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Straight Outta Money: Institutional Power and Independent Film Funding

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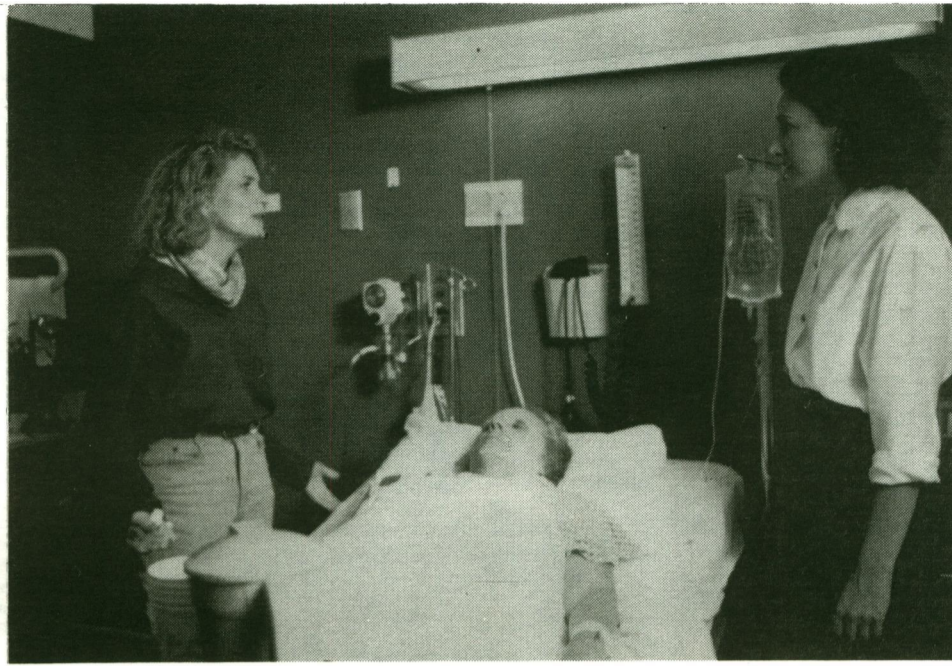
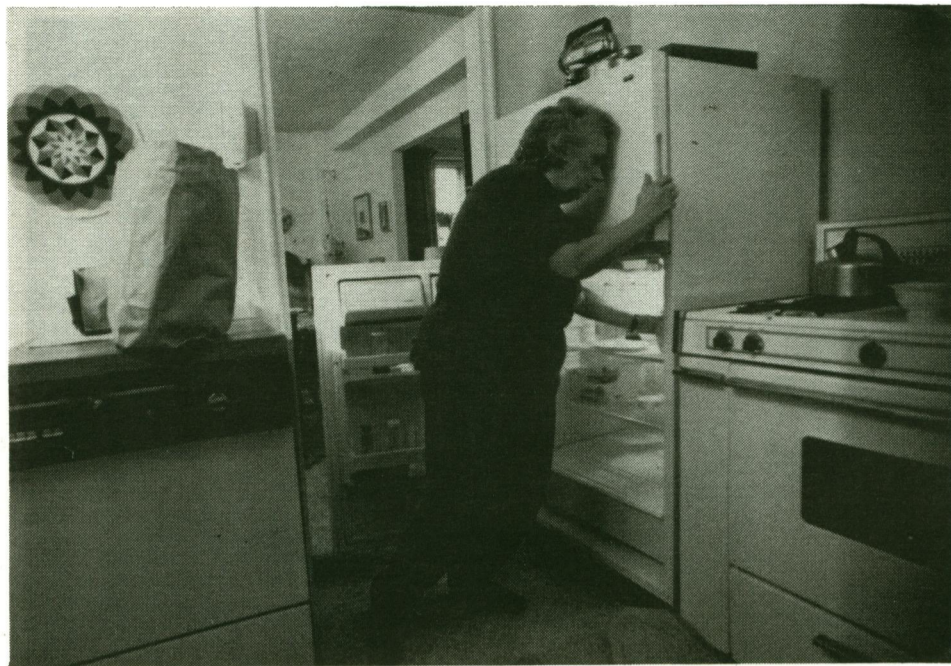
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Stills from *The Family Business* (1993) by E. Deidre Pribram.

