinema. One denied Mamet the status of a coherent extra-textual agency that could anchor the reception of his films, while the other aggressively promoted Mamet as a brand name with very specific connotations. These articulations are clearly seen in the trailers and posters for all the films he scripted and directed since 1987, and which I shall discuss shortly. On the other hand, both these expressions of Mamet's institutionally assigned authorship avoided any references to his 'idiosyncratic' use of style and the 'anti-realist' aesthetics of his films. These, suppressed by film advertising markers of Mamet's authorship, can be located only through formal analysis, which is conducted in the second half of this chapter.

Before any discussion about Mamet's authorship, however, I would like to offer some important observations on the textuality of the various forms of film advertising and film trailers in particular

Reading Film Advertising and the significance of the film trailer

If advertising, according to Janet Staiger, has served the capitalist imperatives of stimulating, directing and controlling demand for a product through industrially produced representations (1990, p 3), film advertising is automatically placed in an unusual position. This is because the industry film advertising represents is by definition in the business of creating representations. In other words, the film industry is characterised by a more powerful correlation between the product it makes and its representation through advertising, to the extent, that various forms of film advertising can assume formal elements and convey aesthetic effects that mirror the formal organisation of the film-product advertised. It follows, then, that the film trailer, which is literally a short film about a feature film, is uniquely suitable for a type of analysis usually reserved for the actual film-text. Although a formal analysis of film trailers does not in any way guarantee the same results in terms of authorship construction that a similar exercise on the actual films themselves would, it can nevertheless provide findings that support alternative, complementary and even contradictory, articulations of authorship.¹⁴ For this reason, I deem a close examination of film trailers a very constructive exercise in itself but, especially, when it is also accompanied by an analysis of the films.¹⁵

With the possible exception of television advertising, the film trailer constitutes a distributor's best opportunity to sell a movie to a demographically desirable and,

more significantly, captive audience. This audience, according to industry estimates, “registers five times more retention than TV” or the equivalent of 80% recall (Hayes, 1999, p 9; Bannan, 2001, p 10). Although the film trailer has been employed as a significant form of advertising since the late 1910s (Staiger, 1990, p 26) and has assumed various formal and structural characteristics, only recently - possibly due to the rise in cinema attendances in the last decade - has it been recognised as a crucial advertising strategy.¹⁶ The motion picture industry’s new interest in the film trailer lies in the belated recognition that “the audience for trailers is by definition a moviegoing audience,” a remark that underscores the trailer’s premier significance as a vehicle for the production and dissemination of a plethora of discourses that surround the advertised film, one of which has increasingly been the film’s author.¹⁷ Strategically placed between non-film advertising and feature presentation, the trailer bridges the world of advertising with the world of film, provides the audience with ‘free samples’ of coming attractions and whets their appetite for the main feature. For all those reasons, there is a distinct element of pleasure associated with the viewing of film trailers. This pleasure is created both on a contextual level (the trailer adds to the general enjoyment of the in-theatre experience) and on a textual level (by the form and structure of the trailer which, as suggested earlier, mirrors the film text).

In the list of promotional material that the distributor can employ for an effective marketing of a film, the trailer is the first to appear, before other forms of advertising such as the film poster and the television spot reach the public eye; and since it allows audiences to experience a film’s sample directly, it becomes crucial in determining audience response to the film (Durie et al, 1993, p 136). Film advertising in the form of trailers serves four main objectives, as John Durie et al have observed:

- (a) to create awareness of the title
- (b) to impart an overall impression of the film to its potential audience
- (c) to ensure that the audience *is aware of the film's director* and of the main stars, in cases where such names will help sell the picture (emphasis added)
- (d) to create want to see among the potential audience

(1993, p 136; my italics)

All the above functions of the film trailer are achieved through specific arrangements of the trailer's formal elements, which both mirror and, crucially, also subvert the formal organisation of the feature film it promotes. As Mary Beth Haralovich and Cathy Root Klaprat have put it: "Trailers and films share aspects of the cinematic institution but they organise them differently. Trailers present in 90 seconds the material that films will take 90 minutes to work over" (1982, p 66). It follows then that film trailers are organised on the basis of a specific formal arrangement that, largely, aims to fulfil the four above-mentioned objectives. The trailer's textual composition depends on the different ways it inscribes narrativisation compared to a feature film. In the words of Haralovich and Klaprat:

Hollywood films are characterised by continuity in narrative, space and time. Narrative operates to work over the questions established by enigmas until closure and a return to a narrative stability. Hermeneutics are much more strongly marked in trailers than in films. The emphasis on enigmas deforms narrative continuity. Trailers are, in fact, constructed by a series of ruptures to an implied narrative homogeneity by subverting the linearity of causality. In the

films...the causal chain is clear and complete. In the trailers, the causal chain is elided (1982, p 66).

It is within the framework of their textual organisation that film trailers can raise questions of authorship. This is through their particular formal configuration and the modes of spectator address that they employ as the discussion of the trailers for David Mamet's films will demonstrate.

The construction of Mamet's authorship

Since his initial foray into cinema with the screenplay for Bob Rafelson's The Postman Always Rings Twice (1981) David Mamet has scripted and directed nine films. He adapted four of his plays for the screen, had another of his plays (Sexual Perversity in Chicago) made into a film without his involvement (About Last Night ..., 1986) and scripted a significant number of films for other directors that have been distributed by the majors.¹⁸ This prolific career in cinema has been supplemented and, arguably, exceeded by his work in American theatre, where since 1972 Mamet has written and (frequently directed) a large number of plays, and by his work in the literary arts, where he has published several volumes of essays, theoretical treatises about cinema and theatre, novels and poetry. Additionally, Mamet has scripted television shows such as Hill Street Blues and has occasionally worked as an academic in Yale and Columbia universities, teaching creative writing and film respectively. This voluminous body of work, which ranges from the literary and performing arts to film and theatre criticism and mass entertainment, suggests Mamet's status as a 'celebrity' in various fields, an author-name that has addressed different audiences through different media and establishes him as a marketable

commodity with the power to attract a specific segment of the public in his every venture through various media forms.

In American cinema, film distribution companies have employed the name 'Mamet' in four distinct ways:

- Through tentative brief references, which are subordinate to more aggressive forms of star and genre-based marketing (House of Games, Homicide)
- Through an emphasis on his renowned capacity as a genre screenwriter for major motion pictures (Things Change)
- As a critically acclaimed playwright (Glengarry Glen Ross)
- As a critically acclaimed writer/director (Oleanna, and, in particular, The Spanish Prisoner, The Winslow Boy, State and Main and Heist)

As my analysis of the trailers for the above films will demonstrate, Mamet, the director, has become a brand-name for the film industry only in his last five films to date (Oleanna, The Spanish Prisoner, The Winslow Boy, State and Main and Heist), an argument that essentially leaves a substantial body of work prior to Oleanna under an 'unstable' authorship. As a result, I tend to agree with Wyatt's argument that film authorship in contemporary Hollywood is a process of construction, subject to redefinitions, renegotiations and re-readings, which are influenced by several determinants, and especially industrio-economic ones.

The beginnings of a brand-name: the first period.

The trailer for House of Games attempts to promote the film as a thriller. From the very beginning, there is a montage of shots and images that foreground a series of potentially dangerous situations, mostly taking place in dark areas, while upbeat non-diegetic music helps intensify the audience's experience. Very soon, a voice-of-God narrator introduces 'the players' ("a woman of one world seduced by the thrills of another discovering danger in the ultimate high") and the rules of 'the game' the characters/players are seen to be playing. In this manner, the film is pitched as the story of a woman who engages herself in a dangerous game whose rules she ignores. The trailer finishes with the foregrounding of the names of the film's stars (Lindsey Crouse and Joe Mantegna) in "David Mamet's House of Games", the first and only instance when the filmmaker's name is mentioned. This essentially means that the film's director (and screenwriter) does not function as a strong marketing hook since his name is relegated to the end of the trailer with no other hint about his previous work in Hollywood cinema (Academy Award-nominated screenwriter for The Verdict) or his work for the theatre. In the trailer, therefore, House of Games is promoted as a fast-paced, action packed noir-thriller and the name Mamet becomes a metonym for a *metteur en scène*, a craftsman who delivers a conventional genre piece for mass consumption (which, in hindsight, is a totally misleading view).¹⁹

Conversely, (and even when the trailer actually advertises a totally different type of film), the genre based approach to advertising by Orion's marketing team signals the distributor's commitment to release 'idiosyncratic', or 'esoteric' films, that other studios would not even dare greenlight, given the rules of the film business game and the height of economic stakes in 1980s Hollywood.

Despite the very good reviews,²⁰ the poor American box-office of House of Games (\$2,585,000) did not particularly alter Mamet's clout as a marketable commodity.²¹ However, before the release of his second film (Things Change) as a writer/director in October 1988, Mamet found himself at the centre of public and Hollywood attention due to the critical and financial success of Paramount's The Untouchables (1987), which he had scripted (and for which he was nominated for a Writers Guild award for best screenplay based on material from another medium). More importantly, Mamet attracted even more public attention from the unprecedented media publicity and financial triumph of the Broadway production of his play Speed-the-Plow (1988). Although it was his contribution to the De Palma gangster film that was directly utilised as a hook for the marketing of Things Change, I would like to stay briefly with his Broadway play and examine the role it played in Mamet's subsequent career in American cinema.

The play is about two Hollywood producers in the middle echelon of the industry's hierarchy, who specialise in the production of trashy, mass-consumption films. When a temporary secretary is sent as short-term replacement for their assistant, she takes the opportunity to convince one of the producers to greenlight a 'serious', though financially risky, project. As soon as the other producer finds out about his partner's decision to produce 'a different film', he intervenes and persuades him to 'come to his senses'. The secretary gets fired and the two men continue their business as usual, focusing on films which promote harmless entertainment.

The deliberately acerbic tone of this satire of the Hollywood industry and, in particular, the image of American film as harmless entertainment that the play conveyed, found their way to a very large audience, who were initially attracted to the production because of Madonna's presence as the female lead. Literally overnight, David Mamet became a celebrity, a savvy Hollywood insider, who knows the tricks of the trade and is not afraid to criticise the industry within which he also earns a living. Additionally, Madonna's participation signalled the playwright's ability to write plays that can attract stars of global calibre (in past years stars such as Al Pacino, Robert Duvall and Peter Weller had appeared in various productions of American Buffalo and The Woods).²² For this reason, when Columbia Pictures released the trailer for Things Change they tried to capitalise on his capacity as a writer-celebrity, despite the fact that they followed Orion's example in their overall marketing strategy. This means that Columbia marketed the film primarily as a genre piece, in this case a buddy-movie with overtones of gangster elements aptly summarised in the tagline: "Bonnie & Clyde ... Butch & Sundance ... Gino and Gerry???".

The trailer for Things Change commences with a reworking of a joke that appears in the film. A voice-of-God narrator and large white letters on a black screen inform the spectator that 72% of the people arrested in the United States have 'organised crime ties'. "One wonders", the extra-diegetic narrator continues, "why don't they get rid of their ties!"²³ This linguistic pun is followed by a jazzy soundtrack as the narrator invites the spectator to "meet two unlikely friends" in an unforgettable weekend at the mafia's expense. The imagery consists of a montage of shots that highlight gambling, showgirls, Roman baths and life on the fast lane until a shot depicts Don Ameche

losing a large amount of money in a casino. “Things Change,” he utters emphatically, and his words (and title of the film) appear on a black screen. After that point, the trailer abandons the Las Vegas iconography and concentrates on the potential for comedy by juxtaposing shots of what the protagonists desire (low profile vacations) and shots of situations they have dragged themselves into (which get everyone’s attention) which always connote dangerous moments. Towards the end of the trailer, the narrator utters: “From the writer of The Untouchables comes a rather unconventional view of unorganised crime”, thus employing Mamet’s name as a brand-name that can guarantee the unfolding of a good (though unconventional) gangster story, perhaps targeting the same audience that enjoyed the Elliot Ness versus Al Capone saga. This framework, however, operates to the detriment of Mamet’s capacity as the director of the film, since the trailer chooses to ignore that matter completely and closes with a focus on the stars of the film, “Don Ameche and Joe Mantegna in Things Change.” In other words, Mamet’s authorship is foregrounded only in terms of story construction and of his proven savvy with the gangster genre.

After the mixed reviews and the disappointing box-office revenues of Things Change (\$3,527,886)²⁴ Mamet concentrated for the following three years on his drama career and returned to filmmaking in 1991 with Homicide.²⁵ The film featured a rather unconventional detective/conspiracy theory story where the main hero (played again by Joe Mantegna) attempts to rediscover his Jewish origins (and in the process betrays everything he stands for), when he is assigned the investigation of a strange murder case of an old Jewish woman. Mamet’s protracted absence from filmmaking accompanied by the difficult subject matter of the film led J&M Entertainment, the

independent company that distributed the film, to resort to a variety of marketing strategies. These included a strong emphasis on the detective film genre (which means that the conspiracy theory sub-plot was suppressed), but mostly on Joe Mantegna, who, during Mamet's break from filmmaking, had established himself as a versatile character actor with credits in Coppola's The Godfather III and Woody Allen's Alice (both in 1990). The trailer for Homicide, therefore, consists of several rapidly edited shots that foreground moments of conflict, whilst an extra-diegetic narrator recites the rather long film tagline: "Bobby Gold is a cop. A good cop. But, tonight he will betray his friends, disgrace the force, and commit an act of violence because he believes it is the only thing to do." Accordingly, the trailer closes with the phrase "Joe Mantegna in David Mamet's Homicide," though the emphasis is placed on actor and title rather than the film's director.

The significance of Mantegna's lead in the film is further underscored in the movie poster for Homicide, as well as in the VHS cover for the film, which, to a great extent, mirror the trailer's emphasis on the film's star. In particular, the poster features an overwhelming close up of the actor's face against a black background accompanied by the phrase "JOE MANTEGNA IN DAVID MAMET'S HOMICIDE" in large, striking red capital fonts at the lower-middle part of the poster [fig 1]. Similarly, the cover for the film's British VHS release figures a close up shot of the star's face, which takes up almost a quarter of the cover's space, leaving another quarter for the film's tagline, title and the above phrase, while in the lower half a spectacular explosion suggests the film's genre. Interestingly, in the sparsely designed lower half the distributor has also included the information that Mamet won the London Film Critics Award for best screenplay as well as a review from The

Express (“It’s a cracking thriller”) that complements the explosive action that the film promises. Although both the above features are missing from the trailer, they nevertheless do not substantially destabilise the conditions for the production of authorship in the promotional material. Their contribution to the discourse of authorship resides solely in their additional emphasis on the storytelling skills of the filmmaker, which are strictly located within genre boundaries and, to a certain degree, extend the discourse created in Things Change.



Figure 1

The Poster for Homicide

The poor box-office receipts (a little less than \$3 million)²⁶ for the third time in Mamet’s brief career as a filmmaker clearly point towards the hypothesis that by 1991 there was a distinct schism in Mamet’s position in American cinema, which to a degree informed the public’s lukewarm reception of his work. On the one hand, there was Mamet the screenwriter, a hot Hollywood property who could deliver distinguished scripts for mainstream genre studio productions accompanied with solid

(and occasionally spectacular) box-office results.²⁷ Conversely, there was Mamet, a marginal writer/director who played with the conventions of different genres (thriller, gangster, buddy-movie, conspiracy theory and detective genres) and opted for medium/small-calibre stars who under no circumstances could 'open' a film.

The former 'Mamet' had already established a position of power in the American film industry, whereas the latter 'Mamet' (who, arguably, existed due to the success of the former) was relegated to the periphery of Hollywood, working with low budgets and (with the exception of Things Change) away from the majors. For that reason, by 1992, the name David Mamet could not possibly have signified a concrete reception framework for any of the films he collaborated on. Studio marketing strategies, therefore, dictated the suppression of his celebrity writer status in the critically and financially successful films he scripted, foreshadowing instead the presence of celebrity directors (Bob Rafelson, Sidney Lumet), directors with a distinct visual style (Neil Jordan) or both (Brian De Palma)²⁸ On the other hand, both the mainstream and independent distributors who marketed his films opted for campaigns that were based on the concepts of genre and stars, occasionally championing Mamet's writing skills and, in the case of Things Change, omitting his credit as a director from the film's promotional material.

Between the release of Homicide in October 1991 and his next directorial project Oleanna (November 1994), an adaptation of his own play, Mamet saw his status as a filmmaker growing bigger. This was largely due to another adaptation, this time of his 1984 Pulitzer Prize winner Glengarry Glen Ross for New Line Cinema. With a glorious history of record-breaking runs on and off Broadway, Glengarry Glen Ross

attracted A-List stars (Al Pacino, Alec Baldwin, Ed Harris) as well as several very respectable character actors (Kevin Spacey, Jonathan Pryce, Alan Arkin) and veteran Hollywood star Jack Lemmon, all accepting their parts with drastically reduced salaries. Although Mamet undertook the task of adapting his play for the screen, he did not wish to direct the film. Instead, James Foley was offered the job and almost exactly a year after the release of Homicide, Glengarry Glen Ross hit the screens (September 1992). Although, once again, the trailer for the film suppressed all but one reference to Mamet's authorship, I would argue that it constituted a transitory stage in the process of constructing Mamet as an undisputed auteur (in the institutional sense of the term). For this reason, it became a precursor for marketing Mamet's later films as auteur films.

The trailer starts with a relatively long take (for trailer standards), where Blake (Alec Baldwin) notifies a group of salesmen about his company's decision to fire all the employees who do not perform up to standard. The shot is intercut with explanatory intertitles, which establish the story as 'a game', where there can only be one winner.²⁹ Immediately after, the trailer is divided into two parts separated by the news of a burglary that has taken place in the company's office. In the first part, an extremely rapid editing of shots foregrounds fragments of conversation between the employees who seem to be planning a burglary of the office they work in, whereas the second part consists of slightly slower edited shots of the aftermath of the burglary, where the same people are accused by the police and accuse each other of the crime. When a policeman's voice is heard asking "what's your name?", the trailer highlights the film's main assets – its stars – in consequent close-ups: "Al Pacino, Jack Lemmon, Ed Harris, Alec Baldwin, Alan Arkin in the Pulitzer Prize Winner"

(the last phrase is also visible in bold red capital letters), followed by the title of the film in similar fonts.

Although Mamet's name is not mentioned in the trailer (except in the small letters that constitute the credits of the film), he is nevertheless indirectly inferred through the title of the play and the prize he was presented with at the expense of James Foley, the film's director who also remains uncredited. It is obvious that besides the ensemble cast, the real marketing value of the film is the award-winning script, which is represented both visually and aurally at the end of the trailer. Furthermore, the trailer for Glengarry Glen Ross is also pivotal for the redefinition of Mamet's authorship through its themes and motifs which clearly construct a distinct Mamet(ian) world. For instance the 'game' motif, established in House of Games, is utilised again in a forceful manner, whereas the theme of betrayal and its consequences (a structural element of Mamet's plays and key concept in the marketing of Homicide) is strongly underlined in the fragmented conversations of the characters. For that reason, the trailer for Glengarry Glen Ross is pitched as an illustrious script with distinct thematics served by the talents of superstars and well-respected actors, and directed by a nameless craftsman, who is unable (or unwilling) to make this great script 'his own.'

Despite the good reviews, the star studded cast and the Pulitzer winner script, Glengarry Glen Ross proved a modest failure with a gross of \$10,725,000.³⁰ This failure seemed to support the thesis that Mamet could only be perceived as an industrial commodity so long as he worked within clear-cut genre constraints (the film noir [The Postman Always Rings Twice] and the gangster film [The

Untouchables) supported by performances of stars of the calibre of Jack Nicholson or Robert De Niro and by the tens of millions of dollars of the major studios. If this was the case, then the decision of the Samuel Goldwyn Company to market his next project, an adaptation of his new Broadway hit Oleanna, as an auteur movie did not make any marketing sense, especially since at the time of its release the play was still at the peak of its fame (or notoriety) and its title carried substantial marketing force. Ironically and, intriguingly, despite the very limited release and the petty gross of \$124,693,³¹ Oleanna established the foundations of Mamet's 'commercial auteur' career, since, after the film, the filmmaker emerged as a brand-name that could potentially guarantee a reception framework for a specific audience. This audience is usually associated with film festivals, art-house cinema and film societies and came to be defined within the context of an increasingly expanding American independent cinema in the last decade of the twentieth century.

“From the acclaimed writer/director David Mamet”: The second period

Speaking from an industrio-economic point of view, the only common feature between Mamet's first career, unstable in terms of authorship construction, and his post-1994 auteur phase is his continuous affiliations with independent distributors, who have demonstrated a striking proliferation in a film industry otherwise utterly controlled by a handful of conglomerates.

This proliferation can be primarily explained as a counter-trend to cater for a significant audience, who grew tired of the majors' emphasis on action-adventure blockbusters and sequels of established franchises that tend to return more profits from merchandising than from theatre rentals. For that reason, a large number of

distributors have gradually created a strong independent sector within the American motion-picture industry, whose primary purpose is to provide diversity of product at a time when films by the majors have started to look and sound increasingly alike.

The formation of this distinct independent sector has been benefited by a constant expansion in the number of screens in the US (Hillier, 1994, p 22) and most notably, by the proliferation of distribution windows in the last 20 years which has caused an insatiable demand for film product. With the old studios confidently controlling the market through the stratospheric profits from blockbuster films and, especially, through ownership of almost every major distribution outlet, independent production gradually flourished. This was primarily under the tutelage of the old studios, which, on several occasions absorbed such companies when they became substantially successful (as the examples of Miramax and New Line Cinema clearly illustrated). Alternatively, the majors could opt for the formation of a Classics division, which through its relatively autonomous organisation and structure could ensure a major's presence in the independent sector, ready to reap the benefits from hits with a potential for crossover.³²

Whether studio-affiliated (or owned) or fully independent, the above distributors have succeeded in creating a significant niche market. They achieved this by targeting audiences from various categories of non-mainstream cinema (art-house, third world, exploitation, documentary, etc) and by occasionally flirting with mainstream cinema, therefore luring a significant number of regular Hollywood film viewers.³³ In the process, the independent distributors have created a powerful institutional apparatus (primarily exemplified by the huge number of film festivals – such as the increasingly

popular Sundance Film Festival – specialised theatre circuits, distributors’ associations and even an Independent Spirit Award body) which, for the time, seems to have put this type of cinema on the map of the American film market.

This context seems to provide the key features of Mamet’s second, ‘auteur’ phase. For, even when his prior career seemed to be defined within the independent circuit (independent distributors, participation in various festivals,³⁴ low budgets, absence of big stars), it was nevertheless always perceived as complementary to his more lucrative career as ‘a gun for hire’ by the majors. In other words, ‘Mamet’ as an author-name lacked clear defining characteristics that would eventually attract a desirable audience (for the films’ distributors), who would automatically respond to every ‘David Mamet film’. In this sense it is not coincidental that in his second ‘commercial auteur period’ (after providing the screenplay for Fox’s Hoffa [1992] and until 2001) Mamet did not script another film for a major studio.³⁵ Rumours have it, however, that he has worked on various studio projects without getting any credit for his services.³⁶ The above argument can also be supported by the fact that since Oleanna Mamet has been consistently marketed as an ‘auteur’ for the films he writes and directs, which essentially means that the construction of his authorship has become more stable compared to the period between 1987 and 1992.³⁷ It is now time to examine how this auteur career has been constructed through a discussion of the trailers and posters for his more recent films.

The trailer for Oleanna starts with the Samuel Goldwyn company logo, which gives way to the title “A Film by David Mamet”, thus immediately foregrounding Mamet’s name as a guarantor of a specific type of film. The importance of this marketing

decision can be stressed by the distributor's refusal to presage the title of the film (by that time the word Oleanna was familiar to virtually everyone that has had any knowledge of the contemporary American theatre repertoire) and hence hook the audience upon the word Oleanna. The trailer continues with a relatively fast montage of shots that reveal some information about the plot of the film, emphasising words and phrases uttered by the male character that could potentially carry an ambiguous meaning outside the film's context. Towards the middle of the trailer the first of the two taglines used in the clip appears on the black screen: "One man, one woman: two truths". This is followed by a second group of rapidly edited shots that focus, this time, on the female character's point of view (as she accuses her teacher of rape) and on scenes of conflict between the two characters.³⁸ The clip closes with very large capital fonts on a black screen reading: "DAVID MAMET OLEANNA", thus emphasising Mamet's authorship for a second time, and fades to black with the second tagline: "Whatever side you take ... You' re wrong".

It is obvious then that the Samuel Goldwyn Company's marketing strategy differs considerably from the one advanced by New Line Cinema in Glengarry Glen Ross (the other adaptation of Mamet's play in the early 1990s) mainly due to the fact that Oleanna did not actually carry the star power of the former. The trailer for Oleanna, however, does not attempt to sell the film as an adaptation of the play. In fact, it can be argued that the distributor does not assume that the targeted audience knows the play (there are no references to its huge controversy, nor any reviews by journalists, critics or cultural commentators). Instead, the strategy opted for is a conscious marketing of the film as a David Mamet creation supported by few visual references to the subject of sexual harassment in an academic institution. My contention is that

the distributor attempted to avoid further controversy (the film was not guaranteed wide release) within a general climate of political correctness in US society, which is why it resorted to a 'tame' marketing technique that did not succeed in generating any awareness of the real nature of the film.

A different, and more interesting, explanation about the reasons behind the Samuel Goldwyn Company's tame marketing strategy can be extracted through a reading of the film poster below.³⁹ Unlike the trailer, this marketing ploy, which features a close-up publicity still of the two main characters lit in a warm, light-blue colour, does not attempt to suggest visually the real nature of the film's story [fig 2]. Although John's (W.H Macy) inquisitive gaze and his hand on Carol's (Debra Eisenstadt) shoulder do imply a rather sinister purpose (which is one of the central themes debated in the film's narrative), the overall *mise en scène* of the picture, ironically, suggests a love story. Besides the caption DAVID MAMET OLEANNA, which reflects the opening shots of the trailer, the only other visual clue about the possibility of controversy comes at the bottom of the poster, in the form of a review from the Rolling Stone magazine which reads: "Shakes up audiences like no movie in years". Given the readership of the magazine in question, it seems that the distributor attempted to target primarily a youth audience, a decision which, of course, explains why it completely avoided including information about the film's origins in American theatre. Still, the obvious marks of authorial presence that the extended title DAVID MAMET OLEANNA signifies did not make complete marketing sense at this point in Mamet's career.

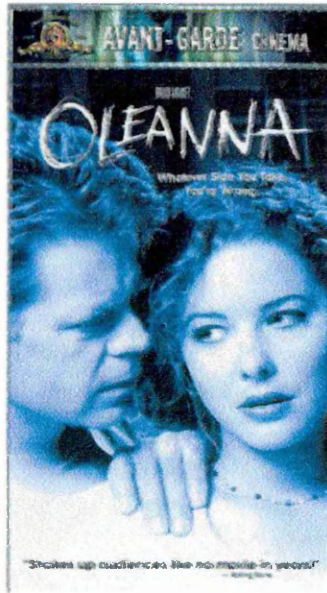


Figure 2

The poster for Oleanna

Where the trailer (and to a lesser extent the poster) did succeed, nevertheless, was in consolidating Mamet's status as an auteur since they presented variations of already familiar Mametian themes (deceit, betrayal, irreconcilable differences between two worlds, right versus wrong, etc.). They therefore established a pattern of marketing for films written and directed by Mamet that would be invariably employed, improved upon and perfected by Pathé, Sony Classics and Fine Line Features, from the mid 1990s to the early 2000s (with the exception of the Samuel Goldwyn Company's campaign for American Buffalo in 1996) and as Mamet's status as a celebrity would steadily increase through his work in several fields of American culture.⁴⁰

Mamet clearly becomes a brand name in the trailer for his 1997 film, The Spanish Prisoner. The opening shots are accompanied by three triumphant reviews written in

white fonts at the bottom of three different frames. These shots consist of fragments of dialogue scenes between various characters, which foreground such themes as trust and betrayal, power and money. When one character utters that he is willing to pay \$1000 for a camera, the screen fades to black and the phrase “FROM THE ACCLAIMED WRITER AND DIRECTOR DAVID MAMET” appears in large white fonts, therefore claiming authorship for the afore-mentioned themes in the strongest possible way. Masterfully placed towards the beginning of this advertising campaign, the name Mamet functions as an anchor of meaning for the first shots of a trailer that does not have shots of Joe Mantegna, William Macy or any other of Mamet’s close collaborators, who could indirectly suggest his involvement in the picture. Immediately after the authorship credentials, furthermore, there follows a large number of shots that reiterate previously established themes and introduce some more (especially the ubiquitous Mamet trademark “things are not what they appear to be”).

Through this marketing strategy, Pathé and Sony Classics directly invite the viewers to consider the film as a product of David Mamet, aiming at an audience already familiar with his work and the issues that his films tackle. This approach is further supported by other reviews used in the trailer after the naming of the film’s stars. In particular, the trailer employs two more reviews, though this time, the reviews are both written at the bottom of the frame and repeated by a voice-of-God narrator, “Mamet’s best foray into filmmaking to date” and “a taut and intriguing tale,” which clearly emphasise Mamet’s directorial competency and his panache for exceptional story-telling, respectively.⁴¹ For all the above reasons, when the title The Spanish Prisoner appears on a black screen at the end of the trailer, in exactly the same fonts

that the phrase “from the acclaimed writer and director David Mamet” appeared earlier, the audience can make no mistake about who the film was created by.⁴²

In tandem with the imperatives of contemporary independent cinema in the United States, The Spanish Prisoner started its impressive (for a Mamet film) box-office career⁴³ after it appeared in a series of festivals (Toronto Film Festival, Deauville Festival and Edinburgh Film Festival).⁴⁴ Additionally, the distributors decided to open the film first in Europe (France, Belgium and Luxembourg) before its official release in the US on 3 April 1998. Releasing a film abroad before its premiere in the United States is not a rare phenomenon for films which are not considered by distributors as strong box-office attractions. In fact, a successful European release can often generate considerable interest in a film in its home country and consequently somewhat change the box-office destiny of the film in question. This is especially so, when films are released in an increasingly crowded marketplace with four or sometimes five films in a week striving for the filmgoers’ attention.⁴⁵ Under those circumstances it is very easy for a ‘different’, low-budget film to be overlooked by mainstream audiences, which is the reason why independent distributors sometimes resort to European premieres before the official release of a film in the US.

Mamet’s transition from an occasional (and relatively indefinable) ‘author’ to the concrete marketing ploy (and potential reception strategy) that the phrase “acclaimed writer and director” suggested is indicative of the workings of contemporary Hollywood cinema. The New Hollywood apparatus can turn any filmmaker into an ‘auteur’ so long as the filmmaker is a celebrity and, to a certain extent, associated with specific themes that are tackled in his/her films. For it would be foolish to argue

that Mamet became an “acclaimed writer and director” after the commercial reception of his previous film, the largely overlooked Oleanna. Instead, Mamet became “the acclaimed writer and director” he now is, when his celebrity status was consolidated within the context of American independent cinema. It was the consolidation of this status that transformed his distinct thematics from properties of genres to authorial expressions in the mind of the public and of the industry alike.

The critical and commercial success of The Spanish Prisoner gave distributors further impetus for marketing Mamet’s films on the basis of the filmmaker’s name. When Mamet adapted for the screen and directed Terence Rattigan’s The Winslow Boy, a period costume drama set in Britain, Sony Classics resorted to the same marketing strategy even when the film seemed far removed from Mamet’s contemporary world of con-games, gambling, heists and petty criminals. However, under the heavy costumes, make up and the Edwardian language, the film raised questions of deceptive appearances, trust and betrayal, right and wrong, in short, quintessential Mamet themes that had structured all his previous films (and the trailers for the films). For that reason (and with the success of The Spanish Prisoner still fresh), it is no coincidence that Sony Classics’ promotional clip employed Mamet’s name with a pomposity not previously seen in other trailers for his films.

The trailer opens with a series of shots that introduce the first (generic) narrative focus of the film, which revolves around the accusations that Ronnie Winslow has stolen a postal order. Those shots are succeeded by a shot of a road where the phrase “from the acclaimed writer/director David Mamet” is superimposed in extremely large white fonts that overwhelm the frame, while, at the same time, an extra-diegetic

narrator reiterates the same phrase. Interestingly, this is the only shot in the trailer without any narrative significance since the rest of the shots are either parts of dialogue scenes or shots that play an integral part in the film's narrative logic. In this way, Mamet's name and authorial status are not promoted at the expense of narrative information; instead, they are introduced at a 'dead time' offering spectators the opportunity to digest the information that the first rapidly edited shots convey in both visual and verbal ways.

As the trailer continues, there is a brief introduction of a second narrative line (the romance), even though the overall focus clearly remains on the accusations and Arthur Winslow's (Ronnie's father) attempts to clear his son's and family's name. Towards the end of the trailer, there is the ubiquitous (in trailers for Mamet films) naming of the stars in respective close-ups and the title of the film against a black background. However, this time, Mamet's name accompanies the title of the film, therefore providing it with a very strong authorial presence; a strategy never before employed for advertising Mamet's films. This statement is followed by a few final shots that, interestingly, focus on the romance sub-plot (a clever technique to withhold information that could reveal the outcome of the main plot). Finally, there is a third manifestation of Mamet's authorship through the aural affirmation by the extra-diegetic narrator that this is "the new David Mamet film".

The pomposity with which the brand name Mamet is used in the trailer is also reflected in the promotional art-work for the film, which, by and large, reworks the main marketing hooks of the trailer. In particular, the emphasis is placed on the relationship between Arthur Winslow (Nigel Hawthorne) and his young cadet son

(referring to the main generic narrative strand) who are depicted together, though the main focal point is the romantic relationship between Sir Robert Morton and Catherine Winslow (the second narrative line), who occupy a much larger space in the poster. The picture implies the impossibility of their romance mainly due to the specifics of the court case (Winslow and son appear to be dividing the couple), but also because they are looking towards different directions [fig 3]. For the purposes of our discussion however, my interest in the poster lies in the two marks of authorial agency:

- THE WINSLOW BOY: A David Mamet Film (in the middle of the poster between the words Winslow and Boy)
- A NEW FILM FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE SPANISH PRISONER (below the images and before the credits)



Figure 3

The poster for The Winslow Boy

The second mark, in particular, clearly acknowledges the existence of an established film career for the film's director, and invites the audience, which has seen and enjoyed The Spanish Prisoner, to return and see the new film by its writer/director. Combined together the trailer and poster for The Winslow Boy represent the most complete attempt by a distributor to market a film made by Mamet on the strength of his name.

Although the box-office career of the film was rather disappointing (about \$4 million gross),⁴⁶ attesting therefore the questionable effectiveness of such a form of advertising, it nevertheless makes clear the lengths that film advertising can reach in order to exploit the marketing potential of an auteur brand name. As the trailer for The Winslow Boy suggests, the name David Mamet carries enough marketing clout to deliver a desirable demographic category for distribution companies such as Sony Classics who, by definition, cater for a more specialised film market and operate mainly within the context of American independent cinema. It is not surprising, therefore, that Fine Line Features, the independent distributor of State and Main, followed the same tactic.

The trailer starts with a comparison of the invasion of a small American town by the crew of a film production company to the invasion of England by the Saxons in 449 and Belgium by the Germans in 1914, and immediately highlights the advertised film as a satire of Hollywood. The ensuing quick montage of shots highlights the effects of the presence of the film cast and crew on the townspeople and the problems the production company faces in making the movie. As the trailer continues to unfold the emphasis is placed on the shenanigans of the cast and crew who are pictured in

compromising positions (the threat of going to jail is highlighted twice). Towards the end, a voice-of-God narrator introduces the ten stars of the film one by one (in individual frames), whilst a critic from Rolling Stone is utilised to promote the film as “pricelessly funny,” capable of making the viewer “laugh till it hurts.” The reviews are followed by a few more snippets of comic dialogue until the narrator informs the spectator that this is State and Main, “A David Mamet film.”

What distinguishes the trailer for State and Main from the other trailers in Mamet’s commercial auteur phase is the absence of references to deceptive appearances, confidence games, questions of loyalty and betrayal, in short, to the themes that have come to characterise Mamet’s authorship since 1994. If this is the case, however, then what does the phrase a ‘David Mamet film’ convey in a trailer that seems to highlight sex, misunderstandings, miscommunication and, finally, comedy? The answer to this question is ‘dialogue;’ well-written, razor-sharp, witty one liners (such as “Who designed these costumes? It looks like Edith Head puked, and the puke designed these costumes”) uttered by William H. Macy, which have been chosen to make the spectator “laugh till it hurts.” Mamet’s name, therefore, is employed here to take the credit for a witty script that satirises the way Hollywood does business. Furthermore, Mamet’s talent for writing good comedy takes a primary position in the film’s poster [fig 4]. The poster features a review that reads “State and Main is the year’s best and *smartest* comedy” (my italics) in red bold letters which immediately attracts attention to the film’s dialogue (the year’s smartest). It is under this review that the phrase “a David Mamet film” is featured (at the top middle part of the postcard).



Figure 4

The poster for State and Main

Back to Mainstream: Towards a Third Auteur Phase?

The consistency with which David Mamet's extra-textual authorship has circulated within the context of American independent cinema since the early 1990s, has firmly established the filmmaker as a brand name, despite the modest and, sometimes, poor box-office takings of his films. From this new position of power, David Mamet recently attempted to transcend the borders of the institution within which he has been firmly located since Glengarry Glen Ross and re-establish his ties with mainstream Hollywood in 2001. This is clearly demonstrated in his involvement with MGM and Universal's Hannibal (2001) and Warner's Heist (2001). If his contribution to the production of Hannibal might suggest a return to 'a-gun-for-hire' practices of the past, Heist signals the filmmaker's first attempt to work with a \$35

million budget for a major studio.⁴⁷ It would be interesting, for that reason, to examine this recent return to the majors in the light of the above arguments.

Mamet's name was linked to the Hannibal script in the late spring of 1999, when Ted Tally, the screenwriter of The Silence of the Lambs, passed on the project following Jonathan Demme's lack of interest in resuming his role as the sequel's director (Anon., 1999a, internet). Once Ridley Scott accepted the directorial seat and Thomas Harris drafted a more 'audience-friendly' end to his book, Mamet was hired to produce the script, which he finally submitted in mid-October of the same year, just before production for State and Main commenced. According to the New York Daily News, Universal requested rewrites of the script,⁴⁸ but Mamet was unavailable to do them due to his prior contractual obligations to State and Main. The production companies, therefore, brought in Steven Zaillian, who produced a script more to the liking of the producers.⁴⁹

What makes Hannibal interesting for the purposes of this chapter is the fact that Mamet shared the screenplay credit with Zaillian, despite the fact that Zaillian's draft was the only script version used in the shooting and editing of the film.⁵⁰ As James Berardinelli mentions in his review of Hannibal, Mamet's name was retained as a result of WGA (Writers Guild Association) rules, which dictate that screen credit is given to the originator of the characters in script form, regardless of whether the original script is used in the production of the film (2001, internet). According to the WGA rules, however, should the screenwriter in question wish to disassociate themselves from the final cut, they can choose to remove their name from the film's credit (Muskewitz, 2001, internet). The question that is significant here, then, is why

Mamet decided to retain his screenplay credit, especially when promotional material for the film has obliterated all but one marking (his name in the credits) of his contribution to the film.

Although an argument that holds the box office failures of The Winslow Boy, and, in particular, of the more ambitious State and Main as instrumental in Mamet's decision to hold on to his screenplay credit might carry substantial exegetic power, it is still imperative to consider other possibilities.⁵¹ Besides interpreting Mamet's conscious association with Hannibal as a safety net that would guarantee him work after two consecutive box office flops in the rather precarious environment of American independent cinema (who wouldn't consider financing another small project from the 'originator of Hannibal Lecter and Clarice Starling in script form'?), one needs to see the bigger picture. Firstly, the limited release of both The Winslow Boy and State and Main suggests that neither of the films was destined for huge box office grosses.⁵² Secondly, Mamet's multi-stranded career would have certainly guaranteed him work in other cultural industries less susceptible to box office performance.⁵³ For that reason, it would be more constructive to seek an explanation for this decision in a different domain. This, I contend, encompasses the filmmaker's efforts to secure production and marketing funds for his latest project, Heist. In particular, I would argue, Mamet's association with probably the most eagerly awaited film of early 2001 served a specific publicity purpose, that of re-introducing the screenwriter to mainstream audiences until the release of his new film. Even though this argument does not entirely explain why Mamet sought mainstream financial support for Heist,⁵⁴ the publicity from the phenomenal global success of Hannibal seems to have paved the way for Mamet's return to mainstream filmmaking, but this time as an 'auteur

proper.⁵⁵ The manner in which Heist, a \$35 million studio-financed thriller, was marketed certainly attests to this line of thought, however, with some reservations, as a brief look at its trailer will demonstrate.

The trailer opens with a series of shots of different characters as they walk on the streets of a contemporary city. The fragments of dialogue that accompany a constant non-diegetic upbeat music immediately establish one of the major themes of the film, the hunt for money and, in particular, gold, which is emphatically prized above love as the most important thing in life. These initial shots are followed by a block of spectacular shots that depict explosions, car chases and accidents as well as a shot of the robbery. Extremely visceral and fast-edited, those shots firmly establish the genre of the film in the action-adventure category, initially suggesting that the heist plot is only a vehicle for the delivery of a fast-paced, action-packed thriller. Almost immediately, however, and despite the continuation of fast edits, the pace of the trailer is somewhat reduced, as the next block of shots is mostly dialogue-driven. The particular juxtaposition of shots and the new fragments of dialogue attempt to narrativise a situation whereby a heist is set up and questions of loyalty, betrayal and deceptive appearances are raised as different characters are presented in various forms of verbal confrontation. For a moment, it seems that we finally arrive at the first instances of what constitutes Mamet's cinematic universe, after the initial shock of the opening shots. This moment of recognition, however, is immediately undermined by a second round of spectacular shots (more explosions) as well as by a return to the original theme of the hunt for gold. It takes a few more seconds until the trailer picks up again the questions raised earlier and devotes some extra time to more verbal confrontations until three new spectacular shots of an explosion interrupt anew

the process of narrativisation. After one last block of shots that places the emphasis on the only female character in the trailer (who provides some more narrative information) a non-diegetic narrator names the stars of the film and introduces Heist as a film “written and directed by David Mamet”

Although the articulation of Mamet’s authorship in the above trailer follows to a certain extent the route instigated by independent distributors, Warner’s marketing of the film also features a few differences from the marketing practices of the independents. Firstly, the filmmaker’s name is used only once and at the end of the text compared to the more ostentatious use in The Spanish Prisoner and The Winslow Boy. Secondly, Mamet’s name does not appear on the screen at any point during the trailer apart from the final credit shot where it appears in rather small fonts twice (“A DAVID MAMET FILM” and “WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY DAVID MAMET”) along with the names of the two production companies, the distributor and the producer of the film. Finally, the trailer seems to place more emphasis on generic and spectacular elements at the expense of the more quintessential (for Mamet’s films) narrative information. Interestingly, this intermediate articulation of Mamet’s industrial authorship by a mainstream distributor does not seem to be supported by other promotional material such as the print ad where Mamet’s name does not figure at all. Instead, the image-driven poster is overwhelmed by the names of the three stars (Gene Hackman, Danny De Vito and Delroy Lindo), which occupy a substantial part in the middle section of the sheet [fig 5].



Figure 5

The Poster for Heist

One could argue, then, that the marketing of Heist might signal the beginning of a third phase in David Mamet's film career as an industrial auteur, a phase that sees the filmmaker as a solid brand-name, who can deliver a large audience for a studio-financed film. Having previously obtained credentials for such a status from his strict association with American independent cinema, and via his contribution to one of the most financially successful American films of all time,⁵⁶ he has now been 'promoted', though not fully, to an auteur proper within the institutional apparatus of contemporary mainstream American cinema. The question is whether this new articulation of Mamet's authorship will prove successful (and consequently employed with more ostentation in the future) since box office gross is a considerably more influential factor in mainstream cinema compared to independent cinema.⁵⁷ As his new feature, Spartan (again distributed by Warner), is scheduled for release in March 2004 it will be interesting to see whether Warner chooses a similar marketing approach to Heist.⁵⁸

As the discussion of the trailers has shown, the process of the construction of authorship in Mamet's films has been determined by a plethora of parameters, which eventually made marketing sense within the context of contemporary American independent cinema. Even when a filmmaker's work presents specific recurrent traits (stylistic, thematic, generic or otherwise) that could be traced throughout a body of work (often referred to as the filmmaker's oeuvre) and that could function as signifiers of authorial presence within the text, it is still imperative for the filmmaker in contemporary American cinema to be clearly defined within the structures of an institutional apparatus (be it mainstream Hollywood or 'independent Hollywood'). This is the only way to achieve recognition with the increasingly media-savvy film audiences.

This position, however, which is largely determined by industrio-economic factors, does not necessarily explain or account for all signifiers of Mamet's authorship. In fact, as the discussion of the film trailers demonstrated, Mamet's authorship has been constructed primarily on the basis of a small number of themes that are recurrent in his films (deceptive appearances, game-playing, loyalty and betrayal, etc) and not on the basis of the distinct visual style of his films. This means that Henry Jenkins's argument that industrial auteurism in contemporary Hollywood cinema promotes the development of idiosyncratic styles (1995, p 115) does not hold true in Mamet's case and for this reason needs to be refined. As the last part of this chapter will demonstrate, however, Mamet's visual style is more distinctive than his thematics, which means that a very important signifier of Mamet's authorship can go unnoticed if a critic approaches the filmmaker's work only within the context of industrial

auteurism. I propose, therefore, a close examination of this (suppressed by the industry and economic imperatives) authorial trait. As I argued in the previous chapter (and will reiterate here), style in Mamet's films often tends to be counter to ideas of realism and verisimilitude (clearly stressed as defining characteristics of classical filmmaking and mainstream Hollywood) and instead assumes a different role. This is to support the 'central idea' of screenplays that follow their own logic.

In light of all this, one could argue that the trailers for Mamet's films, particularly the ones emphasising the films' genres (House of Games, Things Change and Homicide), have possibly fooled audiences as on the basis of a number of distinct themes, they advertised the films as conventional genre pieces when the films themselves were 'idiosyncratic' in terms of style and 'ambiguous' in terms of genre.⁵⁹

The Auteur in the Text

All Is in the Scene

Since the publication of his first volume of collected essays under the title Writing in Restaurants (1987), which coincided with the release of House of Games, Mamet has gone at great length to articulate the coherent philosophy that lies behind the seemingly rigid structures of his work in theatre and cinema. In the previous chapter I outlined some of the basic principles of that philosophy which was based on various readings and revisions of work by philosophers (Aristotle), film theorists (Eisenstein) and, in particular, theatre practitioners (Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov, Tovstonogov and Meisner). The mixing of all those influences allowed Mamet to construct a distinct practice equally applicable to the fields of theatre and film (with some permutations

in the latter). This unique practice, which encompasses such areas as acting, set-designing, *mise-en-scène* (in both theatre and film) and narrative structure, narration and editing (in film) has been the end result of Mamet's persistent endeavours to stress the significance of the script, be it a play or a screenplay, as the sole agent in the process of artistic creation.

Although the works of figures such as Aristotle, Eisenstein and Stanislavsky seem too disparate in terms of subject matter, as well as in terms of the respective fields (philosophy, film, theatre) within which they were expressed, they nevertheless share certain fundamental elements. These can be detected in the definition of dramatic structure as "an organic codification of the human mechanism for ordering information. Event, elaboration, denouement; thesis, antithesis synthesis, boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl; act one, two, three" (Mamet 1998a, p 73). This definition of dramatic structure based on the cognitive model of human perception is remarkable in its effective summary and creative mingling of all three theorists' key positions:

- i) the Aristotelian notion of narrative unity in terms of a character's pursuit of a specific goal through a series of incidents that progresses the story
- ii) The Eisensteinian notion of montage (in film) as the juxtaposition of images that create in the mind of the viewer the progression of the story

- iii) The Stanislavsky-inspired practice of treating the character as habitual action, which, in its turn, is defined as an attempt to accomplish a goal (and which mirrors Aristotle's definition).

As it is evident, all three positions point towards a specific arrangement of information both in the macro-level (Aristotle) and in the micro-level (Eisenstein, Stanislavsky). Consequently, they lend themselves to dramatic structure, which for Mamet, is "an exercise of a naturally occurring need or disposition to structure the world" (1998a, p 66). It is this disposition that constitutes the backbone of every script, good or bad, in theatre or cinema, leaving for the writer therefore just one 'simple' task, namely, to exercise his/her craft in "stat[ing] the problem" (1998a, p 30). This necessarily means that the script follows an internal logic, which is only determined by the hero's actions as those are stated in the pages of the script through language.⁶⁰ Consequently, whether something in drama is true in real life or not is irrelevant so long as it is pertinent "to the hero quest *as it has been stated to us*" (1998a, p 30; original italics). It comes, then, as no surprise that the screenplay is invested with such importance in Mamet's filmmaking practice and determines the use of film style as we saw in the previous chapter.

The emphasis on the hero's actions, as stated in the screenplay, can be clearly detected in Mamet's preoccupation with the scene as the foundation for any creative decision. Unlike many contemporary directors whose use of film style starts from 'arranging' the shot because of the possibilities it offers in terms of the use of *mise en scène*, Mamet firmly believes that the starting point for a film should be the scene, as it is only within the scene that a character's actions (which structure any story) can be

expressed. In On Directing Film, his treatise on filmmaking which was based on a series of seminars for film students at Columbia University, Mamet argues:

The smallest unit is the shot; the largest unit is the film; and the unit with which the director most wants to concern himself [sic] is the scene. First the shot: it's the juxtaposition of the shots that moves the film forward. The shots make up the scene. The scene is a formal essay. It is a small film. (1992a, p 3)

True to the above, Mamet breaks or 'blocks' the script into scenes according to the characters' actions (the process of 'blocking the script' will be examined in detail in the next chapter). Each scene is characterised by a clear 'through action' or 'through line' which represents unequivocally what the main character does, the specific goal(s) he or she tries to achieve on the way to his/her main objective.⁶¹ The clear demarcation of each scene on those grounds helps the filmmaker leave out all that is unnecessary for the progression of the story material and instead concentrates on how to film (and edit) a scene that portrays a very specific action. Consequently, all stylistic choices (set-designing, costumes, props, make-up, hair-style, lighting, camerawork) are made on the basis of how they promote the actions that define each scene. Mamet has been adamant about this aspect of his filmmaking practice, which again stems from his work in American theatre. As he stated in one of his essays:

Everything which does not put forward the meaning of the play impedes the meaning of the play. To do too much or too little is to mitigate and weaken the meaning. The acting, the design, the direction should all consist only of that bare minimum necessary to put forward the action. (1994a, pp 202-3).

This terse approach to filmmaking, which was also evident in House of Games, came to characterise Mamet's work in all his films, even in Things Change, the only film to be financed and distributed by a major during the first phase of Mamet's career in cinema. As my analysis of a large section of the film will demonstrate, the filmmaker has been consistent with his philosophy. Consequently, all his stylistic choices have been geared towards highlighting the characters' actions (the through lines of the scenes). Furthermore, and as in House of Games, narrative structure and film style once again break the rules of realism and verisimilitude.

Things Change or Do They?

Things Change tells the story of Jerry (Joe Mantegna), an out of favour mafia thug, who has a tendency to disobey orders. When the Don of his 'family' convinces Gino (Don Ameche), an elderly Italian-American shoe-shiner, to take the blame for a crime committed by a 'friend of the family,' Jerry is given the opportunity to redeem himself in the eyes of his colleagues and, perhaps, be reinstated. All he has to do is stay in a hotel with Gino for a weekend before the latter surrenders to the police on Monday morning. However, Jerry disobeys his orders once again. He takes Gino to Lake Tahoe, Nevada, for a weekend of fun. By presenting him as an out-of-town mafia *capo di capi* Jerry manages to get a very luxurious holiday at the mafia's expense. Things, however, become complicated when their presence in Lake Tahoe is noted by the local mafia chief, Don Guiseppe (Robert Prosky), and when Jerry's boss arrives in town. The rest of the narrative deals with the consequences of Jerry's act of disobedience as the two heroes try to escape without exposing their real identity. Back in Chicago Jerry once again goes against his boss's will as he tries to convince

Gino to change his mind and not take the blame for something he did not do. Gino objects to that and declares that he has given his word and cannot take it back. Having betrayed his 'family' Jerry expects the inevitable. However, like a *deus ex machina*, Don Giuseppe intervenes and saves both Gino and Jerry. In the final shot of the film, Jerry has now joined Gino in his store as a shoe-shiner and has started a new life away from organised crime.

It is evident, even from this brief synopsis of the film's plot, that the film's main through-lines (as distilled from the two main characters' actions) are: 'to use one's free will and thinking – even if this means that one disobeys orders' (Jerry) and 'to keep one's word' (Gino). The film deals, therefore, with the tension created between these two antithetical objectives as exemplified by the actions of the two key characters. These through-lines can be demonstrated in a clear manner if one dissects the film into scenes and examines each scene's individual through line (see Appendix II). Table 1 offers a segmentation of the first 'act' of the film (the 'event' or the 'thesis' to use Mamet's terminology) on the basis of what the characters do. This segmentation will help reconstruct Mamet's practice upon which I shall discuss the use of film style.

SCENE	SCENE'S OBJECTIVE/THROUGH LINE
	PROLOGUE
	A man picks up a coin lying on top of an old photo album and opens the album (opening credits)
	ACT ONE/EVENT/THESIS
1	Two mafia thugs are waiting for a man's appearance.
2	The thugs follow the man to the shop he works.
3	They get in and invite him to their boss's house.
4	The mafia Don asks Gino to take the blame for a murder and in return he offers him an opportunity to realise his dream (to buy a boat in Sicily)
5	Jerry, an out of favour mafia thug, is ridiculed by his colleagues. Frankie calls Jerry to assign him a task.
6	The Don accompanies Gino on his way out of the house. Jerry is assigned the task of guarding Gino and of ensuring that he is ready for his confession.
7	Jerry preps Gino for his role but he disobeys his orders when he decides that they go to Las Vegas for a final fling before Gino goes to prison.

Table 1

The through lines of the scenes that constitute the set up/first act of the film

The through line of the first scene is 'waiting for someone to show up'. This is conveyed formally through the juxtaposition of four shots. The first shot commences in a music instrument shop. The camera follows a man playing the mandolin as he wanders around the shop and focuses on the instrument. A few seconds later, the man puts the mandolin down and picks up another one on display. As he plays the second mandolin he starts walking to the till. The camera, however, passes him and focuses on two men inside the shop looking out of the window. The second shot frames the two men in a medium close-up. The two men look at each other and Frankie (J.J. Johnston) nods at Silver (Ricky Jay). As they look back out of the window, Mamet uses an eye-line match in order to reveal what they look at. The third shot, therefore, is a long shot of a busy street with the camera picking on a man who walks on the opposite pavement. Finally, the fourth shot returns to the framing of the second shot. After they see their man, Frankie and Silver make their way out of the shop.

Although the opening scene does not contain any dialogue, Mamet conveys all the necessary narrative information visually, through the juxtaposition of four shots. Additionally, the long duration of the opening shot (68 seconds) suggests that the two men have been waiting inside the store for a substantial period of time. This piece of information is reinforced through the music which commences outside the diegesis and becomes diegetic with the opening shot. Finally, in the three shots that the camera focuses on Frankie and Silver, the lighting used is very low-key and creates ample darkness around their faces (even though outside is daylight). This stylistic choice suggests that, perhaps, the two men in the music store have a sinister purpose, a piece of information that will be picked up on in the following scenes. To summarise, the

through line in this scene is primarily conveyed through editing but also supported by other techniques.⁶²

The second scene also conveys narrative information in similar ways. It consists of two relatively long takes (18 and 26 seconds respectively), the juxtaposition of which creates the notion of 'surveillance,' while at the same time reinforcing the possibility of danger that the first scene suggested subtly. The first shot starts with the camera anticipating Gino. As the character passes by the camera and walks away Frankie and Silver are also seen entering the frame and moving in the same direction. In the second shot, likewise, the camera again anticipates Gino as he enters the frame and walks away. When the two men appear behind him, the camera follows them as they are heading towards a shoeshine store. This time, however, Mamet highlights the through line of the scene (surveillance and, especially danger) through an emphasis on setting, which, via an intertextual reference, underlines the possibility of violence. As the camera frames the shoeshine store in the second shot, it also includes the sign of the next-door shop, which reads 'Vito's Grocery Shop,' a direct reference to Coppola's The Godfather through the name Vito (Don Corleone's first name) and the place where he survived an assassination. The spectator is then invited to expect the possibility of violence and Mamet finds an early opportunity to foreshadow the genre of the film, even though in later scenes it becomes evident that he uses various conventions from different genres.

In the third scene narrative information is conveyed in both verbal and visual ways. Mamet chooses to employ the shot/reverse shot structure [shots 3-4 and 6-7] for the verbal articulation of significant information that pertains to the objective of the

scene, 'to convince Gino to visit the Don's house', whereas other techniques are also employed to underscore this specific through line. It is important to note that Mamet keeps the dialogue to an absolute minimum, privileging therefore visual narration through the sequence of shots and especially the strategic placement of an insert [shot 5] in the middle of the scene. In particular, when Silver informs Gino that "a friend of ours" (a euphemism for a mafia guy)⁶³ would like to talk to him, Mamet breaks the shot/reverse shot pattern established in the previous two shots [shots 3-4] with a close-up of Silver's hand passing his business card and \$100 bill to Gino's hand before he continues anew with another shot/reverse shot pattern [shots 6-7]. This close-up shot provides Gino with a reason to accept the invitation (as we shall witness in the following scene), in other words 'to be convinced,' and links the set of shots before and after it, which clearly signify the beginning and the end of the first transaction between the characters. The through line, therefore, is conveyed again through the juxtaposition of shots. In the meantime, the first three scenes have created in the mind of the spectator a succession of events that pave the way for the statement of the problem, which is elaborated in the following three scenes.

The fourth scene represents the first instance in which the narrative structure breaks the rules of verisimilitude and reveals its own logic. The longest scene of this section of the film (6 minutes 52 seconds), it consists of fifty-five shots and its objective is 'to persuade Gino to take the blame for a crime he has not committed.' Since the through line suggests the construction of an elaborate lie, I would argue that this is reflected in the narrative structure through the use of specific narrational techniques but, mainly, through an absence of clear psychological motivation in the narrative

logic of the scene. The character whose motivation is under question is Gino (though Jerry's motivation is also problematic).

The scene commences with an exchange of glances between Gino sitting on a chair [shot 1] and a mafia thug standing by a door [shot 2]. The third shot introduces another set of doors in the room through which Silver and Green (the mafia Don) enter to meet Gino. This shot will later prove significant for the achievement of the scene's through line, since it foreshadows the existence of two different spaces in the Don's house, each with a particular function. On the one hand, therefore, there is the 'waiting room' where Gino has been asked/ordered to wait, while on the other hand, there is the 'office,' a space that all the 'important' people (the Don, his girlfriend and Silver) have access to and which opens to Gino only once he agrees to take the blame for the murder. In short, Mamet creates a hierarchy of power, which is conveyed in visual terms through the use of space. Additionally, the significance of the office space is further highlighted in several shots throughout the scene as it remains in sharp focus in the background through the use of deep focus cinematography.⁶⁴

The next set of shots [5-23] serves to answer all the previous questions posed in the opening scenes (who Gino was followed by, for what reason, who "the friend of theirs" that he was asked to visit is and so on) and naturally create more questions (Will Gino accept the Don's offer? What happens if he refuses?) to be answered in the following scenes. The first shot in this set [shot 5, fig 6] provides some background information that is supposed to be 'public knowledge.' Gino (and the spectator) find out that a member of the mafia has been wrongly accused of a crime he, allegedly, did not commit. The shot lasts 31 seconds and contains a large amount

of information that is conveyed verbally. When it comes to the distribution of ‘non-public knowledge,’ however, the film’s narration conveys all the information visually and strictly through the juxtaposition of shots. The fact that the mob would like Gino to take the blame for the murder is never actually stated through dialogue; rather it is conveyed through the editing of five shots [7-11, figs 7-11], the juxtaposition of which creates this idea in the spectator’s mind. For this reason, it is interesting that from the moment the Don commands Silver to show Gino the picture of their friend [end of shot 7, fig 7] to the moment the Don asks Gino whether he understood what is asked of him [shot 12, fig 12], the only dialogue heard is the phrase “This is the picture of the person that’s mistakenly accused of murder” [shot 8, fig 8]. In the meantime, however, both Gino and the spectator have understood exactly what the mafia boss is asking Gino to do.



Figure 6

Scene 4, Shot 5



Figure 7

Scene 4, Shot 7



Figure 8

Scene 4, Shot 8 (the only shot that contains dialogue)



Figure 9

Scene 4, Shot 9



Figure 10

Scene 4, Shot 10



Figure 11

Scene 4, Shot 11



Figure 12

Scene 4, Shot 12

Another very interesting aspect of this section of the scene is that the narration withholds the actual amount of money that the mafia offers Gino [shots 16-17].

Although Gino looks at the written amount showed to him by Silver, the spectator is denied access to this important piece of information. As I shall argue shortly, the narration's uncommunicativeness at this point complicates substantially any attempts on the part of the spectator to account for Gino's psychological motivation first to reject and then take on the mafia's offer. For the purposes of the argument I am advancing here (that Mamet privileges the distribution of narrative information which serve the central idea of the script in visual terms), the inaccessibility of this piece of information means that the proposed amount does not have any narrative significance.⁶⁵

When Gino refuses to take the blame and, therefore, rejects the opportunity to 'earn' an amount of money that would help him fulfil his dream of buying a fishing boat in Sicily (a reason that could have explained Gino's motivation, had he originally accepted), the narration starts blurring the clarity of the narrative structure.

Specifically, from the moment Gino enrages the Don by refusing to serve him [shot 27] until the time he stands outside the office and triumphantly proclaims that 'he will do it' [shot 38], the film's narration 'fails' to account clearly for the hero's motivation and, consequently, presents the first in a number of 'problems' that the film's narrative presents. Even when the juxtaposition of shots does present an explanation for the hero's change of mind, this is done in a way that proves to be questionable.

After Gino's original negative answer, Silver picks up his polishing stand and places it by his boss's feet [shot 27]. The Don then orders Gino to shine his shoes [shot 28] and puts his right foot on the stand [shot 29]. Gino stands up and starts moving towards the Don [shot 30] who orders him to be particularly careful because he is

wearing expensive socks [shot 31]. At this point the Don's girlfriend enters the frame and takes a cigarette from a table [shot 32]. The camera, which up to that point was still, starts tracking forward and focuses on the woman. As Gino picks up a lighter, in order to offer her a light, the camera isolates first Gino (in a close-up) and then the woman (in another close-up) stressing her 'contemptuous look'⁶⁶ and her refusal to accept anything, even a light, from Gino [shots 33 and 34, figs 13 and 14].



Figure 13

Scene 4, shot 33



Figure 14

Scene 4, Shot 34

For the moment, Gino looks stunned (possibly from the sight of a beautiful woman) but he is quickly brought back to reality by the Don's urge to hurry up [shot 35, fig

15]. He kneels down to shine Green's shoes but Green deliberately gets up and walks back to his office, where he joins his girlfriend and Silver [shot 36a and 36b, figs 16 and 17]. At this point Green starts a monologue that carries over to the following shot. This depicts his girlfriend coming out of the office and passing by in front of Gino whose eyes are fixed on her [shot 37a and 37b, figs 18 and 19]. Although Green's monologue does not exist in the published script and is almost indiscernible at points, it goes as follows:

A man comes to my house. What is it you want, I'm telling him. Anything you want. The guy's dying. Fifty bucks a week. He says buy me a boat. ... I'll buy him a pushcar, buy him an organ, a monkey and he can put a bandana on it. The son of a bitch said he wanted a boat. I'll give him a boat!"

(transcribed from a version of the film recorded from television)

This is the point where Gino changes his mind and decides to accept the mafia's offer. His sudden change of mind is marked visually by an abrupt U-turn in order to face the Don as he exclaims emphatically that 'he will do it' [shot 38a and 38b, figs 20 and 21]. As Gay Brewer has suggested Gino's change of mind takes place after he is treated as "a shoeshine 'boy' and laughable foreigner" (1993, p 71) that the phrase "shine 'em uppa Joe..." signifies (Mamet and Silverstein, 1989, p 7). However, one should also add the woman's contemptuous look; his exclusion from the office space; the degrading names he is called (without clear evidence that he heard them) and the woman's second dismissal (she passes by him as if he is not there). From the above list, it is the woman's impact on Gino that the narration seems to be privilege as the most likely reason behind his motivation to change his mind. In particular, Miss

Bates's rejection is stressed both in the juxtaposition of the two close-ups I mentioned earlier [shots 33-34] and of the two last shots of this section of the scene [shots 37-38].



Figure 15

Scene 4, Shot 35



Figure 16

Scene 4, Shot 36a



Figure 17

Scene 4, Shot 36b



Figure 18

Scene 4, Shot 37a



Figure 19

Scene 4, shot 37b



Figure 20

Scene 4, Shot 38a



Figure 21

Scene 4, Shot 38b

If Gino's longing for Miss Bates's attention is, according to the film's narration, the main reason for reconsidering and eventually changing his decision, this turns out to be an insufficient explanation as it does not have any impact on the narrative trajectory.⁶⁷ If on the other hand, Miss Bates's contemptuous look and rejection of Gino is seen as a narrative trick, a McGuffin, that serves the through line of the scene 'to convince Gino to take the blame for a crime he did not commit,' then the lack of clear cut psychological motivation in Gino's action becomes a secondary issue. It becomes subordinate to the primacy of a story that follows an internal logic. After all, it was Mamet himself who argued that "the unremarkable, when framed appropriately

affords dramatic enjoyment and becomes particular and objective” (1998a, p 5). For this reason, Mamet provides several other possibilities for an attempt to contextualise Gino’s abrupt change of mind, implying therefore that it does not matter why so long as it helps the unfolding of the story.

Immediately after Gino agrees to take the blame, the ‘office’ space opens to him.

From that moment the narrative moves to the establishment of the second problem of the first ‘act’ (the set up) which later proves to be the key question for the development of the narrative, namely, Jerry’s inclination to disobey orders and break the rules. The problem is stated through a demonstration of what happens to people who do not follow orders, who refuse to conform to externally-defined preconceptions of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong,’ what must be done and what must not. This is for Mamet (via Aristotle) one of the central principles that define the journey of the hero. The fifth scene, therefore, presents the first building block towards establishing the film’s hero by introducing an individual who acts according to his own will and who is subjected to scorn and contempt by his ‘friends’ for that very reason.

Jerry’s relegation to the margins of the mafia circles is, again, conveyed visually through the juxtaposition of two distinct spaces. On the one hand, there is a space for Frankie and his men who are sitting around a kitchen table and receive their payments for doing their job according to the rules [shot 2]. The room is brightly lit and the camera pans and tracks following Frankie’s movement as he distributes the paychecks. All the characters are dressed in suits and seem to enjoy their social gathering. On the other hand, Jerry is consigned into a marginal space in the back

room washing dishes and receiving an envelope with no money [shot 3]. As opposed to the previous shot, the lighting is dark and the camera is still. Furthermore, instead of a jacket Jerry is wearing an apron and, naturally, seems to hate what he is doing. What is interesting in the scene, though, is the dialogue between the 'wise-guys' (the term here is used to describe the characters present as both members of the mafia and as people who follow the rules), which has Jerry's situation as its main subject. It is worth citing this section from Mamet's script in full:

FRANKIE: We got a ... what is this ... Jerry something or other working here?

I thought we sent him down to the Farm team...

RAMONE: Why was that Frank?

FRANKIE: It seems that he can't follow orders...

RAMONE: Can't follow orders? What, is the guy a team player or what?

FRANKIE: No it would seem not.

BELLENZA: That's a shame Frank

FRANKIE: Yes, I agree with you.

NO PALS: No pay, no pals, no prospect.

RAMONE: What kind of guy is that?

(Mamet and Silverstein, 1989, p 11)

FRANKIE: The work to the wise is sufficient. Where are we on the shipping thing?

MAFIOSO: Here are the figures on the shipping thing.

FRANKIE: I would like to hear it from you too Jerry. Maybe when you get out of probation. What does the guy get, who can't tell the line?

EVERYBODY: Probation (laughs)

FRANKIE: Right! ⁶⁸

As it is evident in the extract the dialogue is so full of clichéd and coded phrases that it immediately strikes one as ‘artificial’ even when it is generically motivated in a film that deals with the mafia’s business (until this point at least). As a result, and while on one level the dialogue attempts to mock Jerry and his propensity towards individualism within an environment that does not allow free will, on a different level, the same dialogue is exposed as ‘jargon,’ as a mechanical exchange of utterances between members of a specific group. As Mamet would have put it the dialogue is ‘make believe’.⁶⁹ This signals that the intended meaning of the words the wise guys use is undermined by definition, which can mean only one thing: that Jerry is right to exercise his free will (and the spectator should expect that he will do it again when he will be assigned a new task).

The penultimate scene of the film’s set up [scene 6] serves to indicate that Jerry is offered a new chance. The scene consists of seven shots and carries very little dialogue. For that reason, it conveys narrative information mainly through editing and *mise-en scène* and ends with Jerry getting in a car with Gino. What is of primary importance in this scene is the new picture of Jerry the narration puts forward (Jerry as a trusted employee who can easily handle important tasks) and which directly contradicts the narrative information conveyed in the previous scene.⁷⁰ This revised image of Jerry is reinforced by the fact that he is now wearing his full suit and is fixing his tie in front of the Don [shot 4] in an attempt to look more like the conventional ‘goodfella’. However, the last shot of the scene returns to the motif of

Jerry's tendency to ignore rules. Jerry states that he will do the "right thing" because he wants to get out of probation, whilst Frankie is not willing to assure him that this would be the case.

Interestingly, the juxtaposition of shots in this scene promotes a kind of paradox, a binary opposition that will come to inform the rest of the film. On the one hand, Mamet's editing advances Gino's unquestioning acceptance of a task he could have refused had he chosen to (which, as I argued earlier, was based on unclear psychological motivation). Shots 1-6 present Gino walking out of Green's office after accepting the task [shot 1], receiving the evidence of 'his crime' [shot 3], shaking the Don's hand [shot 5], and reiterating his subservience with a bow [shot 6]. Throughout these shots there is no dialogue whatsoever which means that all the above signifiers of his acceptance are conveyed visually. On the other hand, Mamet's editing highlights Jerry's acceptance of a task (which is motivated psychologically in an uncontested way [to get out of probation]), though in an unconvincing manner. Specifically, shots 4 and 7 present Jerry in contrasting light, with one shot confirming his abilities as a man who can do what he is asked to [shot 4], and the other questioning the very same abilities to follow orders and do his job [shot 7].

The final scene of the film's set up [scene 7] reveals which of the two pictures of Jerry the narration presents is the real one. It is the scene where Jerry is initially seen to follow his orders (is helping Gino rehearse his confession) only later to decide that Gino knows his part well and for that reason they could use their time to have some fun. In short, it is the scene where we actually see Jerry breaking the rules.

The through line of the scene consists of two different building blocks, two different units of action,⁷¹ which signify a change in the character's objective during the unfolding of a scene: from 'prepping Gino for his confession of the crime' to 'disobeying orders.' The change in the protagonist's action is visually supported by a change in camerawork and serves to prepare the spectator for the route the narrative takes in the following scenes. The scene opens with Jerry and Gino working on the confession [shots 1 and 2]. The second shot, in particular, depicts them in a deep focus composition where each character occupies a fixed position on the frame as they are rehearsing the details of the crime. Throughout this take, which lasts 39 seconds, the camera remains still. Suddenly, Jerry decides that Gino has mastered his role and suggests they do something. He starts moving about in the room [shot 3] and the camera starts also moving with him, tracking his movement religiously. Gino remains in his position and reminds Jerry that he was ordered to stay in the hotel room for the whole weekend [end of shot 5]. What is interesting about the scene is that it reinforces the paradox in the motivation of the character. Gino does not show any inclination to enjoy what seem to be the last two days of freedom before he is convicted for a murder he did not commit. He does not even physically move from his seat. Conversely, Jerry decides to transgress, even when he is offered an opportunity to regain his credibility in the mob circles. This act of transgression sends the narrative to a different direction and therefore marks the end of the film's set up.

It is clear from the above discussion that Mamet's use of style in Things Change serves a specific narrative logic, which, as in House of Games, does not always coincide with the logic of the classical narrative. Although the narrative of the film develops in a linear fashion, based on (mostly) clear cause and effect logic, and leads

to the restoration of the equilibrium marked by an uncontested character transformation (Jerry starts a new life in Gino's shoeshine store), it also presents gaps and fissures which are especially associated with inconsistencies in the psychological motivation of the two main characters at this stage of the narrative.⁷² Equally, although the film's *mise-en scène* does not constitute a major departure from the norms of realism and verisimilitude, it nonetheless fully supports the aforementioned inconsistencies as all stylistic choices made foreground simply the characters' objectives and do not seek to assign motivation when none is provided. On the contrary, they offer a number of alternative motives the spectator can choose from, as the example of Gino's change of mind clearly demonstrated. As a result, the narrative in Things Change comes across, once again, as contrived and ultimately unconvincing.⁷³

These labels, however, are applicable only if one takes the film as a 'slice of life' account of the adventures of a small-time mobster who disobeys his superior's orders. Things Change does not profess to present a slice-of-life. As Mamet put it in an interview with Michael Billington entitled 'Dream Sequence:'

...[Things Change] is a *fable*, and the setting is mythic. It is saying that, in a country far away, this could happen. There are films where *realism* is important, but this one is pure myth (Billington, 2001, p 106; my italics)

This is a film, then, where 'realism' is not important as the narrative is following the logic of a 'fable.' Consequently, the absence of clear-cut psychological motivation and, later, the substitution of flamboyant coincidence for the 'expected' cause-effect

logic serve a very particular purpose. They highlight the fact that ‘things’ are always bound to ‘change:’ firstly, for the worse and then for the better.