STRAIGHT OUTTA MONEY: INSTITUTIONAL POWER AND INDEPENDENT FILM FUNDING

E. DEIDRE PRIBRAM

In the last few years, and despite the increased prominence of American independent films, there have been surprisingly few feature films by women that have "made it" on the independent circuit. The success of an independent film can be considered by the following criteria: securing theatrical release, receiving critical and media attention, and obtaining visibility among audiences.¹ The few films that come to mind as having met these criteria are Lizzie Borden's *Working Girls* (1986), distributed by Miramax; Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), a Kino release; and most recently, Allison Anders's *gas, food, lodging* (1992), released by I.R.S.² Theatrically distributed independent films continue to be heavily dominated by the work of heterosexual white males. Further, no gesture has been made toward identifying women directors as a "new" or "emerging" film movement as has occurred, however superficially, with black and gay cinema. This situation of non-recognition exists despite increasing numbers of women making films and a cultural climate of heightened attention to diversity.

I do not cite these few films made by women as success stories that are improving conditions for other women filmmakers.³ To my mind, they are no indication of a breakthrough for women within the independent film world. Apart from their merit as individual films, their examples are too few, and as an examination of their distribution histories discloses, often successful despite the existing structures of independent film institutions or because of a system of patronage within those institutions. The emergence of distinct groupings of filmmakers rests upon the quality of the work, but is dependent in addition, on the selection process and distribution possibilities for those films.

Moreover, a cultural discussion has not yet coalesced around the handful of independent films made by women that raises such questions as: What makes a film a "women's" film? How do these works position and address their audiences differently? How are differing narrative meanings established and unfolded?⁴ A parallel set of questions did occur in response to Spike Lee's *She's Got a Way* (1986), distributed by Island, as well as to his subsequent films. In addition, heated debates about "objectivity" accompanied Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* when it presented a political view that challenged the dominant, "neutral" norm. Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), a Miramax release, in its critique of the American justice system, was widely credited with altering the outcome of the specific criminal case it depicted. Arguably,

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the posing of such difficult questions is one of the primary roles for independent films.

Ironically, more heated discussion on gender issues occurred around MGM's *Thelma and Louise* (1991), directed by Ridley Scott and written by Callie Khouri, than has, to date, accompanied independently released films by women. Unfortunately, a film that depicted women's frustrations and anger about gender inequities, and that was popularity received by women audiences, became, too often, a discussion about "male bashing."⁵

Two issues intersect in this discussion of women and independent film: first, the institutionalized and privileged nature of the independent film industry; and second, the differing needs, too often left unarticulated, of various marginalized groups.

The selection and marketing of independent films is run in the U.S. by a fairly small community that includes four major distribution companies—Miramax, Fine Line, Goldwyn, and Sony Picture Classics (formerly Orion Classics). There are also a number of smaller distribution companies (for instance, Zeitgeist, October, Aries, I.R.S., and Kino), a handful of producer's representatives, and pivotal festivals (Sundance, New Directors/New Films, Cannes, etc.).

The power base—who is making the decisions—hasn't significantly altered. In spite of a current cultural emphasis on diversity, far too few women and minorities hold the positions of power that determine what films the independent film industry will support and promote. As members of foreign and domestic sales companies as well as women filmmakers complain, women have reached management positions that permit them to promote a specific film and perhaps influence decisions but have not yet, for the most part, attained levels of power that mean they can approve a project. That decision is still made by men at the top levels of management. This structural ceiling applies to domestic theatrical distributors, domestic television companies, and their foreign counterparts, all important sources of revenue and visibility for independents. Those who do have the power to "call the shots" have to be convinced of the merits of a specific project. Diversity, as in many other arenas beyond film, remains at the mercy of traditional sources of power; filmmakers must appeal to the political sensibilities of decisionmakers, or more likely, to their belief in the project as a business proposition—its profitability, marketability, etc.