Conclusion

The major implication of this use of style, for the purposes of this chapter at least, is that it does not originate from a filmmaker’s attempt to exploit the limitless possibilities the medium of cinema offers. Rather, it is *strictly* determined by the limited needs of each story that Mamet commits on paper before making it into a film. This explains why “no single image from any of his films is memorable for its own sake” and why the scenes from his films “revel in their visual ordinariness” as the Sight and Sound editor argued in the introduction of this thesis (James, 1998, p 24).

In other words, style in Mamet’s films does not become a vehicle for an articulation of a filmmaker’s technical competence or a marker of his or her visual flair, which labels such as ‘idiosyncratic’ often connote (at least in the way Henry Jenkins uses it). The non-tour-de-force approach, therefore, that characterises his films stands at the opposite end of New Hollywood auteurs such as Brian De Palma, Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg or more recent filmmakers that have been acclaimed for their cinematic style such as David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino, Guy Ritchie, Paul Thomas Anderson and Robert Rodriguez (interestingly, with the exception of Spielberg, all writer/directors).

This is the reason, I propose, why Mamet has not been constructed as an auteur in terms of stylistic consistency, even though such a consistency exists on a different level. The absence of ‘the spectacular’ in Mamet’s films convinced Hollywood

distributors (mainstream and independent) to resort to alternative ways to underline his authorial presence, by foregrounding thematic uniformity within generic constraints as the first part of this chapter argued. As a result, the distributors suppressed all traces of the truly idiosyncratic manner in which he uses style and which was discussed with reference to House of Games and Things Change.

CHAPTER THREE

WRITING THE FILM'S PERFORMANCE: THE SCREENPLAY AS MARKER OF ACTING IN THE CINEMA OF DAVID MAMET

Natural! That isn't the point of acting.

(Bette Davis, quoted in Shingler, 1998, p 57)

I want everything to look real but not necessarily to be real.

(King Vidor, quoted in Tucker, 1994, p14)

Introduction

In the previous chapters I argued that David Mamet's use of film style (in particular with reference to House of Games and Things Change) is subordinate to the aesthetic integrity of his respective scripts and, as such, not determined by external notions of realism and verisimilitude. With narratives that often depart from the rules of causality and with a film style that does not always follow the conventions of realism (often borrowing from drama conventions), to the extent that it draws attention to itself, Mamet's films convey very distinct aesthetic effects which are far removed from what film critics have called classical aesthetic effects. This necessarily suggests an uneasy relationship between Mamet's films and theoretical formulations such as that of the classical Hollywood cinema, which purports to account for the aesthetic effects conveyed by American films. On the other hand though, such an argument does not entirely negate the idea of classicism, if by such a term one understands a

close relationship between style and subject, if as Adrian Martin suggested "... the modulation of stylistic devices across the film are keyed closely to its dramatic shifts and thematic developments" (Martin, 1992, p 90). Consequently, classical cinema here is determined by the organic unity between the form and content of films and not by the extent to which narrative and style adhere to specific rules.¹

Besides challenging the validity and, ultimately, the usefulness of the term classical Hollywood cinema (as Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson defined it), the above paradox serves a more significant function for the purposes of this chapter. It directs critical attention to the screenplay as a guide for the use of particular stylistic devices and, on a deeper level, calls for a re-evaluation of the relation between the written words of the script and the images and sound which they turn into on the screen. However, rather than starting from how filmmakers have exploited the possibilities that the medium of cinema offers and how their choices have transformed the screenplay, this chapter proposes an approach that starts from the screenplay itself in order to explore how it can dictate the use of film style. In other words, rather than starting from the film and move backwards to examine how it transformed the screenplay, this chapter concentrates on the written text and moves forward to examine how it can determine the use of film style and what happens when the filmmaker 'trusts' the written text.

This suggestion, for a shift of film criticism to the written words of the script, seeks neither to propose the adoption of a logocentric approach to film (reversing thus the trajectory of a fifty-year-strong film theory and criticism) nor to marginalise the obvious significance of cinema as a visual medium (relegating thus questions of film

spectatorship to a critical periphery). What it does suggest however, is the need for the creation of a framework within which the screenplay, as a tool for the creation of a film (and even as a significant work of art in its own right), can be adequately studied before one turns one's attention to the script's visual and aural expression in the form of the projected film.

The rationale behind the need for such a framework is supported by the perennial inability of Film Studies to deal with the problem of acting in film. As Lovell and Krämer have argued in the introduction of their edited collection Screen Acting (1998), one of the main reasons why acting has escaped the critical attention it has certainly deserved was the specific historical trajectory film criticism adopted under the influence of auteurism and its emphasis on *mise en scène* as a "tool" for analysing films. In particular, the authors suggest, acting was seen as an element of a film's *mise en scène* "along with setting, lighting and costume, which are 'put into the scene'" (Lovell and Krämer, 1998, p 2). This methodological choice, on the one hand, downplayed the dynamic parameters of acting – considered in other fields an art in its own right – (thus reducing acting to a device), whilst on the other hand, privileged the importance of the visual aspects of the film (and simultaneously sought to credit the film director with even more creative input).²

The ensuing marginalisation of film acting and the side-lining of the script constituted a relatively small price film scholarship had to pay compared to the eventual triumph of freeing film from literature, a battle that was, by and large, won through the favouring of the medium's visual qualities. Lovell and Krämer again:

In the struggle to demonstrate how important the visuals are in a film, *mise en scène* was often equated with the ‘writing’ of a film. It is through the deployment of *mise en scène* that a film is created. The enemy, of course, in this struggle was the script because it was equated with literature. Put crudely, a film wasn’t written with words but with images” (1998, p 2).³

This critical neglect of the significance of the script was further justified, if not encouraged, within one of the central arguments advanced in Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson’s The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (1985).⁴ Specifically, Staiger argued that a certain type of script, the continuity script, functioned as a defining tool, a blueprint (to use her term), for the particular configuration of a mode of production and of a use of style that eventually developed to what the authors called “Classical Hollywood Cinema”. The continuity script, she suggested, brought together the industry’s momentum for organising production practices in rigid ways (budgeting the film in advance) with “techniques for achieving continuity, verisimilitude, and narrative dominance and clarity” (1985, p 128).

This position, on one hand, assumed that screenwriting practices were subordinate to larger working practices in Hollywood cinema (an undisputable fact); however, it also implied an essential uniformity in the screenwriting practices, which the author did not account for and which has remained unchallenged. As a result, the aforementioned study helped cultivate a culture which saw the script as a standard(ised) device. This device acquires significance solely as part of the (classical) system and at the expense of any real attention to the internal mechanisms

of the written text. For that reason, it is not accidental that the authors used the term 'blueprint', a word that encompasses both the notions of subordination (an early stage of a project) and standardization (a detailed plan for a future project). In other words, The Classical Hollywood Cinema is also responsible for the minimal critical attention the screenplay has received by encouraging a perception of it as a standardised device, which in turn plays a part in the creation of a homogeneous aesthetics that the term classicism signifies.

Such an approach, however, is essentially flawed. One has only to consider the sheer volume of screenplays that have circulated in American cinema before even examining particular scripts that do not conform to ideas of continuity and clarity (for instance screenplays with contrived plots or without a tight narrative closure) to realise that scripts should not be perceived as standard. Moreover, film practices in the post-studio era seem to reinforce this idea ad infinitum (can anyone argue that Jurassic Park [1993] and The Blair Witch Project [1999] were created by the same type of screenplay or that the films themselves share similar aesthetic effects?), to an extent that the idea of a classical Hollywood has been questioned by a number of critics. As my lengthy discussion of the use of style in Things Change demonstrated, Mamet's use of style tightly supports the aesthetic integrity of his script, which nevertheless is not entirely organised around notions of psychological character motivation, cause-effect logic or the formation of the heterosexual couple, ingredients associated with classical narratives.

While in the previous chapters I looked at how specific stylistic features (lighting, setting, composition, camera movement and especially editing) supported the internal

logic of Mamet's script, I deliberately left out acting and, more generally, performance for two main reasons.⁵ Firstly, because certain elements of performance in Mamet's films (especially the actors' mode of dialogue delivery) draw so much attention to themselves that they ought to be discussed in detail and separately from other textual features. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, any discussion of screen acting as simply another element of a film's *mise en scène* is problematic. It consequently needs to be placed within a larger framework, one which does not solely emphasise visual elements but also takes into consideration non-visual features such as the language of the text.

In order to achieve a systematic study of the question of the actors' performance in Mamet's cinema, I propose a methodological distinction between the two main aspects of performance, the poetic and the aesthetic, primarily aiming at constructing 'a poetics of performance' in Mamet's films before I then examine the aesthetic effects that such a poetics conveys. Drawing on a substantial number of sources devoted to Mamet's work as a theatre practitioner and an acting teacher, I shall argue that acting in his films is completely at odds with dominant models of cinema acting (in particular, the 'method'). This creates an anti-realist aesthetics, on par with the spirit of his scripts but remarkably removed from any prevailing notions of Hollywood verisimilitude. If this sounds similar to the argument I advanced in the previous chapters, it is because the actors' performance is indeed an integral part of his films' textual system, a system that is not only confined to and defined solely by visual markers.

To support the above argument I shall examine in detail the realisation of performance in Mamet's third feature as a writer/director, Homicide (1991, J&M Entertainment, US, 101 min). Before focusing on Mamet though, I need to raise some questions pertaining to my critical approach to film acting, an approach that has its starting point in the role of the screenplay as text.

Acting in Cinema

Screenplay: The Written Text as Marker of (a) Visual Style

The screen play has no aesthetic existence independent of its performance
(Panofsky in Sternberg, 1997, p 27)

One, and probably the most important, difference between the practice of criticism in drama and in film is the prioritisation of the dramatic text and the projected film over the dramatic performance and the screenplay text respectively (Sternberg, 1997, p 26). The intrinsic properties of each medium facilitate such a distinction since it is the dramatic text and the projected film that are fixed in time compared to the ephemeral nature of a dramatic performance and the constant revising of the screenplay during the production process. This hierarchy, nevertheless, does not cease also to be a product of an ideological operation, the roots of which can be, again, traced in the attempts of film criticism to establish film as a visual medium. The emphasis bestowed upon the projected film by critical discourse, endows the film with an absolute degree of definiteness (or 'finality' to use Sternberg's term), which in effect signals the transformation of the film into an original text. This becomes, then, a primary source from which all meaning emanates, despite the fact that the projected

film constitutes “but one of the possible performances” of the screenplay (Sternberg, 1997, p 27).⁶ In other words, the projected film appropriates textual properties as well as formal systems that have originally manifested in the screenplay while at the same time negates the existence of its source, thus burning the bridges that link it with its literary predecessor. Consider, for instance, Andrei Tarkovsky’s comment: “the scenario dies in the film” (quoted in Sternberg, 1997, p 26)

The above project of film criticism can be rendered as partly responsible for the formulation of one of the cornerstones of the argument that Staiger put forward in The Classical Hollywood Cinema. (see introduction). This is because the classical aesthetics is actually the product of *but one of the possible performances* of the screenplays that were filmed during the studio era. Certain screenplays, however, were not necessarily written with the classical style inscribed in their structure, but were nonetheless filmed as such.⁷ In these cases the classical style was ‘enforced from above’ and to the detriment of any alternative stylistic patterns a screenplay might have suggested.

If as Henry Sayre has argued “in [performance] the potentially disruptive forces of the “outside” are encouraged to assert themselves” (1990, p 94), we can see the inverse taking place in the case of American cinema: a distinct (classical) style attempting to assert itself over the internal force of the text. This necessarily means that the relationship between a screenplay and a dominant mode of filmic representation can be unstable, to the extent that the latter may not be entirely successful in containing the internal logic of the former. More importantly, however, such a position clearly suggests that screenplays can be assertive in terms of their

eventual visualisation. They can prescribe a specific use of a visual style, which, as I shall argue later, if not taken up by the filmmaker(s), can indeed compromise the aesthetic unity of the projected film. As William Horne has put it: “the screenplay cannot specify exact images but it can provide a structure and suggest a visual style” (1992, p 52), an argument that has found its full force in Claudia Sternberg’s Written for the Screen: The American Motion Picture Screenplay as Text (1997), the first major critical study on the screen-written text.⁸

Sternberg commences from the thesis that the screenplay “assumes the role of an artistic agent, *a hidden director*” (1997, p 2 original emphasis) independently of questions of film authorship. Like the dramatic play, the screenplay functions as a “literary substratum” for a future performance, which may or may not materialise. Unlike the play however, and due to the conditions of film production, the screenplay is composed for the possibility of a one-off performance, an axiom that is very likely to govern the screenwriter’s disposition to design the text specifically with that view in mind (1997, p 27).⁹ This in effect means that the author will provide the written text with as much concrete detail as possible, a fact that, Sternberg suggests, is also encouraged by “the representational nature of the film medium” as opposed to the ‘bare stage’ of the theatre (1997, p 27), which is likely to compromise a playwright’s inclination towards an overload of stage details.

Although Sternberg’s view that the ‘bare stage’ does not invite written texts with a richness of concrete detail is somewhat problematic,¹⁰ the point she makes about the screenplay raises some very interesting questions about the extent to which performance is embedded in the text. It also raises questions, indirectly, about the

degree to which a writer's intentions are taken into account over the course of the production. In terms of the first question, if one follows her line of thought and assumes that the written text is likely to be designed according to specific, 'externally-imposed rules,'¹¹ (and supported by 'concrete detail' that explains and strengthens the action and dialogue of the script)¹² one could argue that such a screenplay may call for or invite a specific type of visual style. This argument can be founded on the prescriptive nature of the 'concrete detail', which, according to Sternberg, the screenwriter is likely to endow his or her script with, and which appears in the form of four modes of presentation: description, report, comment (literary, technical and paratechnical) and speech (1997, pp 71-76). These modes are controlled by a distribution ratio specific to the style of the individual author.

If speech is self-explanatory and corresponds to the dialogue text, it is worth citing the definitions of the other three modes of presentation, which together comprise the scene text. Sternberg defines 'description' as "detailed sections about production design in addition to economical slug-line reductions;" 'report' as "typified by events and their temporal sequence and center[ed] on the action of human beings;" and 'comment' as "information that is not transmitted audiovisually or [that] it makes use of figures of speech which contribute only indirectly on sound and image. Passages or parts of sentences which explain, interpret or add to the clearly visible and audible elements of the screenplay" (1997, pp 71-73). Furthermore, 'comment' can be subdivided to 'literary comment', "explanatory inserts" which often take the form of "adverb-adjective constructions" (1997, p 73), 'technical comment', which suggests "the cinematic/technical registration and presentation of the narrative" (1997, p 74) and 'paratechnical comment,' which Sternberg relates to "we-constructions" of the

kind “as we move by, we see” or “in the glass pane of the window we see” (1997, p 75).¹³

As the above definitions suggest, the scene text of any given screenplay can potentially contain an immense richness of visual indicators (from stage design instructions, location and time markers to character movement, camerawork and editing suggestions) which support, explain and strengthen the dialogue text (another marker of visual style) in concrete ways. What the screenplay cannot do, however, is ensure that its inherent visual style is adopted by the filmmaker, since the material conditions of film production, in American cinema at least, have perpetuated a detailed division of labour which determines that the screenwriter is involved in an early stage of the course of the production and that the overall supervision of the production process is assigned to a different person, be it the central producer (in the 1920s), the producer (1930s and early 1940s) or a different individual in the post-studio period.¹⁴

It could be argued, therefore, that ‘the concrete detail’ of the screenplay is likely to yield a more or less standard *modus operandi*, which then anticipates ‘one possible performance’ (to paraphrase Sternberg) or a specific visual style which corresponds to what critics have called the classical style. In other words, the screenplay is likely to be consciously structured and composed with the classical aesthetic in mind because the dominant visual style has traditionally reflected such an aesthetic. In terms of the question of whether the writer’s intentions are taken into account, such a screenwriting practice does guarantee the author of the written text a more substantial role in the translation of the text to film (though, significantly, not in the production

process itself) as the director or the producer can ‘trust the text’ more, and implicitly serve the screenwriter’s intentions.¹⁵ On the other hand, the enforcement of a classical style on a screenplay not constructed according to the criteria that foreground the classical aesthetic, could damage the aesthetics of the projected film. In these cases the visual style would look artificial and pretentious, rather than seamless and transparent as the classical style is supposed to be.

A very telling illustration of how a discrepancy between a suggested-by-the-screenplay visual style and an enforced-from-above style can fundamentally compromise the film’s aesthetics is the screen adaptation of Mamet’s play American Buffalo (1975; 1996).¹⁶ The film’s director, Michael Corrente, employed a classical style which aimed at presenting “a slice of low-brow life” in contemporary America and convincing the spectator that “if [the spectator] met these characters in the real world they would probably be fascinating” (Crudo, quoted in Fisher, 1996, p 56). This style centred mainly on the naturalistic performance of the actors (particularly of Dustin Hoffman) and the rich detail of the main setting (a junk shop), which according to the director was designed to convey “that there was a coat of dust an inch thick on everything” (Corrente quoted in Fisher, 1996, p 55) and commented on the conditions of the three petty criminals’ existence.

This film style stood somewhat at odds with a narrative structure which was mainly determined not by the characters’ actions but by the fragmented and circular use of language which substituted for any real action in the film. Throughout the film power relations change – often from moment to moment – and new alliances and enmities are formed on the basis of how feasible the planned robbery seems when the

characters approach it from a different perspective, and also when they discover new information. As a result, the characters are never close to the realisation of their goal because it is not clear whether the robbery was an actual goal or a topic of conversation for three people who are not doing much in their everyday lives. If the robbery was a real narrative goal, then the narrative breaks completely the rules of verisimilitude as there are a number of instances in the film that do not make narrative sense (for instance, why does Donny never give the address of the house to Teach so that the latter can do his homework about how he would break in?). If spending time is the actual characters' goal, then the robbery becomes a 'McGuffin,' an invented subject of conversation that justifies the rather schematic cause-effect logic for the three characters' (in)action. In either case, the narrative cannot be seen as classical, an argument that is reiterated by the fact that there is no real character transformation at the end (especially on the part of Teach who renews his meeting with Donny for the following day as if nothing happened) and which questions the use of classical conventions in the film's style. Despite Hoffman's star power, the film recorded a petty gross of \$0.6 million and overall received negative reviews.¹⁷

On the other hand, Glengarry Glen Ross (1984; 1992), adapted for the screen again by Mamet and directed by James Foley for New Line Cinema, manifests a visual style that can be easily traced back to the script. Like American Buffalo, Glengarry Glen Ross also features characters (real estate salesmen) whose use of language prescribes their actions. However, despite the fact that the use of language in the latter is also fragmented (unfinished sentences, innuendos, rhetorical questions), the characters use language for the very specific purpose of tricking potential customers to buy real estate or, more often than not, for the purpose of undermining each other's

efforts to save their jobs. This means that the film's narrative is generally organised along the lines of a classical narrative structure (tangible goals, clear psychological motivation, cause-effect logic etc), which for the most part is served by a straightforward, 'invisible' film style.

On certain occasions, though, narrative and style stray from this arrangement, as can be seen in two scenes that feature Moss and Aaronow discussing the possibility of breaking into their own office, stealing the leads and selling them to a competitor, and also the repercussions of such actions. In both scenes the break in the rules of the classical style is so evident that it inevitably draws the spectator's attention to technique. Moss and Aaronow's prolonged stichomythia,¹⁸ which for the most part consists of just one or two words each time a character speaks, is marked on the screen by an editing pattern that often cuts from one character to the other every time they open their mouth (with a significant number of shots lasting less than a second). Specifically, the first scene lasts 99 seconds and consists of 34 shots (giving an average shot length of 2.9 seconds) while the second scene lasts 101 seconds and consists of 32 shots (average shot length 3.1 seconds). Despite calling attention to it and creating a dizzying effect, the editing pattern of those two scenes punctuates the machine-gun exchange of words of the two characters in a similar way in which they appear on the screenplay, while at the same time comments on how Moss manages to draw Aaronow in his plan to rob the office, namely by confusing him with his fast talk. Thus although the filmmaker could have avoided such an editing pattern and opted for fewer cuts or for a two-shot occasionally interrupted by a shot/reverse shot editing pattern (thus 'slowing down' the discussion), he nevertheless adopted the editing style suggested by the script. The film grossed \$12 million, was nominated for

an Academy Award (best supporting actor for Al Pacino) and received very good reviews, including Vincent Canby's, which I cited earlier and which highlighted the fundamental significance of the script.

Besides illustrating the point that a direct correlation between script-suggested style and film style is beneficial for the aesthetic completeness of the projected film (and, in this case, for its box-office career), the above examples also serve to suggest that Mamet's screenplays are extremely assertive in terms of the specific visual style they invite. In fact, they are assertive to such an extent that failure to conform to the visual directions they prescribe can render them aesthetically incoherent and, ultimately, critically uninteresting. As I will demonstrate in a later section of this chapter, Mamet's screenplays achieve this assertiveness despite the minimal use of scene text, a fact that implies that the strength of Mamet's screenplays as visually suggestive texts lies overwhelmingly in the dialogue text.

Screenplay: The Written Text as a Marker of Acting and Performance

In an article for Film Comment entitled 'Acting Up,' film critic Robin Wood argued that the starting point for any definition of a filmmaker's visual style would have to be the filmmaker's "work with actors, the kind of performances that his (sic) creative collaborations with them produce, and the way those performances are presented on the screen" (1976, p 24).¹⁹ This emphasis on the significance of acting and its materialisation into a performance on the screen, to the detriment of more obvious stylistic elements (for instance, *mise en scène* or editing), might strike one as surprising. But since acting necessarily involves the creation of the illusion of a

character, it appears that acting is, after all, an extremely strong indicator of the expression of a distinct visual style. In the words of Robert Burgoyne, “the character seems to organise the text around itself – defining the editing patterns, motivating the camera work, controlling the sound-image relations – among myriad other textual extensions” (1986, p 71). If visual style is, then, inextricably linked with performance in general and acting in particular, I would like to examine, in the light of my previous discussion, the screenplay’s contribution to the production of the actors’ performance, which for Wood can be defined as a system of relations that includes the following parameters:

1. ‘Acting’: the ability of the actor to transform himself into another character, to become unrecognisable.²⁰
2. The actor’s presence/personality
3. The developed ‘star’ persona
4. Mannerisms, gestures, expression, intonation, movement: the concrete detail of performance, which may relate to any of the first three items or to all of them at once. (1976, p 21)

My thesis is that, even more than other visual indicators, performance is also embedded mainly in the screenplay, even if all four parameters that Wood mentions seem, to various degrees, external to the screenplay’s text. The questions that are of interest in this section of the chapter are:

- a) the extent to which the set of relations that is called performance is prescribed by the screenplay, and

b) whether there are screenplays that differ in the ways they suggest characterisation.

As my discussion will finally demonstrate, Mamet's screenplays determine the actors' performance in such an extreme way, that parameters that are external or alien to the script can easily jeopardise the aesthetic effects that a text-driven performance is set to convey.

The main point of entry for such a discussion is the concept of characterisation, which, at a basic level can be defined as "the interpretation of a character by an actor; the realisation of a specific personality with particular characteristics and manners" (Konigsberg, 1997, p 53). This definition immediately brings together the text and the actor since the "specific personality" and the "particular characteristics and manners" that the actor should convey, and that the film should realise, can almost completely be traced in and suggested by the written text. In other words, the text can provide the actor with the "concrete detail of performance" (to use Wood's phrase) before this performance is realised through the work of cinematic signifiers such as *mise-en-scène*, editing and camerawork (which as I argued earlier can be also suggested by the screenplay).

In a model for the systematic examination of characterisation in drama proposed by Manfred Pfister in his book The Theory and Analysis of Drama (1991) one can clearly see the extent to which the dramatic text determines the concrete detail of performance. This model is schematically represented in the following diagram (Pfister, 1991, p 185)

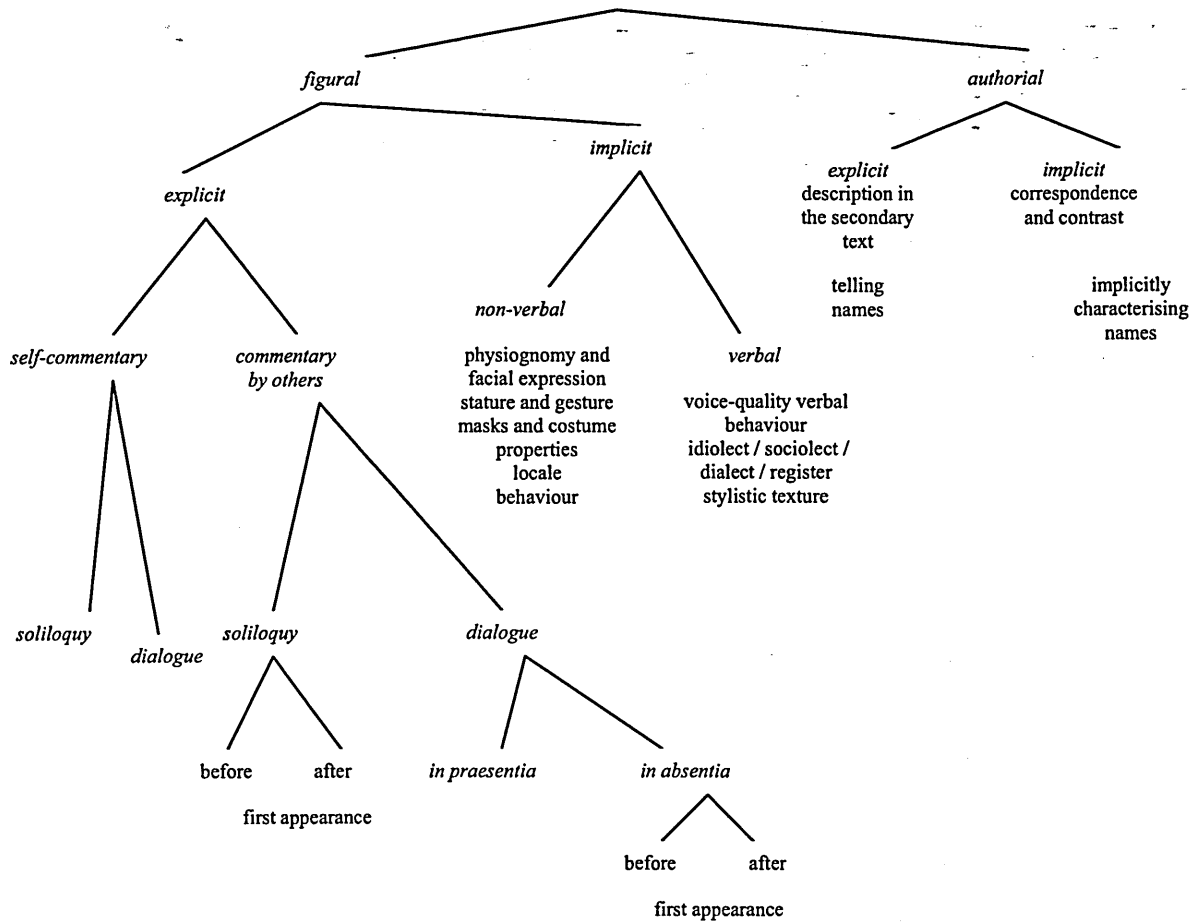


Figure 1
Characterisation

With the exception of physiognomy, which obviously depends on the performer's physical characteristics and, to a certain extent, voice quality,²¹ stature and gesture, which are determined only partially by the text (1991, p 192), the remaining techniques of characterisation are textually bounded and transmitted in verbal or non-verbal codes. It is then the job of the actor (and the director), through the process of reading the text, to detect the transmission of this vast wealth of information in the text in order to create a performance. This is the point, however, when the two other elements of performance – the actor's presence/personality and the developed star persona – come into play. From that stage on the character, previously "no more a collection of inert, textually described traits" (Smith, 1994, p 40), becomes personified as the actor's presence and/or the star's persona add to the character anthropomorphic features.

The above two elements influence performance in distinct ways and, frequently (as is the case in American cinema), their influence is manifested simultaneously. The first element highlights purely physical qualities on the part of the actor. Among others, these include physiognomy, stature, diction, voice quality, voice set²² and any other characteristic that is biologically determined. On the other hand, the developed star's persona influences performance in the same way as the actor's presence does but, significantly, also adds to the character extra-textual meaning, which originates in the star's other film performances (meaning concentrated in a concrete body of cinematic work) as well as in a series of non-cinematic performances (meaning amassed through the star's 'performance' in various other media forms such as interviews, photo-shoots, advertising etc). The developed star persona then endows the character with a network of meanings, which are alien to the text (unless the screenplay has

been written with a particular star in mind), a process which is often at odds with extremely assertive texts.

This distinction has highly significant implications. While the actor's presence transforms the textual indicators of characterisation through the physical abilities he or she possesses, it nevertheless allows the 'voice of the text' to be heard, since the interaction between text and actor remains more or less untainted by external (non-biological) parameters.²³ On the other hand, the extra layers of character interpretation that the star persona necessarily adds to the creation of performance produce a hierarchical configuration in which the developed persona determines the 'voice of the text'. In the first case, therefore, all the textual elements of characterisation that I identified above can, in principle, remain unaltered in the actor's performance, whilst in the second case, most implicit non-verbal elements (facial expression, gesture and behaviour) and almost all implicit verbal ones (idiolect, sociolect, dialect, register, verbal behaviour) can be severely compromised.

Although, in theory, all these textual indicators of performance can be breached by the developed star persona, it is nevertheless extremely rare to note such a complete rejection of the text, even in American cinema where the star persona has been an integral part of Hollywood's institutional power. In practice, however, several film stars' performances make explicit a recurrence of one or more implicit verbal and/or non verbal characterisation elements, which can be attributed to the star and not the text. Stars such as Jack Nicholson (whose frequent eyebrow raising is an instance of facial expression) and Warren Beatty (whose [slight] stuttering is an example of a distinct idiolect),²⁴ it can be argued, bring the above implicit non-verbal and verbal,

respectively, elements of characterisation as addenda to other, textually derived performance indicators. Obviously, one needs to examine the screenplays in detail in order to see whether these elements of characterisation are indeed not prescribed by the text, and they may well be.²⁵ However, the frequency of their recurrence and the concrete association in the popular critical discourse of both elements with the respective star's persona strongly suggest that they have been created extra-textually. In other words the text becomes the vehicle for the star/actor.

The inverse of this procedure can potentially take place when a star is cast against type. Although this is not always successful, such a casting decision is generally made on the principle that the star will not bring to the performance extra-textual elements (even though the success of the performance in the mind of an audience can be judged against the differences between the new performance and the star's previous cinematic and non-cinematic performances). A good example that comes to mind is Steve Martin's performance in Mamet's The Spanish Prisoner (1997). With a body of comic performances mostly based on the actor's physical, often acrobatic, skills (and therefore not entirely created on the basis of dramatic/realist characterisation)²⁶ and with a substantial staple of mostly comic performances in dramatic, dialogue-based films,²⁷ Martin's performance in The Spanish Prisoner surprises due to the star's complete disassociation with the performance elements upon which he has built a very successful career. The detachment of the actor's presence from the star persona can potentially destroy the uneven relationship between text and performer and consequently allows the text to assert itself. In these circumstances the actor/star becomes the vehicle for the text.

If the above argument about the degree of influence of the developed star persona on performance holds sway, one could argue that acting (as the ability of the actor to become unrecognisable) is in general undermined by the function of the star persona. This is because the extra-textual indicators would always remind the audience that they are watching a film with this or that star. On the other hand, if a performance is devoid of the presence of a star, or if a star is cast against type, then the act of transformation becomes more powerful and allows the audience to 'read' the projected character on the basis of the given circumstances of the text. In other words, performance in film is determined by a network of relations between its constitutive elements, which in various combinations direct it towards a particular aesthetic outcome.

Although the basis of the above discussion has its origins in the study of drama, it can nevertheless find an immediate application to the study of film, especially in light of Maltby and Craven's suggestion that "cinema criticism has borrowed its discourses of performance from the theatre" (1995, p 237). Since the screenplay combines the dramatic with the descriptive form (Horne, 1992, p 52), it provides the performer with an even greater wealth of performance-related indicators, especially in the descriptive passages of the screenplay (scene text). These tend to contain the concrete detail for the realisation of the film and support and strengthen the information transmitted in the dialogue text.

Even though, in the practice of screenwriting, there is no universal way to introduce characters, a short psychological profile accompanied by some physical detail at the time of the first appearance of the character has become the accepted form of scene

text characterisation.²⁸ This usually entails information such as external appearance, age, profession, class status as well as other (implicit non verbal) details.²⁹ From that point on the scene text refines, enhances, explains and comments on the given information about the process of character construction. According to Sternberg, there are three modes of non-verbal behaviour contained in the scene text: “kinesics” (body movements, facial expressions, glance and eye contact, automatic physiological reactions), “haptics” (touch behaviour) and “proxemics” (spatial interrelationships) (1997, p 116). These modes have two major functions: firstly, to convey ‘emotional display’ (spontaneous physical expression for momentary psychological moods) and secondly, to ‘externalise’ (to make visible information about staple dispositions, opinions, attitudes, features and interpersonal relationships beyond their temporary state) (1997, p 117).³⁰

Besides providing the actors with concrete material for the creation of their performance, the significance of the above modes of non-verbal characterisation lies also in their capacity to convey the manner in which the prescribed action should be filmed. In other words, kinesics, haptics and proxemics are also modes for the communication of visual style, a property that necessarily marks them as modes of non-verbal characterisation more relevant to film, than drama. A very obvious example in the mode of kinesics is eye-contact, which, on one level, marks a distinct action for two actors (to fix their eyes to a specific direction on/off screen) whilst on a different level invites the filmmaker for a particular type of shot (individual close up shots on the face/eyes of the actors) and a particular editing technique (point of view cutting).

The above brief discussion of non-verbal characterisation techniques in the screenplay underscores the fundamental importance of the scene text in the creation of the characters as well as in the suggestion of visual style. A text, however, also contains explicit characterisation techniques which are inherent in speech (dialogue text) and which function as visual style indicators (already discussed in the previous section) as well as performance indicators. The rest of this chapter will focus on the ways in which the dialogue text determines performance by focusing on Mamet's screenplay for Homicide (1992b) before examining its realisation on the film itself. As my discussion will demonstrate, Mamet's screenplay is very assertive both in terms of prescribing performance (primarily in the dialogue text) and of inviting the application of a specific visual style, an assertiveness that the filmmaker respects totally. First, though, I need briefly to outline the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings in Mamet's screenwriting practice and trace their origins. This will illustrate the very specific ways in which performance is created.

The Poetics of Performance in Mamet's Cinema: Against Embellishment

All Is in the Text

One of the most common complaints that critics of Mamet's films have consistently articulated is the flatness of the actors' performances, a complaint that, to a great extent, involves a rather strong dissatisfaction with the mode of delivery of the lines of the script.³¹ Adjectives such as clinical, dry, flat, boring, mannered, rigid, austere and stylised have been abundantly used in order to describe such a mode of dialogue delivery, which in a sense then becomes the key signifier and primary determinant for criticising the actors' performance in Mamet's films, at the expense of other

contributing (more cinematic) features such as editing and *mise en scène*. Although such a reductive approach to performance is obviously extremely problematic, since it equates dialogue delivery with performance as a whole, it nevertheless offers a very good entry point to a general discussion of the poetics of performance in Mamet's films. This is mainly due to the fact that it prompts us to remember that Mamet came to filmmaking from the theatre, where he was particularly influenced by two long-standing traditions of 'verbal' playwrights, on the one hand, the American 'realists' (such as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee) and, on the other hand, the European 'absurdist' (such as Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard).³² More importantly for our purposes, the above approach to performance underscores the significance of the dialogue text in Mamet's screenplays, while at the same time it links the dialogue text with the work of the actors and the filmmaker in the creation of performance.

Mamet's distinct philosophy on acting (in both theatre and cinema) was, to a great extent, a product of his ardent dissatisfaction with actors' training techniques advocated by drama schools in the United States. Originally aspiring to become a theatre actor himself, Mamet grew increasingly frustrated not so much with the spirit as with the substance of theatre training. As he states in the opening pages of his book True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor:

I studied acting in various schools, and could understand little of what was being said. I, and the other students, saw, I know, that the goal of the instruction was clear – to bring an immediacy to the performance – but none of us, I think,

understood, nor did practice reveal, how the school's exercises were to bring that goal about (1998b, pp 3-4).

Aside from targeting the poor teaching skills of certain unnamed drama instructors, Mamet's above assault on the institution of theatre training was mostly aimed at questioning the usefulness of particular acting exercises developed within the context of 'the Method,' a performance style and, more importantly, a philosophy of theatre acting that has dominated the American stage since the late 1940s, and then influenced mainstream Hollywood cinema in the 1950s.³³ An amalgamation of ideas, principles and exercises derived from the writings of the Russian theatre director and practitioner, Constantin Stanislavsky – although it was significantly adapted and appropriated for the needs and distinct characteristics of the American theatre³⁴ – 'Method acting' soon became the norm, especially after the critical success of the Broadway production of A Streetcar Named Desire in 1947.³⁵ More importantly for our purposes, a particular strand of Method acting, largely associated with the tuitions of Lee Strasberg, had a powerful influence on film acting, to the extent that it became synonymous with quality acting in mainstream Hollywood cinema.³⁶

One of the major differences between Stanislavsky's 'system' and its American appropriation(s) concerned a shift of emphasis from the facts of the text, as the sole determinants in the creation of a character, to the performer's personal experience of the text and the director's role in shaping that experience.³⁷ This shift essentially dispensed with the significance of the script's internal logic as a guide in the creation of performance. It also anticipated gaps and contradictions as these necessarily emerged from the juxtaposition between the literary and the personal, the textual and

the extra-textual. "Instead of using the given circumstances of the play", Sharon Carnicke observes, "the Method encourage[d] actors to use analogous or emotionally appropriate incidents from their own lives (personal substitutions)" (1998, p 83), a process that inevitably entails the subordination of the script to the personal experiences of the performer.³⁸ Significantly, in the Strasberg Method these personal experiences are mediated and manipulated by the director, who assumes such a position of supremacy and omnipotence in the production process, that he or she can actually define the character's actions extra-textually, therefore challenging the authorial signature of the writer as well as the intrinsic logic of the text. "A method actor's logic", Carnicke continues, "does not necessarily reflect the playwright's, but must result in whatever the director wants" (1998, p 83), or as Cicely Berry has put it: "the words [of the text] were not there to define the situation, rather as an adjunct to it" (2001, p 32).

Besides the rather obvious consequences that such an approach to acting entails in terms of a reallocation of power in the creative process, Method acting also invites particular types of re-presentations which are, largely, associated with the style of naturalism. This is mainly because of the Method's minute attention to emotion and personal experience. As Brockett and Findley have argued:

The dominant style in the American theatre from the late 1940s until about 1960 was a theatricalised realism comprised of acting which emphasised intense psychological truth and of visual elements which eliminated nonessentials but retained realistic outlines. It combined near naturalism in performance with stylisation in settings (quoted in Blum, 1984, p 59).

It is not coincidental, then, that the Method, as a style of performance, really took off with the success of plays by Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee.³⁹ These plays afforded actors such as Marlon Brando, Karl Malden and Paul Newman (students at Actor's Studio) opportunities to showcase their Method training, as the plays tended to feature characters with various psychological and emotional problems. More importantly though, and aside from its philosophical and stylistic implications, the Method was deemed as particularly suitable for the practical conditions of filmmaking (Carnicke, 1998, p 84). By training actors to remember randomly and retain at will specific psychological states and emotions that derived from their own personal experiences,⁴⁰ the argument goes, the Method dovetailed the disruptive and fragmented process of filmmaking, whereby a film is shot out of sequence and the actors are not afforded the luxury of a linear and uninterrupted process of character building. In cinema, then, the Method acquired the added value of offering concrete solutions to the actors' practical problems in the process of creating a performance.

David Mamet's philosophy of acting has been founded on a set of principles and ideas that contrast directly with the above fundamental foundations of the Method. These principles include the absolute significance of the script as the *only* determinant in the creation of performance, the complete and utter elimination of any signifiers outside and foreign to the facts of the text, and the principal role of the author as the (unconscious) creator of meaning.⁴¹ As a mark of the extent to which Mamet's approach to acting has been shaped by the above 'anti-method' principles consider the following statement: "The actor is not on stage to have an experience or expose

himself to the audience, but to help tell a story” (Bruder et al, 1986, p 31). With these preliminary axioms in mind, I will proceed to discuss Mamet’s theory and practice in reference to acting as they have been articulated in a large number of essays written by Mamet himself and by a group of his students.⁴²

Practical Aesthetics

Given the fact that Mamet first achieved worldwide fame as a playwright, it might not come as a surprise to the reader that the most striking element in his approach to acting (both in theatre and film) is the central role of the script.⁴³ The centrality of the script is evident in his definition of acting as “living faithfully under the imaginary circumstances of the play” (Bruder et al, 1986, p 6). This definition immediately brings to the fore all three of the above-mentioned principles in the Mamet ‘acting canon’. Mamet himself cites his apprenticeship to the Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre in New York, under the guidance of Sanford Meisner, as the key influence in the above definition. It was there that he “wa[s] exposed to, drilled in and inculcated with the idea of *a unified aesthetic of theatre*; that is, a theatre whose every aspect (design, performance, lighting, rehearsal procedures, dramaturgy) was subordinated to the Idea of the Play” (1994a, p 107 original italics).

This emphasis on the written text necessarily suggests a strict adherence to a set of circumstances that are intrinsic to the script – what Bruder et al. call “given circumstances” (1986, p 8) – and which provide the actors with certain incontestable information as the basis upon which they can start creating their performance.⁴⁴ With the given circumstances of the text providing the working framework within which the actors are invited to understand the characters they portray, acting becomes a

process whereby the actors bring the words of the script to life through a series of actions that are strictly determined by those words. Essential for an understanding of this process are the definitions of the terms 'action' and 'character,' which Mamet formulated in the light of his interpretation of Aristotle's Poetics and, interestingly, of Eisenstein's theory of montage.

'Action,' for Mamet, is "the *physical* process of trying to obtain a specific goal, an objective" (Bruder et al, 1986, p 7; Mamet, 1998b, pp 72-3; my emphasis), a definition that is inclusive either directly or indirectly of the six constitutive elements of action as they have been outlined by Keir Elam (1980) in his semiotic analysis of theatre and drama: "agent, intention, act, modality (manner and means), setting and purpose" (1980, p 121). In order for this process to be successful, however, the goal or objective must be concrete and accomplishable; a condition that is again stipulated by the text.⁴⁵ Consequently, the script can be defined as the total sum of concrete, attainable goals that the characters strive to achieve. In this line of thought, each scene becomes earmarked by the accomplishment or not of one or more such goals (Mamet, 1992a, p 10). This subsequently lays the ground for the next scene – this time with a different objective for the characters – until the protagonist reaches his/her final objective at the end of the story. True to the above, Mamet has admitted that outlining the action of the characters is the first task in his screenwriting routine. He does this before considering more 'cinematic' questions, such as the rhythm of the movie – which, in his opinion, is determined "by the proximity of the protagonist to her [sic] goal" – and visual aspects of the film (1994a, p 314).

The aforementioned definition of action and the structure of the script as a logical progression of a series of scenes whereby the characters strive to achieve specific goals stems directly from Aristotle's Poetics, in which the Ancient Greek philosopher analysed the constitutive elements of the classic Greek drama and reached his famous definition of tragedy. In particular, Mamet has cited Aristotle's notion of the "unity of action" (determined by the hero's pursuit of the one goal) as the cornerstone of his own poetics (Mamet [1992a, p xv]; Mamet [1994a, p 163]; Mamet [1998a, p 73]; Bruder et al [1986, p 74]), a notion that sits well with the narrative traditions of both American theatre and, especially, Hollywood cinema.⁴⁶

If 'action,' according to Mamet (via Aristotle), is a physical attempt to accomplish specific goals, then his definition of character as "habitual action" (1994a, p 265) or "the sum total of an individual's action (Bruder et al, 1986, p 74) – again originating in Aristotle's writings – is clearly dependent on the setting up of those goals as the structuring principles of any given story. It is at this point that the role of the writer becomes extremely important as it is his/her job to establish them clearly in the script, and, in Mamet's case, mainly in the dialogue text. This necessarily suggests that Mamet fully subscribes to the idea that dramatic language is (or must be) performative and seeks (or must seek) to accomplish, a function that the writer must expose in the construction of the text.⁴⁷

Under these circumstances the performative force of the language in the dialogue text has the capacity to delineate meticulously each individual action for every character, and therefore question the usefulness of the scene text as a contributor to the creation of performance. His compelling declaration that "good drama has no stage directions"

(1994a, p 118) clearly testifies to the performative potential of the dialogue text. This also explains Mamet's noteworthy habit of including an absolute minimum of stage directions or other type of commentary in his plays and of scene text (with the exception of report) in his screenplays. If the script is well-written, Mamet suggests, then all the actions will be easily reducible to physical, 'actable' objectives, which would then help forward the story towards the through-action, "the single overriding action that encompasses all the actions an actor pursues from scene to scene" (Bruder et al, 1986, p 88).⁴⁸

Although the above position necessarily entails certain obvious ideological implications about the role of the writer in the creative process, which Mamet does not seem to deny entirely, it is nevertheless founded on the important proviso that the text is (or should be) the product of the "unconscious mind". Art, for Mamet, cannot be created consciously (Mamet, 1998a, p 49). "Artists don't set out to bring *anything* to the audience or anyone else. They set out, again, to cure a raging imbalance" (Mamet, 1998a, p 51; original italics). As a result, the structure of well-written, dramatic texts follows unconsciously, but necessarily, the mechanisms of human perception, in particular our propensity to transform incomplete information into coherent mental representations in a cause-effect logic.⁴⁹ Human perception naturally obeys the above fundamental laws, which entail the formation of hypotheses upon which one can subsequently 'act.' It follows therefore that the well-written text encourages actors to establish categorically their performance on an extremely concrete basis, which the author has 'unconsciously' created. Upon this supposition, every scene should be easily reducible to a series of physically actable objectives,

which would necessarily lead to the overall (accomplishable) objective of the protagonist that has originally triggered all the other actions, his/her through-action.⁵⁰

More importantly, the above position seems to advance an argument that sees a distinct type of acting as determined by the mechanics and logic of a script crafted in a particularly way. Even though this argument seems to reflect Staiger's position regarding the relation between script and acting in general terms (a specific type of script is the blueprint for the use of style, as well as for the actors' performance), it nevertheless does not necessarily support the quest for realism (a type of which is conveyed by the classical style) that, for Staiger, the continuity script essentially implies. For the authors of The Classical Hollywood Cinema the continuity script (not different in spirit and structure from Mamet's well-written script) presupposes a particular use of film style, *sometimes despite the script's intrinsic logic* (resulting in a number of films where the classical realist style looks out of place). For Mamet, however, it is this specific logic of the text that actually determines the use of film style.⁵¹ This is, in fact, the most controversial aspect of Mamet's aesthetic practice and, as I demonstrated in the first two chapters of this thesis, the majority of popular criticism against his films almost always commenced from the films' lack of realism in terms of use of visual style.⁵² If, however, the use of an anti-realist visual style, in the age of 'post-classical' American cinema, could be accepted by audiences as a formal exercise by a filmmaker associated with the periphery of mainstream cinema, anti-realist acting is considerably more difficult to digest. This is because it shatters the illusion of the character and the ensuing spectator's identification with them.

It is time now to turn my attention to the pragmatic aspects of performance in Mamet's films. These aspects involve the presentation of performance indicators in scene and dialogue text, the filmmaker's approach to the blocking of the script (introduced in the previous chapter) and the key issue of dialogue delivery.

Creating a Performance

From the moment a Mamet script becomes available to the actors, the filmmaker works with them in 'blocking the script', that is, stripping the text down to the actual actions of the characters as those are prescribed by the dialogue text.⁵³ The scene text in his screenplays consists of brief descriptive and report passages, whilst the mode of comment is completely absent, with the exception of the category of technical comment. In particular, description is utilised in the form of slug lines, which provide information about the location and time of the action, but interestingly, not in the form of stage directions (setting and objects to be visualised). In this way, a Mamet script becomes open to corrective responses, potentially dictated by economic parameters such as budget limitations or location problems, which nevertheless can never affect the given circumstances of his text.⁵⁴ Report, which is the most significant mode of presentation in Mamet's scene text, takes the form of sentence constructions that prescribe simple *physical* actions on the part of the characters, just as the dialogue text does.⁵⁵ As a matter of fact, Mamet ensures that all the actions prescribed in report are concrete and physical by almost completely depriving his sentence construction of adjectives and adverbs. Thus all the actions are just performable (and not performable in a specific way). As he put it in an interview about his experience in writing his first script for Bob Rafelson's The Postman Always Rings Twice (1981):

It was a lot like writing a play, in that I was constantly trying to determine for specific moments – after isolating the events – what the characters do. I compared them in order to understand what their ‘through action’ was and then worked backwards to see how this influenced the various moments. It was a process of refining (Mamet, quoted in Yakir, 1981, p 21).⁵⁶

On the other hand, comment finds its way to Mamet’s screenplays only in the form of technical comment (indicators for camera movement, position and angle and cues for editing) and never in the form of literary or paratechnical comment. If the author avoids adjectives and adverbs in his use of report because they cannot be visualised concretely, then it is not surprising that he refuses to include figures of speech and explanatory inserts that cannot be visualised at all. This is despite the fact that comment, as Helmut Bonheim argued, “[can] assign purposes, causes [and] motivations” (quoted in Sternberg 1997, p 73) and, in effect, can complete the picture suggested by dramatic language.

The above practice has extremely significant implications for the creation of performance (as well as the eventual visualisation of the screenplay) in Mamet’s films. This is because the absence of comment (and in particular of literal comment) suggests that if one (the actor, the critic, the reader) wants to locate purposes, causes and motivations in a Mamet screenplay, one needs to look at the text (and especially the dialogue text). The Mamet text however, may or *may not* provide explicit causes for its characters’ actions.⁵⁷ If the latter is the case, then it can be argued that an approach to acting that seeks to establish the psychological underpinning of the

character is doomed to fail since the available data would never allow the creation of a complete picture of a character's psychology. The actor (the Method-trained actor in particular) then has no other alternative but to resort elsewhere for answers and, hence, bring to the performance motivations and purposes that do not exist, therefore compromising the aesthetic integrity of the character he/she portrays.⁵⁸ On the other hand, acting on the basis of performing individual accomplishable objectives (as those are prescribed in the continuum created by interaction between report and dialogue) bypasses the obstacles of clear character motivation that any text might raise and ensures its true rendering. In other words, Mamet's practice anticipates the text's attempt to assert itself (1998b, p 29).

Mamet's perception of acting in purely physical terms stems from two major principles that constitute the backbone of his poetics of performance:

- a) that emotions and other psychological traits cannot be physically acted upon, (a principle that stands completely against the Method); and
- b) that characters exist only in the script and can certainly not possess any emotions or psychological traits.

The first principle is partly explained by the absence of adjectives and adverbs in the screenplay.⁵⁹ The second principle holds significant interest since it throws sufficient light on the question of why performance in general, and dialogue delivery in particular, in Mamet's films can be perceived as flat, clinical or dry. Although the lack of emotion in the delivery of speech does indeed compromise the realist aesthetics of performance, Mamet believes that the audience is served well, since this

type of emotionless acting strips the performance of any pretensions and, consequently, releases the truth of the text. For Mamet, the words of the script and the actions those words connote, contain by nature any form of characterisation that is necessary for advancing the story and, therefore, anything else (including the actor's attempt to be emotive) he sees as embellishment. It is worth citing his views on this issue in some length:

There is no such thing for the actor, as characterisation. Character, as Aristotle reminded us, is just habitual action. We know a man's or a woman's character *by what they do*, and we tend to blatantly disregard what they say about themselves, particularly and especially when those things they say about themselves are obviously designed to induce us to respond to them in some manner which will redound to their own self-interest. ... We know that we will withhold judgements of someone's character until we saw *how they act*. We know it when we meet them at a party, and we *also* know it when we meet them in the theatre. Characterisation is taken care of by the author, and if the author knows what he is about, he *also* will avoid it like the plague, and show us *what the character does* rather than having the character's entrance greeted with 'Well, well, if it isn't my ne'er-do-well half-brother from New Zealand' (1994a, p 265; original italics).

The above process of perception (and understanding) through association is certainly reminiscent, at least in Film Studies, of the concept of cinematic montage. In fact, Eisenstein, whom Mamet has very frequently cited as a major influence on his use of film style (see Chapter One), chose the term "associations" to refer to the symbolic

meanings created by the juxtaposition of two individual shots (Buckland, 1998b, p 22). It is not surprising, then, that Mamet resorted again to Eisenstein in order to support theoretically this aspect of his philosophy on performance, as the following extract from True or False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor clearly indicates:

...it is the juxtaposition in the mind of the audience between the spoken word of the author and the simple directed-but-uninflected action of the actor which creates the ineluctable idea of character in the mind of the audience (1998b, p 10).

True to the above, Mamet's work with the actors reflects the synthetic power of montage as this becomes manifest in the blocking of the screenplay, which always takes place on a scenic level. As he argued: "finding what a character does is the irreducible essence of the scene" (1998b, p 90). Each scene is broken into its constituent parts, in terms of what each character would like to accomplish, and the individual actions that the actors will be called to perform physically are outlined. The blocking process has three phases, and each phase is completed with an answer to a question, which then becomes a concrete step towards the creation of performance. The three questions are:

- a) What does the character want?
- b) What does he or she do to get it?
- c) What is that like in my experience?

(Mamet, 1998b, p 99)

The first question functions as a vehicle for outlining the objective of the character(s) in each individual scene. According to Mamet's students, the most significant aspect of this question is the precision of the answer, since in a large number of scenes the character(s) might be doing or saying several things that could even be contradictory (Bruder et al, 1986, p 19). Incorrect, imprecise, incomplete or inaccurate statement of the objective would lead to a physical action that is not on a par with the objective of the character and would consequently jeopardise the coherence of the actors' actions (as well as contradict the author's intentions). Furthermore, and in the rather improbable case that the actors are tempted to think of themselves as 'being the characters' during the blocking stage, Mamet's 'system' stipulates that all the answers must be given in the third person, as this tactic should discourage any such beliefs (Bruder et al, 1986, p 20).

The answer to the second question enables the actor to find the appropriate action for what the character is doing in the scene, as it was agreed in the previous stage. This action is subject to a series of conditions, which, in their totality, ensure that the action is performable. These conditions include that the action must:

- a) be physically capable of being done
- b) be fun to do
- c) be specific
- d) have its test in the other person
- e) not be an errand
- f) not presuppose any physical or emotional state

g) not be manipulative

h) have a 'cap'

h) be in line with the intentions of the playwright [or the screenwriter]

(Bruder et al, 1986, pp 13-14).

All the above conditions, with the possible exception of (b) and (e) are clearly set to ascertain that the chosen action is physical and therefore possible to execute.⁶⁰

Although the performer can give only one correct response to the question of what a character's goal is (since the goal has already been put forward by the author), finding the appropriate action is a process more open to alternatives. This is because it is possible that there might be many actions that can lead to one specific objective (and more importantly because the actual physical action itself is not prescribed by the author but determined by the actor).⁶¹ Longer scenes might contain more than one objective for any individual character, and consequently might require that the actor performs more than one action. In such a case the actor has to find the individual 'beats', the "single units of action" (Bruder et al, 1986, p 87) of which a long scene is comprised. If the script is well-written, each beat should be obvious, since it would necessarily prescribe a clear objective for the character. Different beats within a single scene are marked by 'beat changes', which "[occur] when a new piece of information is introduced or an event takes place over which the character has no control and which by its very nature must change what the actor is doing" (Bruder et al, 1986, p 87). In the rare case that a scene consists of an unusual number of beats, which the actors might have a problem in demarcating, Mamet prescribes them in his scripts.⁶²

Once the appropriate action(s) that the actor is going to perform is or are decided the blocking of the script moves to its final stage, where the actor determines the physical parameters of the action through recourse to his/her own experiences. Although this process is somewhat reminiscent of Method-related techniques of acting, Mamet has taken pains to establish its difference by insisting on the actor's ability to 'imagine' as opposed to the ability to 'concentrate' (Mamet, 1998b, pp 93-94). For Mamet, the answer to the question "what is that like in my experience" must always begin with the phrase "[it is] as if." This is a phrase that stimulates the actor to imagine a situation, real or unreal, in which he/she would be called to perform the exact same action he/she is to perform in portraying the character.⁶³ The difference from similar Method-inspired techniques lies in the fact that the imagined situations should not necessarily stem from the actor's personal life. For Mamet it is sufficient as long as the imagined situation could actually happen in real life to the actor and corresponds with the physical action that has been already determined in the previous blocking stage. Through this type of work, the actor uses his/her powers of reason and application and ensures that he/she has found an actable, physical goal, which can always be consciously controlled and, therefore, if necessary, repeated (1998b, p 91).⁶⁴

Before I turn my attention to Homicide and discuss in detail Mamet's 'practical aesthetics', I would like to close this section of the chapter with a few words regarding the above process of blocking the script and how it can be used critically in identifying the performative force of the screenplay's dialogue text. In particular, the first two stages of the process can be understood as an attempt to isolate the illocutionary intentions of utterances and the perlocutionary effects these utterances

essentially produce.⁶⁵ Since dramatic language presents what Keir Elam calls “a ‘pure’ model of social intercourse” (1980, p 178), that is, it is necessarily purpose-driven, then one can argue that, potentially, all utterances have specific illocutionary intentions and create specific perlocutionary effects. These effects can be traced when the characters’ goals are identified and the success or failure of the characters in achieving these goals is determined, which is the essence of work that takes place in the first phase of the blocking process.

If the perlocutionary effects of the characters’ utterances are clearly stated in the text (which explains why the answer to the question “what the character wants” has to be correct, precise, accurate, etc), the illocutionary acts (intentions) that determine those utterances are open to the actors’ interpretations (through the work in the second phase of the blocking process). Since the same utterance can indeed constitute the performance of different illocutionary acts,⁶⁶ it is expected that the actor should strive to find the ‘correct’ illocutionary force of the utterance within the context of the given circumstances of the text (Elam, 1980, p 164). In this attempt, the actor is helped by various “illocutionary force indicators,” which are inherent in the script, and thus determine the correct mode of the utterance.⁶⁷ Assigning the appropriate illocutionary intention to the utterances is one key aspect in the actor’s work for a successful performance since it constitutes the easiest way for the actor to establish motivation and purpose to the character portrayed. More importantly, however, this type of engagement with the text is also a marker of a productive and, ultimately, essential interaction between the actor and the text since as Elam has argued: “if dramatic discourse were illocutionary self-sufficient on the page, the performance would be all but superfluous” (1980, p 166).

In Mamet's approach to performance, however, the actors' relative flexibility in locating the illocutionary intention of the utterance (as opposed to having to assign one 'correct' intention) opens up the possibility for the creation of a potentially unstable relation between the illocutionary intention and the perlocutionary effect of the utterance. On one level, this means that the chosen-by-the-actor illocutionary intention might not clearly assign motivation or purpose to the effect produced, thus rendering the above relation more ambiguous. Furthermore, and since Mamet's actors refrain from endowing the delivery of their words with signifiers of emotion, the illocutionary force of the utterances often remains undetermined, despite the existence of several illocutionary force indicators in Mamet's screenplays.⁶⁸ The result then is a form of dialogue delivery that has been labelled flat, clinical or dry, in other words, superfluous and, one might add, unrealistic.⁶⁹

It's time now to see how all the above elements of performance are indicated in Homicide with specific references to Joe Mantegna's performance as the film's central character (while I shall also examine in some detail Rebecca Pidgeon's performance).

The Assertive Text: Homicide

Questions of Performance

Homicide tells the story of Robert Gold (played by Joe Mantegna), a detective involved in the pursuit of an African American criminal, who is taken off the case against his will and, instead, is ordered to investigate the murder of an old Jewish

woman mainly because he is also Jewish. Gold is reluctant to take the second case seriously, and unwilling to accept that his Jewish origins are of significance for the job he does. He later finds himself drawn to the homicide case due to a series of events set in motion by his actions, events that make him question his identity and prompt him to embark on a journey of self-discovery with ultimately tragic consequences.

The story is instigated by the hero's deep urge to help, to offer his services, which, in Mamet's screenplay, coincides with the most integral aspect of the character's job (apparent in the words '*to serve and protect*'). This urge to perform conscientiously (even obsessively) this specific aspect of his job functions as Gold's through action (main objective) in the screenplay and it becomes obvious from the first scene in which he appears. In the middle of a crisis, Gold offers valuable information, which could lead to the arrest of William Randolph (the African-American criminal), despite his partner's objections and in spite of having previously been removed from the case (Appendix III, scene 6).⁷⁰ After this initial instance of the hero's main objective, the rest of the story revolves around the consequences of Gold's urge to help through his job and, significantly, the consequences of the one time he did not do his job properly (as a matter of fact, the second half of the script focuses on the hero's efforts to make amends for this one mistake). Appropriately, the story comes to an end when Gold "is off homicide" (1992b, p 125), when he is officially deprived of his job and therefore prevented from further pursuing his main objective.⁷¹

As I noted in the previous section, Mamet's practical aesthetics is founded on the precise identification by the actors of the characters' through actions, which guide

them in the creation of their performances. As Joe Mantegna admitted, the most important factor in preparing to play the character was to learn as much about detectives who are obsessed with their work as possible (Zucker, 1995, p 175). He explained:

It was important to me to talk to homicide guys, see how they dress, see how they look. I would ask them: "What are the little things you do that only you guys know?" I would go through the script with them. They said: "Well, one thing homicide guys always do is carry a lot of pens," because, at any given moment they don't know if somebody's going to make a confession... That was a little thing; I had pens all over my body. And then he said that they use the pens a lot, because if you come on a body, you don't want to touch it, you don't want your fingerprints on it, so the pen becomes a tool (Zucker, 1995, p 175).

Although the above extract might strike one as an attempt by the actor to create a verisimilar performance (with the potential to disrupt any anti-realist aesthetic conveyed by Mamet's script), this type of research is a useful procedure which, according to Mantegna, ultimately allows the actor to become more comfortable with the objective of the character. He or she can then focus on the script without any external distractions. As he put it: "you want to be more comfortable in what you're doing so you can forget about it, so then you can concentrate on *just doing the script*." (Zucker, 1995, p 175; my italics). As Mamet does not prescribe in his screenplays details such as costumes, hairstyle or objects that a character possesses (and the screenplay for Homicide is no exception), it falls within the actor's responsibility to locate the typical traits of the given circumstances of the script (in this case, simply, a

homicide detective obsessed with his work). After the actor does that he or she can proceed with 'doing the script,' that is, perform a series of physical actions while delivering the lines.

If throughout the story the main objective of the hero is to do his job obsessively, it follows that all his other objectives in the seventy-six individual scenes of the script are subordinate to this. Indeed, if one blocks the script in terms of Gold's distinct through actions in each scene he appears (see Appendix III), one will discover that the character's through actions in the first nineteen scenes [scenes 6 - 24] are strictly determined by the one key objective we identified above.⁷² In the following eleven scenes however, the hero's individual through actions seem to be less determined by his main objective. As a matter of fact what seems to characterise Gold's actions is a lack of compulsion, an absence of the force that had driven him in the previous scenes. If one looks at his through actions in those eleven scenes, one will see typical police work objectives, though, significantly, blended with attempts to dismiss the case as non-existent (see Appendix III [scenes 25-35]). In other words, although Gold's objectives in this segment of the script do not necessarily contradict his central objective, they nevertheless lack the compulsion and, therefore, the energy that had made Gold the exceptional detective the previous segment clearly demonstrated.

Interestingly, Mamet's script originally locates Gold's substantial lapse (in the way he does his job) in his attempt to concentrate on the Randolph case, a flashier and more significant case, for the homicide squad, for which Gold is "the lynchpin" (1992b, p 60). Scene 36, however, moves the story in a different direction and suggests other latent reasons for the hero's conscious refusal to take the murder case seriously. In a

phone conversation with Sullivan (his work partner), Gold makes clear that the murder of the old woman was a consequence of the greed that (stereo)typically characterises a wealthy Jewish family, which is here manifest as the family's attempt to make more money by making her work in a black ghetto neighbourhood:

GOLD: Don't *tell* me, don't send the old lady *work* down there, and tell me "how you are so surprised." ... Ten more bucks a week they're making lettin' her work down there? (1992b, p 61; original italics and quotation marks).

Gold's assumption about the deeper reasons behind the homicide, an assumption based on prejudice and hasty judgement rather than on a professional police investigation, colours the way he conducts his business at the Kleins' house. For that reason, although his through actions are in fact determined, at least to a degree, by his main objective (Appendix, scenes 27-31), they are nevertheless supplemented by other through actions (Appendix, scenes 32-35) with which he attempts to expose Dr Klein's fears as paranoia and, therefore, dismiss the allegation that "somebody's taking "shots" at them" (1992b, p 61; original quotation marks) as imaginary.

Gold's phone conversation with Sullivan, however, is overheard by Miss Klein, the dead woman's granddaughter who, unbeknownst to Gold, is sitting in a dark corner in the same room. For the rest of the scene, Miss Klein's through action is to show the detective his wrongdoing and convince him to do his job properly. Due to its significance for the story (it is after that scene that Gold shows the same impulsive traits in his work and starts realising the significance of his Jewish origins) as well as its structural weight (it takes place right in the middle of the story as it is laid out by

the screenplay) I shall focus my discussion of how a text prescribes performance and style entirely upon this scene. For reasons of space I have not included the beginning of Gold's phone conversation to Sullivan, through which we learn what has happened in the Randolph case:

GOLD: ...Some bullshit, somebody's taking "shots" at them.

As GOLD speaks, he fiddles with objects on the desk, including a magnifying glass. From this angle, Gold's body blocks most of the view through large sliding doors into a dark adjoining room

(Into phone): *Fuck 'em. Don't tell me, don't send the old lady work down there, and tell me "how you're so surprised."* Fuck 'em, and the taxes they pay.

(Pause.)

Angle from the dark adjoining room, over a pair of hands holding the undertaker's notebook previously seen; beyond the notebook GOLD is visible through the sliding doors on the phone in the study.

Reverse angle from study, with most of Gold's body blocking the view into the adjoining room. GOLD leans over to reach for another object on the desk – and reveals MISS KLEIN sitting on the sofa in the next room with the notebook on her lap.

(into phone): You tell me. Ten more bucks a week they're making lettin' her work down there? Not...“my” people...baby ... *Fuck* 'em, there is so much anti-Semitism, last four thousand years, they must be doing *something* to bring it about. I'll see you at the house half hour. Yo Tim. See you then.

He hangs up, straightens his tie. He senses something and looks around the room.

POINT OF VIEW: MISS KLEIN *sitting on the couch, crying quietly, looking at him.*

Close up: Gold

Close up: Miss Klein

MISS KLEIN: My grandmother was killed today.

Beat. She walks over to him

She stayed down there because she wanted to stay there. She was a fighter. She wanted to die there.

Beat.

You're a Jew.

Beat.

And you talk that way. In the house of the dead.

Beat.

(Softly): Do you have any shame?

Beat.

GOLD: I 'm sorry about your grandmother.

MISS KLEIN: No one asked you to be sorry.

Beat.

No one asked for your sympathy. (She walks to the door). We would have appreciated your respect.

Beat.

Do you hate yourself that much?

Beat.

Do you belong nowhere...?

Beat.

GOLD: I...

She turns away.

I'll find the killer.

Beat.

I'll...

MISS KLEIN starts out the door. GOLD follows.

(Mamet, 1992b, pp 61-63; original italics and quotation marks).

The scene contains ten beat changes, which correspond to ten different individual actions that the actors are called to perform in order to bring forward the through action of the scene. Table 1 demonstrates what each of the two characters wants in the above scene:

CHARACTER		OBJECTIVE/THROUGH ACTION
GOLD		TO ASSIGN GUILT (ON THE BASIS OF STEREOTYPES) AND TO DISSOCIATE HIMSELF FROM THE STEREOTYPE
MISS KLEIN		TO REMIND GOLD OF THE DEATH OF HER GRANDMOTHER
	BEAT	
MISS KLEIN		TO EXPLAIN TO GOLD THAT HER GRANDMOTHER WAS HER OWN BOSS
	BEAT	
MISS KLEIN		TO REMIND GOLD OF HIS ETHNIC ORIGINS
	BEAT	
MISS KLEIN		TO REPRIMAND GOLD FOR HIS DISRESPECT WHILE ON THE PHONE
	BEAT	
MISS KLEIN		TO QUESTION GOLD'S ETHICS
	BEAT	
GOLD		TO EXPRESS SYMPATHY ABOUT MISS KLEIN'S FAMILY TRAGEDY
MISS KLEIN		TO REJECT GOLD'S SYMPATHY
	BEAT	
MISS KLEIN		TO ASK FOR GOLD'S RESPECT
	BEAT	
MISS KLEIN		TO ACCUSE GOLD OF SELF-HATRED
	BEAT	
MISS KLEIN		TO ACCUSE GOLD OF BEING ROOTLESS
	BEAT	
GOLD		TO PROMISE MISS KLEIN THAT HE WILL DO HIS JOB
	BEAT	
GOLD		INTERRUPTED

Table 1

The characters' through actions as stated in the screenplay

As is obvious from the above segmentation, the through line of the scene is that the hero realises that *'he must do his job well.'*⁷³ But how do the goals of the two characters interact in order to advance the above through line?

The beginning of the scene finds detective Gold having already made his mind up about who the murderer of Mrs Klein is, a verdict not based on thorough police investigation, but rather on stereotypical assumptions about the Jewish people's greed for material wealth, assumptions that are unexpected, to say the least, given the fact that Gold is Jewish. When a shocked Miss Klein hears Gold making the above comments, she reminds him that her beloved grandmother has just been murdered and explains to him that it was her decision to continue working even though in the meantime her family had become wealthy. More importantly however, she cannot

believe that a Jew can make such derogatory comments about a dead person of the same ethnic origin, especially in her own house, and evokes his sense of shame. Interestingly, Gold does not apologise for his unacceptable behaviour and instead he simply offers his condolences on the death in her family, which Miss Klein does not accept. As she explains, all she wanted to see was Gold's respect for her dead grandmother, an act that Gold could not have possibly demonstrated due to his lack of humanism and belongingness, a statement that triggers Gold's final reply that he will do his job and find the killer. His new objective could not have been more timely as in the next scene [37] a sound of a gunshot is heard, which triggers the hero's subsequent (obsessive) investigations and his eventual encounter with the other side of the law.

Gold's decision to take the case seriously and do his job conscientiously is made on the basis of Miss Klein's concerted series of actions to make him see his mistakes and inadequacies (as a man of the law and as a man of Jewish origins). These actions interact with Gold's own concrete goals, which until this scene were to dismiss the racial motive for the murder of the Jewish woman and the allegations that the Klein family are under threat, as an example of Jewish paranoia, in favour of the more important Randolph case. All these actions can be expressed physically by the two actors who portray the characters.

Table 2 outlines the two actors' potential physical actions based on the objectives presented in Table 1 [the forward slash (/) indicates alternative actions that the actors could possible perform].

ACTOR PLAYING GOLD		TO PRESENT ONE'S CASE / TO MAKE UP ONE'S MIND WITHOUT CHECKING THE FACTS AND TO KEEP ONE'S DISTANCE FROM AN ISSUE
ACTRESS PLAYING MISS KLEIN		TO PRESENT ONE WITH THE FACTS
	BEAT	
ACTRESS PLAYING MISS KLEIN		TO RECTIFY A WRONG ASSUMPTION
	BEAT	
ACTRESS PLAYING MISS KLEIN		TO POINT OUT SOMETHING ONE HAS FORGOTTEN
	BEAT	
ACTRESS PLAYING MISS KLEIN		TO SHOW ONE THAT ONE IS OUT OF ORDER
	BEAT	
ACTRESS PLAYING MISS KLEIN		TO IDENTIFY THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING NATURAL
	BEAT	
ACTOR PLAYING GOLD		TO RESPOND TO ONE'S MISFORTUNE
ACTRESS PLAYING MISS KLEIN		TO DISMISS ONE'S THOUGHTS ON A MATTER
	BEAT	
ACTRESS PLAYING MISS KLEIN		TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT ONE SHOULD HAVE DONE UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES / TO STATE WHAT I DEEM AS AN APPROPRIATE ACTION
	BEAT	
ACTRESS PLAYING MISS KLEIN		TO POINT OUT AN UNEXPECTED CHARACTERISTIC
	BEAT	
ACTRESS PLAYING MISS KLEIN		TO IDENTIFY THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING NATURAL
	BEAT	
ACTOR PLAYING GOLD		TO MAKE AMENDS FOR A MISTAKE / TO CONFIRM I AM THE MAN FOR THE JOB
	BEAT	
ACTOR PLAYING GOLD		TO DISCOVER I HAVE LOST SOMEONE'S TRUST

Table 2

The actors' potential actions

“Gold’s” first actions, therefore, ‘to make his mind up without checking the facts and to keep his distance from an issue’ is greeted by ‘a statement of the facts’, the fundamental action upon which any decision is made.⁷⁴ Following this, “Miss Klein” proceeds ‘to rectify a wrong assumption’ revealing thus the mistake in the first part of “Gold’s” previous action (‘to make up his mind without checking the facts’). By ‘pointing out something he seems to have forgotten’ “Miss Klein” delivers another blow to “Gold’s” action and, in particular, to its second part (the distance he keeps from an issue) since her action serves specifically to remind him of the significance of that issue. ‘Showing him that he is out of order’ is a building block that, even though mainly aimed again at the second part of his action, nevertheless stands to verify “Gold’s” overall mistake in his chosen action. Finally, ‘to identify the absence of something natural’ delivers a particularly effective blow to “Gold” (it is after that

point that the author has chosen for Gold to advance his new objective), as she literally challenges him to act on this absence. The outcome of her actions however, is not the one expected. When “Gold”, on the basis of “Miss Klein’s” above actions, ‘responds to her misfortune’ rather than ‘make amends’ or ‘verify that he will do the job’, “Miss Klein” ‘dismisses his thoughts on the matter’ and launches another series of actions that are aimed towards the same objective. By ‘stating what she deems to be an appropriate action in a given circumstance,’ she tries to reach her objective in a more forceful manner, as instead of pointing out to Gold his shortcomings she now articulates them for him. ‘Pointing out an unexpected characteristic’ in “Gold’s” action (which she has already found lacking in the previous building block) brings “Gold” even closer to re-evaluating the situation and ‘make amends for his mistake’. As in the previous sub-section, “Miss Klein’s” final blow comes in the form of ‘identifying the absence of a something natural,’ and this time she is successful in bringing about “Gold’s” change. Table 3 shows the building up of “Miss Klein’s” actions and their effect on “Gold.” The left part of the table represents the first half of the scene, while the right part represents the second half of the scene.

“MISS KLEIN’S” ACTIONS (PART 1)	“MISS KLEIN’S” ACTIONS (PART 2)
TO PRESENT ONE WITH THE FACTS	
TO RECTIFY A WRONG ASSUMPTION TO POINT OUT SOMETHING ONE HAS FORGOTTEN	TO DISMISS ONE’S THOUGHTS ON A MATTER TO STATE WHAT I DEEM AN APPROPRIATE ACTION / TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT ONE SHOULD HAVE DONE UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES
TO SHOW ONE THAT ONE IS OUT OF ORDER TO IDENTIFY THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING NATURAL	TO POINT OUT AN UNEXPECTED CHARACTERISTIC TO IDENTIFY THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING NATURAL
THEIR IMPACT ON “GOLD’S” ACTION: TO RESPOND TO ONE’S MISFORTUNE	THEIR IMPACT ON “GOLD’S” ACTIONS: TO MAKE AMENDS FOR A MISTAKE / TO VERIFY I WILL DO THE JOB

Table 3

“Miss Klein’s” actions and their effect on “Gold”

What is apparent when one chooses to perform the scene in the way demonstrated above is that the actress who plays Miss Klein structures her actions towards an identification of an absence, a state of disorder, which would eventually motivate the actor who plays Gold to fill it in, to establish order again.

If one suggests that the above potential actions bring about the objectives of the characters, as those are inscribed in the screenplay for Homicide, it will be interesting to examine how Joe Mantegna and Rebecca Pidgeon performed the same scene in the final version of the film. Additionally, this final part of the chapter will aim to discuss other elements of their performance (including facial expressions, gestures, mode of delivery and other verbal and non-verbal modes of characterisation) before it briefly examines the use of film style and the effects conveyed by Mamet's aesthetic practice. The scene in question consists of seventeen shots and lasts one minute and twenty-nine seconds.⁷⁵

The first shot [fig 2] frames Gold in a 'face-on' medium close shot sitting on a desk. The camera is still, recording Mantegna's facial expressions, and in particular several slight, but emphatic tilts of his head as he "unleashes [his] tightly knit ... stream of four-letter obscenities and anti-Semitic remarks" (Ebert, 1991, internet). What strikes one as significant in Mantegna's performance in this shot is not so much an eagerness to assign guilt to the Jewish family for letting the old woman work in a black ghetto, as the emphatic and overtly arrogant manner in which he expresses Gold's anti-Semitism, which peaks in the phrases: "*fuck 'em*", "not... "my" people, baby" and "*fuck 'em*" again. The emphasis on the above phrases is clearly indicated in the screenplay, as Mamet has stressed all three phrases through the use of italics (for the

expletives) and quotation marks (for the possessive pronoun),⁷⁶ a fact that immediately demonstrates how faithfully Mantegna follows the text in this shot. Interestingly, the actor's arrogant delivery of Gold's lines in the shot chronologically follows a shot in which he learns that the Randolph case is a step closer to resolution mainly because of his own contribution. This building block motivates a triumphant manner of expression (a response to good news for which he is mainly responsible) as well as a strong frustration for not being able to be present when the event took place. Consequently, Mantegna brings to his performance both elements from the previous shot, which colour accordingly the delivery of both the obscenities and the anti-Semitic comments.



Figure 2

Scene 36, Shot 1

At the point when Mantegna's character says that Jewish people are not "his" people, he walks off screen left and the spectator is able to see Miss Klein sitting quietly on a sofa in the background [fig 3, shot 1a]. Although she has listened to all the derogatory comments articulated by Gold, she does not respond and remains motionless in her seat looking towards Gold's direction while he continues off-screen with his statement that anti-Semitism is justified. In this extremely short segment (a couple of

seconds later Mamet cuts to a different shot), Pidgeon remains inexpressive, with no traces of emotion visible on her face and no evidence of gesticulation. These are performance elements that clearly suggest an extremely attentive mode at this point in the scene rather than an emotional outburst in the making [fig 4, shot 1b].



Figure 3

Scene 36, Shot 1a



Figure 4

Scene 36, Shot 1b

Although both through actions of the hero (to assign guilt on the basis of prejudice and to dissociate himself from the stereotype) become apparent in the shot, Mantegna's delivery highlights mostly the second and in a sense communicates Gold's hubris, which, of course, sets up the ground for his attempt to redeem himself

in the rest of the film. This is the reason why the camera focuses on his face, which at no point changes expression to signify any type of remorse.

The following shot picks up Gold walking in the room and finishing his phone conversation [shot 2, fig 5]. The medium close shot framing of the actor is opted for again (with the camera slightly panning right and tracking back to preserve the above framing as he moves towards the telephone set to place back the receiver). Mantegna here slightly lowers the volume of his voice after the strong emphasis he placed on his previous lines. The through action of the character in the shot is **'to finish the conversation by arranging to meet his partner'** and the chosen action by the actor seems to be **'to make plans with a loved one,'** a performance building block that further attests to Gold's desire to finish with this case as quickly as possible and get together with his working partner.⁷⁷

As he moves towards the desk, however, he looks slightly up off screen and stops his movement [shot 2a, fig 6]. All traces of smiling and other facial characteristics from the previous segment of the shot immediately disappear and he remains momentarily frozen. Due to the small touch of omniscient narration in the previous shot, the spectator understands that Gold has just become aware of Miss Klein's presence and the shot finishes with the formation of a supplementary through action for the hero: **'to take notice of someone's presence,'** which Mantegna performs in the manner of **'to see something one did not expect to see.'**



Figure 5

Scene 36, Shot 2

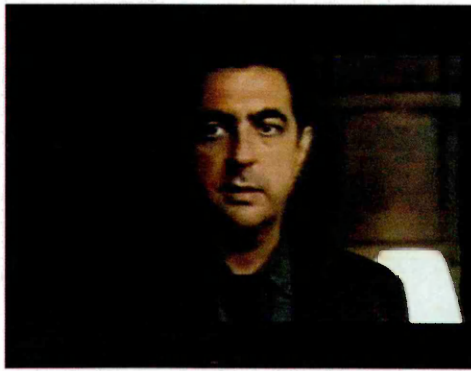


Figure 6

Scene 36, Shot 2a

The next shot confirms the spectator's expectations, as Mamet presents a medium-long shot (in the form of an eye-line match) of Miss Klein, still motionless and in the same position as in the first shot [shot 3, fig 7]. This is followed by a cut to Gold in the exact same frame we left him in the second shot [shot 4, fig 8]. Both shots function as reaction shots and serve to reinforce each character's through actions, Miss Klein's **'to respond to insulting comments'** and Gold's **'to deal with Miss Klein's justified anger.'** The complete stillness of both characters in this pair of shots is broken only for a fraction of a second by a non-scripted, almost imperceptible, twinkle in Mantegna's eyes, which is nevertheless substantial in its

connotation of nervousness as his character is prepared to face the consequences of his action.



Figure 7

Scene 36, Shot 3



Figure 8

Scene 36, Shot 4

Shots 5 and 6 add more layers to Gold's through action. In particular, shot 5 [fig 9], a close up of Gold's hand **'putting the receiver on the phone,'** emphasises the time that has passed between the moment he became aware of Miss Klein's presence in the room and the moment he completes his physical action of hanging up after talking to Sullivan. Although the shot lasts barely 2 seconds, Mantegna's slow, unguided movement of his hand as he tries to find the correct position for the receiver suggests

that Gold has maintained eye contact with Miss Klein all this time and, of course, highlights the difficult position in which he has put himself. On the other hand, shot 6 [fig 10], a medium-long (match on action) shot of Gold finishing his previous action and standing still motionless suggests extreme tenseness⁷⁸ which is reinforced even further when we hear in the soundtrack the sound of footsteps, which we assume belong to Miss Klein as the camera starts tracking forward putting across Miss Klein's point of view. What is of interest here are Gold's eyes, which move down and up twice (as if the character has noticed something in the lower part of Miss Klein's body and then back to eye contact). Although at this point it is impossible to know what Gold is looking at, this little detail further contributes to Gold's above-stated objective and creates more expectations about the manner in which Miss Klein will voice her anger. As the shot scale starts changing and the distance between the two characters becomes shorter, Mamet cuts to the next shot, the first in a series of dialogue-driven shots, which will eventually advance the plot.



Figure 9

Scene 36, Shot 5



Figure 10

Scene 36, Shot 6

The first shot in this segment (shot 7) is another medium-long shot (in reverse angle from the previous one), this time of Miss Klein walking towards Gold [fig 11]. As she approximates Gold in a slow but steady and confident pace, the spectator can see that she is holding something, perhaps an object that can be used as a weapon, which is the detail that grabbed Gold's attention in the previous shot. The delivery of her lines is a clear statement of the facts without a single trace of emotion or, for that matter, any melodramatic tendencies [fig 12, shot 7a]. One could go so far as argue that the mode of Pidgeon's dialogue delivery reflects and complements her physical characteristics and in particular the way she walked at the beginning of the shot - slowly, steadily and confidently. Therefore when Mamet cuts to Gold (shot 8), the spectator finds him not moving his eyes any more but looking straight into her eyes, listening carefully to what she says [fig 13].



Figure 11

Scene 36, Shot 7



Figure 12

Scene 36, Shot 7a



Figure 13

Scene 36, Shot 8

When Miss Klein explains to Gold that her grandmother stayed in the shop because she wanted to (therefore correcting Gold's wrong assumption), the film cuts back to her [shot 9, fig 14] as she reminds Gold again of the death of her grandmother (though not so much in the mode of 'pointing out something one has forgotten' as in 're-emphasising the facts'). After this action however, she starts walking away from Gold towards the door of the room without directly confronting Gold about his previous actions [shot 9a, fig 15]. The camera pans right to follow her slow, confident movement and frames her in a medium long shot as she suddenly turns around and starts her 'attack' on Gold [shot 9b, fig 16]. Pidgeon expresses Miss Klein's response to Gold's insults in an extremely contained way, which is conveyed by a slight shift in the volume of her voice and a change in the tempo of her delivery. Both these elements of characterisation are in stark contrast to the previous slow, matter-of-fact delivery of her lines, though, significantly, her body posture remains unchanged and she does not use any gestures whatsoever to emphasise the content of her response, which is, therefore, solely articulated through the words she speaks.

Immediately after she utters the word Jew ("You 're a Jew and you talk like that") Mamet cuts to a close up of Gold [shot 10, fig 17], who also turns around to look at Miss Klein as she eventually starts reprimanding him for his behaviour. Mamet's editing decision to focus on Gold's reaction to the word Jew rather than privilege Miss Klein's verbal attack strongly foregrounds Gold's 'Jewishness' (or lack of it) as the most significant element in Miss Klein's agenda, and foreshadows the import of Gold's ethnic origins, a building block that will become dominant in the rest of the story.



Figure 14

Scene 36, Shot 9



Figure 15

Scene 36, Shot 9a



Figure 16

Scene 36, Shot 9b

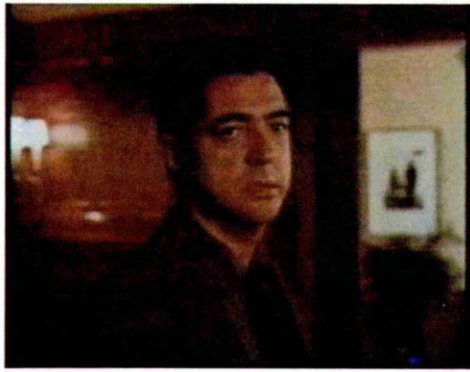


Figure 17

Scene 36, Shot 10

As Miss Klein gets Gold's attention again, the film cuts back to her [shot 11, fig 18] in time for the last point she makes in this first confrontation with Gold: "Do you have any shame?" Although barely longer than 1.5 seconds, the shot brings about Miss Klein's anger but, more importantly, showcases her surprise about Gold's inexplicable anti-Semitic comments and overall attitude. The emphasis on the last word (shame), evident in Pidgeon's intonation, underscores this element of surprise in Miss Klein's attempt to confront Gold and prompts his first effort **'to get out of trouble'** [shot 12, fig 19] by expressing his condolences to the dead woman's granddaughter. Mantegna's chosen action however, is more reminiscent of a conventional response to someone's tragedy or misfortune and less an honest attempt to make amends for a mistake or even to question his handling of the case. What seems important in his performance in this specific shot is his strong emphasis on the character's emotional detachment from the events that surround him, a detachment that should not be the case given the hero's same ethnic origins as the family of the deceased. Therefore, even though the line "I'm sorry about your grandmother" is a standard, conventional response in such situations, it is Mantegna's lack of conviction, emphasis and, of course, *emotion* that makes it inappropriate (given the

content of his comments at the beginning of the scene) for this encounter and motivates Miss Klein's second take on Gold in the last five shots of the scene.



Figure 18

Scene 36, Shot 11



Figure 19

Scene 36, shot 12

Shot 13 returns to Miss Klein (still framed in a medium long shot by the door) as she responds to Gold's bland and inappropriate declaration [fig 20]. The long duration of the shot (17 seconds) breaks the pattern of the scene, which with the exception of the opening shot had been strictly structured along quick edits (the average shot length of the scene is 3 seconds if one does not include shot 13) in order to emphasise the reaction of the characters, and especially Gold, during the course of the confrontation.

For the purposes of this chapter however, the significance of the shot lies in Rebecca Pidgeon's performance, which showcases a series of physical actions as she delivers her lines and as such deserves a closer examination.

The shot is marked by four distinct segments, which are structured around the dialogue text of Miss Klein's character. The first segment sees Miss Klein immediately responding to Gold's previous statement [shot 12]. Pidgeon's manner of dialogue delivery, "No one asked you to be sorry. No one asked for your sympathy," closely follows the mode she chose for her previous lines (contained but authoritative), and clearly conveys her character's immediate dismissal of Gold's response as inappropriate [shot 13, fig 20]. Miss Klein then turns around to get out of the room, but reconsiders and turns back to her exact previous position and explains to Gold that her family would appreciate his respect. This marks the second segment of the shot where Pidgeon returns to a more subdued manner of speaking,⁷⁹ through which the utterance of her lines suggest a new objective, that is, **'to show one what is the right thing to do'** as her emphasis on the words "appreciated" and "respect" clearly demonstrates. This ends the second segment of the shot and introduces the third one, which portrays Miss Klein walking towards Gold in order to make her final points [shot 13a, fig 21]. The camera remains still as Miss Klein's position in the frame changes from a medium-close shot to a close up, indicating her current spatial proximity to Gold at this stage in the shot. Here Pidgeon walks slowly towards the camera and delivers the line: "Do you hate yourself that much?" in the mode of a rhetorical question, which suggests that her character does indeed find Gold's self-hatred uncharacteristic of a man of such origins and which explains Pidgeon's simple utterance of the question without any complementary gestures or movements.

Finally, and while Miss Klein occupies the same frame position she delivers her final line in the shot: “Do you belong nowhere...?”, which constitutes the last segment of the shot. What distinguishes the delivery of that final line from the previous one is both the manner in which Pidgeon now talks and, more importantly, her use of body language to accompany her dialogue delivery. In particular, the actress uses the scripted question in an affirmative mode, transforming it thus to a declarative statement rather than opting for the interrogative rhetoric that characterised the delivery of her previous line. Such a choice clearly demonstrates Pidgeon’s intention to ‘identify the absence of something natural’ and it is emphatically supported by the physical gesture of moving her head sideways, a motion that conventionally implies denial, refusal, negativity and absence. Thus the character’s objective is conveyed through both language and physical action, which here are in complete harmony.

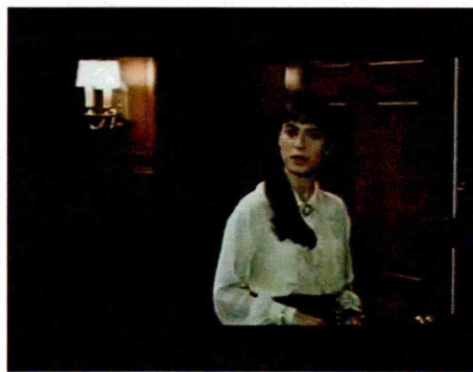


Figure 20

Scene 36, Shot 13



Figure 21

Scene 36, Shot 13a

This final segment marks the end of the shot and Mamet cuts back to a close up of Gold [shot 14, fig 22] who remains motionless after the end of the confrontation before he reverts to Miss Klein [shot 15, fig 23], who is still in the close up frame we left her. As Miss Klein turns around and for a final time makes her way to the door, Mamet cuts for one last time to Gold [shot 16, fig 24] who, at long last, makes a move forward. The scene closes with a medium-long shot [shot 17, fig 25] of Miss Klein walking out of the room and Gold following on her steps and hurriedly pronouncing that he will find the killer (and therefore both ‘make amends’ and ‘do his job’).

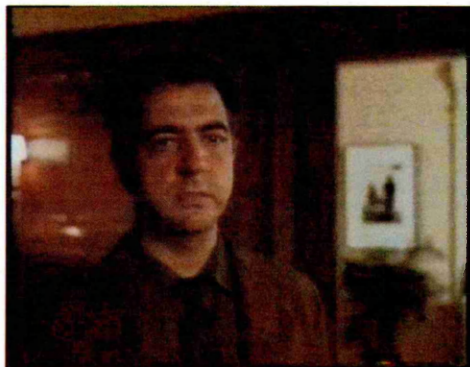


Figure 22

Scene 36, Shot 14



Figure 23

Scene 36, Shot 15



Figure 24

Scene 36, Shot 16

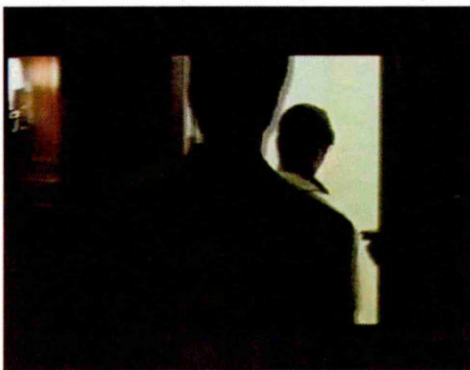


Figure 25

Scene 36, Shot 17

In light of the details of the two actors' performances, we need to revisit the process of blocking the scene and somewhat revise the tables with the characters' objectives and the actors' actions as they bring those objectives to life. Table 4 demonstrates the characters' objectives in the filmed version (the sections in bold signify the changes from the objectives cited in Table 1):

SHOT	CHARACTERS IN SHOT	OBJECTIVE OR THROUGH ACTION
1	GOLD	TO ASSIGN GUILT ON THE BASIS OF STEREOTYPES / TO DISASSOCIATE HIMSELF FROM THE STEREOTYPE
2	GOLD	TO MAKE PLANS TO LEAVE THE HOUSE AS FAST HE CAN / TO TAKE NOTICE OF SOMEONE'S PRESENCE
3	MISS KLEIN	TO RESPOND TO GOLD'S INSULTING COMMENTS
4	GOLD	TO DEAL WITH MISS KLEIN'S JUSTIFIED ANGER
5	GOLD	TO HANG UP THE PHONE
6	GOLD	TO DEAL WITH MISS KLEIN'S JUSTIFIED ANGER
7	MISS KLEIN – GOLD	TO REMIND GOLD OF HER GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH
		BEAT
8	GOLD – MISS KLEIN	TO EXPLAIN TO GOLD THAT HER GRANDMOTHER WAS HER OWN BOSS
		BEAT
9	MISS KLEIN	TO REMIND GOLD OF HER GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH AND TO REMIND GOLD OF HIS ETHNIC ORIGINS
		BEAT
10	GOLD	TO REPRIMAND GOLD FOR HIS DISRESPECT WHILE ON THE PHONE
		BEAT
11	MISS KLEIN	TO QUESTION GOLD'S ETHICS
		BEAT
12	GOLD	TO EXPRESS SYMPATHY ABOUT MISS KLEIN'S FAMILY TRAGEDY
13	MISS KLEIN	TO REJECT GOLD'S SYMPATHY
		BEAT
		TO ASK FOR GOLD'S RESPECT
		BEAT
		TO ACCUSE GOLD OF SELF-HATRED
		BEAT
		TO ACCUSE GOLD OF BEING ROOTLESS
14	GOLD	TO CONSIDER MISS KLEIN'S RESPONSE
15	MISS KLEIN	TO MAKE HER WAY OUT
16	GOLD	TO CONSIDER MISS KLEIN'S RESPONSE
17	MISS KLEIN – GOLD	TO PROMISE MISS KLEIN THAT HE WILL DO HIS JOB
		BEAT

Table 4

The characters' objectives in the film

What is evident in the above table is a number of new objectives (in bold), which were absent from Table 1. With the exception of the first objective portrayed in shot 2 (which seems to constitute a 'violation' in Gold's overall objective in the scene)⁸⁰ all the other additions are character objectives that were either indicated in the scene text or implied as reactions between shots that contain dialogue.⁸¹ Gold's through actions,

therefore, in shots 4, 5 and 6 ('to deal with Miss Klein's justified anger' and to 'hang up') are actually part of his prolonged reaction to the realisation that Miss Klein has been in the room throughout the time that he was offensive to Jewish people, whilst shots 14 and 16 (to consider Miss Klein's response') serve as Gold's reaction to Miss Klein's final remarks. Equally, Miss Klein's objective in shot 3 is to react to Gold's insults rather than proceed with a specific action.

If the characters' through actions in the filmed sequence strictly correspond to the author's original intentions (with the additional layers that the silent shots contribute), it will be interesting to see whether Mantegna and Pidgeon's chosen physical actions also match the actions as presented in Table 2. As I noted in the previous section, the actions chosen by the actors to convey their characters' objectives can be varied since many different actions can convey one specific objective. Table 5 presents the actions of the actors during the course of the scene

SHOT	ACTORS IN SHOT	PHYSICAL ACTIONS
1	MANTEGNA	TO PRESENT MY CASE / TO DENY SOMETHING I KNOW IS TRUE
2	MANTEGNA	TO ARRANGE TO MEET SOON WITH A LOVED ONE AND TO DISCOVER SOMETHING I DID NOT EXPECT TO SEE
3	PIDGEON	TO LET ONE DISCOVER I AM PRESENT
4	MANTEGNA	TO REALISE I HAVE A PROBLEM
5	MANTEGNA	TO PLACE AN OBJECT DOWN WITHOUT LOOKING AT WHAT I AM DOING
6	MANTEGNA	TO GET MYSELF OUT OF TROUBLE
7	PIDGEON - MANTEGNA	TO PRESENT ONE WITH THE FACTS
8	MANTEGNA -PIDGEON	TO RECTIFY A WRONG ASSUMPTION
9	PIDGEON	TO RE-EMPHASISE THE FACTS AND TO POINT OUT SOMETHING ONE SHOULD BE AWARE OF
10	MANTEGNA	TO SHOW ONE THAT ONE IS IN THE WRONG
11	PIDGEON	TO IDENTIFY THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING NATURAL
12	MANTEGNA	TO RESPOND TO ONE'S MISFORTUNE
13	PIDGEON	TO DISMISS ONE'S THOUGHTS ON THE MATTER TO STATE WHAT I DEEM AN APPROPRIATE ACTION TO DISCOVER AN UNEXPECTED CHARACTERISTIC TO EMPHASISE THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING NATURAL
14	MANTEGNA	TO GIVE ONE MY FULL ATTENTION
15	PIDGEON	TO WALK TOWARDS THE DOOR
16	MANTEGNA	TO PREVENT ONE FROM EXITING A ROOM
17	PIDGEON -MANTEGNA	TO CONFIRM I AM THE MAN FOR THE JOB

Table 5

The actors' chosen action in the film

Compared to my earlier blocking of the screenplay in terms of what the actors could do to achieve their objectives (and besides the additional actions that the reaction shots demanded – indicated in bold), the above blocking presents only two differences (indicated in italics). These nevertheless neither contradict the through actions of the characters nor change them in any way. In fact, one could argue that both chosen actions convey the characters’ objectives in a more emphatic way (evident in the words ‘re-emphasise’ and ‘emphasise’) and consequently advance the overall objective of the scene in a more powerful manner.

It is evident then, that performance is inscribed in Mamet’s screenplays to an almost absolute degree. With an extensive use of scene text (in the form of report) supporting the dialogue text, and with both modes of presentation reducible to a series of physical actions for every actor portraying a character, Mamet presents his actors with extremely concrete elements upon which they can create their roles.

Additionally, the filmmaker’s unconditional subscription to the ‘practical aesthetics of performance’ guarantees his actors’ respect for the text, which, as I demonstrated, provides all that is essential for their performance and allows the words ‘to do their job.’ In the words of William H. Macy, Mamet’s long-time collaborator and co-developer of the Practical Aesthetics: “the truth of the matter is that every single thing you need for acting is right there on the page” (Luckhurst and Veltman, 2001, p 65).

Questions of Style

If Mamet’s screenplays are assertive enough to prescribe the actors’ performance, one could argue that they are similarly assertive in suggesting the use of film style. Like

the actors' performance, which is geared towards the foregrounding of the characters' through actions, film style is also employed to express these through actions as clearly as possible. In this respect, *mise en scène*, editing, cinematography and sound become subordinate to the narration of the story (which as I mentioned earlier revolves around the hero's journey to achieve a specific objective) and are not used for decorative purposes (making a shot more interesting or beautiful).

As I have discussed extensively Mamet's use of style in House of Games and Things Change in the previous two chapters, I shall here confine my examination to a brief comparison of how Mamet could have filmed the above scene (the Gold – Miss Klein encounter in the study room) following the markers of style prescribed in his script with the final version that appeared in the film.⁸² As my analysis will show, Mamet's use of style is also "right there on the page" dictated by his own objective as a filmmaker to distil the characters' through actions and present them in a clear manner. As he put it in his book On Directing Film: "The answer to the question 'where do you put the camera?' is the question 'what's the shot of?'" (Mamet, 1992a, p 73). Since the answer to the second question is determined by the characters' through action, it follows that all technical decisions will be determined accordingly.

Although the screenplay for Homicide contains a wealth of technical comment, it is mostly geared towards prescribing camera position and shot scale. There are very few technical indicators for editing or camera movement⁸³ and there are no references to elements of the *mise en scène* such as the details of the set, lighting, costumes or the physical traits of the characters. In short, technical comment is restricted to specific cinematographic choices. This necessarily implies that the remaining stylistic choices

are to be found in the screenplay's report mode (for example, the characters' movement as indicators for camera movement, also known as kinesics) and, more importantly, in the dialogue text (for example, the characters' lines punctuating shots).

If one attempted to 'read' the screenplay in terms of prescribed stylistic details for the Gold-Miss Klein scene, the following are available:

Mise en scène:

- setting (the study of a wealthy family's house, which is joined with another room through sliding doors)
- props (a desk, a phone, a magnifying glass, a notebook)
- costumes (the fact that Gold is wearing a tie obviously suggests that he is also wearing a suit)
- lighting (the adjoining room is dark)
- framing (Gold's body blocking the view in the adjoining room; Gold in the background as we focus on Miss Klein's lap)

Cinematography:

- camera position (close shot on Gold as he speaks on the phone so that his body blocks the view in the adjoining room; over the shoulder shot of Miss Klein's lap with Gold in the background; Gold's point of view of Miss Klein)
- shot scale (emphasis on close up shots)
- camera movement (Miss Klein's general movement inside the room motivates camera movement)

- deep focus (Miss Klein in the background as Gold leans over to pick up another object from the desk)

Editing:

- cuts (aside from the five specific shots identified through the use of technical comment the rest of the shots are punctuated by the dialogue delivery; the first shot is a long take)

Sound:

- dialogue
- other sound (Miss Klein's crying, Miss Klein's footsteps as she walks inside the room).

The above stylistic elements can be combined together in the following table, which represents how Mamet could have filmed the scene, had he strictly adhered to script-dictated stylistic choices (Table 6). This is followed by a second table, which contains his final stylistic choices as they appear on the screen (Table 7):

Shot	Characters	Shot Scale	Camera Work	Dialogue
a	GOLD	M/CS	----	<i>Fuck 'em. Don't tell me, don't send the old lady work down there, and tell me "how you 're so surprised." Fuck 'em, and the taxes they pay.</i>
b	MISS KLEIN BOOK ON HER LAP	CU	----	---
c	GOLD	M/CS (like a)		You tell me. Ten more bucks a week they 're making letting' her work down there? Not... "my" people... baby. <i>Fuck 'em</i> , there is so much anti-Semitism, last four thousand years, they must be doing <i>something</i> bring it about. I 'll see you at the house half hour. Yo Tim. See you then.
d	MISS KLEIN	M/LS (POV)	----	---
e	GOLD	CU	----	---
f	MISS KLEIN	CU	----	My grandmother was killed today.
g	MISS KLEIN	M/LS – M/CS	camera tracks back as she walks towards Gold Gold appears in the frame. Miss Klein is now in a M/CS	She stayed down there because she wanted to stay there. She was a fighter. She wanted to die there. She died there
h	GOLD	CU (like e)	----	(Miss Klein off screen) You 're a Jew.
i	MISS KLEIN – GOLD	M/CS (like g)	----	And you talk that way. In the house of the dead. Do you have any shame?
j	GOLD	CU (like e,h)	----	I 'm sorry about your grandmother.
k	MISS KLEIN	M/CS (like i,g) M/LS	camera pans as Miss Klein walks to the door	No one asked you to be sorry. No one asked for your sympathy. We would have appreciated it your respect.
l	GOLD	CU	----	---
m	MISS KLEIN	CU	----	Do you hate yourself that much? Do you belong nowhere...?
n	GOLD	CU (like l)	----	I...
o	MISS KLEIN	M/LS (POV)	----	---
p	GOLD	CU (like n,l)	----	I 'll find the killer. I'll...
q	MISS KLEIN – GOLD	M/LS	----	---

Table 6

How Mamet could have filmed and edited the scene

Shot	Characters	Shot Scale	ASL (sec)	Camera work	Dialogue
1	GOLD	M/CU	23	----	Some bullshit, somebody's taking "shots" at them. <i>Fuck 'em. Don't tell me, don't send the old lady work down there, and tell me "how you're so surprised." Fuck 'em, and the taxes they pay. (Pause.)</i> You tell me. Ten more bucks a week they 're making lettin' her work down there? Not... "my" people... baby ... <i>Fuck 'em</i> , there is so much anti-Semitism, last four thousand years, they must be doing <i>something</i> to bring it about.
2	GOLD	M/CU	6.5	Left pan for framing purposes	I 'll see you at the house half hour. Yo Tim. See you then.
3	MISS KLEIN	M/LS	2	----	----
4	GOLD	M/CU (like 3)	3	----	----
5	GOLD	CU	2	----	----
6	GOLD	M/LS	4	track in	----
7	MISS KLEIN – GOLD	M/LS - MS	5	Right pan for framing purposes	My grandmother was killed today.
8	GOLD – MISS KLEIN	MS (rev of 8)	3.5	----	She stayed down there because she wanted to stay there. She was a fighter.
9	MISS KLEIN	MS (like 8)	9.5	Right pan following Miss Klein	She wanted to die there. She died there You 're a Jew.
10	GOLD	CU	2	----	Miss Klein off screen: And you talk that way. In the house of the dead.
11	MISS KLEIN	MS (like 10)	1.5	----	Do you have any shame?
12	GOLD	CU (like 11)	2	----	I 'm sorry about your grandmother.
13	MISS KLEIN	MS – M/CU	17	----	No one asked you to be sorry. No one asked for your sympathy. We would have appreciated your respect. Do you hate yourself that much? Do you belong nowhere...?
14	GOLD	CU (like 13,11)	2	----	----
15	MISS KLEIN	M/CU – MS (reverse motion of 14)	2.5	----	----
16	GOLD	CU	1	----	I...
17	MISS KLEIN- GOLD	MS (like 16, 14)	2	Right pan following the characters	I'll find the killer.

Table 7

How Mamet filmed and edited the scene

The comparison between the above tables is extremely telling about the extent to which the film style employed in the scene was dictated by the characters' actions as

they were outlined in the script. As the final section of this chapter will demonstrate Mamet remained extremely faithful to the script and the few changes that can be detected have taken place for the purposes of emphasising the characters' objectives.

The scene opens with a slight change as Mamet left out the shot of Miss Klein's lap [shot b]. Instead he opted for editing within-the-shot to convey her presence as the spectator notices her when Gold's body stops blocking the view in the background, a stylistic choice which was originally intended for the next shot [shot c]. As a result, shots a, b and c from the original shot list become shots 1 and 2 in the final version with the effect of omniscient narration remaining intact.

The following shot [shot d] corresponds directly to shot 3 in the filmed sequence. The transposition of shots e and f however, is significantly different from their materialised counterparts in the film, in the first of the two substantial differences between the screenplay version and the filmed version. In particular shot e (a close up of Gold as a reaction shot to the presence of Miss Klein) has been broken into three different shots [shots 4, 5 and 6], one of which is the original close up inscribed in the screenplay [shot 4]. The two additional shots (a close up of Gold's hand placing the receiver back on the phone set [shot 5] and a medium shot of Gold with the camera tracking towards him [shot 6]) have been inserted to emphasise Gold's reaction to the presence of Miss Klein. Their purpose is to elongate the uncomfortable silence between the two characters. Altogether the three shots of Gold in the filmed version of the scene take up nine seconds of screen time, a considerable amount of time to be invested on the one close up the screenplay suggested. Furthermore, shot 6, serves the additional purpose of introducing Miss Klein's motion towards Gold (via camera

movement) therefore rendering unnecessary the use of a close up shot of Miss Klein [shot f]. Finally and due to the absence of Miss Klein's close up [shot f], Mamet has transported Miss Klein's first line in the following shot [shot 7], even though in the script it is actually spoken before her physical move towards Gold [shot f].

The last-mentioned stylistic decision has had minor effects in the ensuing shot/reverse shot pattern which the conversation between the characters follows. For that reason, Mamet has also chosen to break Miss Klein's first remarks (originally intended for one take [shot g]) into three individual shots [shots 7,8 and 9] with the two characters both visible in the frame. In this manner, Mamet has been able to incorporate Gold's reaction in the middle shot [shot 8] while still focusing on Miss Klein during the confrontation. The editing of the rest of the scene, however, reveals a close match with the 'screenplay-dictated' shots as shots h, i, and j correspond to shots 10, 11 and 12.

The second significant difference between the two visualisations of the scene occurs right after shots [j/12]. In particular, the screenplay seems to dictate at least three shots [shots k,l and m] in order to account for Miss Klein's walking away from Gold and Gold's reaction. Mamet however has condensed this part of the scene in one long take [shot 13] in which Miss Klein is left uninterrupted to achieve her objectives through her verbal attack to Gold. The reasons for this potential decision have to do with the obvious narrative significance of Miss Klein's words, as it is only after those words that Gold decides to make amends for his previous attitude. Furthermore, in the final cut, Mamet has Miss Klein walking back towards Gold in order for her to utter the two final sentences of her speech, an action that was not originally scripted, but

which, again, emphasises the significance of the above sentences. Finally, the rest of the scene reveals a strict match between screenplay and final cut [with shots n,o,p and q corresponding to shots 14, 15, 16 and 17 respectively].

As the above comparison demonstrates, the screenplay here not only contributes to the use of film style (this is normally expected), but it literally ‘calls the shots’, or, to recall Claudia Sternberg’s phrase, it becomes a ‘hidden director’ with concrete suggestions about the use of *mise en scène*, cinematography, editing and sound. These are all at the service of the through action of the scene as this is determined by the objectives of the characters. Even in the case that the filmmaker needs to make some modifications (like in the above example), the modifications do not affect or change the characters’ actions in any way. In fact, they emphasise those objectives further, therefore aiming at presenting a story as clearly as possible.

Conclusion

As my discussion demonstrated the screenplay contains its visual and aural realisation in the various types of text of which it consists. This means that elements such as film style and the actors’ performance are embedded in the words of the text and can potentially be realised should the filmmaker allow the screenplay to assume the role of a ‘hidden director.’ This practice, however, is extremely rare in American cinema since the conditions of film production have traditionally considered the screenplay as subordinate to the logistics of the production process, to the director’s vision (in most cases a different person from the screenwriter) and, often, to a dominant film style (the classical style). As a result, the screenplay has almost always been treated as

work in progress and subject to changes to accommodate the above three dominant practices.

The ephemeral nature of the screenplay and its association with literature led an auteur theory-driven film criticism to dispense with it completely and, instead, concentrate on its final expression, the film itself, which was regarded as the product of the director. One of the outcomes of this critical practice was to consider acting as a device, as one more aspect of the film's *mise en scène*, which is arranged by the director, in the same way he/she orchestrates lighting, the camera's movement and the composition of the frame. This view, however, could not offer a satisfactory critical account of acting in film as unlike filmic devices, acting could not be stripped down to its individual components and thus examined in a systematic way.

Had film criticism not disregarded the role of the screenplay in the construction of the film, it could have approached acting and performance in general in a very concrete manner. Specifically, by establishing the objectives of the characters in the screenplay, the film critic would be in a position to determine how particular actors bring those objectives 'to life' on the screen, and the extent to which external to the script factors (such as star persona) colour this process. In this case, the critic would concentrate on any discrepancies between the characters' goals as prescribed in the screenplay and as they materialise in the film through the actors' actions. The critic would, consequently, discuss performance in terms of the extent to which characterisation derives strictly from the written text or is created extra-textually (the director and actor bring their own interpretation to the characters of the film). As my

discussion of Homicide suggested, performance in Mamet's films is determined strictly by the objectives of the characters as they are stated in the film's screenplay.

In applying the principles of his 'practical aesthetics' and of Sanford Meisner's "unified aesthetic of theatre" to cinema, Mamet has placed an unusually strong emphasis (for the standards of American cinema) on the role of the screenplay. As a result he has opted for a model of filmmaking which places both the actors' performance and the use of film style at the service of the "Idea of the screenplay." This is a concept that, obviously, goes completely against dominant practices in mainstream Hollywood cinema. For that reason, Mamet's 'unified aesthetics of cinema' (we could call it that) stands necessarily at the periphery of Hollywood filmmaking and can be perceived, at best, as a playwright's experiment or, at worst, as Nick James suggested, as a joke (1998, p 24). The film's financial failure at the US box office certainly testifies to both these views and demonstrates once again that Mamet's approach to filmmaking is located outside the dominant mode of film practice in American cinema.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DRAMATIC AND THE NARRATIVE: ADAPTING

OLEANNA FOR THE SCREEN

...adaptation involves neither the staging nor the illustration of literature but a translation to film language (Eikhenbaum, quoted in Lothe, 2000, p 8)

Narratives are composed in order to reward, modify, frustrate or defeat the perceiver's search for coherence (Bordwell, 1985, p 38)

We haven't brought Oleanna to film. We brought film to Oleanna (W.H Macy, quoted in the Oleanna Press Kit, 1994, p vi)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I closely examined the significance of the screenplay in Mamet's filmmaking practice and advanced a set of arguments that advocated the screenplay's considerable role as a marker of performance and film style. My pre-occupation with the screenplay will, to some extent, continue in this chapter, which discusses the phenomenon of film adaptation in general and the adaptation of Mamet's play, Oleanna (1992), in particular. Specifically, I shall consider the manner in which the screenplay transforms the dramatic text as part of the complex process involved in the adaptation of plays for the screen, which I shall treat as the

transformation of the dramatic text into a narrative one.¹ My discussion, however, will not only focus upon textual elements and their respective arrangement in the two media. It will also explore extra-textual parameters and in particular a number of institutional factors that have had a decisive effect on the final film, which was released on 4 November 1994. Furthermore, this chapter will also propose a method for approaching adaptation of a specific category of dramatic texts for the screen, an object of inquiry that has been somewhat neglected within the substantial literature in the general field of film adaptation.²

Approaching Adaptations of Drama for the Screen

Although theatre has been providing cinema with raw material since the latter's inception,³ the study of film adaptations of dramatic texts has been minimal compared to the critical examination afforded to adaptations of other literary texts, especially novels. Despite the obvious affinities between film and theatre – both are characterised by the element of performance and by a collaborative mode of production – film and theatre critics have largely avoided a thorough investigation of the dynamic relationship between the two art forms, including the topic of adaptation.⁴ As a matter of fact, had it not been for the considerable critical interest in the film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays,⁵ it would not be unfair to claim that the relationship between stage and (cinema) screen has been largely under-explored⁶.

The above gap in criticism might be partially explained if one briefly considers the trajectory of critical inquiry in the field of film adaptation of literature. Driven by the work of scholars who, as Robert B. Ray suggests, were trained primarily within the paradigm of New Criticism, academic engagement with the field of adaptation failed

to observe “the cinema’s very different determinations (commercial exposure, collaborative production and public consumption)” (Ray, 2000, p 46). As a consequence, studies of film adaptations of literary texts were plagued by a strong emphasis on questions of the film text’s fidelity to the literary original, an approach which necessarily privileges the source text and the medium through which the text has been originally conveyed. For that reason, the discourse of adaptation had for many years been locked in largely evaluative and mostly futile debates about film’s (supposedly) inherent inferiority to literature as an expressive medium. Within the above critical climate film scholarship, faithful to its own agenda of establishing the medium of film as a visual one, naturally kept the study of film away from the study of literature. As a result the field of adaptation had for a long time been over-determined by literary criticism, until recent studies of narrative and narratology have tried to address both media equally.⁷

The relative absence of film criticism from the above area, but mostly the film critics’ reluctance to explore in depth the relationship between written and cinematic texts, have been, to a large extent, responsible for the even more conspicuous lack of interest in the branch of film adaptation of dramatic texts. Ironically, the formative years of contemporary film criticism (as it was established by Cahiers du Cinéma in the late 1950s and 1960s with the journal’s strong emphasis on the medium’s specificity) coincided with a period in American cinema when Hollywood had increasingly turned to the stage in search of original and, more often than not, controversial material. These were the years, moreover, when a generation of American playwrights such as Arthur Miller, William Inge, Tennessee Williams and Lilian Hellman found themselves working within both media.⁸

If film criticism missed a golden opportunity to examine thoroughly the phenomenon of adaptation during the above period, the transformation of American theatre from the mid 1960s onwards ensured that such a project would be increasingly difficult. As Herman William (1987, pp 18-19) has suggested in his survey 'Theater and Drama in America: 1964-1984', during its years of change American theatre was particularly influenced by the ideas of theatre practitioners such as Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski, who encouraged the theatre's "react[ion] against language and psychology and plot in favor of disturbing imagery and gesture" (Artaud) and "advocated the revelation of truth through the integrity of performance...[as] the very subject of theatre" (Grotowski). Add the even more profound influence of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and what has been termed the 'Theatre of the Absurd,' as well as the staggering proliferation of what has come to be known as 'performance arts', and the result was that American theatre in the 1970s did not bear any resemblance to the (largely) realist theatre of the previous decades. This fact, for drama critic C.W.E Bigsby, signalled the demise of American theatre as a central force in American cultural life (quoted in William, 1987, p 9). With mainstream Hollywood cinema still obeying the rules of character psychological motivation and cause-effect narrative logic (despite an oscillation at the time between art cinema techniques and plot-centred blockbusters), the critical exploration of the relationship between theatre and film (via the study of adaptation) in the 1970s and 1980s became an increasingly difficult feat for scholars within both drama and film criticism.

Although it is possible, in hindsight, to understand the project of film criticism as it was established by Cahiers during the above period, it is nevertheless difficult to

appreciate critical inertia in the face of such a golden opportunity that the pre-1960s period signified. As I shall shortly argue, the field of film adaptation of drama can potentially present considerably fewer problems for the film critic compared to the field of film adaptation of literature and novels in particular. A specific strand of American theatre, broadly associated with the production of realist aesthetics (which dominated the American stage in the 1950s and 1960s), can be seen as particularly receptive to comparison with mainstream American film, which has been traditionally characterised by a quest for realism. What is of significance in such a comparative project is the existence of a number of formal elements common to both drama and film. In the field of drama, these elements have been primarily advanced by the 'realistic' or the 'well-made play,' which contemporary American playwright (and occasional screenwriter) David Rabe defined as:

...that form which thinks that cause and effect are proportionate and clearly apparent, that people know what they are doing as they do it, and that others react accordingly, that one thing leads to another in a rational mechanical way, a kind of Newtonian clock of a play, a kind of Darwinian assemblage of detail which would then determine the details that must follow, the substitution of the devices of logic for the powerful sweeps of pattern and energy that is our lives.

(Rabe, quoted in Demastes, 1988, p 2)⁹

Although largely descriptive, the above formal elements that Rabe refers to in relation to the 'well-made play' correspond almost precisely to the formal organisation of the typical mainstream (classical) Hollywood film's narrative structure. With a strong emphasis on causality, primarily through character motivation, the narrative of the

classical film depends almost entirely on the above characteristics in order to make, as Bordwell et al have put it, “the chain of causality seem plausible” (1985, p 18). Furthermore, it can be argued that both the well-made play and the classical Hollywood film are characterised by a realist aesthetic, which according to their respective proponents is ‘flexible’ enough to incorporate transgressive elements or innovations without destroying the overall realist effect. William Demastes, therefore, talks of the specific dramatic form’s flexibility in accepting non-realistic innovations such as the manipulation of time (1988, p 25), whilst the definition of the classical narrative as advanced by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson is so broad that according to Elizabeth Cowie, it includes all possible transgressions and deviations (1998, p 178).¹⁰

If the above examples of correspondence between the well-made play and the classical film already suggest a formal, more general proximity between theatre and film, it follows that the study of film adaptation of drama and, in particular, of well-made plays can potentially be established upon a solid foundation. This is especially so since a large number of well-made plays – and, in particular, the ones adapted for the screen by their respective playwrights – remain largely unaltered in their transposition to the medium of film. In other words, the film versions of the above plays tend to retain the plot and the dramatic interaction between the characters intact, as well as the original dialogue of the plays with only minor modifications.¹¹ In this respect, film criticism can completely dispose of questions of fidelity, which is taken for granted here.¹² It can consequently turn its attention to the arrangement of the narrative, that is, the film’s narration, arguably the most specific characteristic in the medium of film. Furthermore, and since no adaptation occurs in vacuum, attention

should also be afforded to the institutional pressures exerted in every American film production and which might very well be responsible for any discrepancies on a textual level between dramatic and film text.¹³ Finally, and still under the umbrella of institutional factors, one should also take into consideration the fact that a large number of the adapted 'well-made plays' constitute prestige projects for film companies. They tend to invite star performers and filmmakers who can contribute in the production of meaning, whether through persona and previous appearances or through a specific use of film style respectively. Essentially, a discussion of the process of film adaptations of dramatic texts is incomplete without the due emphasis on institutional pressures.

Adapting the dramatic text for the screen: theoretical problems

In his influential book The Theory and Analysis of Drama (1991), German critic Manfred Pfister has argued that the main difference between dramatic and narrative texts lies in the absence of a "mediating communication system" in the dramatic medium (1991, p 4). Unlike narrative (literary or filmic) texts, which communicate through the filter of narration, dramatic texts communicate primarily through the dramatic interaction between the fictional characters, a qualitative difference which immediately highlights the role of narration as an additional layer in the communication process of narrative texts. The absence of narration in dramatic texts is relative however. These texts can and do rely on mediating communication systems through "access to non verbal codes and channels" that take on communicative functions, and through transference of certain narrative functions to the dramatic interaction between the characters (which Pfister terms the internal communication system of the dramatic text [1991, p 4]). As a matter of fact, Pfister maintains that

some sort of a mediating communication system is always available in dramatic texts, even the realist ones where the convention of the “fourth-wall” actively works towards effacing the presence of any such mediating system.¹⁴ However, and despite the existence of such ‘disruptive’ tendencies, the realist dramatic text largely relies on a mode of presentation that lacks the extra communicative layer inherent in narrative texts and therefore strongly depends on the immediacy of the dramatic interaction between the characters for the unfolding of the story.

Although the communication model can be seen as problematic, especially by a particular strand of film theory broadly associated with pragmatics (Buckland, 2000, pp 80-82),¹⁵ it can nevertheless provide the impetus for a solid approach to questions of film adaptation of well-made plays. For what is significant for the purposes of this chapter is not the model itself but the possibilities it opens for a study of adaptation. If the difference between dramatic and narrative texts is the absence, in the first category of texts, of a mediating communication system (which functions in the same role as filmic narration), then it follows that a dramatic text’s adaptation for the screen will necessarily involve the ‘addition’ of such a mediating system to the original text from the outside. This is necessary in order for the dramatic text (complete with any narrative tendencies) to be transformed into a fully narrative one within the medium of film. This approach necessarily draws attention to the elements of the film’s narration, which, as Edward Branigan has put it, “is the activity of giving a narrative” (1984, p 39). By transforming the dramatic interaction between the characters into narrative information and by exerting control on the spectator’s access to this information, the mechanism of filmic narration becomes synonymous with the process of adaptation itself as it literally constructs the new narrative text. In this

sense, what is explored is not the equivalence (functional or not) between the two texts within the two media, but the new mode of (re)presentation/communication of a pre-existing text, which, in the case of the well-made play, is expected to remain largely unaltered in terms of certain other defining characteristics. By treating adaptation as a new form of (re)presenting an older text through the mechanism of the filmic narration, the film critic is now in a position to examine the relationship between the two texts in an extremely concrete manner. This is because narration automatically becomes the main object of critical inquiry and the way narration impacts on the pre-existing text becomes the main entry point for such a discussion.

The impact of narration, which as Susan Sontag has argued, “has a ‘syntax’ composed of associations and disjunctions” (1974, p 257), primarily takes the form of breaking the time-space continuum within which dramatic texts are normally presented. This means that narration ‘gives a narrative text’ composed of fragments in time and space, the sum of which creates the same story told by the play, but with one significant difference. The fragmentary nature of the film narrative implies a constant shift in spatial perspective as the story unfolds from shot to shot, which necessarily conditions the spectator’s perception of the action and, one could argue, the spectator’s understanding of the story. As Erwin Panofsky put it:

[in] the cinema the spectator occupies a fixed seat, but only physically, not as a subject of an aesthetic experience. In the cinema the spectator is aesthetically ... in permanent motion as his eye identifies with the lens of the camera, which permanently shifts in distance and direction (quoted in Sontag, 1974, p 252).

In this sense, then, narration not only changes the communication of the text but also alters the audience's aesthetic experience of it. Consequently, film adaptation can be also seen as the process by which a spectator's aesthetic experience of a given text is transformed when the text is transposed into film, with narration being responsible for the transformation.

What remains problematic in such an approach, however, is that it takes place, or at least originates, within the context of a communication model which, as I mentioned earlier, has been criticised as inadequate by a particular strand of film theory. For our purposes, what seems particularly contestable within this context is the conception of narration as an intentional communication tool imposed upon the original text from the outside (by the screenwriter, the filmmaker or by the filmmaking process itself).

The critics of such a view would support an argument that sees narration as a symbolic activity (Branigan, 1984, p 39) that is embedded in the narrative and therefore not originating from any historical person such as the author/filmmaker, who necessarily mobilises any exchange of meaning in the communication model. Despite the criticisms, the communication model has not been utterly rejected even by pragmatists or cognitive theorists, who have come to accept that "perception [can] relate to purpose" (Branigan, 1992, p 110) and admit that "the narrational process may sometimes mimic the communication situation more or less fully" (Bordwell, 1985, p 62). As a matter of fact, Branigan, via Martin Wallace, suggests that there can be certain "intermediate positions" (1992, p 110) which essentially bridge the differences between the two distinct models.¹⁶

One such intermediate position is imperative for the above approach to adaptation of well-made plays, not least because the communication model has been much more influential in drama criticism and can be, arguably, defended in a more forceful manner. One obvious but powerful illustration of such a position can be seen in the emphasis that has been traditionally afforded by drama criticism (in comparison to film criticism) on the “author’s intentions” and whether those intentions are served by the material elements of performance.¹⁷ This emphasis is certainly justified both by the mode of production of the play, which is disseminated in a scripted form and attributed to an author, and by the mode of production in American theatre, a mode which includes the playwright in the production process and which treats the dramatic text as final and not subject to any alterations. This emphasis has its origins in the assumption that in producing a dramatic text a historical author “is making a public statement” (Pfister, 1991, p 28), a view that necessarily points towards a communication process between a speaker and a body of listeners. Influenced by the above assumption, drama criticism has habitually approached dramatic texts as expressions of an authorial intentionality that has been shaped by a number of socio-cultural factors, an approach that clearly demonstrates the validity of the communication model in drama criticism.¹⁸

The above assumption is much more problematic in cinema and, in particular, in Hollywood cinema, whose collaborative mode of production with its detailed division of labour has historically excluded the producer(s) of the screenplay from the production process. This practice necessarily relegates the question of authorial intentionality to the critical periphery. Furthermore, even when intentionality is attributed to the film director or producer, the two collaborators who have been

traditionally credited with authorship in American cinema, film's dependence on a visual mode of presentation necessarily raises questions of perception, which, as we saw earlier, undermine the validity of the communication model. In other words, film is more resistant than drama to the logic of the communication model.

In light of the above differences between drama and film, the study of adaptation must compromise dramatic criticism's attention to questions of authorial intentionality with film criticism's emphasis on the spectator's cognitive activities, that is, relate purpose to perception. For that reason the adapted film's narration should be discussed as both communication (a set of stylistic choices, the sum of which communicates filmically a pre-existing story) and perception (a set of inferences on the part of the spectator based upon the above stylistic choices, the sum of which creates an aesthetically different experience of the same story in the mind of each spectator). In other words, one must assume that Mamet is the first reader of the narrative of Oleanna, a position that follows Martin Wallace's argument that "readers and writers possess identical skills of comprehension" (Branigan, 1992, p 110). As my discussion of the film version of Oleanna will demonstrate, a set of stylistic choices, involving mostly editing and camerawork, communicate the filmmaker's intention to expose John as guilty of inappropriate behaviour towards Carol while at the same time prompting the spectator to infer that he is, in fact, responsible for Carol's actions against him.

Institutional and other Pressures

The above approach to the film adaptation of dramatic texts deals exclusively with the textual organisation of the adapted text in the medium of film and its relationship

with the dramatic source. This organisation, however, is to a large extent shaped by several institutional parameters that can potentially exert an enormous influence on the overall process of adaptation, including, of course, the final version of a film.

Under the category of institutional pressures one can find a large group of determinants, some of which have been recurrent in American cinema, while others are more historically specific. Some major recurrent factors, for instance, include the maximization of profits from the commercial exploitation of the film and budget constraints which might prevent a filmmaker/producer from creating the type of film originally envisaged. On the other hand, as regards historically specific institutional parameters one could group a diverse range of influences such as the Production Code and its mandate that adaptations should conform to “a set of external political conditions” (Maltby, 2000, p 82), distinct acting styles which are adopted as appropriate for specific adaptations of plays¹⁹ and historically specific views of what constitutes a commercially potent film project.²⁰

The last institutional parameter, in particular, is extremely important for the purposes of this chapter. It can be argued that film adaptations of plays have been deemed as commercial projects only at distinct periods in the history of American cinema. This is, then, an argument that calls for an examination of adaptations within the specific institutional framework of the historical period to which they belong. In particular, if one examines the pattern of theatrical distribution of film adaptations of plays written by canonical American playwrights (such as Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, William Inge, Lillian Hellman and Edward Albee) from the 1930s to the 1960s, one can see that almost all such adaptations were released by the studios.²¹ From 1970 onwards, however, the theatrical release of such adaptations by the above

established playwrights, as well as by a new wave of critically acclaimed American dramatists (such as David Rabe, Christopher Durang, John Guare, Sam Shepard, Wallace Shawn, Arthur Kopit, David Mamet, Lanford Wilson and August Wilson), has become almost exclusively the property of independent distributors.²² As a matter of fact, the only major release of such an adaptation in the last twenty-five years has been Fox's release of Arthur Miller's The Crucible (1996).²³ Additionally, if one examines the number of adaptations of Pulitzer Prize-winning plays since 1917 (the year when the category of Drama was introduced to the Pulitzer Awards), one will see that such adaptations decreased rapidly after 1970, to the extent that the last one, the adaptation of Neil Simon's Lost in Yonkers, took place in 1991.²⁴ Table 1 offers some statistical data:

Pulitzer Prize Winners	1917 - 1969	1970 - 2002
Number of Adaptations	31 (58.5%)	9 (27.3%)
Number of plays not adapted for the screen	12 (22.6%)	21 (63.6%)
Number of years when no award was given	10 (18.9%)	3 (9.1%)
Total	53 (100%)	33 (100%)

Table 1

Adaptations of Pulitzer Prize Winning Plays

The above shift in the theatrical distribution of film adaptations of American plays clearly suggests that these projects are no longer deemed commercially promising by the majors. Even when a major like Fox decided to back financially an adaptation of a very famous and critically renowned play, the box office result was meagre despite the distributor's attempts to downplay the origins of the film in the marketing campaign and to focus instead on the film's star power.²⁵ Not surprisingly, adaptations have gradually become products for niche markets, which have been traditionally catered for by independent distributors. One could even argue that

adaptations of American plays from the 1970s onwards have been geared towards a specific section of the art-house film audience, a section primarily associated with frequent theatre-goers (who are likely to visit the cinema in the event of such adaptations) before attempting to tap the rest of the substantial art-film audiences.²⁶

The independents' entrance in the market for such films has had significant repercussions on the actual adaptation process of plays into films, since a large number of determinants, mostly absent from the majors' business practices, has come into play in any such project. We can identify those determinants by looking at the three aspects of the film business: production, distribution and exhibition:

Production. Probably the key institutional factor at this level is the playwright's deeper involvement in the film production process. Although playwrights such as Tennessee Williams and Lillian Hellman (and to a lesser degree Arthur Miller and William Inge) were habitually adapting their own plays for the majors in the 1950s and 1960s, the studio mode of production ensured they were excluded from the later stages of the films' production. Playwrights such as David Mamet and Sam Shepard, however, have been closely involved in all stages of their plays' adaptations for the screen and have occasionally directed the films themselves. The playwright's deeper involvement with the film production process is, to a large extent, a product of many independent distributors' standard practice to yield a considerably higher degree of creative control to the filmmaker (compared to the studios). This practice can take many forms, including the distributor's concession of the film's final cut to the filmmaker. This arrangement allows the creative force of the film (with the playwright in potentially more than one capacity) to keep the dramatic structure of the

play intact and present an adaptation that can at least follow ‘the letter’ of the original text. The, generally, low budgets available in such independent productions encourage the director/playwright to avoid major compromises and, to some extent, to disregard certain commercial pressures normally associated with studio production.²⁷ One way this encouragement expresses itself is – as I shall argue in the next section – through the filmmaker’s adherence to the structure of the dramatic text. Finally because of their status as prestige projects and their often risqué subject matter, adaptations of plays tend to attract big stars (a feature that is often exploited in the marketing of the films), who agree to work for a fraction of their salary.²⁸ This is also true of famous directors who are lured to the picture for the same reason as the stars or by the promise of creative control over the project.²⁹

Distribution. Although the distributors of recent film adaptations of plays can be of varying calibre (for instance, a distributor such as New Line Cinema even before its acquisition by Time Warner, via the Turner Broadcasting Corporation, has much more muscle in marketing a film than, say, American Film Theatre or Roger Corman’s New World Pictures), they all nevertheless tend to give such films a limited or an exclusive release.³⁰ These patterns of release generally centre around the idea of opening a film on a few screens or (in some exclusive releases) on a single screen and building word of mouth before the distributors add more screens according to a film’s performance.³¹ Furthermore and due to the film’s artistic intentions, it is standard practice for a distributor to submit the film to one or more film festivals, which, of course, creates awareness among a specific type of audience associated with the art-house circuit.³² The actual marketing of the film tends to focus on the playwright and the title of the play – exploiting his/her status as a commodity – though when stars or

famous directors are involved, marketing certainly also attempts to exploit their names.³³ Finally the adaptation picture offers the distributor a limited opportunity for ancillary profits, as on many occasions the play is licensed for a new edition, the publication of which coincides with the release of the film.

Exhibition. Although this sector of the film business cannot be directly utilised in a critical study of adaptations, it is nevertheless important to remember that the film is likely to be released and run in the art house circuit, as opposed to multi-screen theatres, and will therefore be viewed by a specific demographic which is associated with art-house cinema. The above determinant raises specific questions about the targeted audience for such adaptations, particularly in the light of André Bazin's distinction between an adaptation made for the cinema and an adaptation made for the cinema's audience (Bazin, 2000, p 21), a distinction which, in this case, collapses.³⁴ Bazin argues that most adaptations "care far more about the latter than about the former" (2000, p 21), a factor that has a significant impact on what appears on the screen. I would like to suggest, however, that the advent of independent companies in the American film adaptation market has created the conditions for the production of a more specialised film product. This can be both designed for the cinema (in the Bazinian sense) and, at the same time, cater for its audience as art-house audiences are expected to be familiar with a plethora of stylistic and narrative conventions not normally associated with mainstream film. These audiences can consequently appreciate a 'serious' film treatment of a pre-existing text.

All the above institutional parameters associated with independent film production and distribution of film adaptations must be thoroughly established before the critic

turns their attention to the textual organisation of the film and its relationship with the play. This is why I will start my discussion of Mamet's adaptation of Oleanna for the screen within such a framework before I examine the film itself.

From Page (and Stage) to Screen (1): Institutional Considerations

The theatrical success of Oleanna, which premiered on 1 May 1992 under the direction of Mamet himself, was instant. Originally produced by the Back Bay Theatre Company (a company established by David Mamet and actor William H. Macy) in association with the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the play became a "theatrical sensation" that broke box office records at several theatres in the US (Johnson, 1994, p 54). The success of the three-act play, which depicts three meetings between a male university professor (played by William H. Macy) and a female student (played by Rebecca Pidgeon) in the professor's office at a college campus and explores such issues as political correctness and sexual harassment, was to a great extent aided by the centrality of the above issues in public debate. That debate had peaked shortly before the play's premiere with the Clarence Thomas – Anita Hill televised Senate hearings.³⁵ In a sense, and despite Mamet's categorical denial that he was inspired or in any way influenced by the hearings (Norman and Rezek, 2001, pp 124-125), the play was seen as a dramatisation, if not of the Thomas – Hill case, at least of what could have happened between the Supreme Court Judge and the law employee when they worked together.³⁶ For this reason, but also because of the play's undeniable promise of dealing with sensational and controversial material, the production attracted huge audiences. Shortly after the play's premiere in Cambridge, the production moved off-Broadway to New York with similar success³⁷ and by 1993 it was licensed all over the world, receiving its

British premiere at the Royal Court Theatre in London under the direction of Harold Pinter, to whom Mamet had originally dedicated the play.³⁸

With such a staggering commercial success, which, in most cases, was accompanied by an unprecedented level of audience involvement during and after the end of its performance,³⁹ and with media hype surrounding individual performances of the play,⁴⁰ Mamet's play was bound to attract the interest of film companies. In conjunction with the controversial issue of sexual harassment that the play dealt with, and which could certainly be exploited in the marketing of a potential film, the play had other attractive 'ingredients' for the making of a popular film. These included: a chronologically linear story clearly demarcated in its three acts; an easily identifiable setting (a university campus); and two main characters distinctly penned as antagonists in a dramatic situation. Additionally, a potential film version would certainly benefit from the success of the stage production in establishing a substantial audience that would be interested in a movie based on the play. This means that, in theory, a film adaptation of Oleanna should appeal to the audiences that saw the stage production of the play and then seek to attract other audiences. Finally, a film version of Oleanna would also stand to benefit from exploiting the socio-political zeitgeist, which for the first half of the 1990s was to a large extent defined by an emphasis on political correctness and affirmative action.⁴¹

The last two elements are of a particular significance. The existence of an audience for a film version of the play and Oleanna's extremely close relationship with contemporary political climate in the United States were two elements, I would argue, that precipitated the play's adaptation for the screen. The release of the film Oleanna

on 4 November 1994, approximately two years from the play's world premiere, can be seen as an attempt to capitalise on the above two institutional parameters. There was, arguably, also the incentive to 'beat' Disclosure (Levinson, 1994, Warner, US) another film adaptation – this time of a novel – that dealt with the issue of sexual harassment, in the race for the audience's attention.⁴² Disclosure actually reached US cinemas less than a year after the novel's publication,⁴³ a fact that clearly supports an argument that highlights the significance of the above two factors in the timeframe involved in any film adaptation project.

Although the above list of attractive 'ingredients' was substantial enough to raise the interest of any film company, the play Oleanna also had a number of qualities that were undesirable, indeed problematic, in any adaptation. First, its main characters were, in fact, its only characters. Although the play's dialogue makes specific references to other characters in the narrative (John's wife and son, his lawyer, the woman whom he buys the house from, the realtor, the members of the tenure committee, the court officers who advise Carol to avoid a meeting with John and the 'group' who advised Carol to bring charges of sexual harassment against her tutor), none of them actually appears in the play. Furthermore, the story takes place in only one location, John's office in the university campus, which naturally restricts the spatial articulation of the narrative to a very limited setting. Finally, and most importantly, the narrative depends heavily on the use of language by the two characters and, in particular, on the power of language to colour and shape the characters' action. As a consequence, it does not portray action in the traditional, that is, the spectacular sense of the term. In other words, the play Oleanna is also characterised by a number of qualities, which can be seen as 'un-filmic,'⁴⁴ certainly

from the standpoint of contemporary commercial American cinema, a cinema primarily defined by an emphasis on spectacle.

The above list of 'non-cinematic' qualities clearly represents a cluster of problems, which had to be addressed in the process of adaptation. It is at this point, however, that the significance of institutional parameters becomes obvious, since a specific list of determinants created the framework within which those problematic issues were addressed. The determinants included: the distributor/financer's size of investment in the picture, the filmmaker's and stars' names and track records, the level of the playwright's involvement in the making of the film and, less directly but equally importantly, the film's release dates. Although the above cluster of problematic elements revolved around creative decisions during the production process, the overall approach to the creation of the film was pre-determined during the deal-making stage, when the package for the film was put together. In order to make sense of the packaging for Oleanna, one needs to go back a few years and briefly discuss two other adaptations of Mamet's plays. As I will shortly argue, certain events that took place during the film adaptations of Sexual Perversity in Chicago (1974) – adapted as About Last Night... (1986) and of Glengarry Glen Ross (1984) adapted under the same title (1992), have been extremely influential in the shaping of the film Oleanna.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago was Mamet's first big hit on the American stage. Like Oleanna, it premiered outside New York (in Chicago) before it found its way to off-off Broadway (December 1975), off Broadway (June 1976) and then the London West End (December 1977).⁴⁵ Like Oleanna, the play was deemed controversial and

received much hostile criticism (which in this case primarily focused on the extensive use of expletives in the dialogue, something that is completely absent from Oleanna with the exception of the last scene).⁴⁶ Unlike Oleanna, however, Sexual Perversity in Chicago was structured in an episodic manner, consisting of thirty-four brief scenes, which take place in a large number of locations including a singles' bar, three different apartments, a health club, a restaurant, a movie theatre, a nursery school, a library and a beach. Despite the "fragmentary and circular" nature of the narrative (Begley, 1998, p 166), which deals with four Chicagoans' attitudes towards sex, Sexual Perversity in Chicago attracted Hollywood's interest and Mamet had already written a screenplay 'on spec' by early 1978 (Dzielak, 2001, p 32). His script which, naturally, attempted to stick closely to the play's structure and dialogue (complete with all the expletives), however, was not received favourably. The project was shelved for a number of years until Columbia Tristar bought the play's rights, with Mamet on board, to re-write the screenplay for a major motion picture in the light of the success of The Postman Always Rings Twice and The Verdict, both adapted for the screen by Mamet. Having acquired the film rights, Tristar fired Mamet from the film and hired two other screenwriters to produce a different screenplay (Carr, 2001, p 92). The result was About Last Night..., a film that kept very little from Mamet's original script, and which, Varun Begley described as "an adulterated, unabashed and unregenerate star-vehicle for Rob Lowe, Demi Moore and James Belushi" (1998, p 167).

Amongst other issues, Mamet's experience during the adaptation of Sexual Perversity in Chicago and his eventual disavowal of the film highlight the playwright's sensitivity about outside interventions to his written work for the screen.⁴⁷ As he put

it in one of his essays, by the mid 1980s he had reached a point as a writer that “[he was tired] of being finessed” (Mamet 1990, p 136), a statement that clearly suggests his reluctance in allowing changes to his screenplays. This was especially so when his reputation and stature kept increasing with the success of Glengarry Glen Ross (1984) and Speed-the-Plow (1988) on the American stage and The Untouchables (1987) and We’re No Angels (1989) in Hollywood. For that reason, when New Line Cinema expressed an interest in Glengarry Glen Ross, Mamet was in a position of power to negotiate an agreement whereby his script would not be altered. Indeed, the dialogue of his play was left almost completely intact, and the few changes from the original were made by the playwright himself in an attempt to assign clear motivation to the actions of the four salesmen/protagonists.⁴⁸ Although Mamet’s screenplay and the source upon which it was based were respected in the adaptation process, it is important to note that Mamet was not granted control over the film’s casting, which was decided by the New Line Cinema’s executives and director James Foley.⁴⁹

The critical and (relative) commercial success of Glengarry Glen Ross, which for most critics was due to the powerful performance of the ensemble cast as well as to the script’s power,⁵⁰ paved the way for the specific shape that the adaptation of Oleanna took. The presence of an independent distributor such as New Line Cinema (one year before its takeover by Ted Turner), which mainly catered for non-mainstream film audiences, ensured a substantial level of respect to the ‘art factor’ that the Pulitzer Prize winner and the screenwriter’s stage background clearly signified. The degree of Mamet’s involvement in the project was also seen as an additional factor in the film’s success. In many respects, as I will shortly demonstrate, the film adaptation of Oleanna took the above elements a few steps further.

Although there is no documentation of the extent of various film distributors' interest in Oleanna, one can make specific assumptions about the route the project could have taken had it been a major production marketed to mainstream film audiences. These assumptions primarily centre on the potential solutions which could have been given to the problematic ingredients of the text I identified earlier: the total absence of secondary characters, the limited and limiting setting and the heavy use of dialogue combined with a lack of spectacular action. If the transformation of Sexual Perversity in Chicago into About Last Night... is an indication of the treatment Oleanna would have received, one could have expected a film version of Oleanna, which would still be structured around a number of meetings between John and Carol (not necessarily three) but which would most certainly also feature a number of scenes that would 'open up' the story to include more visually spectacular material. Such scenes would possibly include:

- the meeting between Carol and the tenure committee where she would articulate her complaint
- a meeting between John and the tenure committee where he could express his side of the story
- a number of scenes between John and his wife dealing with the allegations of sexual harassment
- a number of scenes between Carol and members of the group which she comes to represent in the second act of the play
- a number of scenes between college students discussing the scandal in the campus or their dormants

- a number of short scenes that would emphasise the idyllic location of John's new house
- the actual party thrown for John (and not just its aftermath)
- a second scene between John and the tenure committee which informs him of their decision not to grant him tenure.

The inclusion of the above scenes would have certainly made Oleanna a more 'spectacular' film. All those scenes however represent a series of narratively insignificant events. For Mamet, no matter how interesting and meaningful it might be, any piece of information that does not actively contribute to the telling of a story (whether in a play or a film) should be completely removed (Mamet 1992a, p 2). As he put it in On Directing Film, "A good writer gets better only by learning to *cut*, to remove the ornamental, the descriptive, the narrative and *especially* the deeply felt and meaningful. What remains? The story remains" (1992a, p xv original italics).⁵¹ For this reason, any narrative information concerning encounters between the protagonists and other characters in Oleanna is conveyed either through the exchange of dialogue between John and Carol or through monologues (which occur through the convention of the telephone conversations), since the play is about the struggle for power between two people. In the face of potential institutional pressure for such modifications in the story of Oleanna, one could understand why the film was eventually developed in collaboration with an independent distributor, and in particular with the Samuel Goldwyn Company.

The Samuel Goldwyn Company has operated on the margins of Hollywood cinema since 1978, when Samuel Goldwyn Jr. formed an independent production and

distribution company following the settlement of his father's estate (Slide, 1998, p 177). The company has overwhelmingly invested in the distribution of art-house independent films with a library of titles that includes such famous 'indie' pictures as John Sayles's City of Hope (1991) and The Secret of Roan Inish (1994), Jim Jarmusch's Stranger than Paradise (1984), Donna Deitch's Desert Hearts (1985), David Lynch's Wild at Heart (1990) and Greg Araki's Splendor (1999). More importantly, for the purposes of this chapter, the Samuel Goldwyn Company has demonstrated a remarkable inclination towards the distribution of film adaptations of novels and plays. Specifically, almost a third of all its releases since 1978 have been adaptations. These include widely critically acclaimed adaptations of plays such as Longtime Companion (Rene, 1990), Henry V (Branagh, 1989), Much Ado about Nothing (Branagh, 1993) and The Madness of King George (Hytner, 1994). In 1994, particularly, the year of Oleanna's release, five out of the company's eleven releases were adaptations (four plays, one novel).⁵² With such credentials, the Samuel Goldwyn Company seemed to be the ideal partner for the kind of film adaptation Mamet had in mind. This, to a large extent, explains why he decided to direct the adaptation of the play himself (so far the only adaptation of Mamet's own play directed by him).