A filmmaker whose feature deals with an abusive relationship, and is still without a distribution agreement, describes being told that the subject "has been done" as one of her most frustrating experiences. Understanding a

subject does not occur through a single token gesture toward it, but is based on approaching it repeatedly from different angles. This is made evident by Hollywood's numerous male coming-of-age films or stories about adult men taking stances on issues of justice—good versus evil, right versus wrong (most Westerns and police or detective thrillers). In the independent community, a dominant genre deals with aspects of the role of violence in men's lives, or what it means to be male in the company of men.⁶ Permission to identify a range of subtle or complex differences appears to be far greater in films by and about white men.

Discussion of the merits or faults of a work is particularly slippery in that institutional criticism is not overtly gender-based (or based on race, sexual preference, etc.). Rather, the concept of "quality" is used to eliminate work. While the quality of a film is an important factor in what should be promoted and seen, such arguments can also be used as an obfuscating tactic. The ability to determine what material is of value, either economically or artistically, is one of the ways institutionalized power functions. Upon that basis, decisions are made to not only include what is deemed of significant merit, but to exclude other work or other ways of storytelling that do not coincide with those standards, thus rendering them "lesser" or "slight." This problem has been identified in current debates that object to a literary canon or the recognition of modernist "masters."

To return to the example of *Thelma and Louise*, it is conceivable that had the film been directed by someone other than Ridley Scott, it may have avoided becoming a formulaic Hollywood chase film about the necessary capture of two renegade women. It could have perhaps remained focused on its initial premise of women's suppressed anger examined through its attempt to explain Louise's murder of Thelma's rapist, although Thelma was out of immediate physical danger. It is equally conceivable that the film was produced in the first place because the project received the backing of influential director Scott, and his production company, and not simply because it's an important subject. Further, although this female buddy film "has been done," it could just as well pave the way for future films that address some of the issues *Thelma and Louise* left unanswered: Are there ways for women to act in a social context without taking on male roles? Can one imagine another ending besides their eradication? How can developed women characters be created without having them speak for all women in all situations?

A difficult but persuasive argument, then, is that *Thelma and Louise* was made at all because of the guarantee provided by the involvement of a Hollywood director with a track record, and the safety, given the subject matter, of a male director. In addition, given the paucity of films that



Left: still from *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* (1992) by Leslie Harris. Right: still from *Orlando* (1993) by Sally Potter.

represent and appeal to women, it is preferable that *Thelma and Louise* was made rather than not. However, this argument blurs distinctions between Hollywood's patronage system (exemplified here by Ridley Scott and MGM), and the patronage represented in the independent community. In the case of Borden's *Working Girls*, producer's representative John Pierson handled the film. Pierson, who has represented such important independent films as *She's Got to Have It*, *Parting Glances* (1986) by Bill Sheridan and distributed by Cinecom, *Roger and Me*, *The Thin Blue Line*, *Slacker* (1991), by Richard Linklater and a Sony Pictures Classics release, and *Laws of Gravity*, among others, arranged the sale of *Working Girls* to Miramax for U.S. distribution. Whether Hollywood or independent, both *Thelma and Louise* and *Working Girls* depended on someone other than the script writer, filmmaker, or intended audiences "getting it."

Indeed, the identification of audiences is closely tied to institutional privilege in the independent community. Although traditionally dependent on specialized as opposed to mass market audiences, independent distributors do not seem to aim products at, or work to develop new markets, until the existence of specialized audiences is identified for them. Lee's *She's Got to Have It*, and the African American filmmakers who followed,⁷ prove the existence of African American audiences who respond to films in which they are represented or through which they are addressed. The "fact" of this audience's existence is now seeping through to Hollywood.⁸ Independent distributors have long identified gay audiences as a large and loyal following for art or specialty films, possibly a factor in the distributors' willingness to promote such films as *Parting Glances*, *Longtime Companion* (1990), Bill Sheridan/Goldwyn; *Poison* (1990), Todd Haynes/Zeitgeist; *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), Gus Van Sant, released by New Line/Fine Line; *Paris Is Burning* (1992), Jennie Livingston, distributed by Prestige/Miramax; *The Living End* (1992), Gregg Araki/October; and *Swoon* (1992), Tom Kalin/Fine Line.

The difficulty of a film finding distribution if it does not address a previously acknowledged audience is evidenced by the case of Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. As a representative for one of the "mini-majors" (Miramax, Fine Line, Goldwyn, and Sony Pictures Classics) put it, the film had been "kicking around for awhile," meaning it had been offered to, and passed on, by the full range of independent distribution companies. Indeed, it appeared that *Daughters of the Dust* was not going to get a theatrical release at all when it was finally picked up by Kino International, a company that deals primarily in classic foreign films. Even so, its initial opening at New York's Film Forum was greeted by indifferent responses from both reviewers and traditional, predominantly white, art-house audiences.

The ultimately positive reception and success of *Daughters of the Dust* is attributable to KJM3 Entertainment Group, which was hired by Kino to promote and market the film. The recently-formed company advertised the film in local newspapers and on radio stations with a largely African American audience, and placed posters in community bookstores, schools, and churches. KJM3's focused efforts to reach and develop the film's likeliest audience resulted in its attendance by groups from schools and churches, as well as individuals, all non-traditional foreign and independent film viewers, who went to an art theater specifically to see *Daughters of the Dust*. Ninety percent of this audience was composed of African American women, and from there the film went on to find a wider release and appeal.

The distribution background of *Daughters of the Dust* raises issues of concern for both African American and women's audiences. Virtually the entire independent industry failed to understand the film's significance because it addressed audiences unknown to them, and therefore, non-existent. "Ironically, the factors that led to its ambivalent reception by the independent community and art-house moviegoers may have led in part to its success. The independent distributors of such films as *Straight Outta Brooklyn* and *House Party* have prided themselves

on offering realistic and innovative stories about the black community to moviegoers starved by Hollywood's resistance to this product. Yet the films produced until now have combined to form a genre that, with its focus on the inner-city black male teenager, has alienated or excluded much of Dash's audience—black women."⁹ The film's popularity with its intended audience is due to its subject matter—African American issues of history and identity. In addition, the film's narrative differences, poetic rather than linear or "realistic," may explain its ability to resonate with its viewers. However, the very aspects that cause the film to appeal to its particular audiences also make it less accessible for its most non-specific viewers, demanding extra "work" on their part. Further, it arguably neither completely overlaps with nor excludes certain other viewing groups such as African American men or non-African American women. All of these factors required increased efforts in the film's distribution and promotion in order to reach its intended audiences, as well as make its significance understood for audiences beyond.

Although claiming to have learned from this experience, independent distributors' singular response to the misrecognition of *Daughters of the Dust* and its audiences, seems to be the promotion of Leslie Harris's *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* (1992). It is the film most frequently cited since *Daughters of the Dust* as redressing the independent community's miscalculation and their omission of the audiences appealed to by Dash's film. Once again women filmmakers are caught between a system of exclusion or dependency on patronage. *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.*, a Jury Prize winner at the Sundance Festival, and recently released by Miramax, also had early support from producer's representative Pierson.¹⁰

Moreover, to assume that a single film will suffice for an entire audience comprised of a diverse group of individuals veers dangerously close to asking that film to speak for all members of that community in all situations, and returns us to the "it's been done" argument. The attempt to unify and singularize entire communities, by identifying a lone gay, African American, or women's film, or a homogenized gay, African American, or women's audience, is both a simplification and a distortion for which there is no equivalent in dominant films or audiences. The unrealistic expectation of asking a single film to represent all white, heterosexual men is neither demanded nor claimed as an achievement in the independent community or in Hollywood.

Allison Anders's *gas, food, lodging*, released by I.R.S., did not have the same difficulty as *Daughters of the Dust* in getting a distribution deal. However, neither of these two recent films by women, that received significant attention, were picked up by one of the "mini-majors" who control the majority of independent releases (domestic and foreign) in this country, as well as having the greatest access to "A-list" screens, a critical factor as independent theatrical venues diminish in number. The name recognition of the four mini-majors also serves as a marker for art or specialty filmgoers, comparable to the function of stars in mainstream films. *Gas, food, lodging* was produced by Cineville, a company that sought to make a women-centered drama. Anders, who is a friend and former classmate of one of the members of Cineville, was originally brought in to work on the script, then asked to stay on and direct the project. In discussing her next film, *Mi Vida Loca*, about young Chicana gang members, Anders raises the same issues facing many women filmmakers concerning what is validated as important subject matter and therefore taken seriously versus what is excluded as being of lesser dramatic significance. "There's still this macho thing that says the hard core is in the boys' story. Well, this is about girls getting pregnant at 13 and getting thrown out of their homes. That's hard core to me."¹¹