With Mamet on board as writer and, more importantly, as director, the project assumed a very specific direction. As with his previous three films as a writer/director, Mamet brought with him a group of collaborators who were familiar with his work on both stage and screen, key members of which (such as Patricia Wolff – the film's producer) had been also involved in the extremely successful theatrical production of Oleanna. Not surprisingly, this practice was extended to

cover film casting decisions, which are obviously significant for the success of any film. Mamet offered the parts of John and Carol to William H. Macy and Debra Eisenstadt respectively, the actors who played the parts in the original production of the play.⁵³ Finally, the project was also to be developed and produced by Bay Kinescope Productions, a Boston-based film and television production company established by Mamet and producer Patricia Wolff in early 1993.⁵⁴

The above ingredients in Oleanna's packaging are extremely significant for our understanding of the film as an adaptation. They also question dominant critical approaches to the subject of film adaptations that tend to highlight the unity of the original text and the notion of the author as problematic (Naremore, 2000, p 15). Mamet's involvement in all stages of both stage and screen version of the play, as well as the participation of several important players in both productions of Oleanna, clearly implies a degree of correspondence between the two versions, which must be taken into consideration. This necessarily means that the study of film adaptation of dramatic texts must move well beyond the relationship of the filmic text with the literary original and embrace a number of practical considerations associated with the stage production(s) of the text. These considerations could include certain stylistic details that have worked successfully in the theatrical productions of the play and which can be reproduced in a film adaptation: for instance, the actors' costumes, make up and hair style, specific lighting arrangements, the inclusion of certain props and, significantly, the actors' performance, which, as I argued in the previous chapter, is a fundamental constitutive element of 'the Mamet experience' in both theatre and film. The presence of Mamet, Wolff, Macy and Eisenstadt, therefore, in the same roles in both the off-Broadway and the film production of Oleanna, clearly suggests

the possibility of a certain degree of aesthetic homogeneity between the two productions. This must, at least, be noted even though the absence of stage performances' records makes it impossible to study.⁵⁵

Finally, the ingredients in the film's package raise the question of the film production's scope and, consequently, the audience the film targets. Although there is no documentation about the film's negative and marketing costs, the presence of an independent distributor, which mostly caters for the art-film market, coupled with Mamet's refusal to 'open up' his script and the casting of non-star performers for the two leads, clearly suggests that the film Oleanna was designed as a low-budget production.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Samuel Goldwyn Company's plan to distribute the film in an exclusive release pattern early in November also attests to the scope and status of the film, as such release patterns are normally chosen for small, 'arty' productions with 'demanding' content, which will have to fight for the audience's attention. Additionally, early November dates are generally preferred by distributors of smaller films because this is a 'dead' period for big-budget films, which are normally released in the following month to exploit the Christmas holiday period.⁵⁷ A low-budget film, therefore, has better chances to establish itself and find an audience before competition intensifies in December. A November release, moreover, has a very important added value for small, art films, since it places them at pole position for Academy award consideration;⁵⁸ a distinct possibility for the Samuel Goldwyn Company, at least in the category for screenplay based on previously released or published material, given the staggering success of the play.

All the above parameters represent a complex matrix of institutional influences in the production of a film adaptation. Consequently, the critic's failure to account for the level of its determination results in an incomplete and, largely, futile attempt to explore the phenomenon of adaptation for the cinema screen. Having established the institutional context, which is responsible for the specific direction the film production of Oleanna took, I now turn my attention to the film itself.

From Page (and Stage) to Screen (2): Textual Considerations

From Play to Screenplay

The play Oleanna is structured in three clearly defined acts that are sequential in time.⁵⁹ The acts portray three meetings between John and Carol at his university office with each meeting representing a new development in the dramatic relationship between the two characters. A brief synopsis of each act follows:

ACT ONE

Carol goes to John's office to complain that she cannot understand what his class is about. She takes offence at academic language, which she finds inaccessible, as well as at some concepts explored in the course. Busy with his purchase of a new house, John does not take Carol seriously, but offers her an A, provided that she meets him during his office hours to discuss the course. They start their discussions but Carol, still unable to understand key concepts in education studies, complains more intensely, and John tries to calm her down by embracing her.

ACT TWO

John calls Carol to his office to ask her to retract the accusations of sexual harassment she has brought against him. Initially trying to stop her from making a fool out of herself, John gradually realises that it would be a more difficult task to convince her to retract, especially when at one point he uses sexist language. Carol points out to him that because he is in a position of authority, he has the power to mock and patronise the students and needs to be stopped. When Carol tries to make her way out of his office John tries to prevent her by physically holding her back. Carol starts screaming and leaves the room.

ACT THREE

John calls Carol to his office to apologise and make amends for his behaviour in the previous meeting. When he refuses to accept that he has been sexist, he enrages Carol, who tells him that he should be removed from his position. Carol offers him a last chance to save his job by giving him a list of demands, which, should they be met by him, she would consider withdrawing her accusations. One of her demands is to ban a series of “inappropriate books,” including his own. John refuses to accept, but at that point he is notified by phone that Carol has officially accused him of rape. As she leaves his office Carol makes one final comment, which triggers John’s physical and verbal attack on her. The final act finishes with John reflecting on his actions.

Although the above description constitutes a rather crude and epigrammatic summary of the action portrayed in the play, it nevertheless reveals the play’s clear sequential structure and its dependence upon a cause-effect logic, both elements of what has been called the well-made play. As a matter of fact when interviewer Matthew Roudané noticed that, unlike most of his contemporaries, Mamet was reworking a

“more classic, Ibsenesque dramatic form” (2001, p 49), the playwright/filmmaker responded:

I’m sure trying to do the well-made play. It’s the hardest thing to do. I like this form because it’s the structure imitating human perception... This is the way we perceive a play: with a clear beginning, a middle and an end. So, when one wants to best utilize the theater, one would try to structure the play in a way that is congruent with the way the mind perceives it. (2001, pp 49-50).⁶⁰

Oleanna’s debt to the structure of the well-made play is also significant on a different level. Probably the most criticised aspect of Mamet’s play was the transformation of Carol between Acts One and Two from an inarticulate, directionless student who does not know the meaning of the word ‘index,’ to an extremely eloquent and confident representative of the student body who fights for a specific political agenda. This transformation, the critics argue, could not be realistically accounted for within the thirty days that have elapsed between the two meetings.⁶¹ The form of the well-made play does however allow the unfolding of improbable, even preposterous or outrageous stories. This is only when these stories are told in a “clear, neat, balanced overall construction” and when there is “the appearance at least of verisimilitude” (Russell-Taylor, 1967, p 15). Within this format the above, otherwise unrealistic, transformation is allowed to pass unproblematically, effortlessly contained by the internal logic of the play. For Carol’s transformation (which despite its degree is nevertheless adequately motivated by the events in Act One) takes place within a universe where a student is allowed to call her university professor “a yapping fool,” and where a male professor twice tells a female student that he likes her. It is also a

universe where an academic tenure committee does not invite the professor for an interview after a complaint is filed against him, and where the professor does not speak to a lawyer immediately after the accusations (between Acts One and Two). Finally, it is a universe where a victim of rape ignores the court officers' advice and goes to confront the rapist in the 'scene of the crime'.

All the above unlikely events become perfectly plausible in the universe that the characters of Oleanna inhabit, a universe where, to cite David Rabe again, "the substitution of the devices of logic for the powerful sweeps of pattern and energy that is our lives" certainly holds sway. Oleanna does not pretend to subscribe to any externally defined notions of realism, a position clearly supported by Mamet himself who during early drafts of the play thought that the story was so far-fetched that he found it difficult to finish.⁶² The logic of the play, however, with its emphasis on the protagonists' efforts to achieve their individual objectives (despite the fact that those objectives change midway), lends credence to the plausibility of the events portrayed. This consequently guarantees at least the appearance of verisimilitude.

With even the most minute detail of the structure of the story evident in the play's dialogue, and therefore already in place, the screenwriting process took the form of 'dressing up' the original dialogue with a scene text, that is, of providing the characters' dramatic interaction with concrete details pertaining to its eventual visualisation. Indeed, it would not be unfair to suggest that Mamet's screenplay for Oleanna consisted of the entire text from the published play (as this appears in the 1993 Methuen edition), with the addition of description, report and technical comment as well as of a number of extra scenes. Significantly, these scenes (with one

exception) take place either before the first encounter between John and Carol or in the space occupied by act breaks in the stage version, and for that reason, they do not alter the dramatic interaction between the characters as determined by the play.⁶³ In other words, the encounters between John and Carol as marked in the text of the play remain intact in the text of the screenplay. In the face of such “scrupulous faithfulness” (Johnson, 1994, p 54) to the play’s action, I will restrict my discussion to an examination of the additional elements.

Description. As suggested in the previous chapter, the mode of description in a screenplay “comprises of detailed sections about production design in addition to economical slug line reductions” (Sternberg, 1997, p 71). Mamet’s screenplay uses description primarily to break the three acts of the play into several smaller scenes. The beginning of each of these scenes is marked by the provision of information about their location and timeframe. Unlike other screenwriters, though, he does not provide extensive information about setting design and the arrangement of props, unless a specific setting or a particular prop is important for the action. Slug lines such as “INT[ERIOR] SCHOOL CORRIDOR DAY” (*Oleanna*, p 3), therefore, clearly state the space where and the time when action takes place but do not offer any indication about the details of the setting (colour, length and width of the corridor, pictures on the walls, number of people in the corridor etc.). In fact, the only detail in this scene (which does not contain any dialogue) is Carol walking down the corridor, and for that reason no other setting detail is advanced. If, however, there is a setting detail or prop that is important for the action, the screenplay clearly specifies its description and its position in the narrative. Carol’s letter with the grade she received in John’s course, for example, is described as an “OFFICIAL-LOOKING

LETTER, ON BUFF COLOURED PAPER (Oleanna, p 2), whilst the jacket she is wearing in the first scene is specified as a “NAVY PEAJACKET” (Oleanna, p 2). In short, Mamet’s use of description segments the text into small units, but more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, highlights certain production design details that will constitute the more narratively interesting elements of the film’s *mise en scène*.

Report. In terms of “events and their temporal sequence” as these are determined by the “action of the human beings” (Sternberg, 1997, p 72), Mamet’s screenplay consists of numerous, often elaborate, passages that delineate the action of the characters. The content of the screenplay’s report can be based on specific actions that have been tested and found successful during the stage production of the play and hence used in the film. As I mentioned in my discussion of the screenplay for Homicide, Mamet uses report almost exclusively to detail strictly physical actions that the actors are to perform and he takes great care to ensure that this mode of presentation in his screenplays is as devoid of adverbs as possible so that the action is markedly physical.⁶⁴ An example of such use of report is the following passage, “JOHN BRINGS TWO CUPS OF TEA OVER TOWARD CAROL. SHE PLACES ONE ON HER KNEE – THEN TAKES THE OTHER TO HIS DESK” (Oleanna, p 43), which clearly prescribes a series of physical actions for the two actors.

The use of report in Mamet’s screenplay, and in particular its stress on the physicality of the action prescribed, presents an added layer to the discussion of the film adaptation of Oleanna. This is because report here is used strictly as an index of the characters’ non-verbal behaviour, which is largely absent from the original text.⁶⁵

Besides guiding actors in their performance, this index of the characters' non-verbal behaviour gives an insight into the development of the physical relationship between the two characters, which, of course, is extremely important for the subject matter the film deals with. A good illustration of this can be seen in the way a scene is transformed when non-verbal behaviour is added. Table 2 juxtaposes the same scene in play and screenplay (report is indicated in capital letters):

PLAY	SCREENPLAY
JOHN: Well. I don't know if I'd put it that way. Listen: I'm talking to you as I'd talk to my son. Because that's what I'd like him to have that I have never had. I'm talking to you the way I wish that someone had talked to me. I don't know how to do it, other than to be <i>personal</i> ,...but...	JOHN: Well. I don't know if I'd put it that way. Listen: I'm talking to you as I'd talk to my son. Because that's what I'd like him to have that I have never had. I'm talking to you the way I wish that someone had talked to me. I don't know how to do it, other than to be <u>personal</u> ,...but...
	HE MOVES HIS CHAIR CLOSER TO HER
CAROL: Why would you want to be personal with me?	CAROL: Why would you want to be personal with me?
	LEANING CLOSER
JOHN: Well, you see? That's what I'm saying. We can only interpret the behavior of others through the screen we...	JOHN: Well, you see? That's what I'm saying. We can only interpret the behavior of others through the screen we...
Mamet, 1993a, p 19, original italics	<u>Oleanna</u> (script), pp 30-31 original underlining

Table 2

The use of report in the screenplay for Oleanna (1)

It is clear from the above table that any emotional charge created by the expression of the characters' lines is certainly enhanced and coloured by John's physical move towards Carol and the change in their spatial proximity. Later on in the story, during the first controversial scene between them, report (as an index of non-verbal behaviour) again offers an insight into what each character's implicit goals are. This time, report clearly demonstrates John's intention to move closer to Carol, while also

showing Carol's desire not to reciprocate. Both these actions are absent in the play.

Table 3 juxtaposes the manner in which the scene is treated in play and screenplay:

PLAY	SCREENPLAY
CAROL:... you tell me I'm intelligent, and then you tell me I should not be <i>here</i> , what do you <i>want</i> with me? What does it <i>mean</i> ? Who should I <i>listen</i> to...I...	CAROL:... you tell me I'm intelligent, and then you tell me I should not be <u>here</u> , what do you <u>want</u> with me? What does it <u>mean</u> ? Who should I <u>listen</u> to...I...
HE GOES OVER TO HER AND PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HER SHOULDER	HE GOES OVER TO HER AND PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HER SHOULDER
CAROL: NO!	CAROL: NO!
SHE WALKS AWAY FROM HIM	SHE WALKS AWAY FROM HIM
	JOHN MOVES TO COME CLOSER TO CAROL, CAMERA HINGES THEM ACROSS THE ROOM, AS SHE BACKS UP. AS HE NEARS HER THEY ARE OBSCURED BY THE COATRACKS, COVERED WITH COATS
	PAUSE
	CAROL: No...!
	SHE COMES OUT FROM BEHIND THE COATRACK, AND SITS DOWN TO COMPOSE HERSELF, JOHN COMES OUT ALSO FROM BEHIND THE COATRACK. HE COMES TOWARDS HER.
	SHE BACKS AWAY FROM HIM, THROUGH THE DOOR INTO THE CONFERENCE ROOM, HE COMES AFTER HER AT A RESPECTFUL DISTANCE
JOHN: Sshhhhh	JOHN: Sshhhhh
CAROL: No, I don't under...	CAROL: No, I don't under...
Mamet, 1993a, p 36; original italics	Oleanna (script), pp 56-7; original underlining

Table 3

The use of report in the screenplay for Oleanna (2)

The report emphasises John's persistence in approaching Carol ("John moves to come closer to Carol"; "he nears her"; "he comes towards her"; "he comes after her") and her determination to avoid physical proximity ("she walks away from him"; "she backs up"; "she backs away from him"). If, as Mamet has consistently suggested (see Chapter Three), every scene consists of a through-action which advances the story and which is conveyed by what the characters do, then it is clear that here John goes at length to make a physical advance to Carol, whereas Carol tries to avoid him.

Although the above through action is also clear in the play (“he goes over to her and puts his arm around her shoulder”; “she walks away from him”), the screenplay’s report accentuates the extent of the characters’ action while also choreographing the physical movement of the actors. The addition of report, therefore, becomes an extremely significant practice in the adaptation process, since it often goes beyond the action itself (evident in Table 3) and specifies the size and extent of it.

Technical Comment. The final additional element in terms of scene text in Mamet’s screenplay involves “the cinematic technical registration and presentation of narrative” (Sternberg, 1997, p 74). For the purposes of this chapter, technical comment is by far the most important addition to the original dialogue text as it represents the first attempt to register the story in a visual manner. Unlike report and description, which can be also used in theatrical stage directions, technical comment is only specific to the medium of film. As with his script for Homicide, Mamet’s use of technical comment in the Oleanna screenplay is also somewhat limited, making it difficult to visualise the final version of the film in extreme detail. This practice does not necessarily mean, however, that the screenplay is not a substantial indicator of the film’s visual style. In the following brief discussion of technical comment in the screenplay for Oleanna I will demonstrate that the technical registration and presentation of narrative focuses primarily on markers for editing (including point of view cutting) and to a lesser extent on camera movement, camera level, camera angle, shot scale, type of cinematography (deep focus) and shot duration.⁶⁶ The emphasis on editing clearly suggests that, strictly speaking, the process of film adaptation of drama involves the transformation of a story that is continuous in time and space (as it appears on stage) to a story composed by fragments of time and space (as it will

eventually appear on film). As Anthony Davies has argued, “the energy of the dramatic film arises from the suspension of the memorable visual image within a shifting but synthetic context of juxtaposed and discontinuous space” (1990, p 2). This is, of course, dependent upon the function of film editing.

Mamet’s screenplay visualises the narrative for Oleanna through a succession of ‘images’, which are introduced by the word ‘ANGLE’ (not to be confused with camera angle). These images are overwhelmingly defined by the presence of one or more characters (ANGLE: CAROL. PUTTING ON THE COAT, DISAPPEARING THROUGH THE DOOR OF THE ROOM, p 2). More rarely, in the absence of characters, these images are defined by a setting detail, in which case the word ANGLE is accompanied by the letters INS[ERT] (ANGLE INS: THE PILE OF BOOKS. CAROL’S HAND STILL HOLDING THE BUFFCOLORED OFFICIAL LETTER, COMES INTO THE SHOT AND PICKS UP THE GREEN NOTEBOOK, p 2).⁶⁷ What is interesting, however, is that there is no correspondence between the succession of the images specified in the script and the succession of the shots in the film.⁶⁸ This raises the question of the nature and, especially, of the function of those prescribed images.

Those images, I argue, constitute significant instances of narrative information that cannot be reproduced through dialogue and, for that reason, have been pre-selected by the screenwriter as individual shots. Their function is two-fold. Firstly, they simply convey narrative information visually (as in the above two examples). Secondly, they signify the beginning of short scenes in a particular space, and therefore function as

the equivalent of “establishing shots” or “familiar images” which anchor the ensuing action.⁶⁹ The following example is from page 9:

ANGLE

CAROL, JOHN IN THE B.G

CAROL

You don't have to say that to me

JOHN

You paid me the...

HE TAKES OUT A NOTEPAD, AND MAKES A NOTE ON IT

ANGLE, JOHN WRITING

WE SEE THE BROCHURE, AND THE NOTEPAD ON WHICH HE
WRITES: “GET REIMBURSEMENT FOR THE INSPECTION...?”

ANGLE

JOHN AT HIS DESK.

JOHN

you...you paid me the compliment, or the obeisance. alright. Of coming in here.

Alright.

HE STRAIGHTENS UP

JOHN

I find that I am at a standstill. I find that I ...

CAROL

... what ...

JOHN

...one moment. In regard to you...to your...

CAROL

Oh, oh. You' re buying a new house!"

(Oleanna, p 9; original underlining)

Besides prescribing the use of deep focus cinematography, the first instance of the use of ANGLE establishes a new spatial relationship between the characters before Carol responds to a comment previously made by John. The shot in question, therefore, becomes the equivalent of an establishing shot, which anchors the very brief dialogue that follows and which locates Carol as the more important character in that part of the conversation (she is in the foreground). The second example represents an instance of a piece of narrative information conveyed visually (and which cannot be transmitted through dialogue). It, therefore, constitutes an individual shot that breaks the stichomythia between the two characters. Finally, the third example relocates the

action to a different fragment of space, where this time it is John that leads the discussion and the image of him at his desk becomes the dominant visual anchor of the ensuing conversation. Although this scene can consist of several shots, its spine, however, consists of the above three images.

The above, rather idiosyncratic markers for editing allow Mamet to segment the space his characters occupy, and therefore present the story from different angles and spatial perspectives as well as highlight visually narrative information that contribute to the development of the story in advance. Editing then becomes the key signifier in the adaptation process and, not surprisingly, supports a film language, which, as Davies has argued

is essentially based on the manipulation of space – space between different entities in the rectangular frame which encloses the image [as in the second example above], space between the camera and the subject [as in the first example above] and space which contracts or expands as the camera moves towards or away from, or around that subject (Davies, 1990, p 2).⁷⁰

This type of film language is fully supported by other technical comments in the screenplay. This is so even though there are considerably fewer markers for camera movement, type of cinematography and shot scale, whilst the registers for camera level, camera angle and shot duration are extremely sparse.⁷¹ This practice suggests that Mamet provides technical information only for specific story elements, which consequently assume a special function in the eventual narration of the story and must

be visualised in the manner prescribed in the screenplay. The following extract makes this clear:

CAROL

I always...all my life...I have never told anyone this...

ANGLE CU. CAROL STARTS TO SPEAK, SHAKES HER HEAD, STOPS

ANGLE CU. JOHN

JOHN

Yes. Go on. (PAUSE) Go on.

ANGLE

THE **TWO OF THEM**, SHE THINKS AND THEN INCLINES HER HEAD TOWARDS HIM AND STARTS TO SPEAK

CAROL

All of my life...

SOUND OF THE PHONE RINGING. JOHN TURNS HIS HEAD

ANGLE HIS POV

THROUGH THE DOOR IN THE FAR ROOM (HIS OFFICE) THE TELEPHONE.

ANGLE

**FROM THE OFFICE, LOOKING AT THEIR TABLE IN THE
CONFERENCE ROOM. HOLD. JOHN GETS UP SLOWLY, AND MOVES
BACK TOWARD THE PHONE. HE PICKS IT UP**

(Oleanna, p 60; bold and underlining added)

The extract starts with a registration of shot scale. For the purposes of this scene, the screenplay specifies that the characters must be framed in separate close up shots, which, presumably, will be used in succession, thus suggesting a shot/reverse shot editing pattern. As Carol starts speaking, she is visualised in the same frame with John, which of course implies a new shot. Although the screenplay does not register the scale of the new two-shot, one is nevertheless inclined to think that the third shot of the extract is a medium shot because it brings together two characters sitting relatively close to each other. When the ringing of the phone interrupts Carol's sentence, there is a marker for a point of view cutting as well as an indirect reference to the type of cinematography to be used, which in this case is deep focus (we see the telephone in the far room) and hence to a new shot scale (long shot). Depth of focus and the long shot scale are retained in the next image as the camera looks at John and Carol from a position in John's office, which of course implies a 180 degree cut. Finally the word HOLD represents a marker for shot duration, though Mamet does not specify the extent of that duration, only that the camera needs to stay focused for a perceptible period of time. It is clear then that technical comment in Mamet's screenplays is used in a somewhat selective manner, utilised to provide a general

visual guide for the realisation of the film rather than to offer a meticulously designed technical/stylistic segmentation of the story. In this way, the filmmaker has a quite concrete foundation upon which he can build the rest of his film, but also the opportunity to experiment with stylistic choices in terms of camera angles and levels in the filming of dialogue.

Finally, compared to the play, the screenplay for Oleanna presents a small number of additional scenes, which I shall examine in detail in the following section. At this point, however, it is important to state that the scenes, which do not contain any dialogue (with the exception of one scene), were not devised in order to 'open up' the story. As they occupy the space before the beginning of the story and between what in the play are called act-breaks, the role of the additional scenes is either introductory (they set up the first meeting between John and Carol) or transitory (they bridge the first meeting with the second and the second with the third).

To this end, Mamet's screenplay uses the commencing monologues from the first two acts of his play as voice over on the extra scenes. This means that although we visualise images such as Carol walking through the campus gardens (Oleanna, p 3), the screenplay prescribes that we are listening to fragments of John's phone conversation (a convention for a monologue) before we are even introduced to John. Equally, in what in the play is an act-break (between Acts One and Two), we see the aftermath of the surprise party thrown for John, while in voice-over he talks about what he attempts to achieve in his work, which as we will find out later, constitutes part of his opening remarks to Carol in their second meeting. Finally, between Acts Two and Three one scene has Carol in the photocopy shop xeroxing the report against

John, whilst John in voice over seems to be addressing someone, in what later becomes the beginning of his third meeting with Carol.⁷²

It is time now to turn to the film itself. As in the previous chapters my focus will be selective. In particular, my discussion will concentrate primarily on the added scenes, although there will be specific mention of a number of sequences from the rest of the film.

Narration and the adapted text

Whilst the play opens in John's office, with Carol in the room and John talking on the phone, the film begins with a montage sequence and a short scene in the campus before introducing the first encounter between the two characters. The above opening scenes are the first two of seven additional scenes (out of a total twenty – beginning and end credit sequences are not included). These do not exist in the play and, as I mentioned earlier, occupy the positions of the act breaks with one significant exception (scene 4 has been inserted early in what in the play constitutes Act One). Table 4 offers a segmentation of the film in terms of scenes and highlights the additional scenes (marked in bold) as well as the position they occupy with regard to the three act structure of the original text (marked within brackets):⁷³

SCENE SEGMENTATION OF THE FILM VERSION OF OLEANNA					
Scene	Location	Characters	Shots	ASL	Duration
1	Out/inside college campus	Carol	5	12.4	62 sec
2	Carol's room/outside campus	Carol	3	13.6	41 sec
(ACT ONE IN THE PLAY)					
3	John's office	Carol - John	44	9.5	420 sec
4	The corridor	Carol - John	1	60	60 sec
5	John's classroom	Carol - John	27	11	298 sec
6	The corridor	Carol - John	6	18.5	111 sec
7	John's office	Carol - John	15	13.4	201 sec
8	Conference room	Carol - John	33	6.4	212 sec
9	John's office	Carol - John	73	9.2	670 sec
10	Room adjacent to John's office	Carol - John	35	8.5	298 sec
(END OF ACT ONE IN THE PLAY)					
11	John's new house	John	5	21	105 sec
(ACT TWO IN THE PLAY)					
12	John's office	Carol - John	98	9.4	919 sec
13	Room adjacent to John's office	Carol - John	16	6.25	100 sec
(END OF ACT TWO IN THE PLAY)					
14	Hotel Room	John	3	18.3	55 sec
15	University Building	Carol	8	9.4	75 sec
(ACT THREE IN THE PLAY)					
16	John's office	Carol - John	28	5.6	158 sec
17	Room adjacent to John's office	Carol - John	3	15.3	46 sec
18	John's office	Carol - John	8	15.1	121 sec
19	The whole office complex	Carol - John	168	6.2	1037 sec
(END OF ACT THREE IN THE PLAY)					
20	Outside college campus	Students	3	5.6	17
Total			582	13.7	83.4 min

Table 4

Scene segmentation of the film version of Oleanna

Both opening scenes provide background information for the spectator but also plant the seeds for the narrative. In particular, the first montage sequence, which consists of five shots, establishes locale and introduces Carol as the main protagonist. The first three shots, which are edited through dissolves, present a condensed glimpse of the college campus (a building, the students' lockers, the school office) before the fourth and fifth shot (which are connected by a straight cut) highlight Carol as the main character. Furthermore, and in terms of narrative information, the sequence also sets

up Carol's motive for visiting John as she is seen receiving some bad news (in the form of a letter) after her visit to the campus office.

The visual communication of the above information is complemented by a non-diegetic song, which runs from the beginning of the opening credits to the end of the first scene. The song, which was composed specifically for the film, is reminiscent of traditional boarding school songs, but what strikes one as significant is that the lyrics of the song are full of references to all-male academic institutions, which, of course counterpoints with the image of a female student. The second scene, equally, which is also a montage sequence consisting of three shots, establishes further Carol's response to the news from the letter and prepares the spectator for her subsequent action. The scene also highlights Carol's notebook, which will be a significant motif throughout the film.

Although neither of the above scenes contains any concrete details about Carol's goal and the means through which she will attempt to achieve it, they nevertheless establish an initial chain of events in cause-effect logic (Carol receives bad news, she reflects on the news, she decides to do something about it), which will soon become known as the narrative begins to unfold. More importantly, however, and in terms of narration, the additional scenes represent a conscious choice on the part of the filmmaker to highlight Carol as the key protagonist of the film, the character through whom the spectator is introduced to the film's narrative and whose perspective is privileged. This choice essentially places John, who makes his first appearance in the following scene, firmly in the position of the antagonist, until, at least, the end of scene 10 (the end of Act One in the play), when the protagonist/antagonist roles will

be reversed. In essence, then, contrary to the play, the film takes sides from the beginning by asking the spectator to invest in their engagement with Carol, before, as I will argue shortly, it drops her into the position of the antagonist and instead picks up John as the main narrative agent.

The following cluster of scenes [Scenes 3 to 10] cover the first encounter between Carol and John, which is the subject of the first Act of the play. In terms of dialogue and character interaction, the events depicted in those scenes demonstrate a remarkable 'faithfulness' to the play. It would not be unfair, therefore, to argue that even the 'minor modifications' present are 'too minor' to attract critical attention with the significant exception of a new dialogue scene [Scene 4] that does not feature in the play.⁷⁴ The almost word-for-word correspondence between the two texts allows us to focus solely on the medium-specific qualities of the adapted text and hence to examine the filmic rendition of the story.

What is immediately obvious from the beginning of scene 3 (which is the third largest scene of the film, lasting seven minutes) is the relative lack of camera movement once John finishes his phone conversation and turns his attention to Carol. From the fifth shot of the scene, when John hangs up the phone to the end of the scene (in 39 out of a total of 44 shots), the camera is physically mobilised only four times to contribute to the characters' interaction.⁷⁵ As a result, the weight of narration falls on other cinematic signifiers, in particular editing and framing, with the latter depending quite substantially on shot scale and camera angle. Specifically, the scene relies on a heavy use of a shot/reverse shot editing pattern [shots 7-26, 27-32 and 34-38], with the characters seen together only four times in the same frame during the duration of

the scene. This editing choice clearly establishes the characters as antagonists who are occupying different positions, but with each position strong or significant enough to demand 'centre-stage' or, in this case, 'centre-frame.' The strong presence of the shot/reverse shot editing pattern in the above scene is not interesting in itself, since this type of editing has been habitually used in American cinema to narrate conversation scenes. What is interesting, however, is that the three pairs of the principal frames in the above three examples [7-26, 27-32 and 34-38] are different in terms of shot scale and camera angle. As I shall argue, the above difference conveys the shifting position of each character in their struggle for power and control over each other.

In the first example [shots 7-26], therefore, John is framed in a medium shot from the waist up, a shot scale which suggests a 'respectable' distance between the character and the camera. Moreover, the camera looks at him from a slightly low angle, which makes him appear authoritative (on a par with his status as a university professor) but which is not originally motivated by Carol's field of vision [fig 1].⁷⁶ Carol, on the other hand, is framed in a medium close up shot, which suggests a much shorter distance between the camera and the actor and, additionally, she is looked upon from a straight-on angle which is in fact motivated by John's field of vision [fig 2].

Whereas John's frame is 'natural' in terms of shot scale but forced in terms of camera angle, Carol's frame is the inverse, forced in terms of shot scale but natural in terms of angle.

As the conversation progresses the shot/reverse shot pattern is employed again with a new pair of frames. This time [shots 27-32] the camera angle is constant for both

frames (straight on angle) but the shot scale reverses. Now it is John who is framed in a medium close up [fig 3], whilst Carol is framed in a medium shot [figs 4 and 5].

Finally, in the third instance of shot/reverse shot [shots 34-38], shot scale and camera angle are again changed in the framing of each character. This time John appears in a medium long shot and photographed from a straight on angle (not motivated by Carol's field of vision since she is sat [fig 6]), whilst Carol appears in a medium shot but photographed from a high angle (motivated from John's standing position [fig 7]).



Figure 1

Scene 3, John in Shots 7-26

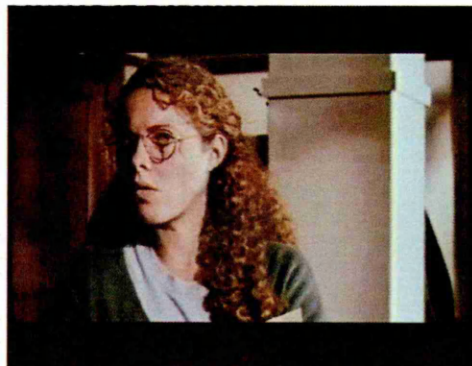


Figure 2

Scene 3, Carol in Shots 7-26



Figure 3

Scene 3, John in Shots 27-32



Figure 4

Scene 3, Carol in Shots 27-32

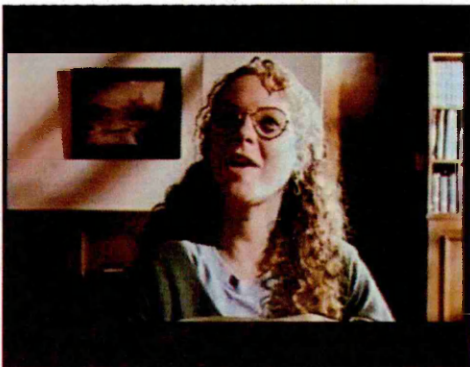


Figure 5

Scene 3, Carol in Shots 27-32

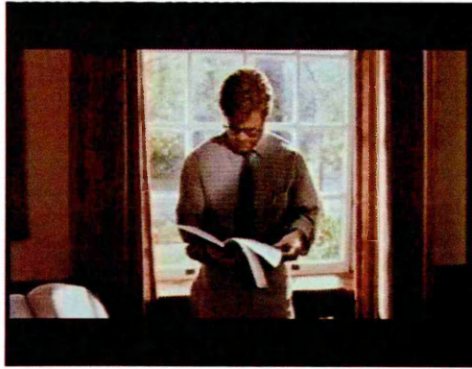


Figure 6

Scene 3, John in Shots 34-38



Figure 7

Scene 3, Carol in Shots 34-38

If one follows David Bordwell, who argued that “all materials of cinema function narrationally” (1985, p 20), one could suggest that the above ever-changing configuration of shot scale and camera angle is employed to present the constant shift in the relationship between the characters, which seems to be extremely fragile as their conversation progresses. In the first portion of the scene therefore the narration emphasises John’s authority over Carol. During this section, John fails to give his full attention to Carol and to provide a definition of the phrase “term of art” but authoritatively informs her that her work is not up to the expected standard. The last

piece of information triggers the change in framing [shot 26] and introduces a new spatial relation between the characters. In an attempt to defend herself, Carol gets up and tries to come up with an excuse for the quality of her coursework. The camera angle is now constant for both frames but the close up used to frame John suggests that it is his space that is now invaded. Consequently, he attempts to recover his authority by moving behind his desk [shot 30] and asking Carol to sit down. Finally, in the third shot/reverse shot portion, and although both characters are now framed in variations of a medium shot (Carol in a medium shot – John in a medium long shot), the high angle used to frame Carol suggests that the power and authority are now back with John, who after reading an extract from Carol’s essay dismisses it as nonsense.

The above examples of space manipulation through editing seem to support fully Anthony Davies’ argument about the defining characteristic of film language in the adaptation of drama. By positioning the characters within a “shifting but synthetic context of juxtaposed and discontinuous space” (Davies, 1990, p 2), which the characters try to control in order to gain control over each other, the film version of Oleanna attempts to articulate the struggle for power in the diegesis as a struggle for control of narrative space. In this sense, it is not accidental that John’s physical attack on Carol at the end of the film commences with him closing the door that leads to the corridor before her in order to trap her within the enclosed space that his office represents.

The issue of space is also prominent in the next scene [scene 4], the only additional dialogue scene in the film version. As I mentioned in previous sections, a film

adaptation of the play has to deal with the problem of the limiting and limited space where all the action prescribed in the play takes place. If the constant changes in shot scale and camera angle provided a solution for the problem of the 'limiting' space that John's office represented, the production team of Oleanna came up with the idea of including other college locations where the meetings between the two characters could take place. These included a classroom, the corridor, a conference room and an adjacent room to John's office, which in the film gives the impression of an office suite.⁷⁷ I would argue that the film's fourth scene represents a solution to the problem of the 'limited' space and functions as a transitional scene on the way from John's office to a classroom where the next section of the long first Act takes place.⁷⁸ However, as expected, it also has a significant narrational value, not least because it consists of one long take in which both characters are present on the screen for the duration of the shot.

The shot/scene, which lasts 60 seconds, is based on an expansion of a few original lines of dialogue that feature in both play and screenplay:

CAROL: No, no...

JOHN: ... certain arbitrary...

CAROL: No. You have to help me.

JOHN: Certain institutional... you tell me what you want me to do.... You tell me what you want me to do.

CAROL: How can I go back and tell them the grades that I...

(Mamet, 1993a, pp 10-11)

In the play Carol and John are still in the office, and John follows Carol's last remark above with a variation of his trademark question "what can I do?" (Mamet, 1993a, p 11), to which Carol responds emphatically "Teach me. Teach me" (1993a, p 11). In the film, however, John leaves his office with Carol following him and the above-quoted stichomythia is expanded to a different direction. In particular, John makes even more manifest his desire to leave the building, whereas Carol persistently repeats the phrase "You have to help me." In place of the above dialogue, the following conversation takes place:

JOHN: ...certain institutional forms. That's right. You may say they are false.

You may say they are arbitrary...

CAROL: You have to help me.

JOHN: (reading something he picks from an envelope by his office door)

Excuse me one moment please.

CAROL: You have to help me.

JOHN: Excuse me. Now, look: I've had a long day and it's not over yet... that's not your problem, I understand that.

CAROL: You have to help me.

JOHN: What do you want me to do? What is it that you have me do?

CAROL: How can I go back and tell them the grades that I...

JOHN: I'm sorry for you. I am. There is a... You're right. We may say...a...harshness in the methodology of grading. But we have accepted it. Both of us. And for better or worse, we must abide by the system which we have chosen. Don't you think? Huh? I think so. Thank you for coming in. If you'd like to reschedule an appointment with my office for a future time, I'll be happy to talk to you then. Thank you. (He walks away from her)

(Dialogue transcribed from the DVD version of the film)

Besides its transitional function, this scene is also very revealing about the characters' intentions, which, of course, impact on the narrative trajectory. John's explicit intention to get away from work contrasts with Carol's persistence in achieving her goal which, at this point, is to obtain John's help to pass the course. The scene then becomes a signifier of the diametrically opposed goals of the two characters and helps in moving them even further from any position where real communication can take place. More importantly, however, and in terms of its narrational function, the scene reinforces the spectator's perception of John as an antagonist, even a villain, who not only refuses to help the protagonist achieve her goal but also stands in the way of any narrative resolution; indeed he physically runs away from it. Stylistically, the

scene/shot is characterised by a long tracking camera movement, where the camera tracks back as John and Carol walk up a corridor (with John always a step ahead of Carol) until they reach the building doors where the camera movement stops and John excuses himself. Once again, it seems that Carol tries to occupy the space that John possesses but she finds herself either behind or opposite but never next to him.

In the following five scenes ([scenes 5-10], which take place in the classroom, the corridor, his office, the adjacent conference room, his office again and another room adjacent to his office), Carol's problem is eventually dealt with. She wants to pass the course and John offers her a deal by which she will get an A grade provided that she meets with him a few times to discuss issues raised in the course. In the meantime, however, Carol has discovered that John's views on the right to education are not 'appropriate' for a professor in Education. Her narrative goal therefore changes midway and is reformulated as 'to prove that her professor is wrong and that he should not occupy the position of responsibility he occupies' or, in other words, to stop him from inhabiting the space he inhabits. The physical expression of John's inappropriateness takes place at a moment when, after one of Carol's emotional outbursts, he embraces her to calm her down, and consequently breaks the final spatial boundary between them. In a stage production of the play the above change in the protagonist's goals could be communicated through dialogue, acting (perhaps a change in the actor's expression) and *mise en scène* (perhaps a sudden change in lighting). Film, however, has the capacity to clearly mark a turning point through a number of cinematic signifiers. Three instances (two sequences and one shot) in particular seem to stand out as definitive moments in Carol's change of goal.

The first one is the opening shot of scene 9. It is the longest take in the film (one minute and forty-seven seconds in duration) and involves John's proposal to Carol that he will award her an A grade, if she agrees to meet up with him a few more times. The shot is extremely rich in detail but, more importantly, it has a very significant narrational function. The shot opens with John and Carol entering his office from the adjacent conference room. The office is dark, so John switches on the lights and leaves the two cups of tea he prepared in the previous scene on the table. He condescendingly tells Carol that there is nothing wrong in asking about her grade, at which point the phone starts ringing. Ignoring it for the first (and last) time, John tells Carol about his decision to give her an A grade and start the class from the beginning, while at the same time he walks around in his office and closes every single door. In disbelief, Carol, objects to his proposal and reminds him that there are rules, to which John replies that they will break them. Still in disbelief, she demands to know why John is willing to do such a thing for her. John's response – "I like you" and "there is no one here but you and me" – is supported by a physical move towards her, which Carol avoids as she steps back and shouts "all right".

What makes this shot extremely important for the purposes of this chapter is neither John's unprofessional proposal to grant his student a mark she does not deserve, nor his inappropriate statement that he likes her, nor even his physical advance towards her. Instead, it is the inclusion of an element that cannot be staged (at least convincingly) in any theatrical production of the play, namely the consecutive closing of the doors that lead to John's office, all of which were open until that moment. This action clearly signifies that John is about to step over the line and for that reason he makes sure that no one can have easy access to his office. Furthermore, part of the

narrative information conveyed during the shot, in particular John's readiness to 'break the rules,' directly contradicts earlier information where he was presented as "abiding by the system that both he and his students had chosen."

This contradiction, which does not exist in the play since John's earlier statement does not feature in the play's original dialogue, once again reinforces the spectator's perception of John as a villain. He now appears to be a character who operates opportunistically, subscribing to different, even conflicting ideologies whenever he sees fit. The image of him casually leaning against a bookshelf ladder as he authoritatively proclaims that he has the power to break the rules stands in direct contrast with the image of him marching away once he explained that he could not help Carol because he respected the rules.

The next significant sequence for our purposes involves the last three shots (shots 71-73) of the same scene, where John physically attempts to calm down Carol after another emotional outburst on her part. Frustrated by her inability to understand the charts and statistics in John's book, Carol starts protesting that she does not understand and takes a few steps back [shot 71], landing outside the frame she occupied in the seventeen previous shots that featured her. As the next shot [shot 72] captures her in a new frame she keeps on protesting about not being able to understand and continues to walk backwards as she sees John approaching her. She passes in front of a blackboard where the words FEAR and ANGER are written in capital letters [fig 8]. When she cannot go any further, as the bookshelf ladder is on her way [fig 9], John pushes her against the ladder and puts his hands around her [fig 10]. She tries to break free but he applies greater force on her. As they move about,

they switch positions and John finds the opportunity to force her down on a chair. They look at each other in silence and John slowly takes his hands off her. Carol immediately gets up and moves towards one of the doors in John's office [shot 73].

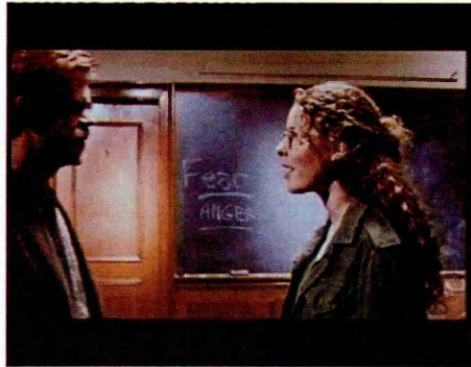


Figure 8

Scene 9, Shot 72



Figure 9

Scene 9, Shot 72a



Figure 10

Scene 9, Shot 72b



Figure 11

Scene 9, Shot 73

Despite the clear stage directions in the play and the report included in the screenplay (see section above), the sequence takes a life of its own mainly through the use of *mise-en scène*, camera position and movement and, in particular, editing. John's entrance into the frame from off-screen space provides the signal for the tone of the remaining of the sequence. Although his entrance cannot be perceived as threatening, as he has not demonstrated any such signs in the course of the narrative, American cinema conventions have taught film spectators otherwise as such entrances have been traditionally marked as at least alarming, if not entirely threatening. As an indication, perhaps, that such conventions hold sway in Oleanna, John also raises his

hands, a gesture that certainly carries specific connotations, as it is normally associated with the gesture a monster uses when approaching potential victims in horror films. Furthermore, and just before John enters the frame, Carol is seen in front of a blackboard with the words FEAR and ANGER featuring in a prominent position and, consequently, commenting on her experience which is characterised by both those feelings.

As Carol walks back to avoid John's advances and continues protesting, the camera keeps them both in the same frame (via a long tracking movement), one character in the offence, the other in defence. The obstacle in Carol's way is the same bookshelf ladder, by which earlier John authoritatively proclaimed that he would break the rules. This time the ladder stops Carol's retreat and gives John the opportunity to trap his student and achieve his objective for that part of the scene, 'to achieve close physical proximity with Carol'. Finally, and very intriguingly, once John has his hands on Carol the final cut in the scene brings a new frame, which violates the pattern of continuity editing that until the very last shot has governed the scene. As John grabs Carol and moves her away from the ladder, to the extent that they exchange positions in the frame, the next shot brings them back again to their previous positions until John moves around Carol's body one more time and finally sits her down. The violation in editing clearly comments on the onscreen violation of Carol by John and without any doubt conveys John's wrongdoing.

In the face of such unambiguous visual evidence about John's erratic behaviour towards his student, Carol's decision to bring charges of sexual harassment against him comes as no surprise to the spectator. What is surprising, however, is that just

before the end of scene 10, and for the rest of the film, the narration shifts its focus from telling Carol's story to privileging John as the film's protagonist. As a result of this switch Carol starts occupying a different position within the narrative. The turning point occurs during six shots in the middle of scene 10. The scene follows directly from Carol's physical attack by John and commences with Carol entering the adjacent room where she is followed by John. In the room she has an urge to confess something really important to him. As she starts talking, the phone rings once more. John does not ignore it this time, but clearly conveys to the caller that he cannot talk. It turns out, however, that there is something wrong with his new house, which leaves him with no alternative but to take the call. This is the point where the significant sequence of shots starts.

Shot 16 (the first shot in the sequence) has both characters in the same frame, as they are sitting close to each other. Without excusing himself, John leaves Carol and the room and goes to his office to finish the conversation. As he gets out of the room he cannot be seen on screen any more. We hear him off-screen picking up the phone in his office and gradually getting angered with the news. The camera stays with Carol for a while, who, after realising that the moment has gone and that she missed her opportunity to confess, finally decides to make her own way to John's office. As she walks towards the office the camera starts tracking right and panning left, gradually revealing John in the background becoming increasingly frustrated with the news about his house and, clearly, losing his temper. As Carol approaches the threshold to his office, the take ends and a new shot follows [shot 17].

Now Carol is framed from the front in a medium close up shot and seems to listen very attentively to John's conversation [fig 12]. She walks slowly towards the bookshelf ladder and stands behind it now in a close up. In the meantime John has been raging over the phone and utters the phrase "SCREW HER," with reference to the female seller of the house, who seems to be complicating the buying process. Immediately after the insulting phrase is heard, a new shot [18, fig 13] depicts John threatening to sue the seller of the house. The film then cuts again to Carol [shot 19] who is still behind the ladder and still in close up listening to John [fig 14]. Once again we cut back to John [shot 20], who finds out that the phone call was actually a hoax to get him out of the office and to his new house where a surprise party was to be thrown for his tenure announcement. The film then cuts back again to Carol [shot 21], who moves away from the ladder and takes a seat close to John's desk.



Figure 12

Scene 10, Shot 17



Figure 13

Scene 10, Shot 18



Figure 14

Scene 10, Shot 19

The above sequence (which lasts for one minute and forty seconds) is crucial in changing Carol's status from a protagonist to an antagonist. John's decision to answer the phone in the middle of an emotionally charged moment for Carol comes as a surprise, especially when he ignored it the previous time (the time he offered her an A grade) during a less emotionally charged moment. Furthermore, his decision to leave Carol alone in the darkness of the room without excusing himself, without even uttering a word, provides ample motivation for Carol to get angry with him. As she approaches the bookshelf ladder, which by this time has become a major element of the film's *mise en scène*,⁷⁹ acting, framing and cinematography work together to

present an image of a 'scheming' Carol, of a character planning to do harm, of a character who wants revenge, which of course ties in with her established goal, 'to prove that her professor is wrong and that he should not occupy his position of responsibility.'

Specifically, Eisenstadt's slow walk towards the ladder in combination with the camera's slight movement toward the same direction and its focus on her face, which is partly in shadow, create a very memorable image that consumes eleven seconds of screen time. If the spectator is still in doubt about whether she is planning to harm John, the inclusion of the words SCREW HER by John on the phone just before the shot ends makes the above point beyond any doubt. The same image returns for an extra nine seconds after a shot of John and is even more powerful. The frame now borders to an extreme close up shot and the camera is still. Off-screen, John is heard once more uttering a phrase with an ambiguous meaning – "I AM NOT COMING DOWN" – which, in light of the image of Carol, sounds particularly ironic. Finally, the same image appears for a third time only for a few seconds as Carol now leaves her position and gets a seat close to John's desk. When at the end of the scene John tells her that some people consider surprises as a form of aggression, he is not in a position to realise how true this statement is. The spectator however – via the sequence of shots examined – is fully prepared.

The next scene [scene 11], which is the fourth additional scene that does not feature in the play, focuses entirely on John. We catch up with him at the aftermath of his surprise party in his new house. All the guests have gone and John wanders around the house drinking champagne and looking at the presents he received for his tenure

announcement and which include a briefcase, a coffee mug, and a collection of three books. He picks up one volume from the collection, walks to the garden and sits by the porch as he starts reading the book. In the background we can see John's wife tidying up the kitchen, but we never see her face or any other characteristic. Through a dissolve we now see John in what seems to be the staff washroom at the college refreshing himself. The final shot consists of a close up of his reflection in the mirror as he straightens his tie and puts on his jacket.

The above montage sequence functions in a remarkably similar way to the opening montage sequences that introduced Carol, and established her goal in abstract terms (she received some sort of news and she needed to act upon it). The spectator is offered a condensed glimpse of John's new house (from inside and outside) and the news that the tenure announcement has taken place.⁸⁰ The last two shots in the washroom, however, establish that he is about to participate in an official meeting of some sort, for which he must be meticulously prepared, at least in terms of appearance.⁸¹ The rather stern and formal greeting he exchanges with a colleague while freshening up, along with his own expressionless face as he looks in the mirror, however, seems to suggest that the meeting John prepares for will not be a pleasant one. This, in a sense, sets up the following scene, where we find out that his meeting was with Carol, who in the meantime has accused him of sexual harassment. One could therefore argue that the extra scene gives the spectator a glimpse of John's (possible) world after the tenure announcement before the following scenes tear this world apart. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the scene's narrational value lies in highlighting John as the protagonist, a character with a goal, which will become concrete early in the next scene.

The above shift in the film's narration seems to be justified. Mamet has stated in an interview with John Lahr, that the main character in Oleanna is not Carol but John, which essentially implies that the story of Oleanna is John's story and not Carol's. In his own words:

Classically, it [Oleanna] is structured as a tragedy. The professor is the main character. He undergoes absolute reversal of situation, absolute recognition at the last moment of the play. He realises that perhaps he is the cause of the plague on Thebes.

(Mamet, quoted in Lahr, 2001, p 119)

In light of the above argument, one is obliged at least to acknowledge the possibility that Carol's narrative status as the protagonist in the first portion of the film was an elaborate trick performed by the film's narration, whose real objective was to conceal John's narrative agency to this point. The fact that Carol's early goal 'to pass her course' changes midway into 'to prove her teacher wrong' clearly attests to the validity of such a possibility. Scenes 12-20 (Acts Two and Three in the play), therefore, consist of John's attempts 'to defend his position through any means possible' and to prove Carol wrong but ultimately 'to understand' (as he puts it himself during scene 12).⁸² This, of course, leads to the realisation that Carol has in fact been right all along. In other words, Carol's status as the protagonist and the formulation of her narrative goal have been a well-disguised narrative distraction designed to bring about 'the truth' behind John's actions. It still remains problematic, however, that Carol is represented as a scheming villain; a representation that seems

to be unnecessary in light of the narrative's clear conviction of John as a 'sexist patriarch'. This representation, I suggest, is problematic only if one fails to detect Carol's placement to the antagonist's position as the narration starts privileging John. In order to be effective, this placement must be clearly marked in the narrative, and 'the scheming villain sequence' performs exactly this function.

Scenes 12-13 represent the first step towards John's realisation of the truth. His actions in the previous scenes are the subject of his second encounter between him and Carol. His actions in these two scenes, however, do not represent any attempts on his behalf to make amends (1993a, p 46), to demonstrate "his unflinching concern for [his] students" (1993a, p 46) or even to understand (1993a, p 45) but to settle Carol's formal complaint before the situation escalates out of his control. In order to achieve this goal, John resorts to several strategies. The most obvious one is through his attempt to convince her that he acts in her interests, a strategy which in the Mamet canon takes the form of a confidence game. The following exchange is extremely telling:

CAROL: ...That you are vile. And that you are exploitative. And if you possess one ounce of that inner honesty you describe in your book, you can look in yourself and see those things I can see. And you can find revulsion equal to my own. Good day. (She prepares to leave the room)

JOHN: Wait a second, will you, just one moment. (Pause) Nice day today.

CAROL: What?

JOHN: You said “Good day”. I think it is a nice day today.

CAROL: Is it?

JOHN: Yes, I think it is.

CAROL: And why is that important?

JOHN: Because it is the essence of all human communication. I say something conventional, you respond, and the information we exchange is not about the “weather”, but that we both agree to converse. In effect, we agree that we are both human. (Pause)

I’m not a ... “exploiter” and you’re not a...“deranged” what? *Revolutionary...*

(Mamet, 1993a, pp 52-53)

After Carol’s powerful verbal condemnation of his teaching practices and of his views on education, a desperate John momentarily believes that he has found a lifeline in her final remark “good day”. For Mamet all forms of human communication are founded on one fundamental principle. “The only reason people speak”, Mamet suggests, “is to get what they want” (1992a, p 71). In this sense, even phatic communication, a trivial form of human interaction “whose aim is to maintain and strengthen social relationships rather than to pass information or produce original texts” (O’Sullivan et al, 1994, p 225) seems to fall under the above premise. The above stichomythia, therefore, represents John’s final attempt to win Carol’s trust

having previously exhausted all possible routes to convince her to drop the charges. When Carol responds and John sees that he has her attention, it is not surprising that his first sentence after his little speech about human communication is “I ’m not a ... “exploiter” and you ’re not a...“deranged” what? *Revolutionary...*”, a clear attempt to regain control of the conversation by providing labels for him and Carol that are simply not true. He almost succeeds as Carol smiles at him, takes off her glasses (both actions occur for the first time in the narrative) and seems actually to relax in his company until another phone call once again prevents John from ‘closing’ on the Carol problem and sets up the second scene of physical contact between the two characters.

John’s second advance towards Carol is conveyed in a sequence of five shots [Scene 13, shots 8-12]. As John fails in his attempts to convince Carol to retract her accusations, he senses that he is losing the battle. He makes one more final attempt to resolve the problem quietly by once again closing a door in front of Carol who, again, stands by the bookshelf ladder. As far as Carol is concerned there is nothing more to be said, and she makes a move towards the door. John desperately tries to prevent her from leaving by extending his hand and grabbing her arm. He then pulls her back and sits her down on a chair [shot 8]. Through a match on action, the following shot focuses on Carol as she is forcefully being sat down [shot 9]. Immediately the film cuts to John who attempts to say something [shot 10] but before he completes a meaningful sentence we cut back to Carol who gets up and once again tries to leave. As she gets up the lower part of her body blocks the camera lens to the extent that only the left edge of the screen is visible. At this point, John’s hands enter the frame from off-screen left and touch the lower part of Carol’s body. Once physical contact

is established, there is no way of determining what exactly is happening as the actors' bodies are so close to the camera that the only meaningful image is Carol's jacket swinging around as she tries to break free from John's hands [shot 11, fig 15]. Once we get a better view with the next shot, we are presented with a remarkably similar image as in scene 10. Once again both characters are framed in a medium shot and once again they change positions in the frame as Carol tries to head towards the door and John tries to stop her [shot 12, figs 16 and 17]. The difference this time is that for most of the six seconds that the shot lasts, Carol's struggle to break free takes place behind a pillar in John's office which blocks the spectator's vision. While the first time the spectator had unrestricted view to the nature and extent of Carol's violation by John, this time the film's narration denies the spectator that privilege.



Figure 15

Scene 13, Shot 11



Figure 16

Scene 13, Shot 12



Figure 17

Scene 13, shot 12a

The reason behind this heavy regulation of seemingly essential narrative information is that the information in question is not actually essential. What matters is that this was another instance of physical force applied by a male university professor to a female student and as such it has been certainly conveyed to the spectator.

Furthermore, the fact that the spectator is denied visual access helps increase the element of surprise that comes with the new accusations that Carol makes in the last scenes of the film (the equivalent of Act Three). This also highlights the significance of the mechanism of narration as a regulator of knowledge in the film narrative. This is because the above effect cannot be replicated in a stage production of the play, as

the architecture of theatres makes it impossible for such an event to be partly obstructed (unless of course it takes place offstage).

At this stage (the second act break), two other scenes that do not feature in the play take their position in the narrative. The first one, a short scene consisting of three shots, depicts John in a hotel going through Carol's accusations and making notes on the margins. He looks exhausted, a clear indication that he had a bad night, and a bottle of alcohol can be seen in a prominent position. The scene is a visual expression of an important piece of information that is revealed later on in the narrative, namely that he spent two nights at a hotel and hence, was not aware of the charges of rape that Carol brought against him. The second scene is another montage sequence, consisting of eight shots, and functions as a pre-taste of the extent to which Carol has attempted to have John removed from his position in the university. Throughout the sequence we see Carol photocopying polemic statements, stamping them and enlarging them into posters. One of these posters finds its way to the corridors of the school and reads:

It is the right of all students to be treated with respect and dignity. This right does not need to be 'earned' or 'deserved'. It is their inalienable right as citizens and human beings. It is not incumbent upon the student to treat professors, administrators and college personnel with deference, the simple civility owed to every woman and man is sufficient. These concepts devolve not out of desire to co-erce [sic], or to revolutionize, but merely to reform that which for a long while, has stood in need for reformation.

(Transcribed from the DVD version of the film)

As the poster dominates the screen, it is impossible for the spectator to ignore it.⁸³ A male student, however, who happens to pass by simply marches away without a single look towards the giant poster. His approach to the central issue of political correctness raises the question of whether Carol's actions will produce any results, a question that is actually answered in the very last scene of the film.

Besides the above functions, the two scenes are also characterised by an omniscient mode of narration. For the first time, the narration reveals how both sides responded to the events of the previous scenes (as well as how they are prepared for their next encounter) and consequently allows the spectator to form certain expectations about the future events. Interestingly, however, this mode of omniscient narration does not necessarily guarantee a high degree of communicativeness. Although the spectator at this point possesses greater knowledge than any single character, they are not in a position to know about the charges of rape that Carol has brought against John, an extremely important piece of information that the narration has kept secret, despite that rare moment of omniscience. As a result, when the final part of the film starts with the third meeting between Carol and John, the spectator enters with a false sense of security that they can anticipate what is going to happen, only to be refuted by the revelations about the rape charges which become known towards the end of the penultimate scene of the film [scene 19].

What is interesting in terms of narration is the manner in which this piece of information is conveyed to the spectator, in this case through a sequence of twenty-three shots [shots 114-136] with a total duration of two minutes and twenty three

seconds. As with the revelation of other important narrative information in the previous scenes, the ringing of the phone once again provides the cue. John answers the phone and starts a new conversation [shot 114]. The film cuts to another part of the room, and in particular the pillar behind which John tried to stop Carol from leaving in scene 13. Carol appears behind the pillar with only part of her body visible to the spectator. She listens attentively to John, who at that point claims (off screen) that he treated Carol's complaint in the best possible way [shot 115, fig 18]. We then cut back to John, who now sounds very determined, stating that if he lost his job in the process, the job would not be worth having [shot 116, fig 19]. The following shot cuts to John's hand as he opens a drawer which contains a packet of cigarettes and a 'paper plane' he had given to Carol earlier in the film when he tried to teach her self-respect [shot 117]. The following eight shots [shots 118-124] alternate between John behind his desk and Carol behind the pillar as John seems to receive bad news over the phone. The narration at this point is again uncommunicative; it withholds the exact content of the conversation but, in exchange, it prolongs curiosity as the shift from John to Carol and back to John suggests that Carol knows something which John and the spectator do not know and which John has just found out. When the news is actually revealed, therefore, the narration marks its importance by framing both Carol and John in successive close ups compared to the previous medium shots, with Carol revealing the new charges [shot 125] and John reacting in disbelief [shot 126]. These new framings for each character continue in the next cluster of shots [127-130], which reiterate each character's position with Carol expanding on the charges and John still reacting to the devastating news.



Figure 18

Scene 19, Shot 115



Figure 19

Scene 19, Shot 116

The final portion of the sequence [shots 131-136] is marked by a change in shot scale in the framing of John. While Carol remains in close up, still behind the pillar, John now is framed in a medium shot as he sits down on his chair. The reaction period has finished and it is time for him to act (hence the change in the framing). He asks Carol to get out of his office [shot 131], starts planning his next step – call his lawyer [shot 133] and once again receives a phone call [shot 135]. In between, Carol expresses her surprise that he did not know about the rape charges [shot 132], prompts him to talk to a lawyer [shot 134] and finally makes a move to go, leaving her position behind the pillar [shot 136].

What is interesting in the above sequence is its remarkable similarity with ‘the scheming Carol’ sequence I discussed earlier. For the duration of the scene Carol is constantly half-hidden behind the pillar in John’s office, refusing to come forward and face the consequences of her actions. Equally, as in the previous scene, the spectator has full visual access to John, who once again receives bad news over the phone. The difference is that in the earlier scene, the bad news was an elaborate con designed to make him leave his office, while this time the news is for real. Consequently, once again, the film’s narration firmly places Carol in the position of the antagonist, the scheming villain who managed to cause great harm to the protagonist, who has now formulated a new goal, ‘to defend himself against criminal charges.’ Even though John is guilty – according to the letter of the law – for his actions against Carol, the narration implicitly also charges Carol with malicious intentions and in a sense supports the film’s tagline which reads: “Whatever Side You Take, You’re Wrong.”

The above sequence of events sets up the climax of the narrative which, again, takes the form of a physical contact between the characters. As Carol opens the door to leave, she makes one final comment that triggers John’s third and final advance towards her. Overhearing John’s phone conversation with his wife, she turns around and tells John to ‘not call his wife “baby,”’ before she makes her way out of his office. The following sequence, which consists of twenty-seven shots [142-168] and consumes approximately two minutes and thirty seconds of screen time is the most important sequence in the film and contains the moment of realisation for the main protagonist, which Mamet talked about in his interview with John Lahr. I would like

to concentrate my discussion on two specific shots, which appear successively in the sequence [shots 151-152], the juxtaposition of which creates the most powerful image in the film.

As Carol is ready to exit the office John's hand enters the frame and forcefully closes the door in front of her. Following this, there are several shots in which John slaps Carol, who tries to find refuge behind the bookshelf ladder and momentarily manages to push him away. John returns and catches up with her as she is trying to escape. The shot in question [151] is a medium shot of a frightened Carol who sees John approaching her from off screen. She turns around to run away but John enters the frame from off screen [fig 20] once again and grabs her. At this point Carol shouts "NO" and the film cuts to a medium-long shot of the two in a match on action [152]. John now has a firm hold of Carol and he pushes her against a table. Carol lands on the table face-on and John approaches her from behind as he exclaims that she destroyed his life [fig 21]. He then gets her up from the table and starts pushing her around until a new shot introduces the next stage of his physical assault, which includes three more slaps on her face, a punch on the stomach and a threat to break a chair on her head. However, he realises the consequence of his actions at the very last minute and reaches the moment of self-realisation, the moment when he understands that he is "the cause of the plague in Thebes" (conveyed emphatically by an eighteen-second close-up take on his face).



Figure 20

Scene 19, Shot 151



Figure 21

Scene 19, Shot 152

The choreography of movement in the above sequence, and specifically in the two shots mentioned above follows fully the conventions of the representation of rape in mainstream American cinema. The image of a woman shouting “no,” forced to bend over in front of a table (or for that matter any other equivalent surface) with a man approaching behind her has very specific connotations, whether an actual rape takes place or not.⁸⁴ In this respect, and although John does not sexually violate Carol, the film’s narration ensures that the image of rape is strongly inscribed in the spectator’s memory, before it allows John to realise the true nature of his actions at the end of the sequence.

While the play finishes with the moment of recognition on the part of the protagonist, the film includes a very short, extra scene, which takes the form of an epilogue and which, in my reading of the film, answers the question of whether Carol's actions have had any long-term results. The scene consists of three shots. In the first shot, which is identical with the opening shot of the film, we see students playing American football in front of the university building. One student throws the ball towards another student, who attempts to catch it [shot 1, fig 22]. As the ball is still in the air, we cut to a shot of the student who tries to catch the ball. As he jumps, both the student and the ball come very close to the camera [shot 2, fig 23]. He does indeed catch the ball and the film cuts to the same long shot that opened the film and the final scene, with the student exiting the frame [shot 3, fig 24]. The film then fades to black.



Figure 22

Scene 20, Shot 1



Figure 23

Scene, 20, Shot 2



Figure 24

Scene 20, Shot 3

Although the scene can be read in many ways, I argue that it represents a final comment on the narrative events.⁸⁵ The ball game, which seems to be a leisure activity for the students (as they are not dressed in sports clothes), suggests that life in college will continue as it was. The fact that the opening shot of the scene is identical with the film's opening shot indicates that the events between those specific shots have not changed the university system or, for that matter, the power structure in education. Instead, the clash between Carol and John was one attempt towards change, which became prominent for a short period of time (and which is represented in the second shot by the size of the ball). The system might have been shaken by this

attempt but finally it did not change (a conclusion aptly represented by the last shot of the scene and film, which again is identical with the very first one). It is through this metaphor, that the little meta-narrative contained in the final scene presents a rather pessimistic view on the possibility of change, a possibility that during the film materialised only on an individual level in one isolated event.

Conclusion

Although the film version of Oleanna essentially tells the same story as the play, the mechanism of filmic narration has the power to manipulate the unfolding of the story and, consequently, provides the spectator with an aesthetic experience that differs from the experience that a stage production is in a position to offer. By fragmenting time and space, withholding crucial information, reversing the protagonist/antagonist roles, privileging one character's perspective at a time and accentuating specific actions while de-emphasising others, the film's narration constructs a narrative that certainly conforms to the playwright's intentions, since the film, like the play, presents John's story. In this sense, Macy's statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter – "We haven't brought Oleanna to film. We brought film to Oleanna" – seems extremely accurate. Unlike the play, however, the film filters John's story through the mechanism of narration, which for the first half of the film, among other things, disguises it as Carol's story until John's perspective starts being privileged. As a result the spectator's understanding of the narrative is complicated since in the first part of the film they are forced to align with Carol only to find themselves in alignment with John once the film moves to its second half. In this way the film certainly lives to the expectation that its marketing tagline "Whatever Side You Take,

You' re Wrong" raises and proves Macy wrong as Oleanna was indeed brought to film.

CHAPTER FIVE

PLAYING WITH CINEMA: THE MASTER OF THE CON-GAME

FILM

Studies are needed of unrecognised genres like racetrack pics, of semi-recognised genres like drama, of cross-generic cycles and production trends like overland bus and prestige films, and of hybrids and combinations of all kinds. (Neale, 2000, p 254)

A Mamet film requires faith: Things are rarely what they seem. His works are exercises in metamorphosis. Or in illusions. Take your pick (Magida, quoted in Kane, 1999, p 262)

Introduction

In her book Weasels and Wisemen: Ethics and Ethnicity in the Work of David Mamet, Leslie Kane argues that “game-playing as structure and element of plot is a controlling figure” in both Mamet’s films and stage plays (1999, p 262). Following Thomas M. Leitch, who studied the function of game-playing in the films of Alfred Hitchcock, Kane suggests that game-playing in Mamet’s films “evokes complex concordances from which the audience derives pleasure ‘from having followed the director’s lead’” (Leitch, quoted in Kane, 1999, p 263). She continues:

Mamet's films, like Hitchcock's, "beguile audiences" enticing them to follow the action as "a move in the game" that surprises or disorients them, 'encourag[ing] them to fall into misidentifications and misinterpretations which have specific moral or thematic force.' (1999, p 263)

Besides evoking what has once been called "the master image for genre criticism", an image, which in Tom Ryall's words consists of "a triangle composed of artist/film/audience" (quoted in Neale, 2000, p 12), the above approach to Mamet's films flirts with genre criticism in, at least, two additional ways. Firstly, it groups a number of films on the basis of a "controlling" common characteristic (game-playing). Secondly, it raises the question of the spectators' systems of expectations in the viewing process and how those systems are affected by the controlling characteristic of this group of films (they beguile, surprise, disorient audiences, encourage them to misidentify and misinterpret).

In light of such strong claims about the existence of a generic framework within which Mamet's films can be located, this chapter sets out to examine the framework in question, to map out its main features and, generally, to address questions of genre in Mamet's cinema. In particular, this chapter concerns itself with introducing and defining a group of films that has been unrecognised as a production trend, cycle or genre by film criticism. This is despite substantial evidence within a number of discourses that constitute the inter-textual relay of Hollywood cinema (Lukow and Ricci in Neale, 2000, p 39) which suggest otherwise. Although this group of films, which I am inclined to call 'the con-artist film,' has had a long-standing institutional history within American cinema (with the lion's share of such films located in the last

20 years of Hollywood output – see Appendix IV), its critical recognition and appreciation has remained elusive. Instead, the critical apparatus has consistently resorted to more established genre labels, categories and appellations, which, more often than not, were clearly overstretched in their attempt to ‘include’ films that, as I intend to argue, belong to a different group, the con artist film. Some of these labels have included: the crime film (and its subcategory: the suspense thriller – Neale, 2000, p 71-85) in order to classify films such as Where the Money Is, Confidence and The Spanish Prisoner respectively), the neo noir film (House of Games, The Grifters, Confidence), the western (Maverick) and comedy (Heartbreakers, Maverick and Bowfinger).¹

This chapter then attempts to put the record straight by introducing and defining the ‘con-artist film’ both from an industrial and a critical perspective. Specifically, it will chart an institutional history of a representative corpus of films by looking at the discourses that have surrounded their advertising and marketing. The chapter will then move to examine the films’ style, internal structure, motifs, narrative trajectories as well as the horizon of expectations they invite spectators to form. More importantly, it will focus on a particular strand or trend within the above group of films, a trend which I shall term ‘the con-game film,’ and within which, I shall argue, Mamet’s work can be most usefully approached when questions of genre are raised. As a case study I shall examine Mamet’s fifth feature film, The Spanish Prisoner (1997, Sony Classics, US, 105 min) although references will be also made to his other films. Finally, I will put forward an argument that sees Mamet’s authorship as inextricably linked with the generic categories of the con-artist film in general and the con-game film in particular.

Genre Recognition (1) The Industrial Context

Defining the con

CON: Abbrev. of CONFIDENCE. Used *attrib.* in *con game, man, talk*, etc.

(Also *ellipt.*) orig. *U.S.*" ([Oxford English Dictionary Online](#))

In order to introduce the con-artist film as an industrial category, one needs to start from the word 'con' and its semantic qualities. According to the [Oxford English Dictionary](#), one of the first uses of the word as an abbreviation of 'confidence' and as a prefix to the word man ('con man') was noted in [Mercury](#), a Portland newspaper, in 1889.² The sentence, which is cited in the dictionary, reads: "It does not take an unsophisticated countryman to get swindled by the 'con man.'"³ This clearly sets the foundations for the subsequent use of the word as a synonym for *cheating* and *deceit*, words which, in actual fact, stand more or less as antonyms for the original word 'confidence.' This paradox is further reinforced when the word con is used on its own, as in an article in [The Listener](#) (21 Dec 1967), which featured the sentence "The intellectual theoreticians of visual pop culture have succeeded...in pulling a con."⁴ In this context con becomes a synonym for *trick* and/or *illusion*, and once again dispenses with the original meaning of the word it stems from.

What becomes evident from the above two literary examples are the negative connotations of the word. In both cases the perpetrators of the 'con' are presented as individuals or groups of people, who are capable of fooling other people (as in the

first example) or of putting across a view that does not hold true but which nonetheless becomes accepted as true (as in the second example). In other words, both subjects achieve a goal by indirect means and at the expense of an object (in the syntactical sense) who assumes the position of the victim.

Finally, the Oxford English Dictionary features a further example of the use of the word con, this time from J.B Priestley's Festival at Farbridge (1951, p 310). The novel in question features a line of dialogue, which can be easily used as a definition for the term 'con-artist' for the purposes of this chapter: "You're a little gang of crooks, con types living on your wits."⁵ Here the phrase 'con types' suggests a particular type of a criminal (or criminals) who earns a living by applying certain skills based on their wits. The use of wit as the weapon of choice for these criminals differentiates them from other 'common' crooks who use guns, physical violence or any other type of force to extract money or valuable goods from their victims. In this sense 'perpetrating a con' becomes here an act of persuasion whose ultimate and ulterior objective, as Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell have argued, is "to bring about attitude change" (1992, p 31). The change expresses itself in the conscious delivery of material goods or money from the persuaded to the persuader.⁶ Defined as an act of persuasion, the term con comes very close to the original word 'confidence' as any act of persuasion involves the manipulation of the degree of confidence that an individual (or a group of individuals) is willing to give to a potential persuader.

With this definition in mind, I am now turning my attention to the use of the word 'con' and of its synonyms (scam, swindle, sting, scheme, deceit, cheat) in the discourses of publicity, promotion and reception that surround American films, and

which are collectively called the films' "inter-textual relay." As this is a mammoth task (because it involves an examination of all the literature that accompanies the release of a film not only in the United States but, significantly, in the other countries where a film is exhibited) I will mainly concentrate on how the word 'con' and its synonyms have been utilised in two of the marketing strategies that all distributors use in the advertising of their films: the film title and the tagline. I will also make occasional references to other surrounding texts. What I intend to demonstrate is that the word con and the other words belonging to the same semantic field have an established and, in recent years, prominent history in the discourses of marketing and advertising that surround American films, particularly, in the title and tagline plays. Once this history is charted, it will be clearer whether claims for the existence of a production trend, cycle or even a film genre can be substantiated.

The Con in American Cinema

Perhaps the first use of the word con in the short slogans distributors use to advertise their films, and which comprise the films' tagline(s), can be found in the Three Stooges film, Merry Mavericks (1951).⁷ The tagline of the film, which reads "Meet The Three Stooges as up-and-coming... always leave-'em-laughing con-men in the wild and woolly west!" (see Appendix IV), makes concrete references to two different generic categories: comedy (leave-'em laughing) and the western (wild and woolly west).⁸ However, it is the brand name 'The Three Stooges' that is the actual focal point of the tagline due to its place in the sentence at the very beginning and, more importantly, due to the specific connotations of comedy it implies. With the title of the film also clearly suggesting a comedy, it is not surprising that the phrase "con-

men” becomes marginalized in the tagline, sandwiched between the other two dominant generic contexts.

The above proto-typical example of the way distributors have dealt with a film that features con men is indicative of the problems associated with the institutional recognition of the con-artist/con-game film, if not as a genre, at least as a type of film with a distinct identity. The majority of films featuring plots about cons, scams and swindles, have been consistently marketed as films that, primarily, belong to a different, more established, film genre or genres (the western and comedy in this case) and then as films that feature specific types of characters or plots that the terms con-artist and con-game film suggest. Table 1 offers some examples of films whose tagline contains the word con but which were mainly advertised as films belonging to different genres (for a complete list see Appendix IV):

Title	Year	Tagline
Shooting Fish	(1997)	As con artists they were hard to beat. But they were easy targets for LOVE.
Distinguished Gentleman, The	(1992)	From con man to congressman
Diggstown	(1992)	Where the pros meet the cons
Bullseye!	(1990)	They were the world's greatest conmen ... almost.
Doc Hooker's Bunch	(1976)	His gang of female flim-flammers con their way across the old West! Half hero, half con-artist , all heart!
Barefoot Mailman, The	(1951)	Meet Sylvanus! Con man ... Gun man... Ladies man!

Table 1

American film taglines containing the word con (source: www.imdb.com)⁹

As it is evident from the taglines, The Distinguished Gentleman, Diggstown and Bullseye! have been marketed primarily as comedies, Shooting Fish as romance, Doc Hooker's Bunch as a comedy-western, while The Barefoot Mailman, another early example where the word con is used in the film's tagline, seems to be advertised as a mix of genres including gangster/adventure, romance and, off course, con-artist film. Despite the fact that the phrase "Con man" precedes the other two in the tagline, the composition of the tagline is such that the emphasis is placed on the phrase "Ladies Man" highlighting thus the element of sex/romance in the film.

A look at the posters and one-sheet ads for the above films further supports the above argument. The poster for The Barefoot Mailman, for instance, is centred around the individuality and eccentricity of Sylvanus (who appears in a striking green suit), while smaller pictures of him kissing a woman and punching a man emphasise further the character's traits as a violent man who is irresistible to women. Shooting Fish, on the other hand, centres primarily on the (im)possibility of romance between the two male characters and a female one [fig1], while Diggstown features the two protagonists in a boxing ring (one dressed in a suit, the other in a boxer's attire) surrounded by a number of people in a situation that looks chaotic (again emphasising the potential for comedy). Finally, the poster for The Distinguished Gentleman is the only one that markets the film explicitly as a con-artist film, though the generic framework of comedy is equally, and arguably more, prominent. In particular, the poster features Eddie Murphy removing the ceiling of a small-scale model of the Capitol while at the same time putting his hands on several hundred dollar bills that spill out of the gap [fig 2]. Murphy's act signifies further meaning due to the actor's

direct gaze to the camera, his trademark smile and his overall persona, which was built on the basis of playing witty characters from the wrong side of the law. However, the exact same elements (the smile, the persona, the wit) are also guarantors of a specific type of comedy that Murphy has been famous for, and which the poster of the film clearly conveys. Essentially then, the con-artist element is here secondary to the comedy element with the second assuming the main responsibility for determining the film's genre.¹⁰

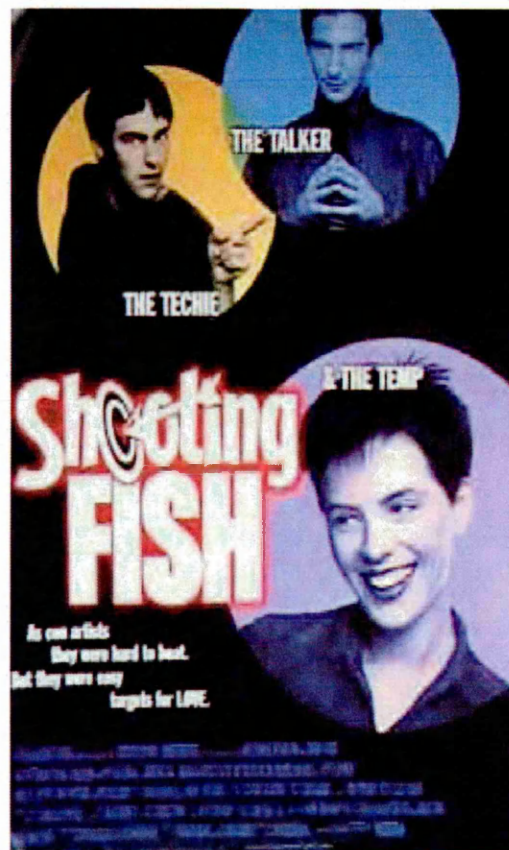


Figure 1

The Poster for Shooting Fish

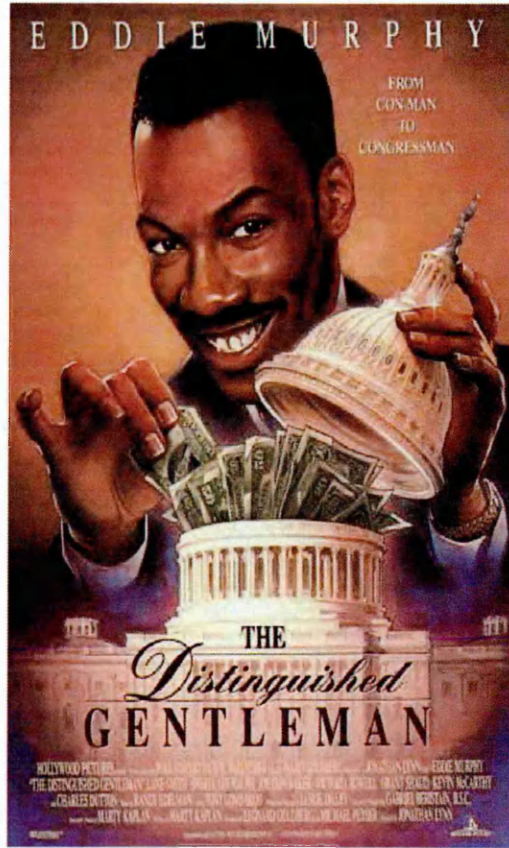


Figure 2

The Poster for The Distinguished Gentleman

Sources: http://www.impawards.com/1998/shooting_fish.html and
http://www.impawards.com/1992/distinguished_gentleman.html

A similar conclusion can be reached if one examines films whose taglines contain the words scam, swindle and scheme.¹¹ Tables 2, 3 and 4 present a list of such films with their respective taglines:

Title	Year	Tagline
Getting Hal	(2003)	She thought she found the perfect boyfriend. He knew he found the perfect scam .
Mercy Streets	(2000)	One con out to save his million dollar scam , one priest out to save his only brother
Con, The (TV)	(1998)	How The Ultimate Scam Led To The Perfect Romance
Criminals	(1997)	Brooklyn to 'Vegas in a '64 Ford, Looking for the perfect girl...and the perfect scam .
Traveller	(1997)	Swindlers. Scammers . Con-men. As American as apple-pie.

Table 2

American film taglines containing the word scam

Title	Year	Tagline
Traveller	(1997)	Swindlers . Scammers. Con-men. As American as apple-pie
Love & Larceny (TV)	(1985)	Charmer. Swindler . Cheat...
Topeka Terror, The	(1945)	The Greatest Land Swindle In The History Of The West!
Sheriff of Sage Valley	(1942)	Billy Tries His Hand At Law Enforcement... And The Biggest Swindle On The Prairie Blows Up With A Bang!

Table 3

American film taglines containing the word swindle

Title	Year	Tagline
Learning Curve, The	(2001)	Steal, Scheme , Seduce, All In The Name Of Love
Second Skin	(2000)	A beautiful woman. A deadly scheme . A perfect murder.
Free Money	(1998)	Right scheme , wrong guys!
Layin' Low	(1996)	One's a dreamer. One's a schemer . Together they're on the run and layin' low.
Smoke	(1995)	Five strangers. Four secrets. Three schemes . Two best friends. And one neighborhood hangout where the world still makes sense
Soldier in the Rain	(1963)	Two highly irregulars, in the very regular army! And this is the story of the million-dollar schemes they dared, the fabulous dolls and dates, they shared.
Ideal Girl	(1946)	She's The Girl Of Their Schemes ... And Man, Oh, Man... how they do!
Millionaires in Prison	(1940)	Self-crowned king of a gray-walled world of treacherous men... He out-schemed, out-talked, out-fought them all!
Secrets of the French Police	(1932)	The story of a daring and audacious scheme of intrigue and murder that shocked Paris. Based on an actual adventure of Bertillon and revealed for the first time in thrilling drama.

Table 4

American film taglines containing the word scheme

As is evident (in Table 2) Getting Hal, The Con and Criminals have been marketed as films with a strong romance interest as in all three cases the 'scam' plot is accompanied by concrete references to a romantic relationship (notice the use of the adjective perfect in all three taglines – perfect boyfriend; perfect romance; perfect girl – which clearly suggests a tight link between genre plot and romantic plot). On the other hand, the advertising for Mercy Streets primarily centres on the relationship between two siblings and promises the unfolding of a suspense thriller as the two

narrative plots (a man trying to save his million dollar con, his brother trying to save him) are clearly stated leaving the spectator to wonder how rather than what or why. This leaves only Traveller, a film to which I shall refer in more detail later, as the only title in the group with a tagline that places it strictly within the con-artist/con-game film context.

Equally, in the category of films which are marketed as films about 'swindles' (Table 3) and again with the exception of Traveller, one can notice the generic frameworks of the western for The Topeka Terror and Sheriff of Sage Valley and of the romance for Love & Larceny (a made for TV film about a female con-artist). Finally, in the list of films that feature plots about 'schemes' (Table 4) one can see that The Learning Curve and Second Skin are pitched as an erotic thriller (with a very telling title) and an erotic thriller/crime film respectively, while Free Money and Soldier in the Rain are advertised as comedies (with the latter also implying a strong romantic generic framework). Ideal Girl has been also marketed as a film with a romance interest, whereas Smoke, Wayne Wang's celebrated independent film, is rather surprisingly pitched as a mystery thriller with only the last sentence of the tagline ("And one neighborhood hangout where the world still makes sense") betraying what the film's focal point actually is, Oddie's convenience store. This leaves us with Secrets of the French Police (a film that deals with a Russian émigré's attempts to pass a girl as the lost Princess Anastasia in order to get the late Czar's fortune), which is advertised as a thriller with a shock value (for the 1930s) and Layin' Low, a film whose tagline promises a story about schemers but whose emphasis seems to be on the relationship between two characters on the run (a combination of a buddy movie and a road movie frameworks).

The above pattern, which can be noted in the advertising of other films (see Appendix IV), would suggest that the con-artist/con game film does not exist as a distinct industrial category in the distribution process of American films. However, it is also never completely marginalized in the advertising of films (in this case film title and tagline) that feature such characters or narrative situations. In some cases (like in The Traveller) it even assumes a prominent position. Table 5 offers a list of films, where the dominant or only generic framework seems to revolve around conning, deceiving, cheating and (non)trusting and therefore films with a potential interest for the con-artist film category. The titles in bold are further discussed later:

Title	Year	Tagline
CON		
Where the Money Is	(2000)	Another con . Another sting. Another day.
Bowfinger	(1999)	The con is on.
Last Call, The	(1998)	Ultimately, the con game will make you very rich or very dead... probably both.
Spanish Prisoner, The	(1997)	It's the oldest con in the book.
Traveller	(1997)	Swindlers. Scammers . Con-men. As American as apple-pie.
Grifters, The	(1990)	Seduction. Betrayal. Murder. Who's Conning Who?
Sting II, The	(1983)	The con is on... place your bets!
Charleston	(1977)	Charleston is my name. Con tricks are my game!
Day the Lord Got Busted, The	(1976)	The Greatest CON MAN of them all!
CONFIDENCE		
Second Room, The	(1995)	Confidence is a seductive concept... if you've never had any and are starting to get some.
Sting, The	(1973)	...all it takes is a little Confidence .
CHEAT		
Watchful Eyes	(2004)	Killing-Stealing-Cheating...all in a day's work
Matchstick Men	(2003)	Lie cheat steal rinse repeat
Spivs	(2003)	You can't cheat an honest man.
Slackers	(2002)	When all else fails... cheat .
Glengarry Glen Ross	(1992)	Lie. Cheat . Steal. All In A Day's Work.
DECEIT		
Under the Influence	(2002)	Murder, deceit , fraud... another perfect day in Los Angeles.

TRUST		
Behind the Nine	(2003)	Trust... is overrated
Crimson Streets	(2003)	Don't trust him. Don't trust him either.
Framed (TV)	(2002)	The stakes are high. The trap is set. There's no one left to trust .
Glass House, The	(2001)	Be Careful Who You Trust Trust can be as transparent as glass.
No Tomorrow	(1998)	Trust no one. Believe Nothing. Watch your back.
Rounders	(1998)	Trust everyone... but always cut the cards
Standoff	(1998)	Trust Will Get You Killed
Spanish Prisoner, The	(1997)	Can you really trust anyone?
Bound	(1996)	A trust so deep it cuts both ways.
Puppet Masters, The	(1994)	Trust No-one.
Deadfall	(1993)	You won't know who to trust . What to believe. Or where to turn.
Flashfire	(1993)	No time to think. No place to turn. No one to trust
Renegades	(1989)	They had to trust each other... or die.
PLAN		
American Buffalo	(1996)	They had a plan . It wasn't worth a nickel.

Table 5

American films of potential interest for the con-game film genre

As I noted earlier, many of the films in the above list are not necessarily films that deal with con-artists and/or con-games, even though their title and/or tagline might indicate the opposite (The Glass House, Slackers, Flashfire). One can, nonetheless, clearly detect a pattern in the advertising of the above films, which suggests the possibility of a trend within recent (mainly post-1990) American film production. In particular, the taglines of the above films invite spectators to form specific expectations, the most important of which seem to be the following:

- (a) to be aware of the many directions that their respective films' narrative trajectories might take, for example Bowfinger, The Grifters, The Sting II, Charleston. This also includes the vast majority of the films with the word **trust** in their taglines. I shall argue later, this is one of the key characteristics of the con-artist/con-game film
- (b) to expect byzantine plots which are structured around characters who cheat, lie, betray and the consequences of such actions (all the films with **con**, **deceit** and **cheat** in their tagline) and, less prominently,
- (c) to perceive those films as a 'slice-of-Americana,' a typical day of American life (Where the Money Is, Traveller, Watchful Eyes, Matchstick Men, Glengarry Glen Ross, Under the Influence).

The above system of expectations, however, does not necessarily differentiate potential con-artist/con-game films from other categories of film or genres, especially the suspense thriller and the crime film (genres that habitually depend on the spectator's expectations of the above elements) and does not therefore automatically signal a distinct trend within American film production. In fact, all the films in the

above list can potentially be seen as belonging to the thriller or crime film genres, both established genres with a much longer and prominent institutional history. In order to establish a distinct identity for at least some of the films in the above list, I will proceed to examine a further advertising strategy that distributors routinely use in film marketing. This is, admittedly, one that has rarely been seen as such, namely the choices distributors make when they translate the title of a film for non-English speaking audiences. What I intend to prove with this exercise is that the titles of a significant number of films from the above lists (with a couple of additions) have actually been translated (in French, Italian, German, Spanish and Greek) in a manner that is much more clearly suggestive of their content as films about con-artists/con-games. Table 6 offers a list with thirteen such examples:

English	French	Italian	German	Spanish	Greek
Confidence	Confidence	Confidence	Confidence	Confidence	Akros embisteftiko
2003	(original)	(original)	(original)	(original)	Highly confidential
Matchstick Men	Les associes	Il Genio della Truffa	Tricks	Los impostores	Epagelmaties apateones
2003	The Associates	The Genius of the Swindle	Tricks	The Impostors	Professional swindlers
Heart Breakers	Beautés empoisonnées	Vizio di famiglia	Achtung scharfe Kurven	Las seductoras	Kardio-kataktites
2001	Poisoning Beauties	Family Vices	Attention: Slippery Curves	The Seductresses	Heart conquerors
Nine queens	Les 9 Reines	Nove regine	Nine queens	Nueve reinas	Ennia Vasilisses
2001	(literal)	(literal)	(original)	(literal)	(literal)
Where the money is	En toute complicité	Per amore dei soldi	Ein Heisser Coup	Donde esté el dinero	To Telefteo Riffi
2000	In all Complicity	For the Love of Money	The Big Coup	(literal)	The Last Riffi
Bowfinger	Bowfinger, Roi d'Hollywood	Bowfinger	Bowfingers grosse nummer	El Picaro	Ena Trello Trello Kolpo
1999	Bowfinger, the King of Hollywood	(original)	Bowfinger's Big Trick	The Smart Guy	A Mad Mad Trick
The Spanish Prisoner	La Prisonniere Espagnole	La Formula	Die Unsichtbare Falle	La trama	Stimeno Pahnidi
1997	(literal)	The Formula	The Invisible Trap	The Plot	Set Up Game

Traveller	Les truands	Traveller	Traveller	Traveller	NOT AVAILABLE
1997	The crooks	(original)	(original)	(original)	
Glengarry Glen Ross	L'affaire Glengarry	Americani	Glengarry Glen Ross	Glengarry Glen Ross	Oikopeda me thea
1992	The Glengarry Affair	The Americans	(original)	(original)	Land with a View
The Grifters	Les arnaqueurs	Rischiose Abitudini	Grifters	Los timadores	Kleftes
1990	The Swindlers	Risky Habits	(original)	The Con Men	The Thieves
Dirty Rotten Scoundrels	Le plus escroc Des deux	Due Figli di...	Zwei hinreissend verduerbene Schurker	Un pur des seductores	Apateones kai tzentlemen
1988	The Best Swindler of the Two	Two Sons of...	Two Ravishing Rotten Tricksters	A Pair of Seducers	Swindlers and Gentlemen
House of Games	Engrenages	La Casa dei Giochi	Haus der Spiele	La casa de los juegos	I leshi tis apatis
1987	The Chain of Events	(literal)	(literal)	(literal)	The Club of Deceit
The Sting	L'arnaque	La stangata	Der Clou	El golpe	To kentri
1973	The Swindle	(literal)	The Hit	The Hit	(literal)

Table 6

Translations of con-artist films in different languages

What is instantly evident in the above table is the emphasis international distributors place on the central characters of the films as swindlers (Matchstick Men in Spanish and Greek; Traveller in French; The Grifters in French, Spanish and Greek; Bowfinger and Dirty Rotten Scoundrels in French, German and Greek) and seducers/seductresses (Heartbreakers in French, Spanish and Greek and Dirty Rotten Scoundrels in Spanish). Furthermore, there is an equally prominent tendency to highlight the con or swindle itself (Matchstick Men in French and Italian; Where the Money Is in German and –indirectly – in French; Bowfinger in German; The Spanish Prisoner in Italian, German, Spanish and Greek, Glengarry Glen Ross (indirectly) in French, House of Games in Greek and – indirectly – in French and The Sting in French, German and Spanish), which as I shall argue later is one of the central elements of the con-game film, itself a distinct trend within the con-artist film.

The titles' emphasis on the central character type in the above films is not coincidental. With the exception of Glengarry Glen Ross, whose main characters are real estate agents (even though their selling techniques and strategies are certainly reminiscent of the strategies con-artists use)¹² and of Bowfinger, which features a protagonist whose main occupation is a filmmaker (but who resorts to an elaborate trick to make his movie Chubby Rain), the remaining eleven titles feature central characters who are con-artists by profession. These characters occupy the position of the protagonist in eight films (Confidence, Heartbreakers, Traveller, The Grifters, Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, Where the Money Is and The Sting), of the antagonist in two films (House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner) and of both positions in two films (Matchstick Men and Nine Queens).

If the profession of the central characters in these films is not a sufficiently strong factor (compared for instance to the profession of the central protagonists in gangster films) to label the above films as con-artist films or if other generic frameworks are also highlighted in the translated titles,¹³ the international distributors' tendency to highlight the con in the translation of the titles seems to be a stronger factor. For each film from Table 6 is indeed structured around a number of con-games (Heartbreakers, Glengarry Glen Ross, The Grifters), a number of con-games as part of one long, elaborate, master con-game (Confidence, Matchstick Men, Nine Queens, The Spanish Prisoner, Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, House of Games, The Sting) or one master con-game (Bowfinger). Consequently the distributors' marketing strategy to highlight this element (extremely prominent in the translations of Matchstick Men, The Spanish Prisoner and The Sting and somewhat less prominent in the translations of Where the Money Is, Bowfinger and House of Games) suggests a distinct identity – at least in terms of content – for the above group of films and, potentially, the existence of a master generic framework within which these films can be located.

Despite the above evidence, however, the intertextual relay of the above films consists also of conflicting discourses that effectively work to deny the existence of such a master generic framework. Instead, they highlight an alternative generic context or even a mix of contexts which are not always convincing (and occasionally completely contradictory). The discourses created by trade and press reviews, in particular, seem to be firmly opposed to the idea of the con-artist/con-game film as a descriptive label, despite frequent references to cons, scams, swindles, schemes and con-men within the written text, as the following extracts from reviews that appeared in Variety clearly indicate:

(NOTE: the reviews' references to genre have been highlighted in bold while the references to cons, swindles and the rest as well as to elements in the review that support the existence of con-artist/con game genre have been italicised):

[Confidence] is a stylish compelling **crime caper** full of smoothly navigated plot twists. ... Foley's polished direction and Jung's clever script expertly stack enough *multiple deceptions and surprise turnabouts* to keep the action ticking. The increasingly *complex mechanics of the scheme* are elaborated with clarity and dexterity and the audience is kept guessing about the trustworthiness and loyalties of the shifty characters

Matchstick Men is a **coldly crafty character piece** about some seriously quirky LA *scam artists*. ... [The] script feels like a companion piece to the sorts of Catch Me If You Can. ... When the *scam unravels at the last minute*...revelations as to who's really been *conning* whom all along ... [The film] never really casts off its cloak of *artificiality* and calculation.

The dirty rotten scoundrels are mother-daughter babes in Heartbreakers, but the concept of a glamorous *tag team fleecing unsuspecting men* overstays its welcome ... a picture to be watched for its *plot mechanics* and very occasional **laughs** rather than any engagement in its characters or the stakes involved. ... *A tale about ruthless connivers.*

David Mamet might kill for a script as good as the one that fuels Nine Queens. A seductively structured and superbly acted **suspenser** that breathtakingly piles

swindle upon scam without giving away the game until the very end. ... there is no reason this utterly accessible genre-and-character piece shouldn't become a must see for the Memento and Amores Perros constituencies Stateside."¹⁴

Dominating every frame, Paul Newman's charismatic multishaded performance elevates the hodgepodge **caper comedy**, Where the Money Is a couple of notches above its preposterous plotting and self-consciously movieish texture. ... The uneven screenplay ... consciously echoes various roles in Newman's rich, 50 year career, particularly that of "fast Eddie Felson in The Hustler and its sequel The Color of Money, with further motifs and subplots from Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid and The Sting.

Several scenes of **explosive hilarity** punctuate Bowfinger ... innumerable **gags and jokes**, many of which are very funny indeed. ... in a wonderful scene at Le Dome full of *bluff, con and bravado*, [Bowfinger] actually gets a commitment to the picture from a smarmy studio exec.

David Mamet has a penchant for **sleight of hand thrillers**, and The Spanish Prisoner is his craftiest to date. Centered on *a relentless cat's cradle of a business scam*, the picture is a devilishly clever series of *reversals* that keeps you guessing to the very end. ... [The Spanish Prisoner] is the sort of daunting, satisfying **thriller**, one would like to see several times just to be sure one hasn't missed any clues or *reverses*. A beautifully crafted **noir**, it's an airtight entertainment sure to sate any audience that wants to be engaged, *challenged and surprised*.

Traveller concerns a tight knit clan of con men with a strict subculture and truly bizarre mores. ... [One of its sections] pretty much follows a **Hollywood buddy movie** format... In the manner of *familiar Hollywood yarns about con artists*, the film humanizes its protagonists ... Well executed climax involves a *scheme* in which...trying to *outsmart* a wealthy mobster and his dangerously vicious men. ... *Predictably, the scam goes awry...*

Harsh story [of Glengarry Glen Ross] examines the underhanded, eventual criminal activities of the salesmen as they *compete to outdo one another in hustling dubious properties to phone clients.*

Producer Martin Scorsese and director Stephen Frears may have had the ideal sensibility for this **quirky tale of deception and erotic gamesmanship.** ... Donald Westlake's script sticks to the form and spirit of Thompson's **underworld narrative.**

Director Rotten Scoundrels [sic] is a wonderfully crafted, absolutely **charming remake** of the 1964 film Bed Time Story. In this classy version, Steve Martin and Michael Caine play the competing French Riviera *conmen trying to outscheme each other in consistently and surprising setups.*

Writer David Mamet's first trip behind the camera as a director is entertaining good fun, an **American film noir** with **Hitchcockian touches** and a few dead bodies along the way. His *big con involves an elaborate set up* to convince a

conventioner, picked up by partner Mike Nussbaum, to offer 'security' for a suitcase full of money found on the street. House of Games cleverly selects its *cons*, explain their workings, then *twists them around again*, all without boring or losing the viewer.

The Sting: Outstanding **con game film**. Paul Newman and Robert Redford are superbly re-teamed, this time as *a pair of con artists* in Chicago of the 30s...George Roy Hill's outstanding direction of David S. Ward's *finely-crafted story of multiple deceptions and surprise ending* will delight both mass and class audiences. ...The 127 minute film comes to *a series of startling climaxes, piled atop one another with zest*. In the final seconds the *audience realises it has been had*, but when one enjoys the ride, it's a pleasure.¹⁵

With the exception of the review for The Sting, the rest of the Variety reviews clearly highlight the problems involved when it comes to attaching genre labels to films featuring con artists and con games. In particular, films such as The Grifters, Traveller, Matchstick Men and Nine Queens seem to resist firmly traditional generic classification, so much so that the reviewer has to resort to vague and rather meaningless phrases. These include "character piece" (Matchstick Men) and "genre-and-character-piece" (without really naming the genre in question - Nine Queens). Reviewers also resort to long descriptive sentences such as "quirky tale of deception and erotic gamesmanship" (The Grifters) and focus on only one section of a film which seems to fit within an established genre such as "the buddy movie" (Traveller). Furthermore, Mamet's films are characterised by the trade journal as thrillers with noir tones (The Spanish Prisoner) or, conversely, as films noirs with Hitchcockian

thriller tones (House of Games). These labels seem too broad and general to classify meaningfully the two films, given that both labels attached are composites of the same two genres, one of which (the thriller) can be further subdivided to a number of smaller, more meaningful categories.

Finally, Heartbreakers, Bowfinger and Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, films which one would expect to be relatively unproblematically proclaimed as comedies, are in fact not labelled as such. Despite evidence in the reviews about the overwhelming presence of comedy elements in the films, the reviewers are reluctant to use the term comedy as a genre category. This leaves Confidence and Where the Money Is as the only two examples of films where specific, almost self-explanatory labels (“crime caper” and “caper comedy” respectively) are attached, while Glengarry Glen Ross seems to defy completely generic classification.

On the other hand, however, these Variety reviews consistently refer to the use of specific plot conventions, narrative situations, set pieces and trajectories (see italicised words and phrases in the above reviews). This is to such an extent that a Variety reader who has not seen the above films would be forgiven in thinking that they belong to a certain group of films with several common elements, if the reviews did not feature the above problematic genre labels. The reviews, furthermore, frequently raise the question of the spectator’s systems of expectations regarding the above films. These systems seem to be structured predominantly around the elements of mystery and surprise as the spectator is invited to guess the narrative trajectory in a group of films where multiple narrative twists and reversals are among the dominant structural components.

More importantly for the purposes of this chapter, however, two particular reviews (The Sting and Traveller) make explicit references to “*con game film*” and “*familiar Hollywood yarns about con artists*” respectively (even though the latter review refuses to label the film in question as such). These phrases acknowledge the presence of a specific generic framework that is waiting to be defined and extrapolated. In support of this statement one could also add a number of extratextual connections between the above films, connections that can be noted in the inter-textual relay of the films themselves and which further suggest that their grouping under the umbrella terms con-artist/con-game film might be more appropriate.

The Variety review for Nine Queens, therefore, starts with the phrase “David Mamet might kill for a script as good as the one that fuels Nine Queens (see above).” A Screen International article that examines the production background of Confidence features a statement by Marc Butan, producer of the film, which reads: “Glengarry Glen Ross was really the prototype for the picture” (quoted in Kay, 2003a, p 27). In “Anatomy of a Scene” (a special feature produced by the Sundance Channel and accompanying the release of Confidence on DVD in the US), Carl Jung, screenwriter of the film, admits that he was influenced by House of Games and The Sting.¹⁶ In the Production Notes for Traveller (one of the special features included in the film’s release on DVD in the US), Bill Paxton, producer and star of the film, likens his part to Joe Mantegna’s Mike in House of Games and John Cusack’s Roy in The Grifters.¹⁷ The Variety review for Matchstick Men compares the film to Catch Me If you Can and Paper Moon, two other films that feature con-artists as protagonists. Finally, a Screen International feature on James Foley, director of Confidence and Glengarry

Glen Ross, actually puts on paper the words that none of the above reviewers – with the exception of the The Sting – wants to utter when it opens with the phrase: “When it came to attaching a director for *ensemble con-man drama* Confidence, James Foley almost picked himself” (Kay, 2003b, p 27; my italics).

In light of all the above – admittedly scattered – evidence pointing towards the existence of a cycle, if not of a genre, of films, which seem to be conscious of the existence of their predecessors,¹⁸ the remainder of this chapter will critically establish this group of films as distinct and discuss how Mamet’s cinema fits in it.

Genre Recognition (II) The Critical Context

Perhaps the biggest problem in critically establishing a distinctive categorical identity for the con artist film lies in its ties with other genres, such as the crime film and the (suspense) thriller – particularly with the former. This problem (which also exists on an institutional level as the Variety reviews demonstrated clearly) expresses itself mainly in the common sense view that con-artists are criminals and that con-tricks constitute a form of crime, which is not redeemed by the fact that it tends to be masterfully designed, stylishly elaborated and elegantly executed. Neither is the crime redeemed by the fact that the perpetrator of the con does not resort to violence or any other form of physical force to achieve their objective, which in most cases is the acquisition of material wealth belonging to someone else, nor is it redeemed by the fact that the victim willingly hands their own fortune/property/goods to the con-artist. Using false pretences to extract material wealth from unsuspecting people as a profession is indeed illegal and therefore a crime, despite the fact that the exact same

premise is in fact acceptable (and does not qualify legal consequences) when it takes place in a non-professional (i.e. criminal) context, as part of everyday life.¹⁹ As films which portray a (particular type of) criminal who performs (particular types of) crime the con-artist films are difficult to distinguish from other crime films.

As Steve Neale argued, however, generic specificity:

is not a question of particular and exclusive elements, however defined, but of exclusive and particular combinations and articulations of elements, of the exclusive and particular weight given in any one genre to elements which in fact it shares with other genres (1980, pp 22-3).

The question to ask here then is which exclusive and particular combinations of elements are characteristic of the con-artist film and how these are articulated. One way of addressing this question is to return to the study that raised it, Steve Neale's Genre, and follow one of the central arguments of this book, namely that "genres are modes of [Hollywood's] narrative system" and that their specificity can be determined by the ways in which they regulate the system's potentiality (1980, p 20). According to Neale, different genres articulate, specify and represent equilibrium and disruption [of the equilibrium] in different and differential ways, bringing into play "a particular combination of particular types or categories of discourse" (1980, pp 20-21). By looking then at how the equilibrium of a particular narrative order is disrupted, the critic is in a position to start determining the marks of generic specificity as those are articulated "in terms of conjunctions and disjunctions between a set of discursive categories and operations" (1980, p 21). Neale performs this task

top-down by assuming that the genre categories he examines (western, gangster, detective, horror, musical, melodrama and comedy films) already exist as genres with distinct identity. I shall be performing the same task here bottom-up, to differentiate a non-established genre category from an established one.

In Neale's view, the western, gangster and detective film are examples of genres where the disruption of equilibrium is "always figured literally – as physical violence" (1980, p 21), which also becomes the "means" by which the disequilibrium will give way to a restored equilibrium, when (social) order is re-established. For this reason, Neale continues, both equilibrium and disequilibrium "are signified specifically in terms of Law, in terms of the absence/presence, effectiveness/ineffectiveness of legal institutions and their agents" (1980, p 21) Consequently, the discourses brought into play by the above genres are discourses about "crime, legality, justice, social order, civilisation, private property, civic responsibility and so on" (1980, p 21). The difference between the above genres exists "in the precise weight given to the discourses they share in common, in the inscription of these discourses across more specific generic elements and in their imbrication across the codes specific to cinema" (1980, p 21).

Despite a certain lack of clarity when it comes to the "more specific generic elements" across which the discourses are inscribed (are we talking about iconography, narrative trajectories, visual motifs or systems of expectation?), Neale's approach provides a concrete entry for a discussion of questions pertaining to genre specificity, since it allows the critic to start from the genre film itself and work their way to the social aspects of the genre. Furthermore, if one sees the gangster and

detective film as sub-categories of a broader, more encompassing genre, the crime film (which in Neale's later study Genre and Hollywood appears to contain the detective, gangster and suspense thriller film [2000, pp 71-85]), one can indeed establish the contours specific to the con-artist film as both similar to and different from the crime film and its subcategory, the suspense thriller.

Taking the disruption of equilibrium as a starting point in a critical approach to the con-artist film, it is easy to detect one fundamental difference from its 'related' genres. Rather than the disruption being marked as physical violence, it is actually marked as a failure in a particular character's cognitive abilities to recognise the truth behind appearances, to distinguish between substance and effect. For this reason, although violence does indeed lurk underneath the shadowy transactions of the con-artists with their potential victims, it more often than not expresses itself occasionally and does not necessarily impinge on the trajectory of the narrative. Conversely, the character's attempt to find the truth amidst a web of lies and deceit seems to be a lot more important than recovering his or her money/goods or punishing the perpetrators of the con. A brief survey of how the disruption of the equilibrium is articulated in the films in Table 6 will prove the point.

In Matchstick Men, Roy (Nicolas Cage) fails to see that his long lost daughter who suddenly disrupts his life is in fact a con-woman who along with Roy's crime partner and his doctor have teamed up to con him out of \$300,000. In Nine Queens, Marcos (Ricardo Darín) who helps Juan (Gastón Pauls) during a trick in order to con him out of his money later, fails to see that Juan has been actually working with Marcos's sister to con Marcos out of his own money. In The Spanish Prisoner, Joe (Campbell

Scott) fails to understand that his boss's reluctance to reward him immediately for the invention of "the process," an act that triggers all the other actions in the narrative, is the first step in an elaborate plan to steal "the process" from him. In Traveller, Bokky (Bill Paxton) fails to realise that his decision to break the rules of his community and take Pat (Mark Wahlberg), an outsider, under his tutelage would eventually lead him away from the community of swindlers he belongs to. In The Grifters, Roy (John Cusack) fails to grasp that his mother's efforts towards reconciliation with him were not as deep as he imagined. In House of Games, Margaret (Lindsey Crouse) fails to see that Billy, her gambling-addicted client, is in fact working for a gang of con-artists and her decision to help him is another first step in an elaborate plan, in this case to con her out of \$80,000.

Finally, Confidence and The Sting are the only films in the group where the disruption of equilibrium is actually marked by an act of physical violence (the killing of Big Al in Confidence, the killing of Luther in The Sting). However, in both films violence is incidental and follows a structurally more important element, the central characters' failure to see that their respective 'mark' was 'connected' to the mob (the King in Confidence and Lonnegan in The Sting), which of course motivates the violent retaliation from the mafia bosses.²⁰ On the other hand Where the Money Is seems to be an exception to the above rule as the disequilibrium is marked by Carol's (Linda Fiorentino) exceptional cognitive abilities as she is the only one to recognise that Henry (Paul Newman) is indeed faking his condition as a paralysed victim of a stroke and embarks on a series of attempts to expose him. Still, the fact that the disequilibrium is marked by such questions attests to the film's inclusion in the con-artist film group.

A similar principle seems to structure the narrative of the three con artist films that include comic elements. In Heartbreakers, therefore, Page (Jennifer Love Hewitt) fails to recognise that the IRS problems she experiences with her mother, Max (Sigourney Weaver), are an elaborate trick arranged by Max to discourage her from going solo.²¹ In Bowfinger, Kit Ramsey (Eddie Murphy) fails to see that he is the protagonist of a film that takes place unbeknownst to him, a failure that is mainly responsible for the comedy in the film. Finally, in Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, Lawrence Jamieson (Michael Caine) fails to recognise the real extent of the threat to his business in the French Riviera that the presence of fellow con-artist, Freddie Benson (Steve Martin), represents, whilst both Jamieson and Benson fail to see that Janet Colgate (Glenn Headly), the woman they both try to fleece, is another con-artist working a scam on them.

If the disruption of equilibrium in con-artist films is marked by the failure of a character's cognitive abilities to perceive the truth behind appearances, then what are the discourses mobilised for the restoration of order and in what specific ways is order restored? Not surprisingly, what becomes immediately apparent (and automatically differentiates the con-artist film from other crime films) is that legal institutions and their agents are rarely present. Furthermore, in the few cases they do appear (FBI agents in The Sting, customs' officers and LAPD detectives in Confidence, a police officer in House of Games, a US Marshall and a police detective in The Spanish Prisoner, two patrolmen in The Grifters) they are either con-artists disguised as agents of the law (The Sting, House of Games), corrupted officials who demand a cut of the loot and therefore are con-artists by proxy (Confidence) or

narratively insignificant characters (The Grifters) who contribute nothing to the restoration of order. This leaves only one film (The Spanish Prisoner) where a law agent turns out to be instrumental in the establishment of a new equilibrium, but who nevertheless is perceived as another con-man until the final scene of the film, which I shall discuss in detail later.

The overwhelming absence of the legal institutions and their agents clearly suggests that the mobilised discourses have little (but not nothing) to do with the discursive categories Neale identified in the crime film, and that consequently one needs to look for them elsewhere.²² One could argue, therefore, that equilibrium and disequilibrium in con artist films are signified specifically in terms of the healthy function or not of one or more character(s)' cognitive skills (perception, cognition, comprehension, realisation and recognition).

In this respect, the main discourse mobilised is that of human nature, which stretches to include psychological, sociological, theological, political, cultural and other perspectives with particular emphasis on the psychology of the human mind. For instance in Confidence, one can discern discursive categories such as the position of 'man' in society (sociological perspective), evident in Jake's voice-over as he explains the reasons for his business conduct. One could also detect the discourse of the psychology of the human mind (psychological perspective), which is evident in the sequences when Jake and his gang study their prospective mark. Furthermore, there is also the discourse of the culture of greed (cultural perspective), which, of course, permeates the whole film and so on.

On the other hand, while the discursive categories of crime, legality and justice are also mobilised they nevertheless assume a considerably less important role. This is mainly due to the narrative absence or ineffectiveness of the legal institutions and their agents. As a result, these discursive categories are articulated in individual rather than social (legal) terms. Additionally, it is one particular cognitive skill, recognition, that takes on the responsibility of reinstating the new equilibrium as the narrative trajectories of con-artist films tend to culminate in the recognition of (a) truth. This is often an absolute truth, which sometimes links the con-artist film with the genre of tragedy. Again a brief review of the reinstatement of the equilibrium in the above-chosen films will prove helpful.

In Matchstick Men, Roy recognises that he longs to have the family he had previously not desired only after a con-woman disguised as his daughter has awakened his paternal instincts (and in the process conned him out of his money). In The Spanish Prisoner, Joe desperately tries to understand why people would want to cheat, steal and lie rather than work for a living and is left completely alone when it turns out that every person he trusted had participated in a con to steal 'the process' from him. In Traveller, Bokky recognises that life outside the clan of 'travellers' is possible while Pat takes his position in the clan. In The Grifters, a film where recognition is accompanied by definite tragic undertones, Roy realises that he is sexually attracted to his mother but he again fails to understand that his mother's sexual advances to him are part of a thinly-disguised plot to take his money and he is subsequently (accidentally?) killed by her. In House of Games, another film that borrows elements from the genre of tragedy, Margaret recognises that she in fact is a 'born thief' and a 'booster' and embarks on a repression-free life after she "forgives herself" for killing

Mike (Joe Mantegna). In Confidence and The Sting Jake (Ed Burns) and Hooker (Robert Redford) make amends for their original mistake (and the death of their respective partners in crime) by “punishing” the King and Lonnegan respectively, while they realise the importance of calculating all the moves of the game in advance (something that both Jake and Hooker failed to do when they swindled a ‘connected’ mark in the opening sequences of Confidence and The Sting). In Where the Money Is, Carol realises that her chosen life as a carer for the elderly in small-town America is not suitable for her and exchanges her job, home and husband for a life as a con-artist in the big city as Henry’s partner. Finally Nine Queens is the exception in this group as, at the end of the film, the spectator is denied access to Marcos’s response when he (and the spectator) realises that he had been conned from the beginning of the narrative.

The above account clearly proves the validity of Neale’s argument as it is obvious that the generic specificity of the con-artist film relies on the different weight given to the elements which it shares with other genres, in particular with the crime film. It remains to be seen how the above discourses are inscribed “across more specific generic elements” and how they are articulated within specific cinematic codes (1980, p 21). To address the first question, I shall focus on the systems or horizons of expectation that the con-artist film invites the spectator to form, while for the second issue I shall examine questions of filmic narration. As I shall argue, the two questions are very-much interrelated and provide some very important answers to the problem of the specificity of the con-artist film.

In terms of the first question, one could argue that the con-artist film is characterised by a rather stable and clearly defined set of expectations that the spectators bring with them, and which, as Neale has argued, “interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process” (2000, p 31). In this respect, the ‘contract’ between film spectators and con-artist films is as strong as the contracts between film spectators and other, more traditional, film genres such as the western and the musical, where “the spectator must process what is seen and heard [and the film] must permit the spectator to derive pleasure from its fictional play” (Krutnik, 1992, p 5). Specifically, the contract drawn between con-artist film and spectator specifies that the film offers a particular type of story which is likely to contain a large (sometimes an unusual) number of narrative twists and surprises, that the spectator is invited to guess throughout the course of viewing from the opening sequence to the final credits and, in extreme cases, even after the credits.²³ The spectator is invited, therefore, to bring along some finely-tuned cognitive skills, which will help them navigate through the, often extremely dense, plots that con-artist films are structured around. Given the con-artist film’s axiomatic dependence on plots structured around characters who steal, cheat, deceive, lie and betray, it comes as no surprise that the key task the spectator is asked to perform is to distinguish between lies and truth or fiction and reality (within the diegesis), which in most of the above films are articulated in an extremely complex fashion.

What becomes obvious, then, is that the main objective for the film spectator is to understand the film’s narrative, a task which is required of the spectator from all film genres, though for many con-artist films it is likely to require multiple viewings. Summarising writing on the field of genre and narrative Deborah Knight remarks:

One might argue that, because they encourage a certain kind of underreading – one which focuses on developing plot action rather than, say, the beauty of cinematography – that generic fiction are ideal places for the rehearsal of a certain kind of interpretation. Generic fictions, we might suppose, allow us to practice our skills of narrative comprehension. (1994, internet)

If one accepts the above argument (an argument that Knight later critiques in her essay ‘Making Sense of Genre’) one could argue that what differentiates the con-artist film as a genre from other film genres is that it actively challenges the spectator to comprehend the narrative, almost as a matter of principle. Unlike other film genres where narrative comprehension is invited as a matter of fact, the con-artist film challenges the spectator’s cognitive skills to understand the narrative to an extent that is rarely seen in other genres. When a film “piles swindle upon scam without giving away the game until the very end,” or when it “stack[s] enough multiple deceptions and surprise turnabouts,” as Variety remarks about Nine Queens and Confidence respectively, the spectator’s cognitive skills assume a considerably more important role in the process of narrative comprehension than in other genres. Consequently, the spectator enters the viewing process with their cognitive skills at full alert in order to successfully deal with the con-artist film’s relentless attempt to “beguile, surprise and disorient them, to encourage them to misidentify and misinterpret.” These are characteristics which Leslie Kane specifically identified in Mamet’s films and which, I argue, are constitutive characteristics of the con-artist film as a genre.

It is obvious, then, that the discourses of human nature in general and of human psychology in particular are strongly inscribed – via the emphasis on spectators’ cognitive skills – across the set of expectations that comprise the con-artist film. This strong link, however, gives way to a paradox that lies at the core of the con-artist film. While, as noted earlier, the narrative of the con-artist film depends on the failure of a character’s cognitive ability to recognise the truth behind appearances, the spectator’s pleasure depends on the reverse, namely on the successful application of their cognitive skills in recognising the truth behind appearances. Unlike the con-artist film characters who do not know whether they are being conned or not at any given point in the narrative, the spectator expects that every single encounter between characters can potentially be a con (or part of a con underway), that every shot, sequence and scene can potentially be a clue which will help them put together the pieces of a (narrative) puzzle. Predicting the con, anticipating the twist, identifying the ‘mark’ in advance, all become parts of the spectator’s pleasure in a category of films where predictability is by definition under attack. This is especially so when “the cumulative expectation and knowledge of the audience,” which according to Richard Maltby and Ian Craven is “central to the operation of any genre movie” (1995, p 124), has created even more complicated con-artist film narratives (two very recent examples would be Confidence and Nine Queens). Here the spectator’s pleasure takes the form of expecting the unfolding of the con in even more unpredictable ways. Central to this process, of course, is the function of filmic narration.

As the mechanism that controls “the overall regulation and distribution of knowledge which determines *how* and when the spectator acquires knowledge, that is, how the

spectator is able to know what he or she comes to know in a narrative” (Branigan, 1992, p 76; original italics), narration is by definition of utmost significance in con-artist films. Despite Branigan’s emphasis on ‘how,’ questions of ‘when’ the spectator acquires knowledge, are equally crucial given the con-artist film’s undisputable propensity towards narrative twists which depend entirely on the narration’s withholding of vital information until particular moments in the narrative. For that reason, it is not only the information that narration withholds from the spectator during the course of the narrative that takes primary position in the overall organisation of the con-artist film’s narrative structure, but also, the time narration takes to reveal this information to the spectator. It could, then, be argued that narration in con-artist films works towards a particular arrangement of narrative information, which is geared towards timely revelations of previously undisclosed information. This arrangement primarily aims at surprising and, occasionally, shocking the spectator, unless the spectator reaches those points of revelation earlier (a process which to a certain extent depends on the degree of communicativeness of the narration). This function of narration is particularly evident in a distinct trend within the con-artist film, the ‘con-game film,’ which I shall discuss shortly, but it is easily noted in all con-artist films. To illustrate this point, I shall briefly discuss the work of narration in Confidence (Foley, 2003, US, Lions Gate, 97 min).

The narration in Confidence withholds a number of crucial pieces of information until the very end of the film. For instance, when Jake decides to abort the job of conning Morgan Price (a job that was arranged by the King, a gangster that Jake and his gang accidentally fleeced at the beginning of the narrative) and declares that he never trusted Lily, the spectator is not aware that this is part of Jake’s plan to double cross

the King, something we discover in the final sequences. More importantly, though, the narration refuses to reveal whether special agent Gunther Butan had accepted Jake's bribe in the past. Despite a flashback which shows Jake offering Butan money to "look the other way" during a different job, at the crucial moment, the narration becomes extremely uncommunicative and does not reveal whether Butan accepted the money or not. Instead, the image freezes and turns black and white, before Butan makes his move. During this shot Jake's voice-over explains that agent Butan "had him on attempt to bribe a federal agent" but, crucially, never actually states whether Butan did take the money or not. When at the very end of the film, therefore, the narration returns to the above flashback and shows that Butan actually took the money and had an integral part in Jake's scam, the spectator is surprised by the turn of events and realises that the film's narration was unreliable, at least on one occasion. Furthermore, at the same final sequence, the spectator also learns that agent Butan was a Customs' officer and therefore instrumental in the execution of Jake's con, which involved by-passing the US Customs in bringing \$5 million to the country.

It is at this moment that the (extremely self-reflexive) narration tests the spectator on whether they have been asking the right questions during the course of the narrative. Specifically, the narration – via Jake's voice-over – formulates the questions themselves while, on the visual level, a quick succession of eight shots provides the answers. Table 7 contains the information provided by the narration in the penultimate scene of the film:

No	Image (shot)	Dialogue (Jake's voice over)
1	Close up shot of Butan in a car	Because sooner or later someone's gonna start asking the right questions:
2	Medium shot of Gordo placing the money bag for inspection at customs	
3	Close up of the bag being switched by a customs' employee	The feds would want to know why they were sent in to bust a couple of crooked cops
4	Medium shot of Gordo picking up the (switched) bag	Manzano and Whitworth [the crooked cops] would ask how the drugs got into that duffel bag.
5	Close up of the duffel bag containing drugs	
6	Low angle shot of Butan getting the drugs from Manzano and Whitworth's car	The King and Price would ask where their money really went;
7	Medium long shot of Butan picking up the original money bag from the customs' employee	
8	Medium close up of Butan walking through customs with the bag. He produces his badge which states that he works for the customs	and everyone would ask what agency was it that special agent Gunther Butan really worked for.

Table 7

Questions and Answers in Confidence

Although the function of the above scene is to provide the missing pieces in the puzzle – in particular, the vital piece of information that agent Butan was working for Customs – it nevertheless simply repeats information that was already introduced in previous scenes, but which was available only for the extremely attentive spectator. Forty-seven minutes into the film, in the scene when he introduces himself to

Manzaro and Whitworth and informs them that he has a record of their illegal activities, Butan again produces his badge, which states that he works for Customs. Although the badge is again presented in a close up shot, the short duration of the shot (1 sec) and the irrelevance of this piece of information within the context of that scene, makes this clue provided by the narration go virtually unnoticed. If the alert spectator however, registered the information on the badge in that early scene, they would have a very good reason to foresee Butan's involvement in the con, especially in the light of Jake's reluctance to explain to his crew how he would get \$5 million through the US Customs. Consequently, the function of the penultimate scene in the film would be different for such a spectator, namely it would confirm that he or she asked *sooner*, rather than later, the right questions.

The narration in Confidence is restricted in range (the narrative is recounted through Jake's flashbacks and voice-overs) but extremely knowledgeable as the spectator is presented with several events that Jake could not have known since he was not always physically present. More importantly though, narration in Confidence adopts various degrees of communicativeness, ranging from completely uncommunicative moments (such as the freeze frame before the spectator sees whether Butan accepted the bribe or not) to subtle suggestions regarding who the mark is. However, it almost never allows complete communicativeness, unless to provide access to information that would later prove false, in which case it is unreliable.²⁴ One could then argue that narration in con-artist films depends on the constant shift in the degree of its communicativeness, which aims at surprising the spectator, unless he or she is attentive enough to pick up the scattered clues in the narrative.

Not surprisingly, the game of creating narrative twists that the narration constantly arranges for the pleasure of the spectator in the con-artist film dovetails several of the discursive categories that are associated with the general discourse of human nature which is mobilised by the narratives of this type of films as I noted earlier. The narration's propensity towards challenging the spectator's cognitive skills in order to surprise them matches fully the con-artists' panache for elaborate tricks which dupe unsuspecting, that is, non-alert characters in the diegesis. Discursive categories such as perception, cognition and, more generally, the working of the human mind are, therefore, masterfully imbricated across the code of filmic narration, all contributing to the generic specificity of the con-artist films.

The Con-Game Film

The narrative in con-artist films like Confidence is usually structured around a swindler or, more often, a group of swindlers who apply the tricks of their trade to unsuspecting characters with the main objective of acquiring material wealth. The placing of such characters in the position of a protagonist, whose psychological motivations and actions drive the narrative forward, however, constitutes an important aesthetic choice for the filmmakers working within the genre. By locating the swindler at the epicentre of action, con-artist films actively seek the spectator's complicity in at least some aspects of the crime (planning, execution, erasing traces of the crime etc) he or she commits. As Murray Smith (1994, p 41) would put it, the spectator's alignment (either through spatio-temporal attachment or through subjective access) with the con-artist-protagonist necessarily involves questions of complicity on the part of the spectator, mainly because the spectator is allowed (always partial) knowledge of the con, which effectively makes the spectator an

invisible gang member who hopes that the con job will succeed. To this end, it is the job of the narration to keep the spectator in doubt about the outcome of the con(s) by withholding crucial information from the beginning, information that will be revealed in time during the course of the narrative. Besides the example of Confidence I noted above, this type of narrative structure and function of narration can be also found in The Sting, Traveller, and The Grifters as well as in the comedy/con-artist films Heartbreakers and Bowfinger, while in Nine Queens both the narrative structure and the role of the narration follow this model only partially.

Conversely, the narrative of a small number of films that includes Mamet's House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner as well as Matchstick Men and, to a certain extent, Nine Queens and Dirty Rotten Scoundrels is structured around a protagonist who assumes the role of the victim in what turns out to be an elaborate con rather than the perpetrator of it. In particular, the narratives of House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner are organised around the actions of Margaret and Joe, a psychiatrist and corporate designer respectively, who fail to see that their encounters and transactions with a number of characters in the narrative are well-disguised, precisely calculated moves in a con-game designed to make them hand \$80,000 and a "process," to con-artists.

Equally, the narratives of Matchstick Men and Nine Queens are centred around the actions of two con artists, Roy and Marcos, who despite knowing the tricks of the trade find themselves handing \$300,000 and \$60,000 respectively to fellow swindlers.²⁵ I would like to argue that this is a distinct trend within the con-artist film genre and I will term this cycle of films 'the con-game film,' precisely because the

emphasis lies on the trick, scheme or swindle, and in particular on the moment of recognition by protagonist and spectator alike. This means that all the narrative events were in actual fact building blocks towards an elaborate con-game that is not revealed as such until the very end of the films.

The similarities between this small cycle of con-game films and the broader category of the con-artist film I discussed above are obvious. The disruption of the narrative equilibrium and the restoration of order in the con-game film follow the same pattern (emphasis on the failure of a character's cognitive skills in perceiving the truth; mobilisation of the key discourse of the human nature; challenging the spectator to comprehend the narrative and so on).

The main difference between the two categories however, lies in the role of the film narration, which in the con-game film assumes a fundamentally different role than in the con-artist film. Specifically, narration in the con-game film works towards concealing any information that would lead the spectator to suspect that a con is taking place, suppressing almost all available cues that would help the spectator order the narrative information correctly. This, therefore, challenges further the spectator's cognitive skills in their attempt towards narrative comprehension. More importantly, by structuring the film narrative around the story of a character who ends up being the 'mark' of a con, narration in the con-game film ensures that the spectator occupies a similar position to the protagonist, that is, the spectator also becomes a 'mark,' the mark in the unfolding of a story. Having a false sense of security that he/she controls the narrative through the psychologically motivated actions of a protagonist who also (falsely) believes that they are in control of all events and transactions, the spectator

comes in for a shock when he/she realises at the end of the film that neither the protagonist nor they 'had a clue' about the real nature of the narrative events.

In order to achieve the above objective effectively, narration in con-game films presents an unusual degree of restrictedness to the actions of the main character.²⁶ In all the above four films, the protagonists are present in virtually every single scene of the narrative, which allows the unfolding of the story to be filtered solely through their individual perspectives. These perspectives are always presented by the narration as reliable and steadfast since in the initial stages of all four narratives each protagonist is represented as a 'knowledgeable' individual who is very good at what they do (Margaret's career as a psychiatrist is on the up, Joe has just discovered a formula that can predict global market changes, Roy is a very successful con-man and Marcos scores much bigger cons than Juan). As a result, the spectator has no reason not to invest in the credibility of the protagonists as intelligent characters who are more likely to be the perpetrators of the con the film is expected to unfold, rather than the actual marks.²⁷ For that reason, part of the surprise or shock the spectator experiences at the end of those films is due to the investment they have made in the knowledgeability of the protagonist.

One of the most important functions of the restricted (to the perspective of the mark) narration in the con-game film is that it prevents the spectator from knowing that a con targeting the protagonist is underway. By denying the spectator access to narrative events outside the protagonist's sphere of knowledge, the narration is able to present narrative information mono-dimensionally, a characteristic which should alert, at least, the cine-literate spectator. It is at this point however, that the

protagonist's status as a knowledgeable and intelligent character becomes important as these exact traits work to reassure the spectator that the protagonist should be capable of intercepting any suspicious signals and exposing any scam underway.²⁸ The unusually restricted narration, however, has a second function, to surprise and shock the spectator in much more forceful ways than the narration in the con-artist films. Given the fact that all information throughout the narrative of con-game films is filtered through one perspective (which is falsely perceived as knowledgeable, intelligent and adequate), the revelation of the real nature of the narrative events can take very surprising, even shocking dimensions, depending on the height of the stakes. The revelation can even assume tragic proportions – as the discussion of The Spanish Prisoner will shortly demonstrate.

In light of the challenge that restricted narration presents for the spectator's narrative comprehension of the con-game film, the spectator responds by employing two information-processing techniques, one of which assumes a more important role than the other. The spectator resorts to the pool of knowledge of the genre accumulated from their interaction with other con-game films (top-down approach) or looks for clues that the narration has not successfully managed to suppress or has even subtly planted (bottom-up approach). Although the top-down approach to the narrative is significant in preparing the spectator for the different directions the narrative can take (including the surprising revelation at the end) as well as in placing the spectator's bottom-up approach on solid foundations, it is the bottom-up approach itself, I argue, that is mainly responsible for the spectator's pleasure from the con-game film.

Despite the extreme extent of the narration's restrictedness, the spectator is always afforded certain clues and, if careful, he or she can obtain information not accessible to the central character. These clues can take several formats such as: rare omniscient moments, frames specifically composed to convey information only to the spectator, meanings conveyed by the juxtaposition of shots and, generally, other techniques associated with a film's *mise-en-scène*. But in order for the spectator to be successful in this pursuit (of superior knowledge to the protagonist), he or she must question from the start the protagonist's perception and intelligence as they are never as adequate as the narration would have them appear. Even in this case, however, the spectator has often to deal with a narration that can and does resort to unreliability at critical stages during the course of the narrative, as my discussion of the second omniscient moment in Mamet's House of Games demonstrated in Chapter One. At this point even the most alert of spectators has no alternative means at their disposal to anticipate the specifics of the outcome of the narrative trajectory. It is at this moment that the spectator realises that he or she was set up by the narration to occupy the position of the mark, just like the protagonist.

This final point about the con-game film raises questions about its formal connections with the broader genre of tragedy, a genre which, as David Mamet argued in an interview with Melvyn Bragg for The South Bank Show, is based on deception. In his own words:

I was trying to remember which tragedy isn't based on deception; I think *every tragedy's based on deception*; that's the meaning of the tragic form...something has been hidden and can only be uncovered at great expense. And when it is

uncovered we say “Oh my gosh, it was in front of me the whole time” whether that’s Death of a Salesman or, or ...any tragedy that’s in front of one for the whole time. Waiting for Godot – he ain’t coming. (quoted in Bragg, 2001, p 153; my italics)

Furthermore, and in the same interview, Mamet extended the above point to emphasise one of the genre’s key objectives, namely, to shock the audience:

But the most difficult form to write is, is tragedy, where the hero or heroine is going to his...Aristotle tells us, come to the end of the play and realise that he or she is the cause of their own problems and undergo[es] a change of the situation at the last moment of the play...such that the audience would say “Oh my God, now I understand. I’ve seen something that is both *shocking* and inevitable (quoted in Bragg, 2001, p 145; my italics).

What becomes immediately apparent from Mamet’s views – influenced by Aristotle – on the form and nature of tragedy, are the remarkable similarities it shares with the con-game film. Firstly, both genres feature stories about deception. Secondly, they are clearly founded on the protagonist and spectator’s original cognitive failure to recognise a ‘truth in front of them the whole time.’ Thirdly, they are both structured around a ‘hidden truth’ that is revealed at the end of the story. Fourthly, the moment of revelation inevitably impacts heavily on the protagonist and spectator alike. These similarities clearly suggest that con-game films are fertile grounds for the rendition of ‘tragic’ stories, perhaps more fertile than other popular American cinema genres.

For, if exposing the con is a vehicle for exposing a different, deeper, hidden truth which has to do with the state of the human condition, then the con-game film can be easily included within the structures of tragedy.

House of Games, the earliest of the four films this chapter has considered, is a case in point. In one of the final scenes in the film, Margaret and the spectator find out that she has been played, from the very beginning, by a gang of con-artists. Humiliated by the way the con-men talk about her, Margaret decides to take some action for the first time in the narrative (as all her previous actions were expected, and counted upon by the con-artists). She confronts Mike in the airport and kills him when she realises that he has no intention to apologise to her for conning her.

In the final scene, a completely transformed (in terms of costume, make up and overall attitude) Margaret confesses to her mentor and colleague, Maria, that “she has forgiven herself” and, over dinner, proceeds to steal a lighter from a woman’s handbag at a nearby table. This chain of events signifies that Margaret has now found the ‘truth about herself’ and her act of stealing the lighter represents her first action in a repression-free life, a life obviously not endorsed by contemporary society, but a life nevertheless which signals that for the first time she is true to herself. Margaret uncovers the truth about herself and puts an end to a life of deception. She does this by recognising that in actual fact she is “a born thief” and “a booster,” terms she first heard the con-artists use to describe her when she found out that she had been conned. Margaret is then the quintessential tragic heroine who in the end recognises that she is the “cause of the plague on Thebes” (like John in Oleanna). She is the cause of her hitherto meaningless life. The spectator’s shock, however, at the exposition of the con

is replaced by an even stronger shock from Margaret's discovery of the truth about herself and, more importantly, from her whole-hearted endorsement of that truth. In this case, then, the spectator is not only invited to understand the narrative but also to consider fundamental questions about the human condition such as one's responsibility to be true to oneself.

If House of Games is an example of a con-game film that clearly follows the form and structure of a tragedy, this does not necessarily imply that all con-game films are also tragedies. In fact, as I shall argue in the next section, Mamet's other con-game film, The Spanish Prisoner, starts as a tragedy only to drop this formal framework en route and adopt a different formal structure. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I would like to maintain that the con-game film, a distinct trend within the con-artist film genre, can be 'hijacked' by filmmakers who aspire to work within the broader genre of (modern) tragedy.

Marketing The Spanish Prisoner

By the time Mamet's fifth feature film opened in the US on 3 April 1998, the film's target audience were likely to be aware of three main issues relating to the film: that it was made by David Mamet; that its story revolved around deceptive appearances and confidence games; and that the film represented the filmmaker's finest achievement. All three of the above marketing hooks were employed by the film's trailer for the US market (which I examined in detail in Chapter Two), one of the many texts that surrounded the release of the film by Sony Classics in the US and Pathé in the UK. As I shall demonstrate, the distributors made use of similar, often identical, marketing

techniques in the rest of the literature that accompanied the film's release, building a marketing campaign that played on authorship, genre and achievement.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the film's two taglines, "It's the oldest con in the book" and "Can you really trust anyone?" clearly located the film within the con-artist/con-game genre. To reiterate this piece of information about the film, Sony Classics and Pathé used a number of quotes from the popular and trade press, which included the following:

The most satisfying feat of gamesmanship Mr Mamet has yet brought to the screen (US 1-sheet ad, New York Times)

A sly, delightful, brilliantly constructed con-game (UK 1 Sheet ad, Daily Telegraph)

Just sit back and let the movie take you for a ride (UK 1-sheet ad, source not discernible)

An Elegant Puzzle (US Trailer, LA Times)

A taut and intriguing tale (US Trailer, Chicago Tribune)

Superb. Reminiscent of The Usual Suspects and North by Northwest (US Trailer WBAI Radio)

The first three quotes in the list feature in the one-sheet ads the distributors produced in the US (the first one) and UK (second and third) respectively. These ads, nonetheless, feature the same image: Joe Ross, the film's protagonist, removing (or putting on?) his prescription glasses, while Susan Ricci, Joe's romantic interest, talks to him behind her dark glasses (see Figures 3 and 4). The emphasis on both ads on the protagonist's vision (the cornerstone of one's cognitive abilities) clearly suggests the film's preoccupation with what can(not) be seen, a major theme in Mamet's films and characteristic of the con-artist/con-game genre. This also, to a certain extent, comments on the subject of a film with a not particularly informative title.²⁹ The remaining three quotes, which also appear in the film's trailer for the American theatres, emphasise the complexity of the narrative directly (LA Times and Chicago Tribune) or indirectly – via a comparison to other narratively complex films – an important characteristic of the con-artist/con-game film.

The distributors' focus on genre, however is, largely, matched by an additional focus on authorship and achievement. This is primarily exemplified by the inclusion of the quote from The New York Times which, among other things, succeeds in linking David Mamet with the con-artist/con-game film. Other such quotes include:

Mamet's best foray into filmmaking to date (US Trailer, Details magazine)

Nobody does it better than David Mamet and Mamet has never done it better than this (quote on the UK 1-sheet ad, source not discernible)

By associating the filmmaker with a particular genre (proclaiming, moreover, that the filmmaker in question is the ‘master’ of the genre at the peak of his career) the marketing of The Spanish Prisoner actively encourages prospective audiences to locate Mamet’s authorship within the con-artist/con-game film. This is despite the fact that, at first sight and with the exception of House of Games and of Glengarry Glen Ross (only scripted by Mamet), the rest of the pre-1997 Mamet’s films belong to different genres.

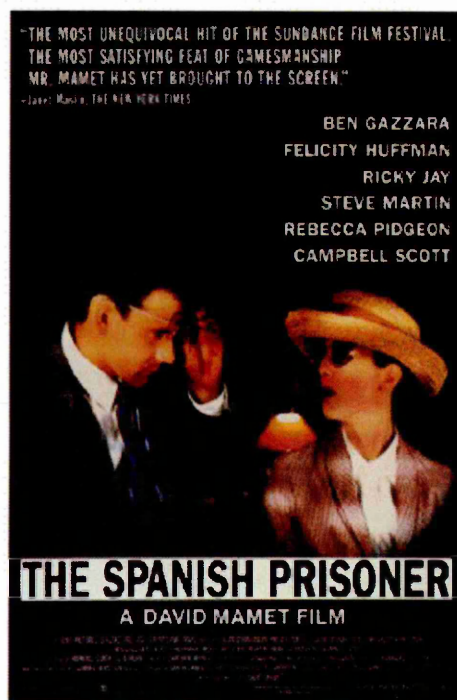


Figure 3

The US 1-sheet ad for The Spanish Prisoner



Figure 4

The UK 1-sheet ad for The Spanish Prisoner

Source: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120176/posters>

The marketing campaign's invitation to the spectator, to make the link between auteur and genre, creates a concrete entry for a critical discussion of the relation between Mamet and con-game film, which the remainder of this essay will address.

"You don't know who anyone is"

Approximately eighteen minutes into The Spanish Prisoner, there are two scenes [scenes 14 and 15: see Appendix V] that involve Joe Ross, the corporate designer and inventor protagonist of the film, and Susan Ricci, the new company secretary and, to that point in the narrative, Joe's potential romantic interest. The scenes take place at the first class compartment of a plane flying back to New York from the Caribbean islands. This was where Joe, Susan and a few select employees of the company had enjoyed a short stay on the company's account, while trying to pitch Joe's invention to a group of investors and businessmen. While on the island, Joe befriended a mysterious, well-off, middle-aged man, named Jimmy Dell, with whom he made

arrangements to meet in New York after agreeing to drop a package on Dell's behalf to his sister.

The first of the two scenes, which lasts approximately one minute, opens with a shot of Joe on the plane corridor trying to find his seat. Susan and George, Joe's business partner and company lawyer, follow him to their own seats. Noticing that Susan struggles to place her bags on the luggage compartment, Joe, who had earlier upgraded Susan's ticket from economy to first class, quickly volunteers to help her. Thinking perhaps that the 'colourful' Susan does not 'belong' to the first class, an air-stewardess enters the shot to check Susan's ticket. Susan explains to her that she would normally not travel first class and elaborates on Joe's gesture of arranging for her to sit "in quality." Prompted by the air-stewardess's check on her, Susan proclaims that "it shows you, you never know who anybody is," a phrase which marks the end of this, rather long, take (approximately 31 seconds) and which is destined to become a major theme for the rest of the film. Upon Joe's agreeable nodding [shot 2], Susan repeats her earlier dictum, most probably attempting to make conversation with Joe and dares him to guess the real profession of a woman they both met in the island, who claimed she worked for the FBI [shot 3].³⁰ Joe asks the question [shot 4] and Susan emphatically replies that she did work for the FBI [shot 5], producing her business card as a proof [shot 6] and passing it Joe to see it for himself. Joe checks the card and hands it back to Susan while uttering the old cliché "funny old world" [shot 7]. Susan takes the card back and offers a much more original saying "dog my cats" [shot 8], which the amused Joe decides to adopt it as the appropriate conclusion to his verbal exchange with Susan [shot 9]. After this shot, the camera cuts to a close up shot of the package Jimmy had asked Joe to deliver to

his sister. Joe places the package in the pocket of the seat in front of him [shot 10] and fastens his seatbelt for the take off [shot 11].

In the second scene – and via a dissolve – we are at a later stage of the flight. Joe is standing again on the corridor looking at some notes and drinking orange juice. As he starts walking towards his seat, he once again hears Susan uttering: “You never know who anybody is” [shot 1]. In the next shot, Susan repeats the same phrase but exempts herself from the otherwise axiomatic dictum by ‘arguing’ that she is what she looks like and therefore cannot be anyone else. Smiling, she continues: “why is that Mr Ross?” Thinking that perhaps Susan is fishing for a compliment, Joe decides to give in and in his own, rather cold, manner compliments Susan by telling her that she looks “just fine.” Susan’s response however, demonstrates that she did not fish for a compliment as she continues talking about deceptive appearances and suggests Jimmy Dell as an example of someone who might not be who he appeared to be [shot 2]. Slightly surprised and somewhat more interested in the conversation, Joe responds that Jimmy was “a fellow who got off a plane” [shot 3], an answer which prompts Susan to emphasise the fact that she was trying to make the exact same point [shot 4].

In a rather playful manner, Joe tells Susan that she can’t go on mistrusting everyone [shot 5] which triggers Susan’s more playful response “no, just strangers” [shot 6]. Joe decides to put an end to the chat by firmly responding that he saw Jimmy getting off the plane, a rather surprising statement, which in no way proves that Jimmy was not a stranger [shot 7]. Susan, now in a close up shot, offers an alternative version of the event however, namely, that she and Joe saw him getting off a boat that came from the direction of the plane [shot 8]. Joe, now also in a close-up, remains adamant

that he saw Jimmy getting off the plane [shot 9] to which Susan responds: “that’s what you just think you saw” [shot 10]. To support her version of events, Susan reminds him of the picture she took of him on the island, in the background of which she saw Jimmy getting off a boat. Deciding to finish off the conversation herself she returns to a paraphrased version of her dictum “we’ve no idea who anyone is,” while in the background the air stewardess starts distributing Customs forms to the passengers [shot 11].

At this point there is a short verbal exchange between Joe and George about whether they should declare some Cuban cigars to the Customs [shots 12-14]. In the next shot, however, Susan suddenly picks up the conversation where it was left and starts talking about “mules,” people who are handed packages by strangers and who might carry illegal material for people whom they do not know, people who trust strangers and get duped. She finishes this point by a slightly different rendition of her haunting phrase: “who is what they seem? Who, in this world, is what they seem?” [shot 15]. Joe’s reaction is immediate. He realises that the hypothetical people Susan talks about could be him [shot 16]. He picks up the package from the pocket of the front seat, whilst intense non-diegetic music starts playing [shot 17]. He stops momentarily to reflect on what he will do [shot 18]. He gets up and walks, package on hand. The camera tracks in behind him as the air-stewardess asks him to return to his seat [shot 19].

Besides their significance for the purposes of the narrative construction, which I shall address later, the above two scenes represent an elegantly-structured confidence game between Susan and Joe, a game in which “everybody knows their part apart from the

mark.”³¹ Since there are only two people in this exchange, Joe and Susan, the question is: who occupies the position of the con artist and who of the mark? Significantly, it is always the mark who believes they are in control of any exchange or transaction between themselves and a second party, a belief that clearly stems from their lack of awareness, even complete misconception about their role in the exchange. As I argued earlier, by placing the spectator, through the means of an extremely restricted narration, on the side of the character who will eventually occupy the position of the mark, the con-game film places the spectator in the position of the mark as well.

In the above two scenes, then, Joe (like the spectator) construes his verbal exchanges with Susan as casual conversation initiated by the female character, who, in previous scenes, was presented as romantically attracted to him. Certain about the ‘real’ nature of Susan’s banter, Joe, who, in previous scenes, made clear to George that he would not reciprocate, tries to ensure that the conversation remains casual through quick, agreeable responses to Susan’s persistent questions. Even his one compliment to Susan – “you look just fine” – is uttered when he is off-screen and in an as matter-of-fact a manner as possible. However, some of Joe’s actions – such as upgrading her ticket, helping her with her luggage, offering her a compliment and generally being courteous and agreeable with her within what seems to be a strictly hierarchical company context – suggest that he enjoys Susan’s attention despite his lack of feelings for her.³² One could argue, then, that Joe is ‘playing’ with Susan. Joe, having perceived himself as the more powerful of the two, the one who is in control of the narrative situation, cultivates in Susan’s mind the possibility of romance or, to be more precise, does not entirely deny (at least in front of Susan) this possibility. This

game, however, bears remarkable similarities with a confidence game, even when its objective does not revolve around the handing over of material wealth. On the basis of false pretences (the possibility of romance), Joe, who does not have a social life outside work, ensures that he is and will be Susan's object of attention and desire. This clearly makes Joe a con-artist and Susan, who does not know that Joe does not intend to reciprocate, the victim of the con.

It later becomes apparent, however, that Joe (and the spectator) could not have been more wrong about the 'real' nature of Susan's approach to him. It is Joe who is completely unaware of his part in the verbal exchange with Susan. Rather than being the 'harmless' con artist swindling his way to Susan's attention, Joe turns out to be the mark of an extremely elaborate con designed to make him hand in his extremely valuable invention, a con perpetrated by a number of people, including Susan, and with each person playing a particular part in every exchange with him. Susan's attention to Joe, therefore, which he thinks he has consciously encouraged, is in actual fact one of the tasks that Susan's role in the con entails. In the two scenes I am discussing, Susan's task is to raise Joe's suspicions about whether Jimmy Dell is someone Joe could trust. By relentlessly repeating that nobody ever knows who anyone is, Susan finally manages to direct the naïve Joe to her objective, that is, to make him check that the package Jimmy gave him to deliver does not contain anything illegal. In the following scene [scene 16] Joe discovers that the package contains a tennis book and a note from Jimmy Dell informing his sister that he recommends Joe as "a good fellow." Joe is now certain that he can trust Dell, whose own part in the con is to advise Joe under his capacity as a successful businessman on how to handle the company's lack of trust on him.

Joe's misconception about Susan's objective is founded on his belief that he is in control of the exchange between them, a belief that, as I argued earlier, is characteristic of a person not knowing his/her part or position in any situation. The spectator, however, despite being sided from the very beginning of the narrative with Joe, is in a position to anticipate the protagonist's misconception and thus disengage from his (limited) perspective that the filmic narration privileges. It is at this point that the spectator's knowledge of the genre (through previous interaction with other texts), and his or her top-down approach to the narrative, can come in handy. The avid con-artist/con-game genre viewer should respond much more quickly and sceptically than the 'average Joe' to the numerous repetitions of axiomatic (for the genre) truths that Susan utters. In particular, the phrase "that's what you just think you saw" [Scene 15, shot 10] – originally used in House of Games in a scene where the con-artists demonstrate to Margaret how a number of con-tricks work – should lead the viewer to adopt a much more cautious stance against Susan, something that Joe never does.

Additionally, and for viewers exposed to Mamet's previous work, one of the other lines Susan utters – "You never know who anybody is. With the exception of me. I am what I look like." [Scene 15, Shot 2] – is also a matter for questioning. This is especially so if one accepts Mamet's view that "people who describe themselves to you are lying" (Mamet, 1992a, p 71). Susan, besides the above line when she describes herself as being what she looks like, later [Scene 26, shot 9] resorts to a much more elaborate description of herself:

Look: Hey, look: Here's the thing. You...um...I know that you're in line for, for, for Higher things. You got it written all over you. But, but...but ...but you never get anything in life if you don't speak out for it. (Pause) so I wanted to say: I, I'm a hell of a person. I'm Loyal and True, and am not too hard to look at. (Mamet 1999, p 38; original capital fonts and repetition of words)

Jimmy Dell is the other character in The Spanish Prisoner who resorts to descriptions of himself during the narrative, besides Susan. In the scene at the private club where Dell takes Joe for dinner, the spectator hears Dell justifying his gesture of making Joe a member of the club by saying: "I'm a solver and I have a heart of gold" [scene 28, shot 13]. A few scenes later, at the tennis club, Jimmy detects Joe's hesitation in passing 'sensitive' information to Jimmy about the nature of his invention and tries to reassure him by saying "I am not a lawyer, I'm just a guy" [Scene 31, shot 5] All the above character descriptions, which are taken at face value by Joe, can be construed as clues planted by the narration for the benefit of the knowledgeable spectator, who is in a position to adopt a much more critical stance to the narrative information they are presented with.

Having outlined the manner in which con-games are played on the level of the scene, I will now move to to discuss narrative structure, narration and the role of the spectator.

The Oldest Con in the Book

The narrative begins with a business trip that a few employees of a company, including Joe Ross, the film's protagonist, take to the island of St Estephe in the

Caribbean. After a fade in, the first shot reveals a sign in an airport that reads: “Did you pack your own bag? Are you carrying gifts or packages for someone you don’t know? Has your bag been out of sight since you packed it?” [Scene 1, shot 1] Almost immediately after registering the information on the sign, the camera tilts down and tracks in towards a security X-ray monitor which shows a number of bags passing through it. After lingering for a few seconds on the monitor, the camera continues its tracking movement to reveal two men, Joe and George, walking to screen left.

Even from the first shot, the spectator is given a number of clues about the nature of the narrative. The camera’s emphasis on the airport sign and the X-ray screen foreshadows future narrative events (Joe’s realisation that he is carrying a package for someone he does not know, his placing of a gun through an X-ray screen etc).

However, and more significantly, it informs the spectator about crucial questions they need to keep in mind for the purposes of narrative comprehension. It also introduces the key idea of the film, namely, that people one thinks one knows might not be what they appear to be. Essentially, then, the opening shot functions as a *mise en abîme* for the whole film as it “designates the economy of mean(ings) with which a [Hollywood] opening prepares the stage and often presents the whole film in a nutshell” (Elsaesser and Buckland, 2002, p 48).

Having introduced the main premise of the film in the very first shot, the rest of the early scenes of the film (the scenes that take place in St Estephe) introduce the main characters and their state of affairs. Two very significant events take place during the unfolding of this part of the narrative. Firstly, Mr Klein, Joe’s boss, evades in acknowledging Joe’s role in the invention of the process [Scene 2, shot 4] and equally

evades settling the matter of his bonus for his work [Scene 3, shot 1]. Secondly, Joe meets a mysterious millionaire, who comes to the island with his mistress, and ends up spending the evening and the early hours of the following day in his company. The first event signifies the end of the equilibrium in the narrative. After Klein's refusal to reassure Joe about his bonus, a refusal which Joe construes as part of the company's strategy to avoid paying him for his work (but which in actual fact is the first kick off in the con-game), Joe starts feeling uneasy about his future and all his further actions are permeated by that. On the other hand, his meeting and subsequent relationship with Jimmy Dell establishes Joe's only contact besides his work colleagues, which, of course, becomes instrumental later in the narrative when Joe finds proof that his company is, indeed, trying to find ways around paying him for his work and he therefore cannot trust his colleagues.

However, the real nature of the above events (precisely calculated moves in a con-game designed to make Joe hand the process over to a crew of con-artists) is not revealed to the spectator until very late in the narrative. At this early stage, the spectator has no reason either to suspect Klein's postponement of settling Joe's bonus as an attempt to avoid paying him or to doubt Jimmy Dell's status as a well-off man on a romantic trip with his mistress. In fact, the film's narration uses the first encounter between Dell and Joe as a proof of Dell's status. Assuming that a photograph Joe took of Susan features him and his mistress, Dell approaches Joe and offers him \$1000 for his camera. Dell's behaviour, which codes him as a rude man who thinks that money can buy everything, helps establish him as a wealthy man who is very sensitive about his private affairs.

The spectator is nonetheless not kept entirely in the dark, despite the lack of any hard evidence about the unfolding of a con-game, at this stage of the narrative. Having entered the viewing process with a fairly stable set of expectations about the film, (anticipation of various directions that the narrative can take, an unusual number of twists, labyrinthine plots structured around people who steal, cheat and lie for a living and so on) the spectator is constantly trying to guess what they are not told and showed by the narration. For this reason, despite not having a concrete reason to suspect that Klein or Dell might have different agendas in their mind, the spectator can and certainly does 'expect the unexpected.' This is all the more so if he or she picks up a couple of very subtle clues that the narration has planted for their benefit. These clues take the format of 'signals' that specific characters seem to be sending to other characters off-screen.

The first of these clues takes place in the scene on the beach when Joe and Susan (and the spectator) hear the very loud noise of a plane flying very close to the beach [Scene 6, shot 3, fig 5]. Prior to this point, Susan and Joe were having a casual conversation about whether it would be appropriate for Susan to call Joe by his first name. Suddenly they both stop walking and talking for a moment as the overwhelming, off screen, noise of a plane's engines draws their attention to it. As soon as the noise fades away and we get a shot of the plane on course to land [shot 4, fig 6], Susan starts asking questions about Joe's earlier meeting with the investors [shot 5], insisting that she understands that it is something very big, a view that Joe does not do anything to dismiss [shot 7]. The loud noise of the plane, I argue, is a signal for Susan to inform her that the part of the con when Dell appears in the picture is about to take place and to start her questions about Joe's meeting. In this second

conversation Susan's objective is to come across as interested in Joe and also as fishing for some information as she is in the lowest position in the company hierarchy and wants to know more (something which will be picked up later when Joe says that everybody needs to feel important). Additionally, she is to take a picture of Joe at the time when Dell appears in the background.



Figure 5

Scene 6, Shot 3



Figure 6

Scene 6, Shot 4

The second clue is provided in the scene where Dell apologises for offering money to Joe during their first meeting and involves Dell's casual dropping of a tennis ball to the court [Scene 8, shot 11]. After expressing his apologies [shots 3-8], Dell invites

Joe for a drink [shot 9]. With a slight delay, Joe, who until that point had been spending the evening on his own, accepts the invitation and gets up from his seat [shot 10]. As the two men walk away from the camera, Dell casually throws behind him a tennis ball he had been holding throughout the duration of the scene. The camera lingers for a few seconds on the ball before a dissolve moves the narrative a few hours later [shot 11 and 11a, figs 7 and 8]. Like the sound of the plane engines, the dropping of the tennis ball is a signal that informs the rest of the gang that everything goes according to plan.



Figure 7

Scene 8, Shot 11



Figure 8

Scene 8, Shot 11a

Although the above clues are so subtle that they can be easily missed even by the most alert of spectators, other pieces of information that the narration provides prove to be 'red herrings.' One particularly prominent piece of information that the narration presents several times throughout the narrative, the involvement of 'the Japanese' in the plot to steal the process, later proves to be the ultimate con that the film narration played to the spectator. From the beginning of the film, 'the Japanese' are established as 'a group of people' that have a particular interest in the process. In short, they are established as characters the spectator should watch closely in the unfolding of the narrative, expecting that at some point they will try to get their hands on the process. This piece of information is provided for the first time in the second scene of the film when Joe singles out 'the Japanese' as the people most likely to have an interest in stealing the process and thus personalises the neutral term 'competition' that all other participants in the meeting use [Scene 2, shot 13].

Following that scene, there are a number of shots where Japanese tourists are present, with their presence noted almost each time by the main characters: in St Estephe [Scene 6, shot 8]; in New York outside the car dealership [Scene 24, shots 2 and 3]; at the tennis club [Scene 30, shot 4]; at the Boston airport [Scene 71, shots 2, 4 and 7]; in the shuttle bus [Scene 72, numerous shots] and on the boat to Boston [Scene 79, shots 6,8,10, 12 and 13]. Despite their presence in the above shots, no Japanese character attempts to steal the process until the penultimate scene of the film, when the narrative momentarily seems to be taking such a direction [Scene 79]. However, the following and last scene of the film reveals that 'the Japanese' were not 'the competition,' but rather, people working for the US Marshals Service.

This final twist was one of the few totally unexpected directions of the narrative trajectory, with no clues whatsoever offered by the film's narration about the presence of the law.³³ In fact, the final narrative surprise depends entirely on the absence of any such clues, especially in the penultimate scene when the 'Japanese' man withholds his identity from Joe. The withholding of this piece of information encourages the protagonist and the spectator to assume (wrongly) that the competition has, at long last (seventy seven scenes have passed between the first mention of 'the Japanese' and their eventual presence in the narrative) revealed themselves. This is until the following scene where protagonist and spectator alike once again discover that "you don't know who anyone is." In a very short span of time, therefore, the identity of one person changes from a Japanese tourist to a Japanese con-artist to a US Marshal.

The scenes on the island and on the plane back to New York, which constitute the set up of the film, are indicative of the function of the narration in the con-game film. Completely restricted to the protagonist's perspective and very uncommunicative, the narration withholds all concrete pieces of information that would lead the spectator to suspect that a con is underway. Occasionally, it becomes somewhat more communicative by offering a few subtle clues to the spectator, challenging them to predict the direction the narrative will take but, also, often sending them to the wrong direction through the disclosure of information that eventually proves wrong (the Japanese interest). As a result, the spectator has the very difficult task of distinguishing between the real clues and the diversions, the times when the narration is reliable and the times when it lies, which of course mirrors the protagonist's task within the diegesis.

Apart from the final scene of the film, which was not preceded by any clues pointing to that direction, the difficulty of the spectator's task becomes even more evident in the scene where Joe signs his name on the membership form he is handed at the private club [Scene 28, shot 14, fig 9]. The shot consists of a close up of the membership form as Joe writes his signature, and lasts two seconds. Despite a club employee holding the form from the top edge, the alert spectator can discern the letters CLU BER IP DECREE before the employee's hand covers the rest of the letters. At this point, the spectator assumes that if they had seen the title of the form it would read CLUB MEMBERSHIP DECREE. The spectator who missed the above information would also believe that what Joe signed was a membership form for entry to the club. However, when the police later present the same form to Joe [Scene 50, shot 43, fig 10] and accuse him of planning to run away to Venezuela, a country with no extradition treaty with the United States, the title of the form reads CONSULADO DE VENEZUELA. This constitutes a shocking and totally unexpected development for the second type of spectator, the one who did not notice the letters on the form in the club scene. This spectator will at this point realise that they placed too much trust on the film's narration as well as on their 'indexical' understanding of what type of form Joe signed.

For the spectator who noticed the letters on the form in the club scene, however, this is a more shocking (though implausible) development since it questions the spectator's senses and, in particular, their sight. But having no other alternative (unless they decide to view the film again), the alert spectator is led to believe that the title CLUB MEMBERSHIP DECREE was 'what they thought they saw' and

consequently accepts the narration's confidence game as reality. As Roger Ebert put it: "The Spanish Prisoner is delightful in the way a great card manipulator is delightful. It rolls its sleeves above its elbows to show it has no hidden cards, and then produces them out of thin air." (Ebert, 1997, internet)



Figure 9

Scene 28, Shot 14



Figure 10

Scene 50, Shot 43

The rest of the narrative is arranged according to similar narrational techniques, so it is not surprising that The Spanish Prisoner (as well as the other con-game films) requires more than one viewing to ensure complete narrative comprehension, or to be more precise, to determine the film's narrative logic.³⁴ The last minute revelation that

Joe's narrative agency had been completely undermined by an invisible gang of con-artists from the very beginning of the film, to the extent that all his (seemingly) psychologically motivated actions were in actual fact reactions to a game set up by others, demands at least one more viewing of the film. This is in order to determine narrative agency (to become aware of the parts every character plays in the con), and to look for further clues. The above problem of narrative agency in the con-game film in general, and The Spanish Prisoner in particular, raises the question of the extent to which con-game film narratives can be seen as classical narratives. This is particularly so given the absence of psychological motivation in the main agents' actions, and reiterates the point I have made throughout this thesis about Mamet's uneasy relationship with contemporary (classical) Hollywood cinema.

One final issue that has remained untackled in my previous discussion of The Spanish Prisoner is the film's relationship to other genres, and to the genre of tragedy in particular. Although for the most part the film follows the format of tragedy in Joe's attempt to "uncover something hidden at great expense," this quest remains superficial (on the level of genre) and, consequently, does not materialise on a deeper (psychic) level. This means that, although Joe undergoes recognition of the situation (he understands that he was the mark in a con), he does not experience a reversal of the situation (he does not achieve "the capacity for self knowledge" [Mamet in Schvey, 2001, p 66] in the same way that Margaret did in House of Games). What is interesting, however, is that the narrative entertains the idea of Joe's (latent) responsibility for the outcome of the events. His persistent questions to Klein about the size of his bonus [Scene 3 and 20], his outburst against Klein and his lawyers when he was asked to "revalidate his agreement" [Scene 33], his immediate turn to

Dell for advice [Scene 34], these all could suggest that Joe ‘brought it to himself.’

This idea reaches its peak when he meets Klein in the police headquarters and listens to him explaining that he and his family will not survive without the money from the process [Scene 52]. It is at that point that Joe feels responsible for ‘his’ actions and two shots of him attempting but failing to say something to Klein, convey this point extremely clearly [shots 10 and 12].

Mamet’s film, however, does not explore this direction further. When Joe reaches his (first) moment of recognition and utters “they played me for a fool; they played me for such a fool” [Scene 66, shot 4], the narrative continues by focusing solely on his objective to break even with the con-artists, and not on any internal quest to understand who he is. Even when Joe reaches his second (and more significant) moment of realisation – when he understands that Susan is also a member of the con gang and that everybody around him, with the exception of George Lang, were in the con – his questions are again superficial: “Why would somebody go into a life of crime? To steal what others worked for; to kill; Why?” [Scene 77, shots 4, 6, 8 and 10]. Rather than having Joe attempting to answer some crucial questions about himself, especially his inability to enjoy himself – which seems to be the reason why he was such an easy target – the narrative resolution remains on the generic level, as Susan provides him with the obvious answer “for the money” [Scene 77, shot 11].³⁵ In the final shot of the film, therefore, when all the con-artists have been captured and a vertical crane shot leaves Joe on his own walking away from the scene, Joe does not know anything new and returns to the same state he was at the beginning of the film. He is still a man with no friends (as his only friend is dead now), no social life and unable to enjoy himself.

The film's departure from the format of tragedy can be seen as partly responsible for its overwhelming reception by critics as a thriller, while the presence of a clear 'McGuffin' (the 'process' everyone tries to steal) has led many critics to add the adjective "Hitchcockian" before the above generic category.³⁶ Even Mamet himself was quick to attach this label to his film when he described it in an interview with Robert Denerstein (1991, p 227):

DENERSTEIN: The Spanish Prisoner... may remind you of the kind of thriller Hollywood turned out during the 1930s and 1940s. The resemblance is not accidental.

MAMET: To me Spanish Prisoner falls into the tradition of the light romantic thriller. The form of the light thriller, as far as I can tell, was created by Hitchcock. The form is quite straightforward. There's the guy on the run. There's the girl who helps him. There are powerful people whose friends turn out to be the bad guys. There's the denouement in an extraordinarily improbable place. There's the deus ex machina, in which help comes from a place where there's no possible help, and everything made right in the last twenty seconds.

The above, rather broad, account of The Spanish Prisoner's generic status as a (light romantic) thriller, does not do the film justice. Firstly, some of the above formal characteristics exist only in a piecemeal fashion and are expressed very late in the film. For instance Joe goes on the run more than two thirds into the narrative [Scene 57] after he discovers that he has been framed for George Lang's murder and Susan's

help does not materialise until a few scenes later [Scene 62], approximately twenty-five minutes from the film's end. The delay in the manifestation of those formal characteristics clearly problematises the film's status as "the innocent on-the-run thriller," a sub-category of the suspense thriller that C. Derry has identified (Derry in Neale, 2000, p 83), and which Mamet seems to allude to. Additionally, and if one saw beyond the above problem, Derry's definition of "the innocent on-the-run thriller," as a film that is "organised around an innocent victim's coincidental entry into the midst of global intrigue" (Derry in Neale, 2000, p 83) is totally inapplicable to a film where coincidences are only a matter of appearance and the innocent victim's entry into a not so global world of corruption is not coincidental but the product of a well-designed plan.³⁷ Secondly, and even more problematically, the above account is so broad that it can be easily applied to films belonging to other genres. For example, what stops a western or a science fiction film from demonstrating those exact same characteristics that Mamet invests the thriller with? A film such as The Matrix (1999) can also be seen to revolve around a man on the run (Thomas A. Anderson/Neo). This film also involves a girl who helps him (Trinity), powerful people whose friends turn out to be bad guys (the agents), a denouement that occurs in an improbable (literally and metaphorically speaking) place (at the ship when Neo dies), a *deus ex machina* who offers help when there is literally no hope (Trinity and her confession of love for the hero) and a happy ending at the very last seconds of the film (Neo exterminates the agents and starts destroying the Matrix). This suggests that there are other, 'more specific generic elements' that must be examined by the critic, elements which point towards the existence of an alternative generic framework within which Mamet's film can be located. This framework is that of the con-game film.

Conclusion: David Mamet's Cons

Well, I was, as I say, I got interested in...the underworld, and the people who lived, in one way or another, lawless lives, because they seemed to me interesting, and also they gave me a nice milieu to set a batch of dramas in. They seemed to be fairly upfront about the fact that they were living a, lives based on deception. (Mamet, quoted in Bragg, 2001, p 153)

Between his two con-game films, House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner, Mamet the filmmaker experimented with a number of genres, often mixing two or more different generic frameworks such as the gangster film, the buddy movie and comedy (Things Change) and the detective film with the conspiracy theory film (Homicide), while Oleanna was an experiment in adaptation of a tragedy for the screen. This practice continued after The Spanish Prisoner, with another adaptation, this time of a period costume drama (The Winslow Boy), an ensemble screwball comedy (State and Main) and a heist film (Heist).

On the other hand, Mamet the screenwriter for hire has mainly worked within the confines of more established genres with less mixing of generic frameworks and minimal experimentation with generic conventions. Prior to House of Games, therefore, Mamet made a name for himself with screenplays firmly located within the (neo) noir (The Postman Always Rings Twice), the court-room drama (The Verdict) and the gangster film (The Untouchables). After his filmmaking debut, he continued with screenplays located within the historical bio-pic film (Hoffa), the con-artist comedy (American Buffalo), the nature-adventure film (The Edge), the political satire (Wag the Dog) and the horror film (Hannibal). An exception here is We're No

Angels, a remake of a 1955 film with the same title, which combined elements from the crime, prison and chase film along with comedy.

However, despite his prolific work within established genres, one could argue that all Mamet films, at least on one level, are about confidence games or use conventions of the con-artist/con-game film. Besides House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner, therefore, where the narrative is structured around the execution of an elaborate con-game arranged by con-artists, Things Change, Homicide, Oleanna, The Winslow Boy, State and Main and Heist all feature scenes where con games are played between characters. Even though these characters are not con-artists by profession, they nevertheless frequently resort to exercises in wit and persuasion to achieve particular objectives. In Things Change, Jerry (Joe Mantegna) presents Gino (Don Ameche), a Sicilian shoe shiner, as a mob boss from the East in order to spend a luxurious weekend in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. In Homicide, the leaders of a Jewish activist organisation earn detective Robert Gold's (Joe Mantegna) support for their cause by awakening his Jewish identity, only to blackmail him later when Gold refuses to provide them with a piece of evidence they requested from the Chicago Police. In Oleanna, a film which can be read as a relentless series of confidence games between John (W.H. Macy), a university tutor, and his student Carol (Debra Eisenstadt), John resorts to a number of confidence tricks to convince her to drop the allegations of sexual harassment she brought against him. In The Winslow Boy, Arthur Winslow (Nigel Hawthorne) accepts young Ronnie's (Guy Edwards) word that he did not steal a postal order while studying at a military school, and consequently goes to extreme lengths to clear the family name from the allegations only to be left in doubt as to whether young Ronnie did indeed commit the crime in

order to leave the military school. In State and Main, Ann (Rebecca Pidgeon), bookshop owner and main organiser of cultural events in a small town in Vermont, which has been invaded by a film crew shooting a film, stages a fake trial for Joe (Philip Seymour Hoffman), the film's screenwriter, in order to convince him to do the 'right thing.' Finally, in Heist, a film that deals with the planning and execution of a robbery at a large airport, each single character resorts to confidence games in order to keep the loot for themselves.

A similar pattern can be detected in all the films Mamet has scripted and not directed. In The Postman Always Rings Twice, Frank Chambers (Jack Nicholson) cons his way into the Papadakis family and finds himself killing Nick Papadakis (John Colicos) so that he and Cora Papadakis (Jessica Lange) can start a new life together. In The Verdict, Frank Galvin (Paul Newman) attends funerals in order to attract potential customers, while Laura Fischer (Charlotte Rampling) earns Galvin's trust in order to feed information about his defence strategies in a major court case to the prosecution. In About Last Night... Bernie (Jim Belushi) and Joan (Elizabeth Perkins) casually convince Danny (Rob Lowe) and Debbie (Demi Moore), respectively, to break their relationship so that they get back together with their respective friends. In The Untouchables Malone (Sean Connery) resorts to a quick trick (he shoots an already dead man) to convince Capone's accountant to betray his boss. In We're No Angels Ned (Robert De Niro) and Jim (Sean Penn), escaped convicts from prison, enter a nearby monastery and pretend to be monks to evade the major search that has been organised to capture them. In Hoffa, confidence games take the form of attempts on behalf of Jimmy Hoffa (Jack Nicholson) to secure political power for the teamsters. In American Buffalo Donny (Dennis Franz)

believes that he was conned by a coin collector when he charged him what he thought was a much smaller amount than the real value of the coin and decides to avenge him by stealing his collection. On the other hand, Teach, a petty criminal and friend of Donny's, tries to con his way into the robbery. In The Edge, Charles Morse (Anthony Hopkins) plays games with Robert Green (Alec Baldwin) to make him confess that he has had an affair with his wife. In Wag the Dog Conrad Brean (Robert De Niro), a White House spin-doctor along with Stanley Motss (Dustin Hoffman), a famous Hollywood producer, design a fake war with Albania to divert the public's attention from a sex scandal that involves the US president. Finally, Hannibal (2001) can also be seen as a film structured around confidence games, as Dr Hannibal Lector uses his charm and wit in order to achieve a number of objectives such as to pass as a university professor in Italy where he is hiding from the FBI or to fool unsuspecting victims in order to satisfy his appetite for human flesh.

One could add to this long list of films a number of Mamet's plays such as The Shawl (1985), The Cryptogram (1997), Boston Marriage (2001) and, especially, Speed-the-Plow (1988). In the latter, a young temp secretary cons her way inside a film producer's psyche in order to convince him to greenlight a 'serious' film 'that matters' as opposed to the 'trashy entertainment' films with which he has been associated. One could then conclude that Mamet's entire work in the last 30 years has been occupied, at least on one level, with the planning, execution and impact of confidence games in all his plays, scripts and films. Although the opening quote for this section of the chapter suggests that Mamet has always been interested in the underworld and the (petty) criminals' 'lives of deception,' the bulk of his work has explored deception away from the underworld and the criminals, and in everyday

environments such as a real-estate office (Glengarry Glen Ross), a junk shop (American Buffalo), a university office (Oleanna), a monastery (We're No Angels) and a middle class house in Edwardian England (The Winslow Boy). Equally, the perpetrators of cons are everyday people who try to achieve their targets: a university Professor who seeks tenure and a student's accusations of sexual harassment stand in the way (Oleanna), estate agents who try to avoid losing their jobs (Glengarry Glen Ross), union leaders who want power (Hoffa), secretaries who desire to do something meaningful (Speed-the-Plow), alcoholic lawyers who want to attract new customers and women in need of extra money (The Verdict).

The above list of dramatic and narrative events in Mamet's films, screenplays and plays seems to trivialise the con. In its original definition the con is a witty but fraudulent act designed to convince a person to hand something valuable to another person. It is, nevertheless, clear that any object or objective can be invested with value by anyone and therefore be sought out through the indirect means of a con. The extremely diverse environments in which cons take place and the wide variety of people and professions that engage in con-games seem to prove Mamet's view that "the only reason people speak is to get what they want. In film, or on the street, people who describe themselves to you are lying" (1992a, p 71). The important factor is whether people 'speak to get what they want' as a profession, which makes them con-artists and therefore criminals, or if they do it under the cover of a different profession, capacity or position which makes the rest of the world con-artists by proxy, but, interestingly, not criminals. When characters in Mamet films speak to get what they want as a profession, they do it within the genre of the con-game film.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this thesis I used the word 'anomaly' to describe Mamet's status in American cinema. I used this specific word because Mamet is the only major literary figure in the United States to establish a consistent filmmaking career in American cinema, while continuing an equally prolific career in other arts and media. One of the results of this highly unusual phenomenon, I argued, was that the films he scripted and directed were largely overlooked by film criticism. This was mainly because of a lack of a critical context within which the work of a 'playwright-turned-filmmaker' could be examined.

Having striven persistently to free the study of film from the study of the literary arts, film criticism found it difficult to deal with the 'stagey' and 'theatrical' feel that the films of a 'playwright' conveyed. Film criticism also found it difficult to cope with the 'portentous dialogue,' normally expected from a literary figure but not from a successful American screenwriter of popular films. Not surprisingly, then, Mamet's cinema has been dismissed as one more vehicle through which a particularly prolific writer could express his considerable talent for storytelling. In other words, Mamet has been seen as an outsider who essentially usurped the medium of cinema to make films that (according to film critics) were largely 'un-cinematic.' This view seemed to be justified given Mamet's strict adherence to a philosophy and practice that originated in the theatre and which was founded on a virtually sacrosanct emphasis that he placed on the role of the script as the sole determinant in the production process.

This thesis set out to examine Mamet's cinema without taking the above 'anomaly' into consideration. Regardless of whether he is better known as a playwright or a screenwriter, the starting point of this thesis was that David Mamet *is* a filmmaker. This filmmaker has produced a significant body of work since 1987, the formal characteristics of which have remained unexplored. For this reason, this project undertook the task of examining Mamet's cinema by placing it within a number of critical contexts that Film Studies routinely use to discuss films (classical cinema, auteur and genre criticism, performance and film adaptation studies). At the same time it also explored aspects of Mamet's filmmaking practice with particular reference to the ways this practice has been influenced by his work in the theatre.

In the process, however, this thesis also voiced numerous objections against certain models of film criticism within the above critical contexts. On certain occasions, these objections were followed by the introduction of alternative critical perspectives which, as I have demonstrated, helped discuss a variety of films in a more constructive manner. For instance, I argued for the benefits of an approach that treats adaptations of plays for the screen as the transformation of the dramatic text to a narrative one, in which case the function of the filmic narration becomes the main focal point. I also argued that a previously unexplored film genre, the con-artist film, is a considerably more useful context to discuss an expanding group of films that deal with confidence games than the contexts of film noir, the crime film or the suspense thriller that critics normally utilise.

Despite the considerable extent of the above work, however, the main emphasis of

this thesis was on Mamet's filmmaking practice, the ways this practice shaped the formal organisation of the films he made as a writer/director and the aesthetic effects the formal organisation of his films conveyed. To this end, the thesis examined in detail the philosophy that underlies Mamet's distinct approach to filmmaking (which was seen by the critical establishment as responsible for the 'un-cinematic' films he produced) before it proceeded to a comprehensive formal analysis of the actual films. It is appropriate, then, that this conclusion summarised the arguments this thesis advanced regarding those specific focal points.

Chapter One framed the discussion of Mamet's practice within the context of classical/post-classical Hollywood cinema and argued that Mamet's 'unified aesthetics of cinema' does not follow the dominant model of filmmaking in contemporary Hollywood. Through a detailed examination of the production background of his first film, House of Games, the chapter demonstrated major differences between Mamet's approach to filmmaking and the mode of film production in American cinema. These differences were exemplified primarily by the rather 'relaxed' division of labour during the production of House of Games which is in direct contrast to the strict hierarchy that characterises Hollywood's dominant mode of production. Coupled with an independent distributor's policy to grant an unusual degree of creative control to a first-time filmmaker, the above 'alternative' division of labour allowed Mamet to transport a distinct aesthetic view he developed in theatre to American cinema. The result was a film that, at first sight, looked 'stagey,' contrived and evoked a strong sense of artificiality both in terms of narrative structure and, especially, in terms of visual style, which often attracted attention to technique. However, as the chapter argued, this type of film style has been used to

support a story that essentially deals with the themes of illusion and artificiality as it revolves around an elaborate confidence game that a gang of tricksters pull on the film's protagonist. This means that the film's style originates in the story and therefore becomes an organic aspect of the story's materialisation on the screen. In other words, House of Games was a direct product of the 'unified aesthetics of cinema.'

Chapter Two continued the discussion of Mamet's approach to filmmaking and focused on the ways it shaped the aesthetics of Things Change. This time questions of style were framed within the context of auteur criticism. Specifically, the chapter argued that Mamet's idiosyncratic use of film style has been suppressed by the distributors' marketing departments. Instead, distribution companies have highlighted a number of recurrent themes in Mamet's films (evident in the film trailers and posters that accompany the release of his films) and, consequently, have defined Mamet's authorship without any reference to the distinct aesthetics of his films. Despite the uncontested presence of specific themes (deceptive appearances, loyalty versus betrayal, right versus wrong and so on), the chapter argued that Mamet's authorship can be equally defined by his use of film style. Through a close formal analysis of the first twenty minutes of Things Change, the chapter suggested that Mamet's use of style is determined once again by the needs of his story, which, in this case, does not provide clear psychological motivation for the characters' actions. This means that film style refuses to assign motivation when no clear motivation exists (in fact, on one occasion, it highlights the problem of motivation by encouraging the spectator to choose from a number of alternative causes). As a result, the film's narrative comes across as problematic and ultimately unconvincing.

This is the case, however, only if the critic fails to detect the film's debt to the formal organisation of fables, which are not necessarily structured in a cause-effect logic. In this light, Mamet's use of style in Things Change is once again revealed as an organic part of a story with a specific logic. This suggests that Mamet's use of style is consistent from film to film. This consistency, however, does not materialise in terms of recurrent stylistic choices in his films as auteur critics expect. Rather, it exists on a different level, in terms of a use of style that is consistent with the needs of the stories he has written. Style then is a very strong signifier of Mamet's authorship despite the critics' failure to see it as such.

If the basic principle behind the 'unified aesthetics of cinema' that Mamet practices is that all that appears on the screen must be motivated by the needs of the story, then acting is no exception. Chapter Three demonstrated how Mamet's approach to filmmaking extended to cover questions of performance, while at the same time investigated why he has placed such a great emphasis on the role of the script. As the chapter argued, screenplays can assume the role of a 'hidden director' which means that they can suggest visual style as well as guide the actors' performance through the wealth of information contained in the screenplay's various modes of presentation. The screenplay's potential to determine style and performance has found an almost natural place in Mamet's approach to cinema. Specifically, the chapter argued, the filmmaker makes all his stylistic choices on the basis of the characters' objective(s) as these are determined after the process of 'blocking the script' as well as on the basis of certain style indicators that exist in the written text. More importantly, Mamet's actors create their performance on the exact same foundations. After establishing their

characters' objectives throughout the scenes of the screenplay, the actors are invited to determine the appropriate physical actions they need to perform in order to convey those objectives on the screen.

This approach to performance, which is designed to discourage the expression of emotion in the creation of a character, has been severely criticised by Mamet's critics. The distinct lack of emotion, which is particularly evident in the way the actors utter their lines (and, consequently, in the way the film's characters speak to each other), shatters completely the illusion of the character that viewers of American films have come to expect. This means that Mamet's approach to acting goes against an extremely long tradition of acting in American cinema which has been founded on conventions of realism and which has changed only when those conventions changed. More importantly, this also demonstrates the extent to which the actors' performance is determined by the same principles that Mamet follows in his use of style, which, as this thesis argued, are markedly different from dominant practices in American cinema.

Chapter Four extended the examination of Mamet's aesthetic practice, this time within the context of the adaptation of his controversial play, Oleanna, for the screen. The chapter approached adaptation as the transformation of the dramatic text into a narrative one and focused on the processes by which the screenplay transformed the dramatic text before examining how the screenplay materialised on the screen. The comparison between play and screenplay demonstrated that Mamet had not changed virtually anything from the dialogue of his original play. As a result, the first stage of the play's adaptation (from play to screenplay) essentially consisted of 'dressing up'

the existing dialogue with scene text (description and technical comment), while also adding a small number of scenes without any dialogue for the space originally occupied by act breaks. Mamet's screenplay, then, demonstrated a remarkable 'faithfulness' to the play, while at the same time it provided a solid foundation for the filmic rendition of the story.

Before discussing the second stage of the play's adaptation (from screenplay to screen), the chapter considered also a number of institutional factors that contributed to the specific route the adaptation of Oleanna took. In particular, it argued that the film's independent distributor who financed the project was considerably more receptive (than a major would ever be) to Mamet's refusal to 'open up' his play and essentially make a film with only two characters. Although this decision compromised substantially the box office potential of his film, it once again demonstrates the emphasis Mamet places on the written text, which, in this case, remained unaltered throughout the stages of the adaptation process. Finally, the chapter proceeded to a detailed analysis of the film's formal organisation with an emphasis on the manner in which the film's narration transformed the dramatic interaction between the two characters into narrative information. In particular, the analysis established that the narration's control over the distribution of narrative information allowed the unfolding of the story in a more 'cinematic' manner. This was mainly characterised by the fragmentation of time and space, the reversal of the protagonist/antagonist roles midway, the emphasis on characters' specific actions and the withholding of crucial information until critical points in the narrative. Consequently, the film Oleanna provided viewers with a markedly different aesthetic experience compared to the experience a theatrical production of the play offers.

The final chapter of this thesis examined Mamet's cinema within the context of genre criticism and argued that a number of his films can be more constructively examined within the generic categories of the con-artist film and the con-game film than the categories of film noir and the crime thriller. Specifically, the chapter challenged critical accounts that have placed films like House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner within the context of genres such as the crime film, the thriller and the film (neo) noir. Instead, it argued that the increasingly large corpus of films that deal with confidence games has its own, distinct generic identity.

This chapter then introduced the main characteristics of the con-artist film genre and paid particular attention to a distinct trend within this genre, the con-game film. It was within the generic framework of the con-game film that the above two Mamet films were discussed. In particular, the chapter focused on the formal organisation of The Spanish Prisoner with an emphasis on the role of narration and the ways in which it played with the spectator's expectations, as these are formed on the basis of the specific generic conventions that characterise the con-game film. More importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, this final chapter demonstrated that Mamet's 'playful' visual style is not only motivated by the needs of another story that deals with illusion and artificiality. It is also motivated by the needs of a genre that by its nature aims to beguile, disorient and surprise audiences. This means that Mamet's use of style is once again organically related to the other aspects of the film. As the majority of his films are either structured around confidence games or featuring incidents that take the form of confidence games it is not surprising that Mamet's choices in terms of visual style have always frustrated audiences and film critics alike.

This thesis then can be construed as one significant step towards *understanding* Mamet's cinema from a Film Studies point of view. Instead of approaching his films as the work of a playwright/screenwriter/ theatre practitioner /novelist/cultural commentator/film theorist/essayist and newspaper and magazine columnist who has also happened to hijack cinema as one more medium through which he could channel (what seems like) an inexhaustible depository of stories, this thesis examined Mamet's films as the work of a filmmaker. In this respect, it disregarded questions of 'suspicion' that other critical approaches to Mamet's cinema have been plagued with and, instead, 'trusted' the filmmaker's work. Having established some of the key characteristics of the filmmaker's practice and proposed specific critical contexts within which his films can be more constructively examined, this thesis intends to trigger the extensive research necessary to understand and appreciate Mamet's cinema in the same way drama critics and scholars have understood and appreciated Mamet's theatre.¹

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FILMOGRAPHY: DAVID MAMET IN AMERICAN CINEMA (AND TELEVISION)

DAVID MAMET AS WRITER/DIRECTOR

House of Games (1987, Orion, US, 102 min)

Things Change (1988, Columbia, US, 100 min)

Homicide (1991, J&M Entertainment, US, 102 min)

Oleanna (1994, The Samuel Goldwyn Company, US, 89 min)

The Spanish Prisoner (1997, Sony Classics, US, 110 min)

The Winslow Boy (1998, Sony Classics, US, 104 min)

State and Main (2000, Fine Line Features, US, 105 min)

Heist (2001, Warner, US, 109 min)

Spartan (2004, Warner, US, 106 min)

DAVID MAMET AS SCREENWRITER

The Postman Always Rings Twice (Rafelson, 1981, MGM/Lorimar, US, 122 min)

The film was adapted from James M. Cain's novel The Postman Always Rings Twice (1934) and is a remake of Tay Garnett's homo-titled film (1946)

The Verdict (Lumet, 1982, Fox, US, 129 min)

The film was adapted from Barry Reed's novel The Verdict (1980).

The Untouchables (De Palma, 1987, Paramount, US, 119 min)

The film was adapted from Elliot Ness, Paul Robsky and Oscar Fraley's novel The Untouchables (1957). The film is also loosely-based on the television series The Untouchables (1959-1963, ABC) which was also adapted from the 1957 novel.

We're No Angels (N.Jordan, 1989, Paramount, US, 101 min)

The film is a loose remake of We're No Angels (Curtiz, 1955, Paramount, 106) which was based on Samuel and Bella Spewack's play My Three Angels (1953). The play was an English adaptation of Albert Husson's French play La Cuisine de Anges. Although Mamet's screenplay has retained a few elements of the original story (the escaped convicts from Devil's Island, their attempt to escape the authorities, the fact that the convicts are good-hearted), the narrative of the 1989 film nevertheless does not bear any resemblance to the story of the 1955 film.

Hoffa (De Vito, 1992, Fox, US, 140 min)

Original screenplay.

Vanya on 42nd Street (Malle, 1994, Sony Classics, US, 119 min)

Mamet co-wrote the screenplay with André Gregory. Anton Chekhov also has a screenwriter's credit as the film is about a group of New York actors rehearsing Uncle Vanya.

The Edge (Tamahori, 1997, Fox, US, 117 min)

Original screenplay.

Wag the Dog (Levinson, 1997, New Line Cinema, US, 97 min)

The screenplay was co-written by Mamet and Hilary Henkin and is based on Larry Beinhart's novel American Hero (1993).

Ronin (Frankenheimer, 1998, MGM/UA, US, 121 min)

Mamet co-wrote the screenplay with J.D Zeik under the pseudonym Richard Weiss. The screenplay is based on a story by Zeik.

Hannibal (R.Scott, 2001, Universal, US, 131 min)

Mamet wrote the screenplay for Hannibal, which was based on Thomas Harris's novel Hannibal (2000). Steven Zaillian is credited as co-author of the film's screenplay, even though it was his version of the script that was used for the film.

DAVID MAMET AS SCREENWRITER (ADAPTING HIS OWN PLAYS FOR THE CINEMA)

Glengarry Glen Ross (Foley, 1992, New Line Cinema, US, 100 min)

The film was adapted from his play Glengarry Glen Ross (1984)

American Buffalo (Corrente, 1996, The Samuel Goldwyn Company, US, 88 min)

The film was adapted from Mamet's play American Buffalo (1975)

Lakeboat (Mantegna, 2000, Cowboy Bookings International, US, 98 min)

The film is an adaptation of Mamet's play of the same title (1980)

DAVID MAMET AS SCREENWRITER (ADAPTING HIS OWN PLAYS FOR TELEVISION)

A Life in the Theater (K. Browning and G.Gutierrez, 1979, PBS, US)

Adapted from his play of the same title (1979)

The Water Engine (Schachter, 1992, Amblin/Brandman/Majestic Films, US, 110 min)

Adapted from his homo-titled play (1977)

A Life in the Theater (Mosher, 1993, US, 78 min)

Adapted from his play A Life in the Theater (1977)

DAVID MAMET AS SCREENWRITER FOR TELEVISION FILMS

Uncle Vanya (Mosher, 1991, WNET Channel 13, US)

Vlada Chernomordik is credited with the literal translation of Chekhov's play, while Mamet is credited as the film's screenwriter.

Texan (T. Williams, 1994, Directed By, US, 26 min)
Original screenplay.

Lansky (McNaughton, 1999, HBO, US)
Mamet wrote the screenplay based on Dennis Eisenberg, Uri Dan and Eli Landau's novel,
Mayer Lansky: Mogul of the Mob (1979).

DAVID MAMET AS DIRECTOR FOR TELEVISION

Catastrophe (2000, BBC/Film Four, GB, 6 min)
Catastrophe (1984) is a short play by Samuel Beckett. In 2000 Beckett on Film, a project financed by RTE and Channel 4, invited 19 filmmakers (including Neil Jordan, Atom Egoyan, Karel Reisz, David Mamet and Anthony Minghella) to adapt 19 of Beckett's plays for the screen. Mamet adapted and directed Catastrophe, which features John Gielgud's last film performance.

The Shield (2004, Fox Television Network, US)
Mamet directed episode 3.11, entitled 'Strays' (broadcast on the US television on 4 May 2004). The episode features Mamet's wife and regular actress in his films, Rebecca Pidgeon.

DAVID MAMET AS WRITER FOR TELEVISION SHOWS

Hill Street Blues (1981, NBC, US)
Mamet scripted an early episode of the successful television series Hill Street Blues (1981-1987), entitled 'A Wasted Weekend' (1981).

DAVID MAMET'S PLAYS ADAPTED FOR THE SCREEN AND DIRECTED BY OTHERS

About Last Night... (Zwick, 1986, Columbia TriStar, US, 113 min)
The screenplay was by Tim Kazurinsky and Denise DeClue and, as I discussed in the main part of this thesis, is very loosely-based on Mamet's Sexual Perversity in Chicago (1974)

APPENDIX I: Scene Segmentation of House of Games

Scene	Description	Duration (secs)	ASL (secs)	Nos of shots	Characters
1	Plaza. Autograph signing	75	7.5	10	Maggie Fan
2	Therapy session	55.5	5.55	8	Maggie woman patient
3	Restaurant	127	7	18	Maggie Maria
4	Therapy session, Maggie's office	168	5.7	29	Maggie Billy
5	Margaret's office night	91	6.5	14	Maggie
6	Exterior night	31	7.75	4	Maggie
7	Interior House of Games	399	8.31	48	Maggie Mike, Bartender...
8	Poker game	720.06	5.37	134	Maggie Mike etc.
9	Exterior House of Games	242	7.3	34	Maggie Mike
10	Maggie's House	55	13.75	4	Maggie
11	Therapy session	195	24.38	8	Maggie woman patient
12	Hospital corridor	70	6.36	11	Maggie Maria
13	Exterior of hospital	97	8.08	12	Maggie Maria
14	Going to meet Mike	44	11	4	Maggie
15	Charlie's tavern	139	6.62	21	Maggie Mike
16	Demonstration at Western Union	334	11.93	28	Maggie Mike
17	At the hotel	75	8.3	9	Maggie Mike
18	Hotel corridor and room	121	7.56	16	Maggie Mike
19	Hotel Room after sex	195	13	15	Maggie Mike
20	Outside hotel	60.02	8.37	7	Maggie Mike
21	The sting setup	100	7.14	14	Maggie various con-artists
22	Hotel room	131	7.28	18	Maggie various con-artists (passive)
23	Hotel room	348	7.73	45	Maggie various con artists (active)
24	Stealing the car	180.07	9.48	19	Maggie Mike Joey

25	Destroying the traces	120	17.14	7	Maggie Mike Joey
26	Goodbye	109	12.11	9	Maggie Mike Joey
27	University corridor	98	4.67	21	Maggie Maria
28	Going back to her office	26	13	2	Maggie
29	Interior Maggie's office	300.01	5.88	51	Maggie
30	In the back yard	72	5.54	13	Maggie Billy
31	Return to Tavern	59	11.8	5	Maggie
32	Revelation	199	14.21	14	Maggie Mike various con- artists
33	Airport	120.09	7.51	16	Maggie Mike
34	Revenge	355	7.72	46	Maggie Mike
35	Last scene	180.09	9	20	Maggie Maria

APPENDIX II: Scene segmentation of Things Change

The segmentation takes place on the basis of the characters' action

SCENE	SCENE'S OBJECTIVE/THROUGH LINE
	PROLOGUE
	A man picks up a coin lying on top of an old photo album and opens the album (opening credits)
	ACT ONE/EVENT/THESIS
1	Two mafia thugs are waiting someone to show up.
2	The thugs follow the man to the shop he works.
3	They get in and invite Gino to their boss's house.
4	The mafia Don asks Gino to take the blame for a murder and in return he offers him an opportunity to realise his dream (to buy a boat in Sicily)
5	Jerry, an out of favour mafia thug, is ridiculed by his colleagues. Frankie calls Jerry to assign him a task.
6	The Don accompanies Gino on his way out of the house. Jerry is assigned the task of guarding Gino and of ensuring that he is ready for his confession.
7	Jerry preps Gino for his role but he disobeys his orders when he decides that they go to Las Vegas for a final fling before Gino goes to prison.
	ACT TWO/ELABORATION/ANTITHESIS
8	Jerry asserts his status as the boss. He meets another Mafia employee and claims that Gino a big boss.
9	Jerry makes Drake believe that Gino is <u>the</u> boss of organised crime.
10	Jerry tries to keep a low profile but Drake interferes and ensures that Gino and Jerry get the highest possible attention.
11	Jerry and Gino are given a luxury suite and their own private butler who tells them that everybody in the hotel is at their service.
12	Gino is given a manicure job and starts playing the role of the big boss.
13	Jerry reminds him that he is the only boss there

14	Jerry and Gino go the hotel casino. Jerry arranges for Gino to win on roulette. Jackie Shore (an entertainer) talks to Jerry and the casino manager. Gino unguarded plays another hand of roulette and wins a large amount. Jerry tries to convince Gino to 'lose' the money back. Gino bets all the money on the Wheel of Fortune and loses it.
15	Jerry and Gino are attending the Jackie Shore show. Jackie Shore throws the spotlight on Gino and refers to him as a friend.
16	Jerry goes backstage to reprimand Shore for drawing attention to Gino. Jerry and Gino exchange gazes with a couple of showgirls.
17	Gino and Jerry enjoy a bath with the showgirls. Gino narrates the Aesopian fable of the ant and the grasshopper. The girls invite them to their house for the weekend. Gino and Jerry decline the offer.
18	Jerry wakes up to find that Gino is not in the suite.
19	Gino gives shoeshining lessons to the butler outside the suite. Jerry takes him back to the hotel and orders him not to do it again. Drake and two other mafia thugs arrive. They ask/order them to visit their boss, Don Guiseppe.
20	On the way to Don Giuseppe's Jerry advises Gino to let him handle the questions.
21	Jerry waits in the mansion's kitchen. He looks out of the window and sees Gino and the Don talking.
22	The Don invites Gino to the living room. He points out that he does not know him and asks him what his business in Nevada is. The Don's 'right hand' is waiting with a hidden dagger. Gino shows the coin to the Don. The Don recognises the coin and immediately befriends Gino. They drink together. Gerry is still looking through the kitchen window.
23	Gino and the Don are sitting by the beach. Gino talks about the craft of shoe-shining. Jerry is following the conversation from a distance. The Don gives Gino another coin (a quarter) and asks him to phone him whenever he needs his help.
24	The Don's 'right hand asks' Jerry how well-connected in the underworld Gino is. Jerry refuses to answer.
25	Jerry and the Don's 'right hand' go back to the hotel to check out Gino. Jerry goes to reprimand the hotel manager for destroying his low profile.

	The manager tells him that he thought they came for the mob meeting. Green, the Don of Chicago (Jerry's boss) arrives with his entourage.
26	Jerry goes back to the Don's house to pick up Gino. On their way out Gino turns around and goes to get his coin. The Chicago Don arrives with his party and chat with Don Giuseppe. Jerry escapes through a window. Don Giuseppe attempts to introduce Green to Gino but Gino hides his face with a rackhat. The Don welcomes the other guests. Gino makes repeated attempts to talk to Don Giuseppe. Finally he goes out of the house.
27	Gino and Jerry walk in the yard of the Don's mansion trying to find a car to leave. As they get in a car they find out that there are no keys. Jerry tries to hotwire the car. Gino finds the keys in the car accidentally. Patrol guards approach them. They drive away.
28	The car runs out of petrol.
29	They stop by a gas station. Jerry asks the assistant to put a dollar's worth of petrol. The assistant misunderstands Jerry and puts 5 dollars worth of petrol. Jerry does not have the money. The assistant takes the keys from the engine and calls the police. Jerry proposes to exchange their return tickets to Chicago for a full tank of petrol. Jerry remembers that he left his jacket with the tickets at Don Giuseppe's yard. The assistant calls the police again. Gino goes to the car and returns with a fat roll of dollars. They go back to the car and drive off. As they leave the station the butler and the two showgirls wave Gino goodbye.
30	Jerry attempts to convince Gino that he will be alright in prison
	ACT THREE/DENOUEMENT/SYNTHESIS
31	A car runs on the road.
32	Jerry and Gino return to the hotel.
33	Jerry asks Gino what he would like to do until the morning. Gino does not respond. Jerry asks him to leave. Gino replies that he has given his word. Jerry explains to him that he was hustled and he would better go. He grabs Gino and pushes him out of the room. Gino comes back and explains that he cannot take back his word. Jerry calls him stupid. Gino goes to the bathroom to shave and fix his moustache so that he would resemble the perpetrator of the crime for which he accepted to take the blame.
34	Frankie comes to pick up Gino earlier than arranged. He asks Jerry what they

	have been doing over the weekend. Jerry lies to him. Jerry tells Gino that it is to go.
35	Gino is walking on a street followed by Jerry and Frankie. Gino disposes of the invitation by the showgirls.
36	The three men are walking towards the beach. Jerry tells Frankie that Gino keep his word. Frankie tells Gino that the whole thing was a set up to give time to the real criminal to flee the country. Gino is to be killed. Jerry objects to the new plan. Frankie informs him that he must kill Jerry to get out of probation. Jerry refuses to do it. Frankie tells him that if he does not do it he will.
37	Gino is walking on the beach. Jerry approaches Gino and without telling him of the plan to kill him makes him understand of the new situation. Gino understands his fate. Frankie approaches Jerry. Jerry hits him with the gun and Frankie passes out. Jerry asks Gino if he has the keys to the car so that they can run away. Gino takes Don Giuseppe's coin out of his pocket. He goes to a phone booth and calls the Don.
38	A judge announces that the defendant pleaded guilty and that he is sentenced to prison for the next 20 years. Disguised in order to resemble the murderer Frankie repeats that he committed the crime.
39	Gino is back at work in the shoeshine store. Jerry is now working with him.

APPENDIX III: Gold's through actions in the filmed version of Homicide

Gold's main through action or objective for the whole film: to do his job obsessively

Key to the Appendix:

In bold: Gold's individual through actions as determined by his main objective:
(Scenes: 6-16; 18-24; 37-78)

In italics: one of Gold's through actions which goes against to his main objective
(scene 17)

In italics and underlined: scenes where Gold's through actions do not manifest the
same compulsion and obsession that characterise his other through actions:
(Scenes 25-35)

Scene 36 is discussed in detail within the main text

The backward slash (\) indicates that there were more than one through actions in one
scene

SCENE	GOLD'S OBJECTIVE \ THOUGH ACTION
1	NOT PRESENT IN THESE SCENES
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	To offer his assistance to the Randolph problem
7	To defend accusations of not doing his job properly \ to dismiss the racial insult by his superior
8	To boast how effective the police are and how incompetent the FBI are \ to understand the Grounder's motive for attacking him
9	NOT PRESENT IN THE SCENE
10	To indicate that the racial insult was wrong \ to boast how well the police can do their job \ to dismiss the FBI as incompetent \ to admit that the job is not the same any more
11	To stop and offer help

12	To find out what has happened to his colleagues in the street
13	To get more information about their situation \ to offer his assistance to the young policeman
14	To solve the problem the second young policeman faces in the candy store
15	To ensure that everything will be according to police procedure \ to continue with his other case \ to disassociate himself from the homicide case \ to convince his superior that he has a more important job to do
16	To interrogate witnesses \ to question the fact that he is taken off the Randolph case even though he set it up \ to protest for being treated unfairly \ to attempt to follow his colleagues
17	<u>To disobey his captain's order to stick with the homicide case</u>
18	To raid Miss Randolph's house \ to do his job
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	To assert himself in front of his colleagues \ to convince Randolph's mother to give her son in
25	<i><u>To dismiss the homicide case as unimportant</u></i>
26	NOT PRESENT IN THE SCENE
27	<i><u>To get information about the allegation that a shot was fired against the Kleins</u></i>
28	<i><u>To ask for immediate evidence</u></i>
29	<i><u>To determine the facts</u></i>
30	<i><u>To listen to witnesses' testimonies</u></i>
31	<i><u>To convince the Kleins' that the sound they heard was not a gun shot</u></i>
32	<i><u>To look towards the direction of where the shot could have come</u></i>
33 (cont 31)	<i><u>To question the validity of the Kleins' claims \ to suggest that their claims are a consequence of their stress \ to promise to station a man to guard the house \ to convince Dr Klein that he does not think of him</u></i>

	<u>as a Jew in distress</u>
34	<u>To try to do his job the way he sees fit \ to express his real feelings against Dr Klein's pressure \ to listen to Dr Klein's accusations of not doing his job properly</u>
35	<u>To demonstrate that he won't take any criticisms from Dr Klein \ to try understand the rituals in the Klein house as people come to pay their respect to the old woman \ to try to get information about the dead woman from a friend of the Klein family</u>
36	SEE MAIN TEXT
37	To promise that he will find the killer
38	NOT PRESENT IN THE SCENE
39	To offer an alternative explanation to the Kleins about the sound heard
40	To offer the same explanation to his colleague \ to ask for directions
41	To climb to the roof of the Kleins' house
42	To look for evidence on the roof
43	To search a room
44 (cont 42)	To look for evidence on the roof
45	To calm down everyone \ to ask for information about the dead woman
46	To examine evidence
47	To re-visit the scene of the crime
48	To ask for directions
49	To get information
50	To collect evidence
51	To examine the case \ to decide against pressing charges for his assault by the Grounder \ to prioritise the homicide case
52	To share his thoughts on the case with his partner \ to suggest that the homicide case could be a conspiracy \ to acknowledge his partner as his only family \ to get the necessary documents for setting up Randolph

53	To wait for his turn to enter an office
54	To share new information with his partner \ to question his partner's understanding on his case and on the subject of his ethnic identity
55	To ask someone to fix his holster (torn after the attack by the grounder) \ to get information on a piece of evidence
56	To research his case in a library \ to get more information about a piece of evidence \ to learn about Jewish religion \ to find out how little he knows about his ethnic identity
57	To ask information about a building \ to admit that he needs help to find the killer of the woman
58	To find out more about the Jewish underground group \ to offer his assistance to the group \ to pledge his commitment to the group \ to refuse to provide them with what they want – conflict of interests \ to question himself about his loyalties
59	To admit his urge to help to a member of the group
60	To admit he is used by the police \ to accept his own shortcomings as a human being
61	NOT PRESENT IN THE SCENE
62	To find out what Chava's mission is \ to volunteer to carry out the mission for her
63	To assert himself \ to ask for instructions
64	To break into a store \ to search for incriminating material
65	To discover anti-Jewish evidence (Nazi Propaganda)
66	To detonate a bomb
67	To run away
68	To pledge his commitment to the group \ to refuse to provide them with what they want \ to realise that he was set up and that now is blackmailed \ to attack the blackmailer \ to remember his appointment for the Randolph case
69	To reach the location of the appointment
70	To find out what happened \ to offer his assistance
71	To save his partner

72	To see his partner die
73	To avenge his partner's killing
74	To find Randolph \ to admit his life is worthless \ to let Randolph know that he was betrayed by his own mother \ to show him the evidence
75	NOT PRESENT IN THE SCENE
76	To realise that he and Randolph have something in common \ to protect Randolph from being killed
77	To return to the Homicide headquarters
78	To realise that he is finished from Homicide

APPENDIX IV: Con-artist films

This table contains all the film titles whose taglines contain the words con game, con artist, con man, conning, con tricks, con, confidence, sting, deceit, scam, scheme, swindle, trust, heist and plan.

All the information was retrieved from the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com). The database has a search facility, which enables the user to search for a film's tagline(s). By putting each of the above words in the search engine, the user can retrieve all the taglines that feature the word on its own, as part of a composite word (**swindler**) or as part of a phrase (**con game**). The results are presented in alphabetical order. I have changed this order to a chronologically descending order, starting from the most recent film and moving to the oldest.

Taglines containing <i>con game</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Last Call, The	(1998)	Ultimately, the con game will make you very rich or very dead... probably both.
Taglines containing <i>con artist</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Shooting Fish	(1997)	As con artists they were hard to beat. But they were easy targets for LOVE.
Taglines containing <i>con man</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Distinguished Gentleman, The	(1992)	From con man to congressman
Day the Lord Got Busted, The	(1976)	The Greatest CON MAN of them all!
Barefoot Mailman, The	(1951)	Meet Sylvanus! Con man ... Gun man... Ladies man!
Taglines containing <i>conning</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Grifters, The	(1990)	Seduction. Betrayal. Murder. Who's Conning Who?
Taglines containing <i>con tricks</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline

Charleston	(1977)	Charleston is my name. Con tricks are my game!
Taglines containing <i>con</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Mercy Streets	(2000)	One con out to save his million dollar scam, one priest out to save his only brother
Bowfinger	(1999)	The con is on.
Happy, Texas	(1999)	They need pros. They're getting cons
Spanish Prisoner, The	(1997)	It's the oldest con in the book.
Diggstown	(1992)	Where the pros meet the cons
Bullseye!	(1990)	They were the world's greatest conmen ... almost.
Sting II, The	(1983)	The con is on... place your bets!
Doc Hooker's Bunch	(1976)	His gang of female flim-flammers con their way across the old West! Half hero, half con -artist, all heart!
Merry Mavericks	(1951)	Meet The Three Stooges as up-and-coming, always leave-'em-laughing con -men in the wild and woolly west!
Taglines containing <i>confidence</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Second Room, The	(1995)	Confidence is a seductive concept... if you've never had any and are starting to get some.
Sting, The	(1973)	...all it takes is a little Confidence .
Taglines containing <i>sting</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Where the Money Is	(2000)	Another con. Another sting . Another day.
Taglines containing <i>deceit</i>		

Title	Year	Tagline
Interlude in Black	(2004)	Sometimes one's pain is another's passion. Together they can spell danger and deceit .
Under the Influence	(2002)	Murder, deceit , fraud... another perfect day in Los Angeles.
Eight Lanes in Hamilton	(2001)	Deceit . Betrayal. Seduction. It's the only game in town.
Mistress of Seduction	(1998)	Seduction and deceit are her way of life...
Other Voices, Other Rooms	(1997)	The Heart is deceitful , Who can know it?"
Rough Crossing	(1997)	Lies... murder... deceit ... betrayal... and YOU thought you had a tough life!
Double Exposure	(1993)	A Double Dose of Deceit , Lust, and Revenge.
True Colors	(1991)	Lies. Deceit . Betrayal. It's What Friendship Is All About.
Taglines containing <i>scam</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Getting Hal	(2003)	She thought she found the perfect boyfriend He knew he found the perfect scam .
Mercy Streets	(2000)	One con out to save his million dollar scam one priest out to save his only brother
Con, The (TV)	(1998)	How The Ultimate Scam Led To The Perfect Romance
Criminals	(1997)	Brooklyn to 'Vegas in a '64 Ford, Looking for the perfect girl...and the perfect scam .
Traveller	(1997)	Swindlers. Scammers . Con-men. As American as apple-pie.
Taglines containing <i>scheme</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Learning Curve, The	(2001)	Steal, Scheme , Seduce, All In The Name Of Love

Second Skin	(2000)	A beautiful woman. A deadly scheme . A perfect murder.
Free Money	(1998)	Right scheme , wrong guys!
Smoke	(1995)	Five strangers. Four secrets. Three schemes Two best friends. And one neighborhood hangout where the world still makes sense
Layin' Low	(1996)	One's a dreamer. One's a schemer . Together they're on the run and layin' low.
Soldier in the Rain	(1963)	Two highly irregulars, in the very regular army! And this is the story of the million-dollar schemes they dared, the fabulous dolls and dates, they shared.
Idea Girl	(1946)	She's The Girl Of Their Schemes ... And Man, Oh, Man... how they do!
Millionaires in Prison	(1940)	Self-crowned king of a gray-walled world of treacherous men... He out- schemed , out-talked, out-fought them all!
Secrets of the French Police	(1932)	The story of a daring and audacious scheme of intrigue and murder that shocked Paris. Based on an actual adventure of Bertillon and revealed for the first time in thrilling drama.

Taglines containing *swindle*

Title	Year	Tagline
Traveller	(1997)	Swindlers . Scammers. Con-men. As American as apple-pie
Love & Larceny (TV)	(1985)	Charmer. Swindler . Cheat...
Sheriff of Sage Valley	(1942)	Billy Tries His Hand At Law Enforcement.. And The Biggest Swindle On The Prairie Blows Up With A Bang!
Topeka Terror, The	(1945)	The Greatest Land Swindle In The History Of The West!

Taglines containing <i>trust</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Land of the Free?	(2004)	In God We Trust
Target of Opportunity	(2004)	Who do you trust ?
Behind the Nine	(2003)	Trust... is overrated
Crimson Streets	(2003)	Don't trust him. Don't trust him either.
I Inside, The	(2003)	When you don't have a memory how can you remember who to trust ?
Recruit, The	(2003)	Trust . Betrayal. Deception. In the C.I.A. nothing is what it seems.
Damaged Goods	(2002)	When Trust Turns To Betrayal... The Damage Is Done!
Framed (TV)	(2002)	The stakes are high. The trap is set. There's no one left to trust .
Get a Clue (TV)	(2002)	Trust No One....Question Everything.... Get A Clue
High Crimes	(2002)	Everything you trust . Everything you know. May be a lie...
Honeytrap, The	(2002)	She loved him so much, she couldn't risk trusting him.
Hot Karl, The (V)	(2002)	When your dreams become your reality...Don't trust anybody!
Insignificant Other	(2002)	Do You Trust Your Significant Other?
Stationery Games	(2002)	Love Me... Don't Trust Me
Ajnabee	(2001)	Never trust a stranger.
AntiTrust	(2001)	Truth Can Be Dangerous... Trust Can Be Deadly. Trust Is Not An Option.
Attic Expeditions, The	(2001)	Your Mind Can Not Be Trusted .

Glass House, The	(2001)	Be Careful Who You Trust Trust can be as transparent as glass.
Knockaround Guys	(2001)	How many friends can you trust with your life?
Oni (VG)	(2001)	A dark future... An uncertain past... No one left to trust .
Proposal, The	(2001)	Their Mistake Was Trusting Her.
Circus	(2000)	Don't trust any of these clowns
Deus Ex (VG)	(2000)	Trust no one. Question Everything.
Edge's Gig	(2000)	Always trust your agent...and you'll always get the gig!
Luckytown	(2000)	Luck always runs out... trust no one.
Breakfast of Champions	(1999)	In a world gone mad, you can trust Dwayne Hoover.
Confession, The	(1999)	Trust No One.
Diplomatic Siege	(1999)	Who knows the truth? Who can be trusted ? Who can stop the countdown?
Fever	(1999)	Who Can You Trust ... When You No Longer Trust Yourself...
Made Men	(1999)	Who can a good liar trust ?
Muse, The	(1999)	In Goddess we trust .
Black & White	(1998)	If you can't trust your partner, who can you trust ?
Fallen	(1998)	Don't trust a soul.
No Code of Conduct	(1998)	When corruption strikes the police force... trust on one
No Tomorrow	(1998)	Trust no one. Believe Nothing. Watch your back.

Rounders	(1998)	Trust everyone... but always cut the cards
Standoff	(1998)	Trust Will Get You Killed
X Files, The	(1998)	Trust in no one Mr Mulder.
Gun, a Car, a Blonde, A	(1997)	Believe nothing. Trust no one.
Midnight in St. Petersburg	(1997)	No One Can Be Trusted . Nothing Is As It Seems. One Wrong Move Could Cost Everything.
Spanish Prisoner, The	(1997)	Can you really trust anyone?
Bound	(1996)	A trust so deep it cuts both ways.
Buried Trust	(1996)	If you won't trust your friends, who will you trust ?
Heaven's Prisoners	(1996)	For an ex-cop obsessed with an unsolved murder, trusting the wrong woman could be a deadly choice.
True Crime	(1996)	Trust no one
Turning April	(1996)	Who would you trust with your life? Your parents. Your husband. Your kidnapper.
Crash	(1995)	Money. Treachery. Vengeance. There is no one to trust ...
Never Talk to Strangers	(1995)	Trust can be deadly.
Reason to Believe, A	(1995)	Sometimes the people you know the best are the ones you can trust the least
Feminine Touch, The	(1994)	When there is nowhere to turn and no one to trust , survival is...
Police Rescue	(1994)	Who can you trust when your life is on the line?
Puppet Masters, The	(1994)	Trust No-one.
Deadfall	(1993)	You won't know who to trust . What to

		believe. Or where to turn.
Flashfire	(1993)	No time to think. No place to turn. No one to trust
Innocent, The	(1993)	At a time of intrigue. In a world of secrets. The only thing you can trust is your heart.
Blown Away	(1992)	Trusting someone can be deadly
Hand That Rocks the Cradle, Th	(1992)	Trust is her weapon. Innocence her opportunity. Revenge her only desire.
In the Deep Woods (TV)	(1992)	Someone she trusts is getting away... with murder.
Shining Through	(1992)	He needed to trust her with his secret. She had to trust him with her life.
Sneakers	(1992)	To trust can be murder.
Kiss Before Dying, A	(1991)	Loving him was easy. Trusting him was deadly.
Proof	(1991)	Before love comes trust . Before love comes proof.
Year of the Gun	(1991)	In a city bathed in blood... who can you trust ?
Havana	(1990)	A gambler who trusted no one. A woman who risked everything. And a passion that brought them together in the most dangerous city in the world.
Renegades	(1989)	They had to trust each other... or die.
Harry and the Hendersons	(1987)	According to science, Harry doesn't exist. When you can't believe your eyes, trust your heart.
Jagged Edge	(1985)	When a murder case is this shocking, which do you trust ... your emotions or the evidence?
Mikey and Nicky	(1976)	In the mob you trust no one. Not even your

		best friend.
No Way Back	(1976)	Never trust a woman with her clothes off!
Man on the Run	(1975)	The City... You Can't Trust Anyone - Not Even A Cop.
Three Days of the Condor	(1975)	His code name is Condor. In the next twenty-four hours everyone he trusts will try to kill Him.
Loving	(1970)	Trust was something she took for granted
Kremlin Letter, The	(1970)	Don't trust anyone in THE KREMLIN LETTER
Savage Intruder	(1968)	She loved and trusted him until he cut off her head.
I Walk Alone	(1948)	Ruthless! because once he trusted a dame! Once I trusted a dame... now I Walk Alone

Taglines containing *heist*

Title	Year	Tagline
Donut King, The	(2002)	it's not about a car chase... it's not about a gun fight... it's not about a heist gone wrong... it's about a simple joy
Body Count	(1998)	It was a simple \$15 million art heist ... until she walked into the picture.
Larceny	(1997)	Get ready for a heist , get ready for Larceny
Dead Presidents	(1995)	In this daring heist , the only color that counts is green
Crackerjack	(1994)	A \$50 million heist , a ski resort held hostage, and a cop with nothing to lose
Blind Rage	(1978)	Five blind master killers pull off the most unbelievable heist of all time...

Taglines containing *cheat*

Title	Year	Tagline
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Watchful Eyes	(2004)	Killing-Stealing-Cheating...all in a day's work
Matchstick Men	(2003)	lie cheat steal rinse repeat
Spivs	(2003)	You can't cheat an honest man.
Slackers	(2002)	When all else fails... cheat .
What Lies Beneath	(2000)	Some men cheat and get caught. Some men pay a higher price.
True Romance	(1993)	Stealing, Cheating , Killing. Who said romance is dead?
Glengarry Glen Ross	(1992)	Lie. Cheat . Steal. All In A Day's Work.
Love & Larceny (TV)	(1985)	Charmer. Swindler. Cheat ...
One More Train to Rob	(1971)	He'd been cheated out of his gold... and his woman... now the only weapon he had left was revenge!
Reivers, The	(1969)	Boon is a reiver (that's a cheat , a liar, a brawler and womaniser) and he had just four days to teach young Lucius the facts of life (like cheating , lying, brawling and womanizing).
5 Card Stud	(1968)	A card cheat was hung... then all hell broke loose!
Guns, Girls, and Gangsters	(1959)	A Cheating Blonde... A Crazy Con.... The Biggest Armored-Car Robbery in History!
Life at Stake, A	(1954)	A Cheat At Heart From Her Painted Toes To Her Plunging Neckline!
Love from a Stranger	(1947)	He lied, cheated , and killed all in the name of love.
Taglines containing <i>plan</i>		
Title	Year	Tagline
Two-Minute Heist	(2004)	Their plan was flawless... until they put it

		into action.
Before You Go	(2002)	Does anything in life ever go to plan ?
Trapped	(2002)	It was the perfect plan until she refused to be the perfect victim!
Eilífðin (V)	(2001)	They had the perfect plan or did they?
Myst III: Exile (VG)	(2001)	The perfect place to plan revenge
Nothing to Declare	(2001)	Nine cases... five kilos... and a plan to die for.
Groom, The	(2000)	A Man with a Secret, a Woman with a Plan ... A marriage for a Perfect Crime.
Bingo Robbers, The	(2000)	He lives in his car. She has a plan . There's a little criminal inside us all.
Perfect Murder, A	(1998)	A powerful husband. An unfaithful wife. A jealous lover. All of them have a motive. Each of them has a plan .
Riddled with Bullets (V)	(1998)	Ex-cons in business together... and they plan to make a killing!
Shadow Run	(1998)	A hardened gangster plans to steal £100 million in 20 minutes... and take full advantage of the shadow run. All he has to fear is his partner.
Simon Birch	(1998)	Destiny has big plans for little Simon Birch
Suicide Kings	(1997)	Their plan was perfect... they weren't.
No Small Ways	(1997)	The plan is simple. The result...deadly.
Albino Alligator	(1996)	They Planned The Perfect Crime... Until It All Went Perfectly Wrong!
American Buffalo	(1996)	They had a plan . It wasn't worth a nickel.
Shooting Star (V)	(1993)	All Johnny wanted to do was to live for the music... dying for it was never a part of the

		plan
Power Play	(1978)	Their objective... to steal a nation! Their plan ... to strike without warning! Their agreement... to share the spoils! Their only obstacle... each other!
Super Fly T.N.T.	(1973)	Same dude with a different plan ... in another country with a different man.
Superfly	(1972)	Never a dude like this one! He's got a plan to stick it to The Man!
Bunny O'Hare	(1971)	ENJOY those 'GOLDEN YEARS' with the most profitable pension plan any sweet little mother ever devised
Italian Job, The	(1969)	Introducing the plans for a new business venture.
Dayton's Devils	(1968)	7 MEN AND ONE WOMAN - their incredible plan - to steal a \$2,500,000 military payroll!
Caper of the Golden Bulls, The	(1967)	A fiesta in the town... a couple of million in the vault... and a genius plan to give the Royal Bank the royal treatment.
Secret Invasion, The	(1964)	The Daring Plan ; The Staggering Odds!
Touch of Evil	(1958)	The Strangest Vengeance Ever Planned !

APPENDIX V: Scene segmentation of The Spanish Prisoner

Scene Segmentation of The Spanish Prisoner

Scene	Description	Dur sec	N.o.S	ASL	Edit	Characters
1	Have you packed your own things?	68	11	6.2	Cut	Ross, Lang, Susan
2	The Process	130	21	6.2	Cut	Ross, Lang, Klein, other businessmen
3	How much is the bonus?	31	1	31	Cut	Ross, Kein
4	Enjoy yourself	30	5	6	Cut	Ross, Klein
5	Keeping the tapes	39	4	9.7	Dslv	Ross, Susan, receptionist
6	\$1000 for the camera	150	29	5.2	Dslv	Ross, Susan, Jimmy
7	Out for the evening	116	14	8.3	Dslv	Ross, Susan, McCune, Lang
8	"I was wrong to offer you money"	86	11	7.8	Dslv	Ross, Jimmy
9	"We dream of money"	124	23	5.4	Dslv	Ross, Jimmy, Lang
10	Suspicion of inside trading	71	7	10.1	Dslv	Ross, Susan
11	Doing a service	97	14	6.9	Dslv	Ross, Lang, Susan, Jimmy
12	Checking in and a grand gesture	74	9	8.2	Cut	Ross, Susan, Lang, airport employee
13	"You never know who anybody is"	60	11	5.4	Dslv	Ross, Susan
14	"That's just what you think you saw"	115	19	6.1	Cut	Ross, Susan, Lang
15	A good fellow who did (or didn't) destroy a present	59	10	5.9	Dslv	Ross
16	"Your problem is that you are too nice"	41	8	5.1	Cut	Ross, Lang
17	"Same book – same edition"	62	6	10.3	Cut	Ross, bookstore owner and assistant
18	Package delivered	35	6	5.8	Dslv	Ross, Hotel Doorman
19	"Loose lips sink ships"	184	32	5.7	Cut	Ross, Lang, Susan
20	"I don't want to take advantage of you and frankly neither I want to be taken advantage of"	90	6	15	Dslv	Ross, Klein
21	Waiting in vain	31	2	15.5	Dslv	Ross
22	A chance encounter?	40	4	10	Cut	Ross, a man from the islands
23	At the dealership: The other side of Jimmy	60	8	7.5	Cut	Ross, Jimmy, car dealers
24	"I don't like being	105	17	6.2	Dslv	Ross, Jimmy, Jimmy's

	accused of lack of courtesy”					assistant
25	A visit from Susan	29	1	29	Dslv	Ross, Susan
26	Susan hits on Ross	233	26	9	Dslv	Ross, Susan
27	“You now have a Swiss bank account”	175	32	5.5	Dslv	Ross, Jimmy
28	“Welcome to the club Mr Ross”	105	19	5.5	Dslv	Ross, Jimmy, club manager and club employee
29	“People are what they seem to be and do business as if the other person tries to screw you”	89	14	6.4	Dslv	Ross, Jimmy
30	“where’s the girl?”	60	14	4.3	Cut	Ross, Jimmy
31	“I’m no lawyer, I’m just a guy”	122	18	6.7	Dslv	Ross, Jimmy
32	At the office: Everyone has got to talk to Ross	48	10	4.8	Dslv	Ross, Susan, Klein, another secretary
33	Revalidation of the agreement and the danger of premature actions	100	18	5.5	Cut	Ross, Klein, two lawyers
34	Jimmy was right!	52	9	5.8	Cut	Ross, Jimmy (off-screen)
35	I knew you would be back	28	2	14	Cut	Ross, bookstore owner
36	The only Mrs Da Silva in the building	58	6	9.7	Dslv	Ross, Hotel doorman
37	First signs of Ross’s realisation that something’s wrong	97	14	7	Cut	Ross, Susan, Jimmy (off screen)
38	Action time	18	5	3.6	Cut	Ross
39	Was Jimmy the reason that McCune was in the islands?	62	4	15.5	Cut	Ross, McCune (off screen)
40	Meeting the FBI	82	10	8.2	Dslv	Ross, McCune, other FBI agents
41	Ross’s feelings were hurt	66	20	3.2	Cut	Ross, McCune, other agents
42	...and bring the process	60	4	15	Cut	Ross, Jimmy (off screen) FBI agent (off screen)
43	Meeting the FBI before meeting Jimmy	55	7	7.9	Cut	Ross, undercover agents
44	The con known as the Spanish Prisoner	155	32	4.8	Cut	Ross, McCune, an operations agent and a team of agents.
45	At the carousel	143	16	9	Dslv	Ross
46	The process’s gone	117	15	7.8	Dslv	Ross
47	At Jimmy’s (now empty) office	66	10	6.6	Dslv	Ross and various detectives

48	At the (now empty) club	55	5	11	Cut	Ross and the detectives
49	The interrogation of Susan	60	3	20	Dslv	Susan, female interrogator
50	"Now Mr Ross, would you believe that story?"	234	47	5	Cut	Ross, and two interrogators
51	Down the corridor	30	5	6	Cut	Ross and a uniformed policeman
52	Bring the process back	77	13	5.9	Cut	Ross, Klein, one of the lawyers
53	"You'll be back"	13	2	6.5	Cut	Ross and policeman in charge of the property room
54	Help and advice	59	3	20	Dslv	Ross, Lang (off screen)
55	Lang's not answering	23	1	23	Cut	Ross
56	Lang's dead	87	15	5.8	Cut	Ross, Lang
57	Escaping	44	4	11	Cut	Ross
58	Blood all over Ross's hands	66	10	6.6	Dslv	Ross, Janitor
59	On the first train: The police are coming	60	12	5	Dslv	Ross, female passenger, policeman
60	On the second train: A 'bright' idea	46	3	15.3	Dslv	Ross
61	Outside the bakery	15	3	5	Cut	Ross
62	Ross visits Susan	62	5	12.4	Cut	Ross, Susan
63	Clean clothes	15	2	7.5	Dslv	Susan
64	"You always get it wrong Joe"	81	16	5.1	Cut	Ross, Susan
65	Susan never doubts Ross's innocence	129	27	4.8	Dslv	Ross, Susan, a policemen
66	"If you are hurt you don't get maroosed, you get even with them"	78	19	4.1	Dslv	Ross, Susan
67	Susan has thought off everything	51	12	4.2	Cut	Ross, Susan
68	The ticket	26	1	26	Cut	Ross, Susan
69	Get the tape and come back to me	33	4	8.2	Cut	Ross, Susan
70	Fingerprints all over the book	125	23	5.4	Cut	Ross
71	Susan is in the con as well	57	7	8.1	Cut	Ross, Susan
72	Ross explains his rationale	26	9	3	Dslv	Ross, Susan
73	Heading back to Boston	20	1	20	Cut	Ross, Susan
74	"Why would you want to go to Venezuela?"	67	20	3.3	Cut	Ross, Susan, Port employee
75	Ross discovers that McCune is also in the con	24	6	4	Cut	Ross, McCune, Susan, Jimmy's assistant

76	Ross's escape plan	47	4	11.9		Ross, Susan
77	Why do people turn to crime? For the money	46	11	4.2	Cut	Ross, Susan
78	The end to a perfect day	92	23	4	Cut	Ross, Susan, Jimmy
79	Japanese tourists and US Marshals	141	42	3.4	Dslv	Ross, Jimmy, Japanese tourists (who are US Marshals)
80	Klein was the mastermind	28	1	28	Cut	Ross, US Marshal
81	Alone in the World	90	13	6.9	Cut	Ross, Susan, policemen, the interrogator, the marshal, Jimmy's body
82	End credits					
		6078	954	6.37		

ENDNOTES

NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

¹ Book-length monographs on Mamet's plays include Bigsby (1985); Carroll (1987) and Dean (1990). Studies that focus mainly on Mamet's plays but also briefly discuss some of his films within specific frameworks include Kane (1999) and Joki (1994). For edited collections that predominantly discuss Mamet's plays see Kane (1992), Kane (1996) and Hudgins and Kane (2001). Interestingly, only six out of the forty-two essays brought together under those three collections deal explicitly with Mamet's films, whilst an equal number have dealt with plays and films within the same essay.

² The only other significant American playwright who has directed films in Hollywood is Sam Shepard. However, Shepard has made only two films: Far North (1988, Alive Films, US) and Silent Tongue (1994, Trimark Films, US) and has been inactive as a filmmaker since. One could also cite here Neil LaBute, a playwright who also turned into commercial filmmaking with such films as: In the Company of Men (1997, Sony Classics, US), Your Friends and Neighbors (1998, Gramercy, US), Nurse Betty (2000, USA Films, US), Possession (2002, Focus Features, US) and The Shape of Things (2003, Focus Features, US). However, LaBute cannot be considered in the same 'league' with Mamet and Shepard as his theatre work has not received significant critical attention and certainly cannot be classed as a major or canonical American playwright. Outside the US, the only major literary figure to also become a filmmaker with a substantial body of work is Jean Cocteau whose films nevertheless are firmly associated with avant-garde rather than mainstream cinema.

³ Thus in 'Suspicion,' Nick James likens Mamet's film work to Frank Capra's, a rather unlikely precursor to a filmmaker who makes films mainly about deceit and confidence games.

⁴ This type of criticism has its roots in the work of French journal Cahiers du Cinéma and, particularly, in the British journal Movie.

⁵ For such approaches to House of Games see in particular Kipnis (1991, pp 25-31); LaPalma (1996, pp 57-62); Van Wert (1990, pp 2-10); Molly Haskell (1987, pp 140 and 146). For Homicide see Van Wert (1995, pp 133-142); Omer (1999, pp 37-50) and Borden (2001, pp 235-254). From the above essays only LaPalma and Van Wert (1995) discuss formal questions to some extent in House of Games and Homicide respectively.

⁶ Examples of such type of criticism include: Ann C. Hall (1992, pp 137-160); Gale (1992, pp 161-174); Carroll (1992, pp 175-189); Hudgins (1996, pp 19-45) and Hudgins (2001, pp 209-233).

⁷ See in particular Hudgins (1996, pp 19-45) and Gale (1992, pp 161-174).

⁸ An exception here is Chapter Two which examines the film trailers for all Mamet's films apart from the trailer for Spartan.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

¹ The two volumes are Steve Neale and Murray Smith (1998) (eds) Contemporary Hollywood Cinema, Routledge, London and Jon Lewis (1998) (ed) The New American Cinema, Duke University Press, Durham. Prior to these two volumes, other book-length studies or edited collections that have contributed to the debate include: Schatz (1983); Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985); Wood (1986); Ryan and Kellner (1990); Corrigan (1991) and Hillier (1994). After 1998 there have been a few more titles, including: Thompson (1999); King (2000); King (2002) and M. Allen (2003).

² References to the production background of House of Games appear in Mamet (1988, pp iii-xviii); Mamet (1990, pp 117-130); and Mamet (1992a, pp 31-32).

³ For a brief discussion of all those terms and of the contexts in which they have been used see Krämer (1998, pp 289-309).

⁴ Yvonne Tasker in particular (who favours the term New Hollywood) suggests that a discussion of contemporary Hollywood cinema can commence not only from industrial or stylistic questions, but also from an examination of the patterns of film consumption (Tasker, 1996, p 213). A very different approach is proposed by Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner (1990) who discuss contemporary Hollywood by examining the social history of the United States and how it has been represented in the post-1967 Hollywood films.

⁵ Up to this point no study has ever attempted to bring formal and economic questions together, at least within a scope as large as the one undertaken by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson.

⁶ Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson cite A. Haut-Pré, as the first reviewer who used the term classical to discuss Charlie Chaplin's *Pay Day* (1922) in an issue of *Ciné Revue* (1925) and the French filmmaker Jean Renoir who used the same term with more rigour in his discussion of films by Chaplin, Lubitsch and Clarence Brown a year later (Bordwell et al., 1985, p 3 and 415n). Also Miriam Bratu Hansen mentions Robert Brasillach and Maurice Bardèche who used the term classicism in the second edition of their *Histoire du Cinéma* (1943) in reference to the evolution of American film between 1933 and 1939 (Hansen, 2000, p 335).

⁷ Bazin's application of the term 'classical' is not limited to American cinema, but extends to include aspects of French cinema.

⁸ At this stage it is important to keep in mind that Bazin formulates his argument along the lines of the masterpiece tradition, where only celebrated films such as Ford's *Stagecoach*, Wyler's *Jezebel* and Carné's *Le Jour se lève* are critically examined. Equally, with regard to genre, Bazin lists only well-known films (*Scarface*, *Ziegfeld Follies*, *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*, *Stagecoach* etc. [1967, pp 28-29]), whereas a few pages later he refers to the 'best' films made between 1930 and 1939 (1967, p 33).

⁹ The new forms that Bazin identified had to do with staging in depth as a result of the development of deep focus cinematography as well as the use of other techniques such as the long take and motionless camera.

¹⁰ For a good summary of Bazin's arguments in 'The Evolution of the Western' and their influence on questions of classicism see Krämer (1998, pp 290-1).

¹¹ In the 4th International edition of *Film Art: An Introduction*, Bordwell and Thompson justify the application of the term classical to Hollywood cinema by referring to the "wide and long history" of a specific mode of narrative form (1993, p 82), which by means of synecdoche stands for Hollywood cinema in general. Setting aside the problems that such an inference implies, it is evident that in *Film Art* classical implies only the historical function of a dominant mode of narrative, a different position than the one expressed in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. (see also NOTE 13)

¹² As Tom Gunning has suggested Mukarovsky's concept of aesthetic norms is fundamental for the arguments put forward in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* because norms are susceptible to diachronic transformation and therefore essentially historical. Thus by resorting to the above concept in their examination of style, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson create a dynamic, historical system and (partially) solve the problem between history and structure (Gunning, 1990, p 10 and 15-16).

¹³ Part Three of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* discusses "the formulation of the classical narrative" and "classical narrative space." Equally Bordwell refers to "classical narration" in his *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985). Although such a large number of 'classicisms' does not necessarily constitute an inconsistency in the work of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, it nevertheless raises questions about the reasons behind such a prolific use of the term. Thus, Douglas Pye (1989) has suggested a latent intention on the part of the authors to turn the phrase 'classical Hollywood cinema' and its above synecdochic uses into a "standard reference point" (1989, p 46). In a similar, but considerably more polemical manner (which provoked individual replies by all three authors [Bordwell, 1988, pp 73-97; Staiger, 1988, pp 54-70 and Thompson, 1988a, pp 48-53]), Barry King actually charged the authors

with a conscious intention to 'reform film studies' and called The Classical Hollywood Cinema (as well as other studies that are related with the University of Madison Wisconsin) a part of "the Wisconsin Project" (1986, p 74). Finally, Christopher Williams (2000, p 212-213) goes to considerable length to cite all the different uses of the term classical in Bordwell's, Bordwell and Thompson's and Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's works. For Williams the term classical is an elusive appellation, "a great undefined term" which is not only used inconsistently but also misleadingly (2000, pp 213-214).

¹⁴ The production practice that has attracted most critical attention by the authors is the detailed division of labour within successive systems of production. Other production practices that the authors discuss are standardisation, assembly and interchangeability within a system of mass production (1985, pp 87-95).

¹⁵ As I shall explain towards the end of the first part of this chapter, the line of inquiry represented by The Classical Hollywood Cinema is a subdivision of a historical poetics of cinema, specifically termed by Kristin Thompson as "neo-formalist poetics" (1988b, pp 3-46; see also Bordwell, 1989, p 385), an approach that examines "external determinants" such as distribution, marketing and exhibition and many others only in their direct relevance to the process of film construction.

¹⁶ It is now commonplace to use the term New Hollywood to describe distinct phases or phenomena that cannot be encompassed in the definitions of classical Hollywood. The relative advantage of the above term over other labels and especially over 'post-classical Hollywood' is that it does not suggest stylistic determination and consequently can be applied to economic and industrial accounts of changes and transformations. On the other hand though, the term New Hollywood has been employed rather excessively and for more than one distinct period which, sometimes, signified very different qualities. For a brief elaboration of the uses of New Hollywood see Smith (1998, pp 11-12) and Krämer (1998, pp 301-303). For studies that employ the term New Hollywood see Neale (1976, pp 117-122); Gomery (1983, pp 52-59); Hillier (1994); Schatz (1993, pp 8-36); Tasker (1993, pp 54-72); Tasker (1996, pp 213-228) and Corrigan (1998, pp 38-63).

¹⁷ In her study Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique (notice that the label classical refers to narrative whereas the word new refers to Hollywood) Thompson employs the term 'modern classicism' to bring together ten films produced in the 1980s and 1990s. Her focus on narration and narrative structure and her assertion that "style's most fundamental function is to promote narrative clarity" (1999, p 19) again stresses the significance of narrative construction as a signifier of the "modern classicism." Although generally concurrent with part of the older thesis (as it was articulated in The Classical Hollywood Cinema) Thompson's most recent contribution to the classical/postclassical debate is considerably more reductive and less totalising in scope. Furthermore, in a seminar that took place at Psalter Lane Campus, Sheffield Hallam University on 13 June 1999, Thompson actually defended the 'classicism of New Hollywood' more in terms of its hegemony as the world's mainstream style and less as a coherent system that implies specific aesthetic qualities.

¹⁸ Schatz's essay 'The New Hollywood' (1993, pp 8-36) deals exclusively with the concept of the blockbuster and the continuities and breaks with classicism. In Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and Action Cinema (1993) Yvonne Tasker devotes a whole chapter in her examination of the blockbuster (action-adventure film) and mentions both continuities and breaks with the 'classic cinema' (1993, p 54). See also Maltby (1998, pp 26-27) and Buckland (1998a, pp 166-167). The latter, in particular, uses the approach of historical poetics to demonstrate that the narrative structure of Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) conforms to the notions of classicism even though aspects of the film's visual style differ from the definitions of classicism provided by Bordwell et al. Interestingly enough, Spielberg himself dismissed the term post-classical as a label which describes his blockbuster films by mentioning the operation of fundamental principles of storytelling (character motivation, for instance) which always define the ways spectacle and special effects are used (personal question to the filmmaker, Liverpool John Moores University, 13 May 2000).

¹⁹ Interestingly enough King Vidor's Duel in the Sun (1946) which Bazin cited as a primary example of the 'superwestern' on formal grounds (1971, p 151) has also been seen as a prototype New Hollywood blockbuster on the basis of a number of elements (stars, high budget, high grosses etc.). See Schatz (1993, p 11). For accounts that question the classical aesthetics of blockbuster films see Schatz (1993,

pp 8-36). Wyatt's work (1994) also exemplifies such an approach but he looks at a distinct trend within the blockbuster film, the 'high concept' film. See also Tasker (1996, pp 213-228) and Hoppenstadt (1998, pp 222-242).

²⁰ For an authoritative account of the conglomeration of the film industry and its assimilation into a horizontally and vertically integrated media/leisure industry as well as of the proliferation of distribution outlets see Gomery (1998a, pp 407-418); Gomery (1998b, pp 245-254); Balio (1990a, pp 3-40) and Balio (1990b, pp 259-296). For a discussion of changes in the patterns of viewing see Corrigan (1991, pp 27-29). For an examination of the changing patterns of reception/consumption see Schatz (1993, pp 8-36) and Tasker (1996, pp 213-228). For the predominance of the package system of production see Bordwell et al. (1985, pp 330-337) and Litwak (1986, pp 155-172). On the subject of the changes in audience constitution see Hillier (1994, pp 30-31) and Schatz (1993, pp 11-12). On the conduct of business in the New Hollywood see Bart (1999).

²¹ Although movie tie-ins and spin offs have had a long history in Hollywood cinema (almost as long as Hollywood cinema itself), the horizontal integration of the media industries in the last 30 years has provided infinite possibilities for the exploitation of every possible commodity associated with a film. Still though, as Tom Dewe Mathews argues, the strategies behind product placement and indirect advertising were perfected more than 60 years ago at the time of studio Hollywood (1998, pp 8-9).

²² The phrase 'once again' here refers to the application of the term New Hollywood to cover both the 1967-1975 period (an era associated with the stylistic innovation and thematic plurality introduced by a new generation of filmmakers) and the post-1975 period (generally associated with the consolidation of the blockbuster tendencies and a return to stylistic and thematic conservatism). For a brief account of both periods see Krämer (1998, pp 301-303).

²³ For a counterargument which opposes Schatz's formulation see Buckland (1998a, pp 166-177). Kristin Thompson also uses Buckland's argument against post-classicism to support her thesis of modern classicism in *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* (1999, p 9).

²⁴ Wyatt's name has been virtually synonymous with the main arguments revolving around the notion of the high concept film, which he elaborated in a series of studies: Wyatt and Rutsky (1988, pp 42-49); Wyatt (1991, pp 86-105) and Wyatt (1994).

²⁵ It is important to note here that Cowie does not actually state that the terms classical/post-classical are devoid of meaning and that the central purpose of her essay is to construct a framework where "the differences between classical and post-classical American cinema can be properly assessed" (1998, p 178). The structure of her argument though and the emphasis she places on the profit motive reinforce such a reading.

²⁶ For instance the lack of stars in teenage horror films and romantic comedies is rectified by the appeal of the genre; the lack of stars in blockbusters such as *Titanic* (1997) is counterbalanced by the excess of spectacle and melodrama. Equally the (relative) lack of causal coherence from comedies such as *There's Something About Mary* (1998) and *Dumb and Dumber* (1994) (both directed by Peter and Bobby Farrelly) is compensated by the power of the genre and the presence of the stars.

²⁷ For an introduction to historical poetics as a form of critical inquiry in the study of American cinema see Jenkins (1995, pp 99-122).

²⁸ For instance one could argue that film sequels are products of such 'not properly-poetic' factors as dealmaking and distribution deals. Furthermore, the hundreds of films that are released 'straight-to-video' can be seen as films made because of changes in film exhibition and in patterns of consumption.

²⁹ Taking distribution as an example and looking at studies which deal with it independently, one can cite Cones (1997). For accounts that examine the role of distribution in the film construction process see Neale (1998, pp 130-141). Finally film distribution has also occupied a central place in industrial-economic historical accounts of contemporary Hollywood cinema. See Wasko (1994).

³⁰ To date there has not been any discussion aiming to assess Mamet's cinema as classical or post-classical, even though several essays discuss Mamet's use of style and the structures of his narratives. House of Games has attracted a particularly noteworthy volume of criticism, the majority of which nevertheless focuses on questions of gender and with an emphasis on psychoanalytic film theory. Such essays include: Van Wert (1990, pp 2-10) (an article that provoked a stinging critique by James Hyder [1991, pp 61-62] and a reply by Van Wert [1991, pp 62-63]); Kipnis (1991, pp 25-31); Hall (1992, pp 137-160); LaPalma (1996, pp 57-62); Hudgins (2001, pp 209-233) and Price (2001, pp 41-59). A very different, linguistic, approach can be found in Joki (1994, especially pp 155-161). Also, the only book-length study of David Mamet's cinema, Gay Brewer's David Mamet and Film: Illusion /Disillusion in A Wounded Land, contains a chapter on House of Games, which is dedicated primarily to a thematic reading of the film (1993, pp 1-28).

³¹ Mamet lost to Costa Gavras and Thomas Stewart's adaptation of Thomas Hauser's novel Missing.

³² Those hits included Glengarry Glen Ross (1983) at the National Theatre in London and at the Golden Theater in New York (1984), The Frog Prince (1985) at the Ensemble Studio in New York and Edmond (1984) at the Royal Court Theatre in London. See Kane (1992, pp xxxiii-xxxv).

³³ Brewer suggests that The Tell is an alternate title of the film but he does not provide any evidence as to whether the film was released anywhere under that title (1993, p 11).

³⁴ See for example his bitter comments in an essay entitled 'A Playwright in Hollywood' from which the following extract was taken: "I have never been much good as a team player or employee, and it was difficult for me to adjust to a situation where 'because I say so' was insufficient explanation. When you write for the stage you retain the copyright. The work is *yours* and no one can change a word without your permission. When you write for the screen you are a *laborer* hired to turn out a product, and that product can be altered at the whim of those who employ you." ((1994a, p 162; original emphasis)

³⁵ As one critic poignantly noted " the film, a loose adaptation of Mamet's circular, fragmentary and acerbic play of the 1970s sexuality, smooths the rough edges into a linear 1980s narrative of capitalist redemption, in which a disaffected young Chicagoan finds affluence and romance through suffering repentance (sic), and entrepreneurial hard work. Indeed, the transfiguration of Mamet's play is so drastic as to call into question the notion of adaptation itself" (Begley, 1998, pp 166-167). On Mamet and adaptation see Chapter Four.

³⁶ This love-hate relationship is manifested in Mamet's writing credits for commercial, big budget films such as Hoffa (De Vito, 1992, Fox, US) and Hannibal (R.Scott, 2001, MGM/Universal, US) and his writing/directing credits for small, independently distributed productions such as House of Games, Homicide, and Oleanna. In a sense, Mamet's relationship to Hollywood resembles somewhat John Cassavetes's (acting in mainstream commercial films but directing independent features) and even more so John Sayles's (screenwriter of Apollo 13 [Howard, 1996, Universal, US] but also director of Matewan [1987, Cinecom, US] and City of Hope [1991, The Samuel Goldwyn Company, US]).

³⁷ As Mamet himself has revealed, he submitted four drafts of the script after meetings and discussion with De Palma and Linson (the producer of the film) which in their opinion aided the script. However, when the above duo required further changes, Mamet refused to make them (Mamet, 1990, p 136).

³⁸ This definition does not cover independent companies formed by producers such as David O. Selznick, Sam Spiegel or actors such as James Cagney, since those companies had a distribution contract with the studios.

³⁹ On the subject of declining theatre attendances see Schatz (1993, p 10); Balio (1990a, p 7) and, especially, Hillier (1994, pp 13-15).

⁴⁰ The only source that estimates the size of the film's budget is CineBooks' Motion Picture Guide Review (a database of reviews available in Microsoft's Cinemanía CD-ROM, 1996 and 1997). The review of House of Games from the above database is reprinted at <http://home.comcast.net/~jason-charnick/mamet.html> (last accessed on 2 May 2004).

⁴¹ The early 1990s saw the end of the above period as most of the 1980s independent production / distribution companies collapsed, went bankrupt or were taken over by the studios. For a concise account of the period see Hillier (1994, pp 19-22). Although new distribution outlets such as digital television and the use of the internet as a broadcasting medium have once again boosted independent production, the period I am referring to has been mostly characterised by the distribution guarantee offered by the stunning growth of video.

⁴² For a full list of Michael Hausman credits see <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0369592/> (last accessed on 5 Jun 2004)

⁴³ In an anecdote from the first day of the shooting of principal photography Mamet remembers how Hausman had deliberately scheduled an easy one and a half page scene in order to build the director's confidence.

⁴⁴ Since there is no available documentation of the deal in question this conclusion has been inferred by cross-referencing three main sources Hillier (1994, p 21); Balio (1990b, p 278) and Thompson (1987, pp 58-59)

⁴⁵ As Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson stated: "A producer organised a film project: he or she secured financing and combined the necessary laborers (whose roles had been previously defined by the standardised production structure and subdivision of work categories) and the means of production (the narrative 'property' the equipment, and the physical sites of production)" (1985, p 331).

⁴⁶ Recent examples include John Sayles, Jim Jarmusch and Kevin Smith, filmmakers who have employed the same actors, music composers and production designers in a series of films.

⁴⁷ Specifically, the music composer, the production designer and the costume designer of the film had never worked in cinema before Mamet's first film. Also actors such as W.H Macy, Mike Nussbaum and J.T. Walsh had previously appeared only in a handful of film productions, whilst other actors in key parts such as Ricky Jay and Steven Goldstein made their debut in the film.

⁴⁸ Thus Scott Zigler and Patricia Wolff are credited as actors and production assistants. Ricky Jay is credited as actor and consultant in confidence games.

⁴⁹ This brief account of Orion Pictures is based on a longer article I wrote about the history of the company entitled 'Major Status – Independent Spirit: The History of Orion Pictures (1978-1992) in The New Review of Film and Television Studies, Vol. 2, No 1, pp 87-135.

⁵⁰ On the subject of the reason for the resignation of the above studio executives from United Artists see Lewis (1995, especially pp 85-87).

⁵¹ Besides the two Dudley Moore vehicles which recorded \$37 and \$42 million in terms of film rentals respectively, Orion delivered six moderate hits (including Excalibur [Boonman, 1981, US]), whilst the company saw fifteen films that lost money at the American box-office (Hanson, 1985, p 25).

⁵² There is a notable absence of executive or associate producers from the credits of House of Games, which can be potentially construed as an absence of the money investors (Orion) from the production process of the film (compared, for instance, with Bob and Harvey Weinstein who appear in the credits of many Miramax films as executive producers [Pulp Fiction, The English Patient, Cold Mountain, etc]).

⁵³ Furthermore Medavoy claims that it took only eleven words to make the deal between Orion and Mamet (2002, p 169), which, if nothing else, indicates the degree of the company's trust in a first-time writer/director.

⁵⁴ Besides his plays these themes can be also found in the five volumes of collected essays Mamet has written: Writing in Restaurants (1987), Some Freaks (1990), The Cabin: Reminiscence and Diversions (1993b), Make-Believe Towns: Essays and Remembrances (1996) and Jafsie and John Henry: Essays

on Hollywood, Bad Boys and Six Hours of Perfect Poker (2000a) and in a number of interviews Mamet has given, some of which can be found in Kane (2001).

⁵⁵ For the purposes of this chapter I shall refer only briefly to those influences. Their complete significance will be examined in Chapter Two: The Auteur in the Trailer: Have Things Changed? and especially in Chapter Three: Writing the Film's performance: The Screenplay as Marker of Acting in the Films of David Mamet.

⁵⁶ It is important to state here that the term narration in Mamet's writings, especially in On Directing Film (1992a, pp 1-7), Jafsis and John Henry: Essays on Hollywood, Bad Boys and Six Hours of Perfect Poker (2000a, pp 95-100) and Some Freaks (1990, pp 118-120) refers to information either in terms of instructions on the script (which mediate/explain the written dialogue) or information in terms of aspects of the *mise en scène* (emotional acting/camera tricks that draw attention to themselves and not to the story). It is obvious then that the term narration in Mamet's phraseology acquires a specific meaning which does not bear any semantic resemblance with the ways the term is used in Film Studies as the mechanism that controls the organisation of the narrative events. For that reason, when I use the word narration in the way Mamet uses in his writing, I place it in quotation marks ("narration").

⁵⁷ This is probably the only occasion that the director talks about the meaning of one of his films. Like many other filmmakers, Mamet utterly refuses to comment on his plays or films (although he normally is willing to give information about the context or the background of the production), thus letting the audiences decipher his work.

⁵⁸ Like his use of the term narration, which, as I mentioned earlier, differs from the Film Studies definition of the term, Mamet uses the term dramatic action in various contexts. One of these is instead of the term narrative. See Mamet (1992a, p 2) and Mamet (1998a, pp 6-8). For a brief comment on the relationship between Mamet's reading of Eisenstein and continuity editing see Wexman (1993, p 246, n12).

⁵⁹ In his writings on film, Mamet has added the word 'stupid' after the 'keep it simple' axiom as a form of homage to the collective power of the audience to read in advance the trajectory of a scene. Hence, "Keep It Simple, Stupid" See Mamet (1990, p 124) and Mamet (1992a, p 20).

⁶⁰ The phrase is uttered by Joey when he explains to Margaret that the fact that she saw him slipping \$20 in an envelope does not mean that he actually did it.

⁶¹ In Margaret's notebook the spectator can read her analytical image of Mike as the "unbeatable gambler. Seen as omniscient", who "doles out punishment" (1988, p 11)

⁶² Even if the spectator does not have any knowledge or experience of card-playing, he/she should be in a position to question the plausibility of several events that take place in the scene. Thus, the fact that Mike nods to Margaret that he is holding three aces (after spending considerable time explaining to her what a 'tell' is) is the first clue that this is not a 'real' game. Later on, Mike reveals his cards without covering the bet (if accepted, the cheque should have been written in advance and placed in the pot). After threatening Mike and Margaret with a pistol, the man from Vegas puts the weapon down on the table (running of course the danger of having the pistol taken by any one of the other players). In the midst of all this, Joey watches calmly the whole incident from a distance and is not ordered to move to a place where he can be visible to the man from Vegas. All the above actions clearly deny any sense of verisimilitude in the scene.

⁶³ One such choice has to do with the staging of confidential information "within earshot of characters who don't hear them" as Jonathan Rosenbaum has noted. For instance, Mike tells Margaret to keep looking for his opponents tell while sitting opposite him at the poker table; Margaret tells Mike that she caught the tell while standing less than a few feet away from the man from Vegas, etc. Rosenbaum has rightly argued Mamet uses conventions of theatre space, which, unlike the usual conventions of filmic space, allow such staging of conversations (Rosenbaum, 2004, internet)

⁶⁴ In this scene Margaret agrees to play Mike's girlfriend to help him fleece the man from Vegas and discovers that she was the actual mark of the con. In the rest of the film, Margaret agrees to play

Mike's wife to help him con a businessman only to discover that she was the mark of the con once again. The first con and Margaret's discovery of it take place during one scene [Scene 8], whilst the second con and Margaret's realisation that she was the mark span eighteen scenes [Scenes 15-32].

⁶⁵ Throughout the sequence those two characters are heard only when clichéd phrases are uttered (such as "I'm going south" and "cards for the players, three good players"), a fact that further decreases their importance in the scene. As I mentioned above though, they are important in terms of their placement within the frames.

⁶⁶ Both shots were filmed with wide-angle lenses that distort the distance between camera and object. Also one must note the unusual camera positions as well as the lack of background diegetic sound.

⁶⁷ Another possible explanation for the inclusion of these two shot is the idea of homage Mamet pays to lifelong poker friends who play those two characters. Although, I believe, this interpretation has a certain truth-value, Mamet's axiom – every choice advances the story – suggests the connotations I have specified.

⁶⁸ For instance in the poker game sequence I also noted a very subtle use of lighting which as the scene progresses becomes more intense, as if someone constantly turns up the intensity of lighting until Mike at the end of the scene turns on the light switch. Thus in the first two shots of the sequence, the room is very dark with one clear source of lighting above the poker table and the rest of the room in darkness (note for example that when the Man from Vegas is framed between Mike and Margaret [shots 6 and 8] all the background is covered in darkness). As the scene reaches its climax, one can see many other sources of lighting which illuminate the room substantially until Mike switches the main lights and the room becomes fully illuminated..

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Queenan (2001, pp 12-13); Romney (1999, pp2-3) and Hinson (1988, internet).

⁷⁰ Mamet's reading of Stanislavsky is examined in detail in Chapter Three.

⁷¹ I am referring here to acting in Hollywood films, which is based on more regulated and specified conventions mainly associated with questions of realism than in other types of cinema where acting is subject to 'non-realist' conventions. As Maltby and Craven have put it: "Acting manuals [in Hollywood cinema] invoke the idea of 'truth' in performance almost as often they invoke the rhetoric of realism" (1995, p 247).

⁷² As Ebert suggests in his review of the film, the delivery of the dialogue resembles the way a speaker is dealing with a second language or an unrehearsed role (Ebert, 1999, internet).

⁷³ Scene 8 can perfectly exemplify some of the 'usual suspects' in Mamet's scripts as well as their actual delivery by the actors. In terms of cliché phrases the dialogue is literally full of poker 'ditties' such as "You wanna win the hand, you stay in till the end", "a man with a style, is a man who can smile," "it happens to the best, it happens to the rest," "the man can't play, he should stay away," "make your own luck" and "aces and jacks, man with the axe." Instances of alliteration are also quite frequent as in "South Street Seaport the man says," "gimme the goddamn money" and "look mister, this man is a man of his word" whereas at most points, the conversation remains fragmented or unfinished:

MIKE: Havin' a good time?

FORD: Never better.

MIKE: Glad to hear it

And later

FORD: He did exactly what you said. He played with his ring and...

MIKE: He did...?

FORD; He's bluffing.

MIKE: Well, he better be, cause my problem is I don't have the six. If I lose I can't...

FORD: You aren't going to. He played with his ring. Call the bet.

All the above words are uttered in slow, monotonous, almost "dreamlike" (Lesser, 1988, p 27) and certainly ironic ways that reinforce the idea of constructedness and as certain critics have noted tend to

emphasise a break with realism which brings to mind the traditions of the theatre of the absurd (Lesser, 1988, p 27; Wexman, 1993, pp 206-207). As a note, Harold Pinter, the leading practitioner of the above tradition, has directed some of Mamet's plays, including Oleanna (1994) and The Kryptogram (1996).

⁷⁴ Macy in particular (who along with J.T. Walsh – until his death in 1999 – have been the only two actors who had established a career away from Mamet's group) has been instrumental in the development of the distinct approach to acting associated with Mamet. Along with the playwright, Macy has been running acting workshops since the early 1970s and together with another group of theatre practitioners (some of them Mamet's ex-students) published an acting manual which champions the acting methods that inform Mamet's theatre and film productions. Incidentally Mamet wrote the preface to the book which is called A Practical Handbook for the Actor (1986).

⁷⁵ The three films following House of Games, Things Change, Homicide and Oleanna, as well as the Mamet-scripted and Steven Schachter-directed The Water Engine (1994), present remarkable similarities in terms of the participation of the same actors (especially Mantegna and Macy) and the acting techniques employed. This is probably one of the reasons that at the end of his introduction to the published screenplay of House of Games Mamet stated about his future films: "Next time I'll eat nothing but microbotic food, exercise every day, and, God Willing, work with exactly the same people" (1988, p xviii). Since The Spanish Prisoner (1997) and The Winslow Boy (1999), Mamet has started working with different actors, although the acting techniques have, by and large, remained the same.

⁷⁶ To this I must add the extremely significant participation of the card magician Ricky Jay in the role of the Man from Vegas.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

¹ The trailers I discuss in this essay are features employed by distributors for the promotion of the following films: House of Games, Things Change, Homicide, Glengarry Glen Ross, Oleanna, American Buffalo, The Spanish Prisoner, The Winslow Boy, State and Main and Heist. My analysis includes only trailers for films that have either been scripted and directed by Mamet or adapted for the cinema from his own plays and as such are pertinent to the arguments on authorship I am proposing, since they employ Mamet's name as a marketing tool. For that reason I am not examining trailers that advertise films based on an original screenplay by Mamet and directed by others (including The Postman Always Rings Twice, The Verdict, The Untouchables, We're No Angels, Hoffa, The Edge, Wag the Dog, and Hannibal) or scripts written by others based on plays by Mamet (About Last Night...). Some of the above trailers were viewed on-line, while others were located in the 'Special Features' section of their respective DVDs. Due to the existence of several versions of a trailer for the same film, I am citing below the sources I have used:

Trailers obtained on-line:

- House of Games (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093223/trailers>) – last accessed on 30 May 2004
- Things Change (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096259/trailers>) – last accessed on 30 May 2004
- Homicide (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0102048/trailers>) – last accessed on 30 May 2004
- Heist (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0252503/trailers>) – last accessed on 30 May 2004

Trailers located in the DVD version of their respective films are:

- Glengarry Glen Ross (Carlton Entertainment, 2003, Region 2)
- Oleanna (Seville Pictures, 2001, Region 1)
- The Spanish Prisoner (Pathé, 2003, Region 2)
- The Winslow Boy (Sony Pictures Classics, 2000, Region 2).
- State and Main (Fine Line Features, 2001, Region 2)
- The trailer for American Buffalo is available in the special features section of the Oleanna DVD

The print ads I refer to in my discussion are available in the following URLs:

- Homicide (<http://www.graphicexpectations.com/itemdetail.cfm?sku=1478>) last accessed on 30 May 2004
- Oleanna (<http://us.imdb.com/ImageView?u=http%3A//images.amazon.com/images/P/B0000542CR.01.LZZZZZZZ.jpg>) – last accessed on 30 May 2004
- The Spanish Prisoner (<http://us.imdb.com/Posters?0120176>) – last accessed on 30 May 2004
- The Winslow Boy (<http://www.culturevulture.net/Movies/WinslowBoy.htm>) – last accessed on 30 May 2004
- State and Main (http://www.impawards.com/2000/state_and_main_ver3.html) – last accessed on 30 May 2004
- Heist (<http://www.impawards.com/2001/heist.html>) – last accessed on 30 May 2004

² This position is a composite of two complementary arguments primarily expressed by Henry Jenkins (1995, pp 99-122) and Timothy Corrigan (1991). In Jenkins's work it appears as part of a larger argument that attempts to formalise the traits of a post-classical Hollywood cinema within the context of a historical poetics. On the other hand, in Corrigan's work, it constitutes the key argument of a chapter entitled 'The Commerce of Auteurism'.

³ This decline reached the point of no return in the mid 1960s when multinational corporations started buying out one by one all the old studios. Since then the studios have become virtually indistinguishable, interchangeable financial organisations in a new media and entertainment landscape, with no distinct identity.

⁴ Henry Jenkins cites the example of the "unmarked subjective tracking shot" once utilised by John Carpenter in Halloween (1978), which came to inform the 1980s and 1990s slasher horror film. Interestingly, Carpenter's name is missing from the names of the four 'auteurs' (Spielberg, Lynch, De Palma, and Cronenberg) that Jenkins uses to support his argument (1995, p 115).

⁵ Following Peter Krämer who pointed out that "in different critical contexts 'New Hollywood' [might] refer to the period of 1967-1975 as well to the post-1975 period, to aesthetic and political progressivism of the liberal cycles of the earlier period as well as to the regressiveness of the blockbuster of the later period" (Krämer, 1998, p 303), one could argue that the two distinct phases of critical attention (in terms of their use of style and formal experimentation, and of producing blockbusters respectively) given to this group of filmmakers, can be associated with the two distinct uses of the term 'New Hollywood.'

⁶ During the heyday of studio era only one filmmaker, Frank Capra, had achieved the privilege of having his name above the title with a degree of consistency. The success of Capra's Lady for a Day (1933) and especially the critical acclaim and box-office triumph of It Happened One Night (1934) led Columbia Pictures to place the filmmaker's name above the title of his films. See Balio (1998, pp 419-433, especially 431). After the Paramount Decree (1948) and as several Hollywood directors formed their own independent production companies, the practice of placing the filmmaker's name above the title became more common (Hitchcock, Preminger, Ford) though it still remained exceptional. On the other hand, non-Hollywood cinema had been utilising the notion of film authorship as a promotional strategy since the 1950s and 1960s, a period when, as Michael Budd has argued, "European and Japanese national cinemas carved out a niche in the American market" (1979, pp 12-19, especially 14).

⁷ Jenkins cites Lynch and Cronenberg as key examples (1995, pp 115). One could also include Woody Allen, John McNaughton, Hal Hartley, Richard Linklater, Vincent Gallo, Jim Jarmusch and a large number of directors associated with American independent cinema since 1980 whose work is primarily promoted through festivals (such as Sundance and The New York Festival) and through popular reviews.

⁸ In a very detailed essay which examines the process of the construction of authorship in Robert Altman's films by (mainly) independent distributors, Justin Wyatt (1996, 51-67) clearly demonstrates how several distributors and especially mini-majors (such as Miramax) have used the concept of authorship to market films by Altman, which otherwise could not find a market.

⁹ Although both critics commence from a position that emphasises the celebrity status of the film director and examine how this parameter can influence the reception of his [Coppola's] films, Corrigan grounds his discussion strictly within the context of postmodernism, whereas Lewis's micro-examination of Coppola's 'Zoetrope films' is not interested in such theorisation.

¹⁰ I would particularly like to note the increasing use of 'The Making of ...' marketing strategy since it offers the audiences an opportunity to familiarise themselves with several aspects of a film's production. As the title implies 'The Making of ...' attempts to 'give away' the secrets of the film, to reveal the tricks of its production to a rather 'secure' audience who demands more than the picture itself. In such featurettes the film's principal players (director, producer, stars and even the less glamorous [but equally important] collaborators such as production designers and directors of cinematography) offer their own views on the film, thereby, guiding the audience towards specific ways of understanding the film. Originally started as an accompaniment to the main feature (usually a high-tech, blockbuster film) 'The Making of ...' has now become a standard marketing strategy in contemporary American cinema equally utilised for expensive, studio-financed pictures (Independence Day, The Matrix and The Perfect Storm) as well as for mid budget independent films (such as Paul Thomas Anderson's Magnolia).

¹¹ Many successful independent distribution companies have now become divisions of the majors (Miramax belongs to the Disney Corporation and New Line (via the Turner Broadcasting Corporation) is part of the AOL/Warner Communications empire) but through an institutional arrangement that sees them retaining a relative autonomy (See Wyatt [1998, pp 74-90, especially p 84]). Thus, it is possible for a company such as Disney to be able to reap the benefits from the financial success of films such as Pulp Fiction (1994) and Dogma (1999), films that do not fit within Disney's wholesome family entertainment regime, but necessary for Disney's control of the American film market in recent years (anon, 2000, internet)

¹² As an example I cite here The Blair Witch II: The Book of Shadows (2000), which was marketed on the strength of the original, ultra-low budget, hugely successful film without any reference to the authorship of Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick. Also, the most financially successful independent film of all time, IFC's My Big Fat Greek Wedding, was marketed without any concrete references to the film's director, Joel Zwick.

¹³ Wyatt demonstrates the benefits of such an approach through an examination of Altman's career.

¹⁴ Although not specific to questions of authorship, Charles Wolfe advances a similar argument about the meaningful relation between advertising material and film as texts. For Wolfe, marketing ploys such as production stills, celebrity photos, photographic poster art, illustrations for pressbooks, programs, interviews as well as reviews have the added value of "bear[ing] an historical trace" through their reproduction, recycling and dissemination, which can potentially help the critic locate discourses of historical spectatorship, that are absent from the film text as a narratological construct (1985, p 45 and 52). In a similar manner, Vance Kepley Jr has also argued that marketing practices mediate between a film and its audience, therefore tempering the conditions of a film's historical reception. After a detailed analysis of the advertising strategies for Griffith's Broken Blossoms, he concluded that "[f]or the commercial's cinema audience, the filmic text exists within a cinematic one," an argument that aptly reveals the significance of promotional material both as texts and contexts that address historical spectators (1978 p 45).

¹⁵ Obviously, such a task is a book in itself. For that reason, I have chosen only one Mamet film to analyse, Things Change.

¹⁶ The renewed interest in film trailers can be also detected in the majors' attempts to circulate film trailers outside the theatre context, via CD-ROMs and on-line. For instance, Columbia Pictures, as early as 1994, signed a contact with Hollywood Online, an information provider, which delivers trailers for Columbia's films through networks such as America Online, Compuserve and eWorld to computer users (Spring, 1994, p 8).

¹⁷ The remark was made by Dreamworks executive, Mark Christianson, (quoted, in Hindes, 1997, p 1).

¹⁸ With the exception of Wag the Dog that was distributed by New Line Cinema, all the other films based on his scripts were distributed by the majors. These include: The Postman Always Rings Twice (Lorimar/MGM), The Verdict (Twentieth Century Fox), The Untouchables (Paramount), We're No Angels (Paramount), Hoffa (Fox) The Edge (Paramount) and Hannibal (Universal/MGM).

¹⁹ An almost identical marketing strategy can be noted in the trailer for Memento (2000), one of the most unconventional American films to reach the screens of multiplexes that year. The trailer for Memento promoted the film as an action-packed thriller revolving around the star image of Guy Pearce, suggesting therefore a conventional genre piece by an unknown filmmaker. As it turned out the actual film bore no resemblance to what the trailer was trying to sell since it was a slow-paced, utterly distinctive exercise in style of a standard narrative situation. This strategy is not an uncommon phenomenon. As a director of acquisition and sales for feature films has noted "distributors can lie perfectly with a trailer" (quoted in McDonald, 1999, p 6); see also Eastman et al (1985, p 52)

²⁰ See in particular Ebert (1999, internet) and Lesser (1988, p 27)

²¹ The box-office figure was taken from the Internet Movie Database (<http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0093223/business> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004)

²² Al Pacino starred in a production of American Buffalo in 1980 (New Wharf Theatre in New Haven); Robert Duvall had the lead in the 1977 production of the same play (Broadway); and Peter Weller starred in a production of The Woods in 1982 (Second Stage in New York). See Kane (1992, pp xxvii-xxxvii).

²³ In the film the joke is a part of the diegesis. In particular, it occurs as a part of the routine of Jackie Shore, a stand up comedian, whose show is attended (on his personal request) by the two main characters. Its (decontextualised) use in the trailer, however, is to introduce immediately the film as a comedy, thus adding further 'genre value' to the buddy/gangster genres that the trailer will ultimately attempt to deploy.

²⁴ For a warm review of Things Change see Ebert (1988, internet). For a negative review see Kauffman (1988, pp 26-27). For a mixed review see Hinson (1988, internet). The film's box office figure was taken from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096259/business> (last accessed on 5 Jun 2004).

²⁵ Between 1988 and 1991 Mamet scripted only one film, We're No Angels for Paramount.

²⁶ The actual figure was \$2,971,661 (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0102048/business> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004)

²⁷ With the exception of We're No Angels which proved a modest box office failure, The Postman Always Rings Twice and The Verdict both returned hefty rentals to their respective studios, whereas The Untouchables was one of the highest grossing films of 1987. In particular, The Verdict grossed \$54 million (returning \$26 million to Fox) whereas The Untouchables grossed \$77 million (returning to Paramount in excess of \$36 million). See <http://us.imdb.com/Business?0084855> and <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0094226/business> (last accessed on 5 Jun 2004).

²⁸ Equally Mamet did not receive any concrete credit for his script for Hoffa. Interestingly, Fox advertised the feature as "A Danny De Vito film" thus focusing on the celebrity status of the actor/director (despite the fact that the phrase 'a Danny De Vito film' does not signify – in my opinion – any distinct thematic or stylistic characteristics).

²⁹ The intertitles used in the trailer read: "This was no ordinary *game*. They did what they had to do to *win*" (my italics).

³⁰ The figure was taken from <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0104348/business> (last accessed on 5 Jun 2004)

³¹ The figure was taken from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110722/business> (last accessed on 5 Jun 2004)

³² The trend to form 'Classics divisions' was initiated by United Artists. UA Classics was formed to handle prestigious, mostly European, auteur films, which were aimed towards a different segment of the film audience. When in the late 1970s and early 1980s films such as La Dernier Metro (1981) and Diva (1981) returned rentals in excess of \$2 million the other majors followed promptly in establishing their own Classics divisions (Columbia/Triumph, Orion Classics, and later Sony Classics and Paramount Classics [with Warner Independent formed in 2003]) to claim their own share of the market. Those divisions operated mostly as autonomous units, which meant that they did not have any affiliations with the domestic sales operations of the parent company. See Klain (1983, pp 3 and 31)

³³ A brief look at the chart with the top ten independent releases in North America as compiled by Screen International can be very revealing regarding the size of that audience. Indicatively, for the weekend 22-24 June 2001 the chart includes films such as Memento (Newmarket Films) with a gross of \$20 million, Chocolat and Bridget Jones' Diary (both by Miramax) with a gross of \$70 million each (anon, 2001, p 25).

³⁴ For instance, House of Games participated in the 1987 New York Festival, Things Change in the 1988 Venice Film Festival and Homicide in the 1991 Cannes Film Festival. The Spanish Prisoner, The Winslow Boy and State and Main participated in eleven film festivals (in total), a fact that further supports an argument that sees Mamet's films within the context of contemporary American independent cinema.

³⁵ The only exception is a script for Fox's The Edge (1997) which, significantly, was produced by Art Linson, and in which Alec Baldwin had the main part (both Linson and Baldwin were close friends and regular collaborators in Mamet's films).

³⁶ For instance, he has worked on the script for John Frankenheimer's Ronin (1998) under the name Richard Weiss. Additionally, Mamet had a script for Lolita rejected by Richard Zanuck, the film's producer, mainly due to disagreements on issues of representation. As Mamet was quoted in Boxoffice Online: "I was hired by Adrian Lyne to write a draft of Lolita. Indeed, there are very few people who weren't hired by Adrian Lyne to write a draft of Lolita. I was real proud of it, and I handed it in and didn't hear anything from anybody for weeks. So I was talking to [the film's producer] Dick Zanuck. I said, Whatsamatter? You didn't like the script? He said, You made him look like a pedophile [sic]." (Greene, 1998, internet).

³⁷ This explains why neither Sony Classics, distributor of The Winslow Boy, nor Fine Line Features, distributor of State and Main, used Mamet's highly publicised Oscar nomination for best screenplay in 1998 for Barry Levinson's Wag the Dog as a marketing strategy for promoting the films. As my analysis will demonstrate, by 1998 Mamet had become a brand-name director that – for independent distributors – could guarantee an audience for his films. For that reason, there was no rationale for resorting to old strategies that used Mamet's name as a celebrity screenwriter.

³⁸ Foregrounding moments of conflict is a key strategy in the creation of a trailer. Even though the area of film trailers has been consistently ignored by academic scholarship, Mary Beth Haralovich and Cathy Root Klapat, in a rare essay on film trailers, have identified the above technique as a fundamental principle in a trailer's attempt towards narrativization (1982: 66).

³⁹ Although the actual figure [Fig 2] is from the VHS cover for the film, it is nevertheless an exact copy of the film poster. Despite an extensive search, I was unable to locate a copy of the poster where both the image and the tagline could be clearly visible when upscaled from their original size.

⁴⁰ The trailer for American Buffalo failed to attract any audiences due to its inability to establish a story, or at least a situation. The distributor's choice to sell the film as a 'comedy' about a company of men that spend their time without any purpose, talking in codes and vaguely raising questions about trust and deceptive appearances (and counting on Dustin Hoffman's star persona and positive reviews about acting [two thumbs up!]) did not seem to make any marketing sense. This is especially so, when the real assets of the film – besides Hoffman's lead – were a 'legendary' play of the 1970s, several moments of intense conflict between the characters (none of which is foregrounded in the trailer) and Mamet's ascending status as a screenwriter/director. Thus although the fragmented dialogue establishes some of Mamet's classic themes (trust, games, deceit), it is completely decontextualised and without

any reference to a concrete situation. Directed by Michael Corrente (who, like James Foley in Glengarry Glen Ross, did not receive any credit in the trailer) American Buffalo grossed an extremely disappointing \$643,129 at the US box-office (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115530/business> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004).

⁴¹ Interestingly, the use of popular reviews is also abundant in the movie poster, where one image from the film – a social encounter with the possibility of romance between a man and a woman – is surrounded by three different reviews on the left, right and above the still. The review on the left of the image focuses on the talents of the filmmaker (“Nobody does it better than David Mamet, and Mamet has never done it better than this”), the one on the right dwells on the greatness of the story, which refers back to Mamet (“A sly, delightful, brilliantly constructed *con game*” – my italics), whereas the one above the still grants the film four stars and invites the audience to “just sit back and let the movie take you for a ride”. Finally, the image is completely surrounded by more verbal information, which stresses Mamet’s authorship (The Spanish Prisoner – A David Mamet Film) in a way that complements the trailer’s intention. For a more detailed discussion of the marketing of The Spanish Prisoner see Chapter Five.

⁴² It would be interesting, at this point in Mamet’s career, to find out whether Pathè and Sony’s strategy to highlight Mamet as the auteur in the film’s trailer was a marketing decision based on the recognition of the artist’s filmmaking abilities or a contractual condition imposed by Mamet’s agent as his client’s clout had been substantially increasing in the period 1992-1997. Even if the end result is similar, identifying the reasons can certainly enhance our understanding of film marketing. I am indebted to Warren Buckland for this remark.

⁴³ Compared to \$2,585,639 (House of Games), \$3,527,886 (Things Change), \$2,971,661 (Homicide) and \$124,693 (Oleanna), the \$9,582,900 of The Spanish Prisoner at the American box-office (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120176/business> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004) is by any measure an impressive figure for a David Mamet film.

⁴⁴ Even after its release, the film participated in various other festivals such as the Espoo Film Festival in Finland and the Reykjavic Film Festival in Iceland (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120176/releaseinfo> last accessed on 5 Jun 2004)

⁴⁵ A recent example of a relatively low budget American film that was released first in Europe and then in the US was Joel and Ethan Coen’s Oh Brother Where Art Thou?. The film was a big success in Europe where it opened in August 2000, first in France and then in the rest of the continent, recording an overseas gross of \$25 million, generating very positive publicity and receiving rave reviews before its release in the US in December and its final – impressive – domestic gross of \$45 million (<http://www.worldwideboxoffice.com/index.cgi?order=worldwide&start=2000&finish=2001&keyword=brother&links=amazon.com> – last accessed on 5 Jun 2004). Another independent American film that has succeeded at the US box-office after a striking financial success in Britain and the rest of Europe is Christopher Nolan’s Memento. Opened on March 16th in the US in a very limited release (almost five months after its release in several European countries), it gradually became a force in the US box office, recording in the first three months of its release \$20 million (anon, 2001, p 25) before finishing with a gross of \$25 million (<http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/2001/MENTO.html> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004).

⁴⁶ The actual figure was \$3,956,112 (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0155388/business> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004)

⁴⁷ The figure was obtained from the Internet Movie Database <http://us.imdb.com/Business?0252503> (last accessed on 5 Jun 2004).

⁴⁸ According to industry insiders Universal Pictures co-chairman Stacey Snider presented Mamet with a 15-page memo about the requested changes (Anon, 1999b, internet)

⁴⁹ According to reviewers of both scripts, Mamet’s version depicted a monstrous Hannibal Lecter “never letting him become even remotely likeable”, whereas Zaillian’s draft “locate[d] a more

humorous, even satiric center of gravity within the mad Doc, making him a devilish predator who doubles as a comedian of manners in a world gone to seed". See F.X Feeney (2001, internet)

⁵⁰ According to The Daily Express, Zaillian worked on Mamet's script by revising and removing scenes in order to accommodate Foster's worries about the representation of Clarice Starling in the film. See Anon (1999c, internet).

⁵¹ The total domestic box office taking of State and Main was \$6,920,692 (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120202/business> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004). Even though I cannot trace the actual source, I remember reading that the film lost a substantial amount of money since its budget was estimated at approximately \$20 million.

⁵² Both films were given a limited release by their respective distributors. The Winslow Boy originally opened in only 6 screens and at the time of its peak it was playing in 145 screens all over the US and Canada (<http://www.boxofficeguru.com/w2.htm> last accessed on 5 Jun 2004). State and Main had a slightly wider distribution with 72 screens in its opening weekend. At its zenith (during its fourth week) it reached 462 engagements (<http://www.boxofficeguru.com/s3.htm> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004).

⁵³ Indeed, had Mamet not secured more work in American cinema, he would still had continued with his theatre and writing career as the list of the following publications (between 1999 and 2001) clearly demonstrates: Jafsie and John Henry: Essays on Hollywood, Bad Boys and Six Hours of Perfect Poker (2000a), Wilson: A Consideration of the Sources (2000b) and Boston Marriage (2001).

⁵⁴ One can only speculate on this question, but an answer should take into consideration elements such as the nature of the story (heist films tend to be characterised by car-chase sequences, glamorous locations and a variety of special effects, all deemed as expensive features), the stars of the film (not A list but respected – and therefore expensive – professionals such as Gene Hackman and Danny De Vito) and more importantly the fact that the producer of the film was Art Linson, who could guarantee Mamet's creative control of the film, even within the context of mainstream American cinema that the film's distributor, AOL-Time Warner, represents.

⁵⁵ Hannibal's global box office takings have been estimated near the region of \$350 million. In the US only the film recorded \$165,091,986, whilst outside the US the film took \$184, 200,000, bringing its global box office takings to \$349,300,000 (<http://www.boxofficeguru.com/intlarch3.htm> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004)

⁵⁶ At the time of writing Hannibal sits at No 96 of the 100 most commercially successful films in the history of US cinema (<http://www.filmsite.org/boxoffice.html> - last accessed on 1 Aug 2004)

⁵⁷ The film's box office takings in the US were a little under \$25 million. In its opening weekend the film grossed \$7,823,521, a rather small figure for a \$35 million film distributed by the largest major company in American cinema (<http://www.boxofficeguru.com/h.htm> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004). Given that the film achieved another \$7-10 million from the international market, its theatrical performance can be considered as a modest failure.

⁵⁸ As of 22 May 2004, the film trailer for Spartan remains unavailable for consultation (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0360009/trailers-screenplay-X23337-10-2>). On the other hand, the film's poster is very reminiscent of the poster for Heist. The emphasis is again on the three stars of the film, Val Kilmer, Derek Luke and William H Macy, whilst Kilmer is the only one of the three whose picture features in the poster. Mamet's name does not appear anywhere (apart from the credits at the bottom of the sheet). This suggests that Mamet's authorship in this third period is not as stable as the one associated with his work for independent distributors. Furthermore, the film's failure at the US box office (\$4,357,745 - <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0360009/business> - last accessed on 22 May 2004) raises many questions about the future of Mamet's industrial authorship as the filmmaker has now two commercially unsuccessful films distributed by a major. Spartan, in particular, delivered the worst opening of the first three months of 2004 for a wide release [<http://www.boxofficeguru.com/031504.htm> – last accessed on 5 Jun 2004]

⁵⁹ As I shall argue in Chapter Five, certain Mamet films such as House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner belong to the con-artist film genre and, in particular, to the con-game film, a sub-category of the former.

⁶⁰ In discussing the quest of the hero Mamet directly refers to Hitchcock and the McGuffin, when he argues that the hero's goal need not be concrete but "a loose abstraction" which "allows audience members to project their own desires on an essentially featureless goal (1998a, p 29)

⁶¹ Like the 'blocking of the scene,' the terms 'through line' and 'through action' stem from Stanislavsky's theories of acting and they will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three which deals with questions of acting and performance in Mamet's cinema.

⁶² One has to point out here the inclusion of two 'currency exchange' signs in the background of the third shot, which foreshadow the action in scene four (the mafia promises Gino money in exchange for his services).

⁶³ Besides its frequent use in gangster films such as Goodfellas (Scorsese, 1990), it is Mike Newell's Donnie Brasco (1996) that gives a formal definition of the phrase 'a friend of ours' as a term that signifies a 'made man,' someone who would eventually become a Don as opposed to the phrase 'a friend of mine' which signifies an individual who, although not 'connected,' is someone who can be trusted.

⁶⁴ The total number of shots in the scene that include the office in focus before Gino is allowed to enter is seventeen.

⁶⁵ The issue of the proposed sum is picked up on again towards the end of the film when Jerry (without knowing the amount) refers to it as crumbs, "not enough to buy toothpaste in a few years time."

⁶⁶ Although Mamet generally avoids writing stage directions, he nevertheless makes an exception for this scene, clearly stressing, that the woman gives Gino a "drop dead look" (Mamet and Silverstein, 1989, p 8)

⁶⁷ There is only one more encounter between Gino and Miss Bates towards the end of the film [scene 27]. In that scene Gino is ready to leave Don Guiseppes house when he sees from a distance Miss Bates searching again for a light for her cigarette. He stops for a few seconds to look at her from a distance. Miss Bates looks to his direction and moves to light her cigarette. Then, suddenly, she looks back at him as if she recognised his face but Gino has already gone. Miss Bates does not pursue the matter further, thinking that it was a figment of her imagination. After that scene there is no other reference to Miss Bates or, for that matter, to Gino's potential desire for her.

⁶⁸ This part of the dialogue does not exist in the published script and has been transcribed from the film.

⁶⁹ Mamet has demonstrated a particular affinity for the notion of 'make believe' as one of his volumes of collected essays Make Believe Town (1996) clearly signals. The significance of the concept of 'make believe' in Mamet's work stems from Thorstein Veblen's A Theory of Leisure Class (originally published in 1899), which Mamet has repeatedly cited as a key influence in his work and which structures the language he uses in his writing for American theatre and cinema. In a nutshell, Mamet (via Veblen) believes that every transaction is founded on a language of games which attempts to mask the real meaning behind people's actions. As he argues in Jafsie and John Henry: Essays on Hollywood, Bad Boys and Six Hours of Perfect Poker "any endeavor using a preponderance of jargon is largely make believe" (2000a, p 47), that is, constructed according to specific rules in order to conceal the true meaning of the endeavour. This is the language of American Business, according to Mamet (1994a, p 110). Consequently, one can begin to understand why Mamet pays particular attention to the dialogue of his scripts, which is largely uttered by con-artists, salesmen, businessmen, wise-guys and Hollywood producers.

⁷⁰ As I noted in the previous chapter, the same type of contradiction occurred in the opening sequences of House of Games when three successive brief scenes demonstrated Margaret's abilities as a proficient

psychologist before the fourth scene put this notion into question and in the process kicked off the narrative.

⁷¹ Mamet uses the term “beats” to describe individual units of action that a scene might consist of (Bruder et al, 1986, p 87). While a scene is normally characterised by a specific action a character has to do, some scenes contain more than one action a character has to do (especially when a character’s objective changes midway). Such scenes contain more than one unit of actions, that is, more than one beat. The term will be discussed in the next chapter which also features a detailed analysis of a scene containing an unusually large number of beats.

⁷² Later on in the film, these gaps and fissures in the narrative will be associated with a number of coincidences that substitute for the cause-effect logic the film generally follows. The most characteristic example of this substitution takes place in the scene at the petrol station. Not having the money to pay for the petrol they have put in their car, Jerry and Gino look doomed as the station attendant is about to call the police. At the very last moment, Gino goes to the car and produces a pack of dollar bills given to him by Randy (the hotel butler) and Cherry and Grace (the two showgirls) who happen to pass by the petrol station. To make things even less clear in terms of causality, all three shots of Randy, Cherry and Grace on their jeep are from Gino’s point of view, while Jerry doesn’t seem to acknowledge their presence. This suggests that the presence of the three characters at the petrol station is a creation of Gino’s imagination, a possibility that is further emphasised by their slow waving of their hands (as they bid farewell to Gino), the sad expression in their faces and the melancholic non-diegetic music that accompanies the shot. This, of course, leaves unanswered the question of where Gino got the money.

⁷³ Film critic Stanley Kauffman, for instance, noted that “even one viewing [of the film] raises questions of credibility” (1988, p 26) and proceeded in citing a number of instances in the film that lack verisimilitude (Gino does not get in touch with his family to inform them of his decision to take the blame for a murder he did not commit; Jerry disobeys orders from a mafia boss knowing that he could be killed if caught; Gino’s impersonation of a mafia boss depends entirely on other people’s misreading of his responses; Gino and Jerry being saved by Randy and the showgirls). As he puts it at the end of his list “the final twists in the last two sequences ask the audience to hurry across a zigzag tightrope” (1988, p 26).

NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

¹ This definition was provided by Adrian Martin in his article ‘*Mise en scene* is dead: or the Expressive, the Excessive, the Technical and the Stylish’ (1992, pp 87-140). In particular, Martin argues that there are three types of *mise en scène* in contemporary American cinema, the classical, the expressivist (where there is a broad fit between style and subject) and the mannerist (where style becomes so prominent that it “no longer [works] unobtrusively”). Although Martin’s definition of classicism differs from the standard definitions identified in Bordwell and Thompson’s work such as Film Art: An Introduction (which suggests that narrative follows specific rules such as the cause-effect logic), it is nevertheless founded on a similar principle, namely, that style is at the service of a film’s narrative.

² Besides *mise en scène* and authorship, Lovell and Krämer cite a number of other methodologies (semiotics, psychoanalysis and star studies in particular) as well as practical reasons for the relegation of acting to the periphery of film studies (1998, pp 3-6).

³ William Horne expresses a similar reason for the marginalisation of the screenplay. In particular, he argues that the influence of realist film aesthetics as articulated by theorists such as Bazin and Kracauer are also to blame for the dismissal of the screenplay (1992, pp 48-54).

⁴ Although Lovell and Krämer point out the influence of the Classical Hollywood Cinema, they nevertheless do not develop the argument.

⁵ Although the two terms acting and performance have been used interchangeably in popular critical discourse, this chapter adopts the definitions provided by Robin Wood (1976) who argued that performance involves a system of relations that include: acting, the actor's presence or personality, the developed star persona and the concrete details of performance (gestures, mannerisms, intonation etc). See Wood (1976, pp 20-25).

⁶ The term performance here is used as a synonym for filmic representation and should not be confused with its later use as the actors' portrayal of a character.

⁷ For instance, Elizabeth Cowie argues that a film such as The Big Sleep (1946) "is wholly classical in style, unfolding action and space coherently." However, she goes on to demonstrate that the film's narrative is not "similarly straightforward," as despite the presence of causes for all narrative events, those causes "are highly convoluted" and the crime narrative functions as "*mise en scène* for the love story which develops between Marlowe and Vivian" (1998, p 187-188). In other words, The Big Sleep is an example of a film where the classical style was imposed-from-above to a text which does not seem to be written with the classical aesthetic in mind.

⁸ Although there is an abundance of screenwriting manuals and textbooks about the process of screenwriting, Sternberg's book - published in 1997- cites only a few doctoral dissertations that deal with the subject and a number of articles that were mainly published in Literature/Film Quarterly.

⁹ This strong claim has been recently put into question when Gus Van Sant used Joseph Stefano's original adaptation of Robert Bloch's novel Psycho for the remake of Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film. On the other hand, Kenneth Branagh gave William Shakespeare a screenwriting credit for his 1996 production of Hamlet, as did Laurence Olivier in his adaptation of the same play in 1948.

¹⁰ One does not have to go very far to discover that playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter included meticulous details for the performance of their plays.

¹¹ What I refer to by the phrase 'externally-imposed' is the total sum of guidelines, proposals and textbook recommendations amassed by an extremely large number of screenwriting manuals and loosely adopted by American film industry practitioners as markers of a 'correct' way of writing screenplays. An example of these criteria can be found in Margaret Mehring's proposition for the format of a sequence, which should manifest: "goal, strategy, struggle, reversal, realisation and bridge for the next sequence" (1990, p 68).

¹² Sternberg uses the terms "scene text" for the non-speech passages of the screenplay and "dialogue text" for the speech passages" (1997, p 65) which will be adopted for the purposes of this chapter.

¹³ An example of description is "window, very small, in the distance, illuminated"; slug lines are the capitalised phrases above sections of speech text and/or scene text that prescribe time and location: "INT: KANE'S BEDROOM – FAINT DOWN" (1997, p 71). An example of report is "Kane's hand that has been holding the ball, relaxes" (1997, p 72). An example of literary comment in an adverb-adjective construction is the sentence "the literally incredible domain of Charles Foster Kane" (1997, p 73). Examples of a technical comment include phrases such as "a very long shot" and "the camera pulls back, showing" (1997, p 74) as well as editing suggestions such as dissolve and fade out. A comment such as "as we move by, we see" suggests camera movement, whereas a comment such as "in the glass pane of the window we see" suggests camera position (1997, p 75). Although Sternberg's distinction between technical and paratechnical comment seems somewhat problematic - "the camera pulls back, showing" (technical comment) suggests camera movement and "as we move by, we see" (paratechnical comment) also suggests camera movement – the author attributes to the latter a unifying function as the pronoun we brings together the author with the filmmaker and, sometimes, with an implied spectator, 1997, p 75), whilst technical comment refers strictly to technology-specific jargon.

¹⁴ This individual is normally the director or the producer, though recently one could argue that producers such as Joe Roth and Jerry Bruckheimer, both specialists in action-adventure blockbusters, can be credited with the visual style of the films they produce. Bruckheimer's films for example, (among others The Rock (1996), Con-Air (1997) and Gone in 60 Seconds (2000)) have a vividly

distinct visual style, which cannot solely be attributed to Michael Bay, Simon West and Dominic Sena, who have respectively been credited with directing them.

¹⁵ According to film critic Vincent Canby trusting the text was “the film makers’ ultimate secret” in the success of the screen version of Mamet’s Glengarry Glen Ross (Lublin, 2001, p 39), though, as I will argue later, Mamet’s screenplays are quite different from the types of screenplays I have been discussing till this point.

¹⁶ The first date refers to the publication of the play and the second date refers to the release of the film. I have used a similar indication for Glengarry Glen Ross in the following pages of this chapter.

¹⁷ See in particular Ebert (1996, internet); Stack, (1996, internet) ; and Morrison (1996, internet)

¹⁸ In Ancient Greek drama the word stichomythia has been used to describe “dialogue in alternate lines, [which is] employed in sharp disputation, and [which is] characterized by antithesis and rhetorical repetition or taking up of the opponent's words.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term can be also applied to modern imitations of this (with the scene between Moss and Aaronow being a prime example) See Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2nd Edit., at <http://athens.oed.com/>.

¹⁹ Although Wood’s proposal was put forward within the context of discussing Leo McCarey’s work, it was nevertheless meant as a proposal with universal applicability.

²⁰ Wood uses the word ‘unrecognisable’ in both its literal meaning (Albert Finney’s Poirot) and its metaphorical meaning (Ingrid Bergman in Voyage in Italy) and suggests that a definition based only on the literal sense of the word is the “crudest” and “least viable notion of acting” (1976, p 21) simply because this definition cannot include internal transformations which are not marked by changes in the external appearance of the actor.

²¹ According to George L. Trager voice quality is constituted by a large number of characteristics including: pitch range, lip control, glottis control, rhythm control, articulation control, tempo and resonance (Elam, 1980, p 79), the majority of which are attributed to the performer whilst, obviously, rhythm control and articulation control can be prescribed to the text.

²² Trager defines voice set as “the ‘background’ characteristics deriving from physiological factors, gender, age, build, etc.” (Elam, 1980, p 79).

²³ As we shall see later in the examination of Mamet’s practice, the filmmaker attempts to tone down the actors’ vocal interpretation of the lines of the text by insisting that “the actors [should] learn the words by rote, as if they were a phonebook” (Mamet, 1998b, p 63) aiming thus towards a more pure interaction between the text and the actor.

²⁴ For a very insightful discussion of what constitutes “the Beatty character” from a political perspective see Polan (2002, pp 141-149).

²⁵ In the elaboration of such an argument one should be particularly cautious with the case of Beatty, since he has received credits for four of his scripts: Heaven Can Wait (1978), Reds (1981), Dick Tracy (1990) and Bulworth (1998).

²⁶ See for instance films such as Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid (1982), The Man with Two Brains (1983) and Three Amigos! (1986).

²⁷ See Parenthood (1989), L.A. Story (1991) and Grand Canyon (1991). Even in this category of films, however, Martin has again brought a substantial element of extra-textual (though narratively motivated) meanings. In a scene towards the end of Parenthood, Gil/Martin bursts into a crescendo of physical acting, when his son catches the ball for the first time in a game of baseball between two children’s teams. The camera stays with Gil/Martin for about 15 seconds following him around in the pitch as his happiness for his son’s success is conveyed through an elaborate choreography of cheering, jumping, crawling, dancing, etc.

²⁸ Claudia Sternberg has called this practice “the first integrated psychological profile (1997, p 107)

²⁹ An example of such form can be seen in Budd Schulberg’s screenplay for *On The Waterfront* on page five: “He is TERRY MALLOY, a wiry, jaunty, waterfront hanger-on in his late twenties. He wears a turtleneck sweater, a windbreaker and a cap. He whistles a familiar Irish song.” (quoted in Sternberg, 1997, p 109) In Pfister’s terms the above passage registers performance indicators which include the following: stature (wiry), facial expression and behaviour (jaunty), locale (waterfront hanger-on) properties (late twenties, whistles an Irish song waterfront hanger on), and costume (turtleneck sweater, windbreaker and cap). Moreover, before we even hear Malloy’s voice, the passage highlights possible sociolect and register (waterfront hanger-on suggests Malloy’s social status as well as a specific linguistic code shared among waterfront workers) as well as dialect (Irish song). The passage does not indicate any information pertaining to idiolect (individual patterns of parole construction) or stylistic texture (an elaborate verbal code that separates a speaker from others). Obviously a number of these characteristics were not retained in Marlon Brando’s performance in the actual film. This was because Brando was Method-trained, a philosophy of acting that privileges the actor’s personal experience of the text. Additionally, the film’s director Elia Kazan, was also a major advocate of the Method, which further explains why the performer’s approach to the character did not follow the guidelines of the script. Later on in the chapter I discuss the central characteristics of the Method in some detail.

³⁰ I have included examples of all three modes of non-verbal behaviour and their function in my discussion of *Homicide* later on in this chapter. However, my main intention will be to demonstrate how explicit verbal script characterisation techniques (found in the dialogue text) work as markers of visual style.

³¹ See Romney (1999, p 2); London (1996, 20); Strick (1991, p 47); Combs (1991, p 17).

³² Interestingly, Mamet is a unique case of a leading American playwright, whose work has been contextualised with equal conviction within both the realist and the absurdist tradition. For instance, John Harrop and Sabin R. Epstein have classified Mamet’s work within a postrealist tradition (which in their book is equated with the theatre of the absurd (2000, p 221). On the other hand, Michael Quinn has located Mamet’s work within a realist tradition, albeit one where mimesis has given way to performed actions, an expressive rather than representational realism (1996, p 235).

³³ As Richard A. Blum has suggested the formation of the Actor’s Studio in 1947 became the instrument for the diffusion and eventual triumph of the Method in American cinema since its film training course shared a lot of common elements with the already established Method in the theatre (1984, p 31).

³⁴ Richard Blum has concisely sketched the main differences between the original Stanislavski System and the modifications and interpretations of the Method. Those differences can be perceived if one compares the two in six major issues including: the core experience of acting, developmental techniques for the training the actor, the goal of training, the predisposition toward analytic probing of the actor’s personal experience, predisposition towards typecasting and on ‘merging’ with the character (1984, p 52).

³⁵ Under the direction of Elia Kazan, the play opened at the Ethel Barrymore theatre on 2 Dec 1947 with Jessica Tandy (Blanche), Marlon Brando (Stanley), Kim Hunter (Stella) and Karl Malden (Mitch). The production ran for two years. (Details from <http://partners.nytimes.com/books/00/12/31/specials/williams-streetcar.html> - last accessed on 5 Jun 2004).

³⁶ The influence of the Method is still very much visible in our times as actors such as Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, and Dustin Hoffman (all of them Method-trained) are considered quality actors both in the mind of the public and in popular mainstream film criticism.

³⁷ The most extreme expression of this shift can be found in Strasberg’s statement “the text is our enemy” (quoted by Lindsay Crouse in an interview with Carole Zucker [1995, p 17]).

³⁸ This is a point also made by Richard Maltby and Ian Craven in Hollywood Cinema when they argue that “the Method incorporated in its understanding of realism a sense of character as more complex and less subservient to the plot function he or she bore (1995, p 259)

³⁹ Titles include Cat on A Hot Tin Roof, Sweet Bird of Youth, Suddenly Last Summer and A Glass Menagerie (all by Tennessee Williams), Death of A Salesman, All My Children and A View from the Bridge (by Arthur Miller) and Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (by Edward Albee). Additionally, one must also include the later plays of Eugene O’Neill and in particular Long Day’s Journey into Night.

⁴⁰ To this end Method practitioners developed techniques and exercises such as the ‘affective memory exercise’ which as Carnicke explains the actor “recalls in full detail a highly charged moment from his/her life in order to recreate a necessary emotional state” and the ‘private moment’ “in which one performs in public an action as private as taking a shower” (1998, p 83)

⁴¹ According to Mamet, art cannot be created consciously. As he put it in 3 Uses of the Knife: “Art, no longer the province of the artist, has become the tool of the entrepreneur – which is to say, the tool of the conscious mind. ... But ... the conscious mind cannot create art. So the conscious mind allies itself to art, and derives enjoyment from making money” (1998a, p 49). In other words, for Mamet, art can only be created unconsciously.

⁴² Mamet’s philosophy on acting has been concisely articulated in his (1998b) book True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor, Faber and Faber, London. His first four volumes of collected essays: Writing in Restaurants (1987), Some Freaks (1990), The Cabin: Reminiscence and Diversions (1993b) and Make-Believe Town (1996) contain the essence of the philosophy articulated in True and False; however, the key points are sporadically disseminated in a very large number of essays. On Directing Film (1992a) also includes some of the main threads of his thought. A Whore’s Profession (1994a), which I refer to in my discussion, contains large portion of the above books (obviously with the exception of Make-Believe Town). 3 Uses of A Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama (1998a) presents Mamet’s view on drama and narrative structures, which, of course, are important for the discussion of characterisation. Finally, Jafsie and John Henry: Essays on Hollywood, Bad Boys and Six Hours of Perfect Poker (2000a) contains a few essays that discuss aspects of theatre and cinema. Apart from the above sources, concrete references will be also made to Melissa Bruder et al (1986) A Practical Handbook for the Actor, Vintage Books, New York, a book written by Mamet’s workshop students and which illustrates how his theoretical ideas can be put into practice.

⁴³ Although as Mamet claims in True or False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor, his views on acting have been primarily “informed by and directed toward performance on the stage in front of a paying audience” (1998b, p 4), with only one hint about their applicability to film (1998b, p 30), in On Directing Film, he demonstrates that they are equally relevant for the medium of film (1992a, pp 67-77).

⁴⁴ Although this definition of the given circumstances of the play obviously includes information that is specified by the text, Bruder et al, surprisingly, have also added the opinion of the director: “...anything asked for by the director from specific blocking to crying or yelling at a certain moment, is a given circumstance and must be respected by the actor as such. In some instances the director may choose to supplant some of the given circumstances of the play, such as the location or the time period. In these cases the actor should simply accept the director’s changes as the given circumstances of the play” (1986, p 9). Although such a modification essentially contradicts Mamet’s view (at no point in his writings has Mamet ever suggested that the given circumstances of the play can be altered by an external force), it is my contention that it is mostly aimed as an attempt to determine a specific format of working relationships within the theatre rather than challenge the ‘teacher’s’ (Mamet’s) ideas.

⁴⁵ This definition is mirrored in Richard Hornby’s discussion of the key concepts in acting as those are outlined in an essay for the Journal of Aesthetic Education. As he puts it: “The objective is the *organizing principle of the performance of the role*” (original emphasis). And later “the pursuit of an objective, however, is *active* behavior, the thing that connects the actor with his role” (1983, p 32; my italics).

⁴⁶ To this end, it is not at all coincidental that Mamet's students chose Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* as their indicative example in order to demonstrate in detail how a text can be broken down to a series of objectives to be accomplished by the protagonist (Bruder et al, 1986, pp 34-37).

⁴⁷ Interestingly, in the introduction to *Performance and Performativity* (1995), Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick use the verb 'accomplish' in their interpretation of Thomas Austin's definition of 'performatives' as "utterances that *accomplish*, in their very enunciation, an action that generates effects" (1995, p 3; my italics).

⁴⁸ Bruder et al have claimed that they have yet to find a play or a scene that cannot be reduced into a series of objectives. As they proudly put it: "*we guarantee* that any scene can be broken down into playable action by this method" (1986, p 38; original italics).

⁴⁹ For a schematic theory of human perception see Bordwell (1985, pp 29-47, particularly, p 30).

⁵⁰ The fundamental significance of the fact that all objectives *must* be accomplishable has been put across by Mamet in an articulate metaphor about the Vietnam War: "One was capable of freeing the 101 Airborne in the Battle of Bulge; but we could not win the Hearts and Minds of the Vietnamese, as the direction was meaningless" (1998b, p 73). In other words the first goal is accomplishable whilst the latter lacks in concreteness and, therefore, accomplishability. Equally, in an earlier passage from the same book, Mamet categorically stated that "All of acting, all parts, all seemingly emotion-laden scenes are capable of and must be reduced to simple physical actions" (1998b, p 64).

⁵¹ In another categorical expression of the correlation between the logic of the script and the visual style it invites, Mamet has written that the answer to the question of where one should put the camera is "over there in that place in which it will capture the uninflected shot necessary to move the story along" (1992a, pp 72-3), a statement that does not necessarily go against the classical cinema argument as I noted in the opening paragraph of this chapter.

⁵² See for instance London (1996, pp 18-20 and 62) ; Heilpern (2000, pp 220-228); Queenan (2001, pp 12-13); Romney (1999, pp 2-3) and Hinson (1988, internet)

⁵³ The fact that Mamet as a director works only with his own scripts immediately erases the problem of 'compromising the author's intentions,' I noted earlier, since the screenwriter's concern that his script will be changed or altered in various ways by the director or the producer does not exist. On the other hand, when Mamet has worked as a screenwriter for films directed by other people, he has seen his scripts changed and his vision compromised (see Chapter 1, Note 37).

⁵⁴ For instance the story of *House of Games* could have easily taken place anywhere in the USA and not necessarily in Seattle where the film was shot.

⁵⁵ Indicative examples from the first two pages of the screenplay for *Homicide* include: "A man in a baseball cap, looking down at his watch. He looks up" (1992b, p 3); "One of the agents holding an electronic detonator" (1992b, p 4); "The man with the watch, his hands up, points to the man with the detonator, who presses the button" (1992b, p 4)

⁵⁶ Interviewed by Carole Zucker, Lindsay Crouse revealed the significance of the through action in Mamet's films as a guiding principle in her performance in *House of Games*: "The Character of Margaret wanted to serve; that's what I played in that film" (Zucker, 1995, p 31).

⁵⁷ Thus in *House of Games* Margaret's need to serve can be attributed to an inner repression that justifies her obsessive (driven) behaviour. The reasons for this repression however never become clear. Equally in *Things Change* (as we saw in the previous chapter) Gino originally refuses the local mafia Don a favour, only to change his mind a few seconds later without an explicit explanation.

⁵⁸ The same argument can be put forward for the filmmaker who seeks to depict visually psychological motivation when it is not available in the screenplay. The most usual solution to the problem is to insert an extra scene (usually a flashback), which explains previously unmotivated behaviour and ties all loose ends. One such example occurred in *Gladiator* (2000). During the shooting of the film, it was

decided that Maximus, the central character, lacked the psychological motivation that would concretely explain all his actions during the course of the narrative. The problem was resolved when, upon reading the original script, a second screenwriter observed that Maximus wants more than anything to be reunited with his family, an objective that eventually became the primary motivation behind every action he performed. (The Hollywood Machine, 2002, Episode 1, BBC)

⁵⁹ In terms of the first principle, Mamet argues that emotions are beyond the control of the human mind (1998b, p 11) and for that reason they cannot be conveyed through conscious physical action. Later on Mamet equates the portrayal of emotion with lying (1998b, p 78).

⁶⁰ These two conditions are posed so that the actors would choose a compelling, action, an action that would “appeal to [an individual’s] *sense of play*” (Bruder et al, 1986, p 14; original italics), which according to Mamet’s students will increase the ‘truth’ of the action performed.

⁶¹ Bruder et al use the famous ‘Stella’ scene from A Streetcar Named Desire in order to illustrate their point. Whilst for the question of what the character wants Bruder et al. provide a single answer (Stanley ‘is screaming for Stella to come home to him’), for the question of what the character does to get it they provide six different answers: “a) to beg a loved one’s forgiveness, b) to clear up a terrible misunderstanding, c) to retrieve what is rightfully mine, d) to implore a loved one to give me another chance, e) to show an inferior who’s boss and f) to make amends for bad behaviour” (1986, p 25). Thus although the character’s objective is fixed, the actions that can be performed to achieve that objective are many.

⁶² For instance the brief dialogue exchange between Gold and Young Miss Klein in the house library scene (which I will examine later in detail) contains ten different beats which indicate an equal number of changes in the action of the two characters (Mamet, 1992b, pp 61-63). On the other hand, as we saw in the previous chapter, the first scene of Jerry and Gino in the hotel room has two clear beats: ‘to prep Gino for his confession’ and to ‘disobey rules.’ It is important here to state that besides its use as “a single unit of action,” the term ‘beat’ has had a second widespread use in playwriting and screenwriting as an alternative term for the word pause. As Michael Bloom has suggested “playwrights sometimes use the word [beat] to indicate one [pause]” (2002, p 35). Given the unusual number of beats in the scene between Gold and Young Miss Klein in the library, it could be argued that Mamet has used the term ‘beat’ ten times to indicate a same number of pauses in their dialogue exchange. A number of factors, however, has led me to believe that Mamet uses the word ‘beat’ to illustrate a change of action in the objectives of the two characters rather than to indicate pauses. Firstly, all Mamet’s screenplays indicate pauses in the characters’ speech through the word ‘pause’ or, more often, through the use of ellipsis (...). The first ten pages of the screenplay for House of Games, for instance, contains the word ‘beat’ two times [1988, p 6], the word ‘pause’ three times [pp 9-10], while it contains a large number of ellipses. Equally page 14 of the screenplay for Things Change contains both words (Mamet and Silverstein, 1989). Secondly, as Michael Bloom informs us, it is not rare for certain directors to advocate “listing an action for every line” (2002, p 35). Although Bloom does not mention names (even though he refers to Mamet’s work in other parts of his book), one could speculate that Mamet’s painstaking emphasis on prescribing each individual action his characters do can certainly reach this extreme extent, if his script calls for it, and therefore uses repeatedly the term ‘beat’. Thirdly, and most importantly, the large number of beats in the scene in question is an exceptional case. There is no equivalent scene in the screenplays for House of Games, Things Change, Oleanna and The Spanish Prisoner (or in the rest of the screenplay for Homicide) which has led me to believe that this is a scene where the characters’ action changes ten times in a very short period of time.

⁶³ Mamet cites here the example of an action for the purposes of performance such as ‘clean up a mess’. In his words: “it’s as if you went shopping with your little sister and she was caught shoplifting. And you go to the store manager and clean up her mess. It’s as if the credit card company charged you three thousand dollars for items you never bought.” (1998b, p 91)

⁶⁴ Such an approach can, in theory, be extremely useful in film acting as the performer would always be in a position to repeat his/her action in various takes.

⁶⁵ The terms illocutionary intentions and perlocutionary effects are associated with speech-act theory, a theory of language (pragmatics) as opposed to a theory of meaning (semantics). According to speech-

act theorists any single utterance may perform three different types of act: a) a locutionary act (the act of producing a meaningful utterance in accordance to all kinds of rules that a language follows); b) an illocutionary act (the act performed in saying something, such as asking a question, ordering someone to do something, promising, etc); and c) a perlocutionary act (performed by means of saying something, such as persuading someone to do something, convincing one's interlocutor, etc; Elam, 1980, p 158). Keir Elam uses the example of the utterance "Give me ten dollars." This utterance is an acceptable sentence in English (locutionary act); the speaker requests ten dollars (illocutionary act); if the speaker gets ten dollars from his/her interlocutor then the request has a successful perlocutionary effect (the utterance performs a perlocutionary act, that is, it persuades the listener to give one ten dollars). See Elam, 1980, p 159).

⁶⁶ The utterance "is the window open?" can serve as a very good example as it can constitute the performance of a command, a request for information, an assertion of surprise, etc (Elam, 1980, p 164).

⁶⁷ Such indicators include stress, intonation, kinesic markers and facial expressions (Austin and Searle quoted in Elam, 1980, p 166).

⁶⁸ One of these indicators as Michael Quinn has suggested (with reference to American Buffalo) is the use of italics for several words in the text. Quinn has correctly argued that the use of italics indicates "a certain pressure on the word that emphasise its performative significance" (1996, p 246). As we shall see later in the examination of Homicide, Mamet has used several other such indicators.

⁶⁹ As Michael Quinn has argued though, the emphasis on the performative functions of the language points towards an expressive (rather than a representational) realism which "focus[es] on performed actions rather than mimesis, and mak[es] judgements of truth a matter of active construction rather than of comparison with an *a priori* reality" (1996, p 235 original italics).

⁷⁰ In this respect the through action of the main character in Homicide is remarkably similar to the through action of Margaret, the heroine of House of Games (See also Note 54)

⁷¹ Appendix III lists Gold's through action in each of the seventy-six scenes of the screenplay. As the reader can see the protagonist's objectives in each individual scene are largely defined by his main through action.

⁷² Scene 17 can be seen as an exception to this pattern as Gold disobeys his captain's orders. On a closer look though, this act of disobedience is also driven by his urge to accompany his colleagues on the way to arrest Randolph's brother-in-law and therefore, do his job.

⁷³ Throughout the script, the phrase 'do your job' becomes a motif as it is repeated at least three times with detective Gold as the only recipient. The phrase is uttered first by Patterson, the Deputy Assistant Mayor's right hand (1992b, p 11; scene 7 in the film), then by the police captain in the ghetto street (1992b, p 35; scene 15 in the film) and finally by Dr Klein (1992b, p 56; scene 33 in the film). There are also variations of the phrase such as "go out and do what you're paid to do" (1992b, p 10; scene 6)

⁷⁴ For the purposes of this exercise I refer to the actors playing the characters with the characters' names in quotation marks. Thus the actor playing Gold is "Gold" and the actress playing Miss Klein is "Miss Klein". Although such a use of terminology is against Mamet's stipulation, it nevertheless makes the writing process considerably smoother. Additionally, the actions of the actors are placed in inverted commas.

⁷⁵ As it appears in the film the scene actually consists of eighteen shots and lasts two minutes and nineteen seconds. But since I did not include the beginning of Gold's phone conversation to Sullivan (through which we learn what has happened in the Randolph case) in my discussion of the screenplay, I will not consider the first shot (50 seconds long), which portrays Gold entering the study and asking Sullivan about the Randolph case.

⁷⁶ Like Michael Quinn (see Note 65), Jennifer Young has pointed out that italicised words in Mamet's scripts are there "to receive primary stress in order to indicate the rhythm of the scene. Italicised words are clues as to how lines should best be delivered and ensure that the text moves along at a steady,

pulsating pace” (Young, 2001). Although there has been no scholarly attention to the function of words in quotation marks, it is my contention that such words exist for thematic (as opposed to linguistic) emphasis. Thus on the same page of the screenplay Mamet has also put the word shot (somebody’s taking “shots” at them) in quotation marks.

⁷⁷ Bold fonts are used to signal the through actions and the actors’ chosen actions that do not appear in Tables 1 and 2.

⁷⁸ His tenseness is primarily suggested by his right hand, which does not hang from his shoulder naturally; rather it appears palsied with nervous tension..

⁷⁹ One could argue that this change in volume is also marked by the physical action of making a move out of the study but turning back to say one more thing.

⁸⁰ In the screenplay, Gold’s through action ‘to plan to leave as soon as he can’ was originally part of the offensive remarks that, as we saw, were strictly contained in one shot (shot 1). By moving this final statement in the following shot, immediately after he revealed to the spectator Miss Klein’s presence (and prior to Gold’s realisation that he is not alone in the room), Mamet attempts to create suspense as the spectator is now expecting the end of the conversation and Gold’s eventual discovery of Miss Klein’s presence.

⁸¹ Gold’s realisation that he has to deal with Miss Klein’s anger is implied in the point of view shot that Mamet prescribes in the screenplay (1992b, p 61), whilst Miss Klein’s exiting the room is clearly indicated in the report section of the scene (1992b, p 63).

⁸² Chapter Four will discuss how film style is prescribed by the screenplay in much more detail.

⁸³ One rare example for such an indicator is on page 37 where the comment “pull back to reveal Gold interrogating the young boys” suggests a tracking shot.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

¹ I am aware of the existence of narrative structures within dramatic texts, in particular, in what has been called ‘epic theatre’. But for the purposes of this chapter I am interested only in dramatic texts without what Manfred Pfister has called a “mediating narrative function” (1991, p 69), texts that can be placed under the broad category of realist drama.

² Key studies on the phenomenon of film adaptation include Davies, (1990); Orr and Nicholson (1993); McFarlane (1996); Cartmell, Hunter, Kaye and Whelehan (1996); Cartmell and Whelehan (1999); Naremore (2000); Cartmell, Hunter, Kaye and Whelehan (2000); and Vincendau (2001).

³ See in particular Vardac (1949); Sontag (1974, pp 249-267 – especially 250-251); Brewster and Jacobs (1997); and Mayer (1998, pp 10-30).

⁴ There are very few exceptions to this rule. These include the studies mentioned in Note 3 as well as Nicoll (1972 – from a theatre perspective) and Bazin (1974, pp 276-290 – from a cinema perspective). Also the journal *Literature/Film Quarterly* has mostly featured articles on film adaptations with an emphasis on adaptations of novels to film.

⁵ An indicative list of book titles on Shakespeare and film would include the following: Manvell (1971); Eckert (1972); Jorgens (1977); Collick (1989); Davies (1990); Donaldson (1990); Buchman. (1991); and Davies and Wells (1994). This list is accompanied by a large number of articles, which makes film adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays the most heavily researched case-study in the field of adaptation. In this respect, it is not surprising that the recent volume of essays on film adaptations (Naremore [2000]) has devoted only one chapter on film adaptation of plays and this is on adaptations of Shakesperean plays: Anderegg (2000, pp 154-171).

⁶ On the other hand there have been studies examining the adaptation of dramatic texts for television. See in particular Ringdman (1998).

⁷ Important studies here include: Genette (1980); Chatman (1990) and, more recently, McFarlane (1996).

⁸ Between 1950 and 1966 a large number of plays by American playwrights were adapted for the screen, with the playwrights themselves adapting their own material. For instance Tennessee Williams adapted his own plays for Fox (The Glass Menagerie [1950]), for Warner (A Streetcar Named Desire [1951]) and for Columbia (Suddenly Last Summer [1959]). Furthermore a large number of his plays were adapted by other filmmakers (The Rose Tattoo [1955]; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof [1958]; The Fugitive Kind (based on Orpheus Descending) [1959]; Summer and Smoke [1961]; Sweet Bird of Youth [1962]; Period of Adjustment [1962]; Night of the Iguana [1964]; and This Property is Condemned [1966]), all for the majors. William Inge had five of his plays adapted for the majors: Come Back Little Sheeba (1952); Picnic (1955); Bus Stop (1956); Dark at the Top of the Stairs (1960); and The Stripper (1963). Arthur Miller had All My Sons (1948) and Death of A Salesman (1951) adapted, with the latter re-adapted in 1957. Edward Albee had Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf adapted by Ernest Lehman for Warner Bros (1966). In this list one should also add Lillian Hellman, whose plays have been adapted for the studios (These Three [1936] and, especially, The Little Foxes [1941] – Hellman wrote the script for both movies) and whose most acclaimed adaptation was The Children's Hour (1962) for United Artists. Finally, although a generation older than all the above playwrights (with the exception of Hellman), Eugene O'Neill had also a few of his plays adapted including Desire Under the Elms (1958) for Paramount and Long Day's Journey into Night (1962) for Embassy.

⁹ Although the term 'well made play' has been invested with various meaning since its inception in the work of 19th century playwright Scribe and can connote very different things (for a historical discussion of the term see Russell Taylor [1967]), the term has been habitually used by contemporary drama criticism to connote the three act play (with a beginning, a middle and an end) and which has characterised the majority of the realist plays in the 20th century. For the purposes of this chapter I will be using the term in this manner.

¹⁰ William Demastes uses Miller's Death of A Salesman as an example of a well-made play with non-realistic elements and, in particular, the use of dream flashbacks, which necessarily involve a manipulation of time, at odds with the linear progression of the dramatic representation. Demastes argues that the play's "primary concern of psychological realism" remains intact, despite the flashbacks' innovative use in the formal arrangement of the play. "The manipulation demonstrates the flexibility of the form rather than warranting a new label for the form used" (1988, p 25). Equally, in the field of film, Kristin Thompson has argued that industrial, stylistic and thematic changes in American cinema especially since the 1970s have been "superficial and nonsystemic", whilst the economic system underlying Hollywood storytelling has remained unaltered (1999, p 4). From the ten examples she uses to illustrate her argument, Groundhog Day seems to be the most transgressive as at an early point in the narrative the plot moves to an impossible situation without any causal motivation (the protagonist relives the same day). Thompson is quick to argue, however, that by the end of the film, the spectator is in a position to infer that the impossible situation was motivated by an implied supernatural agency and therefore the classical narrative system remains intact (1999, pp 131-154).

¹¹ In order to explain the phrase 'minor modifications' I will cite the example of Sidney Lumet's adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night (1962). In his discussion of the film, Donald P. Costello reveals that Lumet cut a substantial part of O'Neill's dialogue (749 out of the play's 2,849 lines – 27.5% of the play). Although, according to Costello, there were only a few lines that were important to the plot and which were cut by Lumet, the overall meaning of the play remained intact. Moreover, Costello argues that the dialogue was respected, 'almost nothing was adjusted or changed' and '[o]nly once was text moved from one place to another" (1994, pp 79-80). Thus the phrase 'minor modifications' suggests quantitative differences with no real qualitative 'damage'.

¹² Besides the useful statistical information that it offers and despite a strong emphasis on questions of style in the second half of the essay, Costello's article, which was published in Literature/Film

Quarterly (Vol. 22, No 2, pp 78-92), is nevertheless an example of a study of a film adaptation which is primarily driven by questions of the film's fidelity to the play.

¹³ For instance, the elimination of any references to homosexuality, Blanche's rape and other 'controversial' material in the film version of Kazan's A Streetcar Named Desire was due to pressures exerted by the Breen office (Pauly, quoted in Costanzo-Cahir, 1994, p 74); for an account of the Breen Office's procedures on the subject of adaptation of 'controversial' material see Maltby (2000, pp 79-105). In the case of Lumet's adaptation of O'Neill's play, one significant parameter that Costello does not discuss is the very likely institutional pressure on Sidney Lumet to reduce the duration of his film, whose final version runs at approximately 170 minutes. With the addition of the extra 27.5% of dialogue that was cut, there is every chance that the film would run to 4 hours, a prohibitive duration for a commercial film of a major studio.

¹⁴ Pfister cites "asides", "monologues ad spectatores" and "commentary from the chorus" as three of the possible ways that the convention of the fourth wall can be broken down (1991, p 5).

¹⁵ Both in Point of View In the Cinema and in Narrative Comprehension and Film, Edward Branigan has voiced a strong critique of the communication model and its application to film. In particular, in his first study, Branigan argues that such a model is inadequate on linguistic grounds (the presence of 'I' and 'You' does not presuppose the exchange of a linguistic message), in terms of the relationship between expression and authorial intentionality, in terms of the ways it accepts causal links between an author and his/her reality, and finally in terms of accepting the author as the first cause in the production of meaning (1984, pp 39-40). Narrative Comprehension and Film largely reproduces the above critiques as Branigan juxtaposes views from critics advocating the communication model with views by critics such as David Bordwell, who is a stern opponent of the above model (1992, pp 107-110). In Narration in the Fiction Film, David Bordwell has voiced a strong critique of the literary theory-influenced communication model. Bordwell advocates that it can be extremely difficult to locate implied authors, non-character narrators, narratees and implied readers in narrative film, an argument that clearly demonstrates the problems of adopting a communication model for film. However, he is also careful to emphasise that "*the narrational process [in film] may sometimes mimic the communication situation more or less fully*" (1985, p 62 original emphasis) but with the proviso that narrators can be constructed by the spectator.

¹⁶ Branigan summarises Wallace Martin's intermediate positions as follows: "1. Narrative texts contain special and private spaces for a reader's personal involvement with the story beyond what may be communicated. 2. Narrative is a cooperative enterprise whereby both reader and writer contribute [equally?] by virtue of being members of particular historical communities that share cultural values and literary conventions. Although the reader and writer share sense, they may perform different functions. 3. Narrative is the product not of readers, writers, and conventions, but of an act of reading. Readers and writers possess identical skills of comprehension. A writer is merely the first reader. The central problem therefore is to describe consciousness and investigate the various skills of comprehension; what conditions make a reading possible?" (Branigan, 1992, p 110)

¹⁷ For a discussion of the weight that the author's/playwright's intentions carry in American theatre see the previous chapter.

¹⁸ Pfister cites several authorial stereotypes including the author as "interpreter of a people's religious and political myths", as "the socially appointed entertainer", as the actively committed spokesman for the socially underprivileged groups", as "the propagandist of revolutionary ideas" etc. (1991, pp 28-29).

¹⁹ For example, method acting was seen as appropriate for the realist psychological dramas of the late 1940s and 1950s (see chapter three). On the other hand, David Mayer argues that early screen actors could choose from a variety of theatrical acting models for their screen performance (Mayer, 1998, pp 24).

²⁰ Thus one could argue that specific genre films were considered commercial ventures only at certain periods in the history of American cinema. For instance, westerns and musicals, extremely popular film genres throughout the history of Hollywood until the 1970s, fell out of favour in the 1980s and re-

emerged as commercially potent film genres in the 1990s and 2000s respectively. As I shall shortly argue, film adaptations of American plays were an integral part of commercial mainstream cinema until the 1970s before they were also deemed as unprofitable by the film industry.

²¹ Eugene O'Neill's Strange Interlude (1932) was adapted for MGM, The Emperor Jones (1933) for UA, Ah Wilderness! (1935) for MGM, The Hairy Ape (1944) for UA, Mourning Becomes Electra (1947) for RKO and Desire Under the Elms (1958) for Paramount. Long Day's Journey into Night (1962) was adapted for Embassy Pictures and it remains the only independently distributed adaptation. Arthur Miller's All My Sons (1949) was adapted for Universal and Death of A Salesman (1951) for Columbia. Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie (1950) was adapted for Fox, A Streetcar Named Desire (1951) for Warner, The Rose Tattoo (1955) for Paramount, Cat on A Hot Tin Roof (1958) for MGM, The Fugitive Kind (1959) for UA, Suddenly Last Summer (1959) for Columbia, Summer and Smoke (1961) for Paramount, Sweet Bird of Youth (1962) for MGM, Period of Adjustment (1962) for MGM, The Night of the Iguana (1964) for MGM, This Property is Condemned (1966) for Paramount, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More was adapted as Boom (1968) for Universal and Last of the Mobile Hot Shots (1969) for Warner. Lillian Hellman's Children's Hour was adapted under the title These Three (1936) for UA, Little Foxes (1941) for Goldwyn/RKO, Watch on the Rhine (1943) for Warner, The Searching Wind (1946) for Paramount, Another Part of the Forest (1948) for Universal, Children's Hour (1961) for UA and Toys in the Attic (1962) for UA. William Inge's Come Back, Little Sheba (1952) was adapted for Paramount, Picnic (1955) for Columbia, Bus Stop (1956) for Fox, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs (1960) for Warner and A Loss of Roses adapted as The Stripper for Fox. Finally Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966) was adapted for Warner.

²² Albee's A Delicate Balance (1973) was adapted for American Film Theatre and The Ballad of the Sad Café (1991) for Angelica Films. O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh (1973) was adapted also for American Film Theatre and Miller's Everybody Wins (1990) for Orion Pictures. The only adaptation that figures in a major's big releases is Miller's The Crucible (1996) for Fox. Furthermore and if one examines the distributors for adaptations of plays by famous contemporary American playwrights, the pattern remains unaltered. Thus David Rabe's Sticks and Bones (1972) was not commercially distributed, whilst Streamers (1983) was distributed by UA Classics and HurlyBurly (1998) by Fine Line Features. Christopher Durang's Beyond Therapy (1987) was distributed by Roger Corman's New World Pictures. Lanford Wilson had nine of his plays adapted for television but none for the cinema and the same applies to August Wilson who had his Piano Lesson (1995) adapted for television. Anna Deavere Smith's Twilight: Los Angeles (2001) was distributed by Offline Releasing. Sam Shepard's Fool For Love (1984) was adapted for Cannon Films, Curse of the Starving Class (1994) for Trimark Pictures, and Simpatico for Fine Line Features. Wallace Shawn had The Designated Mourner (1997) adapted for First Look Pictures Releasing. David Mamet had Sexual Perversity in Chicago adapted as About Last Night... (1986) for Columbia Tristar, Glengarry Glen Ross (1992) for New Line Cinema, Oleanna (1994) and American Buffalo (1996) for The Samuel Goldwyn Company. The only playwrights who had their plays adapted for the majors were Arthur Kopit, whose Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad (1967) was adapted for Paramount (though before 1970) and Buffalo Bill and the Indians or Sitting Bull's History Lesson (1976) for UA, and John Guare's (1993) Six Degrees of Separation was adapted for MGM.

²³ This, of course, does not mean that the majors stopped entirely distributing or financing adaptations of plays. Big critical and financial successes such as Driving Miss Daisy (1989) and A Few Good Men (1992) were adapted for the screen from the homotitled plays by Alfred Uhry and Aaron Sorkin (the plays' authors) for Warner and Columbia respectively. What I would like to point out here is that the majors stopped being interested in the work of critically renowned playwrights and focused on the suitability and commercial potential of specific plays, regardless of the playwright's reputation or lack thereof.

²⁴ Between 1917 and 1970, thirty one Pulitzer Prize winners were adapted for the screen (1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1926, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1934, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1945, 1946, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1961, 1962, 1965, 1967, 1969); twelve were not made into films (1918, 1920, 1927, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1935, 1941, 1943, 1958, 1959, 1960), whilst no play was given the award on ten occasions (1917, 1919, 1942, 1944, 1947, 1951, 1963, 1964, 1966, 1968). On the other hand, between 1970 and 2002, only nine plays were adapted (1971, 1973, 1976, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1988, 1991); twenty one plays were not made into film (1970, 1977, 1978,

1979, 1980, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002), whilst the award was not offered to any play on three occasions (1972, 1974, 1986).

²⁵ The film's poster features the faces of the film's two stars, Daniel Day Lewis and Wynona Rider, whose names stand out in large font against the white background which dominates the rest of the sheet. At the bottom of the poster and along with the credits one can easily miss the film's tagline "Arthur Miller's timeless tale of truth on trial." Alternative posters feature again Day Lewis and Rider, this time in their costumes, which of course emphasises the period costume drama aspect of the film. The film proved a disappointment at the US box-office, recording a gross of \$7.34 million.

²⁶ As evidence for such an argument I would like to cite *Variety's* review of the film version of Wallace Shawn's *The Designated Mourner* (1997) where the reviewer acknowledges the existence of such audience as the above extract clearly suggests: "The Designated Mourner brings the probing eye of the camera to Wallace Shawn's legit original, but nothing more cinematic. World-premiered [sic] at the Berlin festival as a special tribute to the British juror, the film looks destined for *highly specialized theatrical outings before seguing to the small screen* as a permanent record of Shawn's hit. First Look Pictures will need strong reviews, plus plenty of tub-thumping by the creative team, to make this work as a spring release in the U.S." Elley (1997, internet; my italics). Furthermore, the release patterns and box-office figures of a number of such adaptations point towards the same direction. Although there is no statistical evidence to support this argument, the box-office figures of such adaptations demonstrate the existence of a core audience for such adaptations, an audience that should be associated with theatre-goers. For some box office figures of film adaptations of plays after the 1970s see Note 31.

²⁷ This can take many forms including the filmmaker's persistence in using the stage actors who have played the leading parts in the theatrical productions of the play in question (instead of using established stars), a refusal to 'open up' or significantly 'revise' a play in an attempt to make it 'more cinematic' (adding new scenes, elaborating on the action, etc) and a potential predilection towards a 'theatrical' aesthetic (especially if the filmmaker comes from a stage background). All the above elements are present in Mamet's adaptation of *Oleanna*.

²⁸ One only has to look at the casting of adaptations of Mamet's plays for the screen to see stars such as Dustin Hoffman, Al Pacino, Ed Harris, Jack Lemmon, Alec Baldwin, Demi Moore and Rob Lowe to have claimed the main parts.

²⁹ Robert Altman seems to be particularly attracted to such projects as he has directed Shepard's *Fool for Love*, Durang's *Beyond Therapy*, Rabe's *Streamers* and Kopit's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*. As Altman's career has been traditionally characterised by the filmmaker's struggles for creative control in his films (to the extent that he had worked away from the majors for almost two decades), one could certainly accept the argument that such projects represent opportunities for Altman's uncompromising character.

³⁰ According to *Variety*, the difference between an exclusive and a limited release lies in the number of engagements the distributor books for a film. Thus an exclusive release takes place when a film opens in less than 8 screens, whilst a limited release involves the film's distribution in as few as 8 screens and as many as 499.

³¹ Some illustrations are in need at this point. Wallace Shawn's *The Designated Mourner* (1997) was released by First Look Pictures on one screen (exclusive release). The solid attendance of the opening weekend (\$22,886) convinced the distributor to add extra screens in the following weeks until the film peaked with 7 screens on the seventh week of its release. The film recorded a gross of \$183,924 at the US box office.
(http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=film_weekly&dept=Film&releaseID=14102&film – last accessed on 30 May 2004).

Fine Line Features opened Shepard's adaptation of *Simpatico* in one screen. Like *The Designated Mourner*, *Simpatico* demonstrated a good attendance record in its opening weekend, but unlike the previous film, *Simpatico* could boast the presence of three major stars (Nick Nolte, Jeff Bridges and Sharon Stone) upon which Fine Line Features based the addition of 255 screens. The film however, did not manage to find a mainstream audience and remained below \$1 million mark in terms of box office

gross. (http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=film_weekly&dept=Film&releaseID=16671&film – last accessed on 30 May 2004).

Twilight: Los Angeles was released by Offline Entertainment in one screen but the poor attendance of the opening week prevented the distributor from pushing it towards a limited release. The film played for one more week in one theatre before it was withdrawn with a gross of \$10,688.

(http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=film_weekly&dept=Film&releaseID=18367&film – last accessed on 30 May 2004)

Unlike the above three films that opened in an exclusive release, films such as HurlyBurly, American Buffalo and Oleanna, opened at the lower end of a limited release but they demonstrated a similar performance with the three previous examples. In particular, Rabe's HurlyBurly opened in 16 screens and grossed a substantial \$292,006 (corresponding to more than \$18,000 per screen). The presence of stars such as Sean Penn, Kevin Spacey, Robin Wright Penn, Meg Ryan and Chazz Palminteri prompted Fine Line features to push the film in 84 screens by its fourth week of release. But once the core audience of the theatre-goers had seen it, the film did not manage to find a wider audience and grossed \$1,798,862, a quite meagre sum for a film with such star power.

(http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=film_weekly&dept=Film&releaseID=15896&film – last accessed on 30 May 2004)

American Buffalo opened in 29 screens for a gross of \$216,361 (corresponding to an average of \$7,461 per engagement). Despite Hoffman's star power, the film peaked at the third week of its release with 68 screens before it was withdrawn from cinemas four weeks later with a US gross of a little more than \$0.5 million (\$626,056).

(http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=film_weekly&dept=Film&releaseID=10693&film – last accessed on 30 May 2004)

A very similar pattern is seen in the release of Oleanna (about which I will talk in detail later) whereby the Samuel Goldwyn Company opened the film in 15 screens on November 4th, 1994. The lack of stars and the low opening gross of \$36,925 (a little less than \$2,500 per screen) made the distributor add only a few more screens in the second week of release (22 in total) before the film finished its run after 5 more weeks of release with a gross of \$123,089.

(http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=film_weekly&dept=Film&releaseID=10284&film – last accessed on 30 May 2004)

³² For example, Streamers, Simpatico, American Buffalo, Glengarry Glen Ross and The Curse of the Starving Class were all films screened at the Toronto Film Festival, whilst HurlyBurly premiered at the Venice Film Festival.

³³ A key example here is Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross, where the presence of Pacino, Lemmon, Baldwin and Harris made New Line Cinema explicitly market the film on the star power of the film (see the discussion of the film's trailer in chapter two). Other such examples include Simpatico, the film poster for which features large close up shots of Sharon Stone, Nick Nolte and Jeff Bridges and HurlyBurly, the poster for which emphasises the presence of Sean Penn, Robin Wright Penn, Meg Ryan and Kevin Spacey in the film.

³⁴ Through the use of metaphors and examples from other media such as the radio, Bazin associates the phrase "adaptation for the cinema" with a more specifically cinematic aesthetic, which does not necessarily 'reproduce' the original work; an aesthetic that is essentially created by the formal elements of the medium. On the other hand, the phrase "adaptation for its audience" suggests a film that presents a pre-existent work in a condensed form (Bazin uses here the term 'digest') designed specifically to popularise the source text or merely to exploit a known title. It's needless to say that Bazin advocates the former category of film adaptations (Bazin, 2000, pp 19-27).

³⁵ The Hearings which took place in October 1991 (a year prior to Oleanna's premiere) centred on a University of Oklahoma law professor (Anita Hill) who testified that the, then, Supreme Court nominee, Clarence Thomas, had behaved towards her in an inappropriate manner when she worked for him a decade earlier. Hill alleged that Thomas had boasted about his sexual prowess and had described sexual acts he had seen in pornographic films. Thomas was eventually confirmed as an associate justice of the US Supreme Court with a very narrow voting margin (52 in favour versus 48 against). Oleanna Press Kit (1994, p 3).

³⁶ Indicative of such an attitude towards the play is Jack Kroll's review in Newsweek. Kroll starts his review by directly referring to the Thomas – Hill case, and argues that it might have been possible for both parties in the Hearings to tell the truth. "How could that be possible? See David Mamet's new play Oleanna. Mamet's 'Hill' and 'Thomas' are Carol, a college undergrad and John, a fortyish professor" (1992, p 65).

³⁷ The production moved to New York intact but with one change in the cast. Due to Rebecca Pidgeon's pregnancy, the part of Carol was offered to Debra Eisenstadt, Pidgeon's understudy in the original production.

³⁸ The exact dates and details of the play's production are available in the Methuen publication of the play, which coincided with the play's premiere at the Royal Court Theatre (Mamet, 1993a). In this published edition of the play, Mamet has dedicated it to the memory of Michael Merritt, production designer in many of his plays and films.

³⁹ Well documented incidents of audience member shouting at John "do it", "kill the bitch" and other expletives during the performance of the play (reminiscent of audiences of Fatal Attraction) can be found in McGovern (1994, p 31). Also Mamet recounts in various interviews several events that occurred during performances, including people getting into "shouting matches and fistfights," standing up and screaming "Oh Bullshit" at the stage, getting crazy and losing their composure (Norman and Rezek, 2001, pp 124-125). Furthermore, in an interview with Charlie Rose, Mamet has claimed that he was shocked by the audience's involvement having noticed that the audience "would split down the middle, and it wouldn't always be by sex, and it wouldn't always be by age. But one or the other would say 'I think he's right,' 'I think she's right.'" Rose (2001, pp 175-176).

⁴⁰ Characteristic of such hype is a sketch that appeared in a British broadsheet newspaper and which depicted people being asked whether they prefer shouting or non-shouting seats in the theatre.

⁴¹ As Alain Piette has argued, political correctness is a close parent to affirmative action and they are both ideologies which intend to "eliminate from our language, behavior and value system all forms of offensive and discriminatory attitudes towards certain categories of the population." (1995, p 177) For Piette, the 1990s have seen both ideologies been almost exclusively appropriated by minority groups "in their fight for equal rights and opportunities" (1995, p 177).

⁴² Disclosure was released in December 1994, less than a month after the release of Oleanna.

⁴³ The first hardback edition of Michael Crichton's book was published in January 1994 and immediately became a best-seller. The film was released less than a year later by Warner and went on to become a box-office champion.

⁴⁴ In an essay entitled 'On Adaptation: David Mamet and Hollywood', Varun Begley suggests that Mamet's last big stage hit prior to Oleanna, Speed-the-Plow (1988) was "emphatically un-filmic in its structure, offering only three characters and three fairly traditional scenes which alternate between Gould's office and home" (1998, p171). John Simon seems to also make the same point in his review of Glengarry Glen Ross when he talks about the film's "tight, non-cinematic space (1992, p 64). In this sense a play with two characters, three large scenes and no other setting apart from John's office can be seen as even more 'unfilmic'. The fact that Speed-the-Plow is Mamet's only big theatrical success not to have been adapted yet seems to support Begley's suggestion.

⁴⁵ All the dates were taken from Mamet (1994b, p 46).

⁴⁶ In her book David Mamet: Language as Dramatic Action (1990, p 63), Ann Dean mentions that the "extremely coarse, sexist language" of Sexual Perversity in Chicago has been seen by some critics as a deliberate expression of misogyny.

⁴⁷ As he put it in an interview with Brian Case, "in revenge I didn't go and see it [the film]. I wouldn't give them my five bucks. I heard it was dreadful. I hope I'm right. No one can certainly trust other people. Just too many of them" (2001, p 103).

⁴⁸ I am referring here to the addition of Blake, an extra character (played in the film by Alec Baldwin) who visits the real estate office where the salesmen work in order to inform them of their bosses' decision to fire the two salesmen with the worst selling record. Arguably, the salesmen's treatment by Blake adds a further motivation for them to embark on a fight to save their jobs, which of course justifies their abominable actions against each other.

⁴⁹ In an interview with Leslie Kane entitled 'Mantegna Acting Mamet,' the actor revealed that other directors of Mamet's scripts avoid casting decisions similar to the ones Mamet makes. For that reason Mantegna claimed that he would not have been surprised, had he not been offered the role of Roma in the then upcoming film production of Glengarry Glen Ross, despite his extremely successful rendition of Ricky Roma in the Broadway production of the play (1991, p 69). True to the above, the producers offered the part to Al Pacino.

⁵⁰ On the performance of the ensemble cast in the film version of Glengarry Glen Ross see Simon (1992, pp 62-64). On the quality of the script, see Canby (1992, internet).

⁵¹ As I mentioned in the first chapter, Mamet uses the terms narrative and narration in his writings as a synonym to description and not with the meanings the terms have been invested in Film Studies.

⁵² The percentage I cite is the product of calculations using the power search engine provided in the internet movie database (<http://us.imdb.com/list>). By asking to identify all films in English language (excluding TV series, straight to video releases and TV movies) distributed between 1978 and 2003 by the Samuel Goldwyn Company, the engine provides the researcher with 101 entries. If one examines each of these films' credits, one will see that out of the 101 films, 11 films are adaptations of plays, 18 films are adaptations of novels and 1 film is an adaptation of a biography (Stephen Frears' Prick Up Your Ears based on Joe Orton's biography by John Lahr). In total 30 releases out of a total of 101 have been adaptations.

⁵³ Although the part of Carol was originally played by Rebecca Pidgeon (with Debra Eisenstadt as the understudy), when the play toured the United States, the part was offered to Eisenstadt as Pidgeon was pregnant.

⁵⁴ In the same year with Oleanna, Bay Kinescope Productions – under Patricia Wolff's supervision – produced a second adaptation of a Mamet play, A Life in the Theater (1977; 1994), for TNT, an American cable channel. Apart from these two films, the company has yet to produce another film.

⁵⁵ As I mentioned in the previous chapter, dramatic performances are by nature ephemeral since they are not fixed in time and every single performance of a text is bound to be different from previous ones.

⁵⁶ Such a speculation about the scope of the production is indirectly supported by William H. Macy who in an interview stated that Oleanna was "a *little movie* that didn't work very well" (Jones, 1997, internet; my italics).

⁵⁷ The group of films released on 4 Nov 1994 includes only two wide releases by the majors, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (Sony Pictures) and The War (Universal). The rest of the releases were a wide release by an independent distributor, Double Dragon (Gramercy), an exclusive release by a major, Pontiac Moon (Paramount), and two exclusive releases from independents, Floundering (Strand) and Oleanna. Although Sony's release of Frankenstein seems a bit premature for such a big-budget film, one could argue that the adult subject of the film was somewhat at odds with the more youth-oriented pictures released later in the year (Interview With the Vampire, Santa Clause, Star Trek V, Junior and Drop Zone were the big films released in the closing weeks of 1994 with Disclosure being the only exception as an R-Rated film). For that reason, Sony, the distributor of Frankenstein, opted for an earlier release.

⁵⁸ It is commonplace in the American film industry to believe that the best time for releasing films with Oscar aspirations is the last two months of the year as those films will be fresher in the memory of the voting members of the Academy. Although this practice continues unquestioned (with 2002 being a primary example as all five films nominated for best picture: Gangs of New York, Chicago, The Hours,

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers and The Pianist were released in December 2002) there have been many occasions when the eventual Academy award winners were films released earlier in the year (the prime examples here are The Silence of the Lambs which was released in February 1991 and won all five major awards thirteen months later, in March 1992, and Forrest Gump, released in July 1994 and swept the Oscars eight months later.

⁵⁹ In the British edition of the play Mamet specifies that there is a time lapse of one month between Acts One and Two, and a lapse of two days between Acts Two and Three (1993a).

⁶⁰ For a more elaborate version of the relationship between well-made play and human perception see Mamet (1998a, pp 73-75).

⁶¹ Critics who have found problematic Carol's unexpected and unmotivated transformation include McGovern (1994, p 31); B. D. Johnson (1994, p 54); Feaster (1995, pp 52-53) and Kanfer (1992, pp 26-27).

⁶² As he revealed in an interview for Playboy, Mamet had written the first two acts for Oleanna and having decided that his story was far-fetched he put the play in a drawer until the Thomas – Hill affair prompted him to go back to it again and finish it (Norman and Rezek, 2001, pp 124-125). In another interview, this time for The Charlie Rose Show, Mamet referred to his original Oleanna play, which he started writing in 1990, a year before the Thomas – Hill hearings, as a “fantasy about an interchange between a young woman who wants her grade changed and a professor who wants her out of the office so he can go home to see his wife” (Rose 2001, p 163).

⁶³ The screenplay I have consulted and which I will refer to in this chapter is a xeroxed copy of Mamet's script entitled OLEANNA: A Screenplay by David Mamet based on his play. The copy does not have a date on it and there is no way of determining whether it represents a draft or whether it is the version used in the shoot. Although there are several differences between the script and the actual film, (including an additional dialogue scene in the film that is not featured in the screenplay) all the other additional scenes correspond almost entirely with the scenes that appear in the film, which makes me believe that the screenplay used in the shoot was a version quite similar to the one I have consulted.

⁶⁴ As with the screenplay for Homicide, Mamet does not entirely succeed in keeping his scripts clear of adverbs. Thus, in Oleanna, he uses such adverbs as “questioningly” (p 33), “perfunctorily” (p 36), and “angrily and loudly” (p 47). Despite these exceptions though, adverbs are, for the most part, absent from Mamet's report passages.

⁶⁵ Obviously, the play includes a small number of such (report) passages in the form of stage directions, but these almost exclusively appear in the controversial scenes which portray physical contact between John and Carol. For instance, at the end of Act One, the play specifies: “He goes over to her and puts his arm around her shoulder.” “She walks away from him” (Mamet, 1993a, p 36). On the other hand, the screenplay contains the above stage directions as well as the following report passage: “JOHN MOVES CLOSER TO CAROL CAMERA HINGES THEM ACROSS THE ROOM AS SHE BACKS UP. AS HE NEARS HER THEY ARE OBSCURED BY THE COATRACKS, COVERED WITH COATS” (Oleanna, p 56)

⁶⁶ Due to lack of space my discussion of technical comment will cover only the first 64 pages of the script (which correspond to Act One in the play).

⁶⁷ The ANGLE INS label is also used in all point of view shots, which Mamet clearly marks in all his screenplays. An example in the screenplay for Oleanna is: “ANGLE INS HIS POV: IT IS THE BUFF-COLORED PAPER WHICH CAROL HAD PRESENTLY” (Oleanna, p 4)

⁶⁸ The 52 different ‘images’ specified in the first 64 pages of the script is too small a number to refer to actual shots (those 52 images in the screenplay correspond to 242 shots in the actual film) or to the number of principal frames (images filmed with one camera set up and then broken into several shots during the editing stage) that appear in this portion of the film (the 52 images prescribed in the script are translated into 83 principal frames).

⁶⁹ In *Elements of Cinema*, Stefan Sharff introduced the term ‘familiar image,’ “a stabilizing anchor image periodically reintroduced without variations” (1982, p 6). Mamet’s use of those images seems to be similar to what Sharff refers as ‘familiar image.’

⁷⁰ An example of such use of space (in bold) can be seen on page 11 of the screenplay in the following combination of report and technical comment: “ANGLE: CAROL HOLDING THE BOOK, AS SHE TURNS WE SEE THE **BOOK’S BACK DUST JACKET BROUGHT TO THE CAMERA, ON WHICH WE SEE, FOR AN INSTANT, A PHOTO OF JOHN, AND A BLURB, WHICH COMES TO CAMERA, AND WHICH READS:...**”. It is clear here that space contracts in order to bring the audience’s attention to the significant narrative information that the dust jacket contains.

⁷¹ The following technical comment is marked clearly in the first 64 pages of the scripts: 12 references to camera movement, 10 references to depth of focus, 10 references to shot scale (all close ups or extreme close ups), 1 reference to camera level, 12 references to camera angle (eight out of which are marked as point of view angles) and 1 reference to shot duration. Finally there is also one reference to a special effects shot (marked as SFX).

⁷² The film adopts this voice-over technique but only in the first two instances (there is no voice over before the beginning of what in the play constitutes Act Three). The extent of the use of the voice over, however, is considerably shorter in the film compared to the screenplay.

⁷³ The segmentation is based on the definition of a scene as a narrative segment that takes place in a specific time and space (excluding montage sequences) and differs substantially from the segmentation provided in the ‘scene access’ feature in the DVD format of the film, which segments and labels the scenes according to themes. The DVD format was released only in the US and Canada (Region 1) by a Canadian home entertainment distributor called Seville.

⁷⁴ Compared to the dialogue in the first Act as it appears in the 1993 Methuen edition of the play, there are seven points where the film digresses slightly from the play:

(p 1) Seven lines from John’s first conversation were omitted [And what about the land...what did they say...?]

(p 6) John’s line “No. I see, I see what you, it... (He gestures to the papers.) but your work...” was shortened to “**your work...**”

(p 10) John’s second phone conversation was changed from: “...in class I... (he picks up the phone.) (into phone:) Hello. I can’t talk now. Jerry? Yes? I underst... I can’t talk now. I know... I know... Jerry. I can’t *talk* now. Yes, I. Call me back in ... Thank you. (he hangs up.) to “**Hello? Yes. Jerry. I know what time it is. Yes... I’m...I’m trying to get out. Believe me. Why... Why do we need these notes anyway? You’ re right. I’m gonna find my notes. Aha. A ha. I’ ll be there in ten minutes**”.

(p 16) Nine lines from John’s speech about how people learn were omitted. [“I used to speak of... Listen to this.”]

(p 22) A line where John refers to himself as a “fuckup” was omitted. [“Because I was a fuckup. I was just no goddamned good”]

(p 31) When Carol drops her cup of tea John apologises for interrupting her three times, while the film has him apologising once [“How can you ... I beg your pardon”].

A discussion of the additional scene will occur later in my analysis.

⁷⁵ Although there is camera movement in other shots in the scene, the movement represents corrective attempts in the framing process rather than distinctive use of camera movement (pan, tilt, track or boom).

⁷⁶ From shot 18 (and until shot 26), Carol has sat down and the low angle on John becomes motivated by her field of vision.

⁷⁷ The use of locations in *Oleanna* has attracted criticism by Charles Deemer (1998, pp 44-47). Deemer dismisses the production team’s choice as unrealistic and emphatically argues that “anyone who teaches at college or university knows that such extravagance [an office suite] is given, if at all, only to department chairs” (1998, p 46).

⁷⁸ The fact that such a scene appears only in the first Act is justified by the Act's length. The events depicted in Act One [scenes 3-10] consume approximately 39 minutes of screen time, while the events depicted in the second and third Act (scenes 12-13 and 16-19 respectively) consume 38 minutes (16 and 22 minutes respectively) of screen time. For that reason there was no need for an additional scene during the second and third Act.

⁷⁹ Even in the final scene of the film the ladder plays a major part as Carol uses it as a defence weapon to push away John.

⁸⁰ A huge 'congratulations' banner hung in the corridor establishes this clearly.

⁸¹ John's costume here is extremely telling. Throughout the previous scenes he had been wearing a checked shirt and a loose tie, what seemed to be an 'informal' attire for another day at work. This time John is wearing a dark blue suit, a matching tie, which he ensures will be well-worn and straightened, and has his hair combed meticulously. As a result, the spectator expects that he will be attending an important meeting, which in the light of the previous shots could be the signing of the tenure.

⁸² His actual line is "Finally, I didn't understand" (1993a, p 45).

⁸³ The poster nevertheless cannot be read by the spectator, unless one freezes the frame.

⁸⁴ Key examples that come to mind are the rape sequence in *Thelma and Louise* (1991), where Thelma is forced to bend over the bonnet of the car by a potential rapist and the sex scene between Nick and Beth in *Basic Instinct* (1992), where Beth is forced to bend over a sofa with Nick approaching from behind her. Although in the latter scene the sex that takes place is between consenting partners, Beth perceives it as a violation, when she tells Nick that it was not love.

⁸⁵ An alternative reading would be that the football game reflects the 'games' Carol played with John to reveal his sexist attitude.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

¹ For instance, Maitland McDonagh (1990, pp 30-31) labels *The Grifters* as a 'film noir' (p 30); Tim Applegate (1999, internet) uses the terms 'thriller' and 'film noir' to discuss the same film; B. Ruby Rich (1995, pp 6-10) refers to *The Grifters* as 'neo-noir' (p 8) as does Steve Neale (2000, p 175) who also attaches the same label to *House of Games* (p 175); Philip Kemp (1994, pp 46-47) calls *Maverick* a 'comedy western' (p 46) and a 'western' (p 47); Charles Taylor (1999, pp 39-40) describes *Bowfinger* as a mixture of 'satire,' 'farce,' and 'wish-fulfilment fantasy' (p 40); Leyland Matthews (2001, p 44) refers to *Heartbreakers* as a 'comedy;' Anton Bitel (2003, internet) uses five different terms ('crime', 'drama,' 'thriller,' 'film noir,' and 'heist film') to determine the generic context of *Confidence*; and Kim Newman (2000, internet) describes *Where the Money Is* as a caper film.

² Although the word con as an abbreviation of confidence and a prefix to man appeared in the late 19th Century, it has nevertheless had a much longer presence in its full, unabbreviated format. What comes immediately to mind is Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man: His Masquarade* (originally published in 1857), a novel that deals with a trickster who exposes the greed and shallowness of the (then) contemporary American society. In the introduction of the Penguin edition of the novel (1990) Stephen Patterson writes that the phrase 'confidence man' "was coined in 1849 by the *New York Herald* to cover the activities of one 'William Thompson', a man with a variety of aliases" (1990, p xv). Although the figure of the confidence man "had already been present in European life and literature" before 1849, Patterson suggests that "it was the Americans who "gave him 'a local habitation and a name'" (1990, p xvi). This was mainly because American people have always had a fascination with confidence artists, a fascination that stemmed from their "emphasis on and admiration for individual enterprise and ingenuity, which [were] considered notably 'Yankee' qualities (1990, p xvi)

³ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2nd Edit., at <http://athens.oed.com/>

⁴ Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2nd Edit., at <http://athens.oed.com/>

⁵ Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2nd Edit., at <http://athens.oed.com/>

⁶ The actual definition from Propaganda and Persuasion goes as follows: "An effective persuader makes the purpose as clear as possible if he or she *hopes to bring about attitude change*. The explicitly stated conclusion is twice as likely to get desired audience response compared to the suggested one." (Jowett and O'Donnell, 1992, p 31; my italics).

⁷ This does not mean, however, that Merry Mavericks is the first American film that features characters that are con-artists or that its narrative deals with confidence games. Perhaps the earliest examples of such films are Green Goods Man; or Josiah and Samantha's Experience with the Original 'American Confidence Game' (1905, Vitagraph, US), which deals with a couple's experience with a con man when they leave their home in the village and come to the city, and Get Rich Quick (1911, Thanhouser, US), which deals with the effects of a scam performed by the "Utopia Investment Corporation" on its victims. Other films before 1951 that were not advertised as con-artist films even though they feature characters who are con artists include The Decoy (1914, Thanhouser); The Small Town Guy (Windom, 1917, Geroge Klein System, US); The Deep Purple (Walsh, 1920, Realart Pictures, US); The Last of Mrs Cheney (Franklin, 1929, MGM); Darkened Rooms (Gasnier, 1929, Paramount); Wild Company (McCarey, 1930, Fox); Blonde Crazy (Del Ruth, 1931, Warner); Trouble in Paradise (Lubitsch, 1932, Paramount); Hooray For Love (Lang, 1935, RKO); Little Big Shot (Curtiz, 1935, Warner); Beg Borrow or Steal (Thiele, 1937, MGM); Don't Tell the Wife (Cabanne, 1937, RKO); Nation Aflame (Halperin, 1937, State Right); The Wild Man of Borneo (Sinclair, 1941, MGM); Six Lessons from Madame La Zonga (Rawlins, 1941, Universal); The Lady Eve (P. Sturges, 1941, Paramount); Rings on Her Fingers (Mamoulian, 1942, Fox); Nightmare Alley (Goulding, 1947, Fox) and Kind Lady (J. Sturges, 1951, MGM).

⁸ The reference of the film's publicity to more than one genre categories supports Rick Altman's observation that advertising during the studio times almost always evoked "not a single genre but multiple genres" (Altman, 1998, p 7). However, Altman's discussion, which covers films such as Only Angels Have Wings, Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet and The Story of Alexander Graham Bell, does not extend to determine whether the evoked genres are placed in a hierarchical structure with one dominating the others.

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all tables in this chapter were compiled by using a specific search engine provided by the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com). In particular, the site offers a facility through which one can locate individual words in the taglines of the films listed in the database. In this specific case, I searched the uses of the word con (on its own as well as combined with other words such as man, artist, game etc). The complete table of my findings can be seen in Appendix IV.

¹⁰ The rest of the posters consulted can be found in the following URLs:

The Barefoot Mailman: <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0043319/> - last accessed on 30 Mar 2004

Diggstown: <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0104107/posters> - last accessed on 30 Mar 2004

Despite extensive search, I was not able to locate the posters for Doc Hooker's Bunch and Bullseye!.

¹¹ Even though films which promise plots about scams and schemes are not necessarily films about con-artists or con-games (scams and schemes can be perpetrated by corporate lawyers (Other People's Money [1993]); gangsters (The Freshman [1990]; Wall Street brokers (Wall Street [1987]) and White House chiefs of staff (The Pelican Brief, [1994]) and can take numerous forms such as controlling a city's water (Chinatown [1974]); tele-evangelism (Leap of Faith [1992]); marrying and killing older rich men for their fortune (Black Widow [1987] etc.), it is imperative at this stage to remain open as to the ways in which a corpus of films can be compiled given the fact that no prior work on this type of films has been done. As Steve Neale has remarked, writing on genre has often suffered by compilations of film corpuses founded on "pre-established and unquestioned canons of films" (1990, p 50), something that this chapter wishes to avoid.

¹² For instance when customer James Lingk (Jonathan Pryce) visits estate agent Ricky Roma (Al Pacino) to annul a contract he signed with him, Roma enlists fellow agent Shelly Levine's (Jack

Lemmon) help on the spot to convince Lingk that Roma does not have time to see him until a time when the annulment could not take place.

¹³ For instance, romance (Heartbreakers in English and in German) and comedy (Heartbreakers in German; Bowfinger in French and Dirty Rotten Scoundrels in Italian, German and Greek).

¹⁴ Although Nine Queens is an Argentinian film in a group of American films, I decided to include it mainly because of its remarkable similarities with all the other American films. The above decision is further justified by the fact that the film is currently being remade by Steven Soderbergh and George Clooney and entitled Criminal (to be released on 14 Oct 2004).

¹⁵ The extracts from all the reviews (with the exception of The Grifters, and House of Games) were taken from Variety Online. Specifically: Confidence: (Rooney, 2003, internet); Matchstick Men: (McCarthy, 2003, internet); Heartbreakers: (McCarthy, 2001a, internet); Nine Queens: (McCarthy, 2001b, internet); Where the Money Is: (Levy, 2000, internet); Bowfinger: (McCarthy, 1999, internet); The Spanish Prisoner: (Klady, 1997, internet); Traveller: (Levy, 1997, internet); Glengarry Glen Ross: (McCarthy, 1992, internet); Dirty Rotten Scoundrels: (Variety staff, 1988, internet); The Sting (Variety Staff, 1998, internet). The extracts from the reviews for The Grifters and House of Games were taken from The Variety Reviews. Specifically: The Grifters: (The Variety Reviews, Vol. 21, 1989-1990); House of Games: (The Variety Reviews, Vol. 20, 1987-1988).

¹⁶ Special Features: 'Anatomy of a Scene' in Confidence, DVD, Region 1, US, Lions Gate Films, 23 min.

¹⁷ Special Features: 'Production notes' in Traveller, DVD, Region 1, US, October Films.

¹⁸ Besides the above mentioned extra-textual references to each other, the above films also contain a large number of intertextual references to their predecessors. For instance, the protagonist of Matchstick Men and The Grifters has the same name, Roy. The main female character's name in Confidence and The Grifters is Lily. The Spanish Prisoner pays homage to The Sting by featuring a scene with a 'merry-go-round,' and so on.

¹⁹ Consider for instance an example from Bend It Like Beckham (2002). In one sequence Jesminder, the protagonist, 'convinces' her mother to give her money to buy shoes for her sister's wedding. On receipt of the money, our heroine uses some of this money to buy the shoes for the wedding, but she uses a substantial sum to buy football boots, despite her mother's explicit order to stop playing football. Even though one could certainly argue that Jesminder conned her mother so that she can buy professional football boots, her act would never be considered a crime in the legal meaning of the term.

²⁰ Even though the events following the disruption of the equilibrium in Confidence and The Sting are to a certain extent driven by Jake and Hooker's desire to avenge the death of their partners, this motivation fades away (especially in Confidence and to some extent in The Sting) as the con-game is being set. Both Henry Gondorf and Hooker, and Jake Vig are immersed in the elaborate trick they are preparing, so much so that in both films the dead member of the gang is mentioned only once more after the beginning of both films. Furthermore, neither film ends in the spirit of 'justice is done' which would support the vengeance motive. For that reason, I believe it is more useful to perceive the disruption of equilibrium as marked by a failure to see reality with the rest of the narrative exploring the consequences of this failure until order is restored and not as physical violence which motivates vengeance as Alan Nadel (1997, p 124) has argued in his discussion of The Sting.

²¹ Heartbreakers contains a large number of scenes where Page's cognitive skills are put into question. Apart from her first failure to recognise that the 'IRS problem' is a scam designed to make her stay and keep working with her mother, Page almost constantly reads situations wrongly: she confuses the bartender with a potential pick-up artist; she thinks Jake (Jason Lee) is stalking her only to see that he has followed her to give her the purse she forgot at his bar; she believes that Jake is a bartender only to find that he owns the place and that he was offered \$3 million to sell it; when her mobile phone rings she thinks that it is Jake, only to find out that it is her mother; in the following scene, her phone rings again and she thinks that it is her mother when in fact it is Jake. In other words, Page's cognitive skills

are a problem in the narrative and to some extent motivate her mother's decision not to let her go even if this means that she has to use indirect means.

²² Obviously, discourses revolving around private property, crime and justice are certainly at play in the con artist film. However, the virtual absence of legal institutions encourages the articulation of those discourses in individual as opposed to social (legal) terms. When in House of Games, therefore, Margaret accuses Mike of rape, the definition of the crime is not in legal terms, something that Mike picks up on and protests his innocence. Consequently, and within this framework, the above discourses acquire a new meaning.

²³ Although not a con-artist film per se (the erotic element is as strong as the con-game element) Wild Things, (McNaughton, 1998, Sony) is a rare example of a film that presents the final twist, in a story full of narrative surprises, after the first minute of the end credits.

²⁴ An example of the subtle ways that the narration can be communicative can be detected in the scene where Jake informs his crew that the job is off. Lupus, the King's watchman in the con, is frequently isolated from the rest of the gang by means of individual framings whilst the rest of the crew are presented in two-shots or shots with more than two characters. An instance of unreliable narration (originally perceived as an instance of communicativeness) is the building up of expectations that Lupus would betray his boss only to prove much more loyal than the spectator expected.

²⁵ The same principle applies to Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, where the spectator is in the dark about the narrative role of Janet Colgate (con-artist), who ends up making Lawrence Jamieson hand to her \$50,000.

²⁶ In Chapter One, I discussed the narration in Mamet's House of Games as being completely restricted with two short exceptions.

²⁷ This is especially true in the case of Matchstick Men and Nine Queens, two films whose protagonists are con-artists by profession but who come to occupy the position of the mark of a con.

²⁸ House of Games does this exactly when early in the narrative Margaret intercepts the signals during the poker game sequence and exposes a scam which targeted her. Margaret's success however, reassures the spectator even further about the protagonist's highly-tuned cognitive skills, to the extent that the spectator is in danger of not seeing the second, bigger scam that targets Margaret.

²⁹ Unlike the majority of con-artist/con-game films whose "central dramatic tensions [are] encapsulated in their very title," as Maltby and Craven would put it (1995, p 126), The Spanish Prisoner does not make that concession.

³⁰ In previous scenes Susan was seen actively pursuing Joe's company and taking pictures of him on the island.

³¹ This is how Jake Vig, the protagonist of Confidence, defines the successful con-game in the film's narrative.

³² Earlier scenes clearly established that senior staff in the company do not socialise with the secretaries (in the scene in the bar we see Klein and the potential investors in one table, Joe and Ross in another and Susan sitting at the bar socialising with an FBI agent). Furthermore, George Lang in particular seems to have a genuine aversion to the possibility of socialising with a secretary. At one point he asks Joe whether it was his imagination or the secretary did indeed travel first class with them.

³³ An exception here is the presence of a police detective who questioned Joe when the process was (seemingly) stolen by him and who explains to him in the end that Klein was the person behind the organisation of the con.

³⁴ As Jim Byerley, film critic for HBO Online, remarked, he overheard several members of the audience "trying to make sense of the final plot twists as they left the theatre." Byerley (1998, internet)

³⁵ Joe's inability to have fun is underlined by the narrative twice. In an early scene, George suggests that they should enjoy themselves, an invitation to which Joe responds "You should show me how." Also in the scene in the ferry, Susan tells Joe that the "important thing is to have fun." Besides those two verbal renditions of Joe's 'problem' the narrative also presents Joe as a cold person, with only one friend (George) who latently craves other people's attention. This is why he 'plays' with Susan, he looks forward to Dell's company and to meeting his sister.

³⁶ See for instance Berardinelli (1998, internet); Green (1997, internet); Adams (1998, internet); Williams (1998, internet)

³⁷ This is also the case with the other films I have included in the con-game film category: House of Games, Matchstick Men and Nine Queens.

NOTES FOR CONCLUSION

¹ After I completed this project I became aware of the existence of another thesis that examines Mamet as a filmmaker, O.N.Miret's (2003) The Films of David Mamet (University of Sussex). Obviously, at that stage, I did not have the opportunity to acknowledge Miret's work on the subject. However, I must acknowledge the fact that Mamet's cinema has finally started to attract the attention it deserves. I can only expect that these two studies will provide the framework for more work in the future so that Mamet's cinema will enjoy an equal critical attention as Mamet's theatre.