In speaking of the lack of a designated new or emerging women's cinema, I am not saying that African American or gay filmmakers and audiences are better served by the

independent industry. That kind of comparative or oppositional argument represents a dangerous divide-and-conquer tactic that only works to the advantage of those in the existing industry, and for whom it is already too easy to claim they have done their African American, Hispanic, gay, or women's film. What I am suggesting is that the varying needs and difficulties facing each excluded community must be recognized and our differences not homogenized, thus erasing them from visibility. At the same time we must continue to recognize that we are all united in the face of a dominant, institutionally-privileged other.

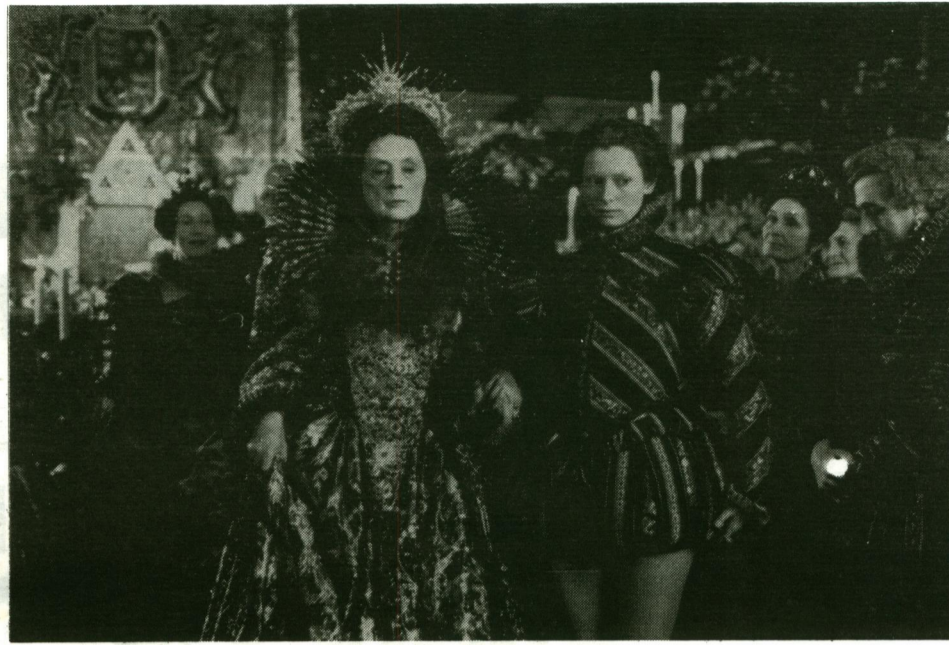
For instance, it is possible to argue that although an African American audience has begun to be identified by the film industry, race and ethnicity mark an always-visible difference that results in a segregation of black cinema so that it is "set apart" from other avenues of filmmaking. Further, the films predominantly permitted and promoted, which focus on young, urban males, represent only the narrowest spectrum of African American experience and risks the reinforcement of stereotypical conceptualizations by non-African American audiences. Similarly and conversely, gay cinema can be segregated from dominant independent film precisely as a specialized genre, by keeping members of the community otherwise hidden, resulting in the continued invisibility of gays and lesbians in non-specialized venues. Whether separating by making visible, or separating by making invisible, the outcomes for race and ethnicity or gay and lesbian cinemas bear similarities. However, the cultural conditions that determine those outcomes vary, and as such, need to be confronted and struggled against differently.

Women face yet another set of circumstances that is marked not by women's absence, but rather by their persistent presence in both mainstream and dominant independent film. After having viewed my film, *The Family Business* (1993), a prominent member of the independent film community asked, "What's the hook?" My response was that this is a film that addresses and appeals to women audiences. The question recurred. I then attempted to explain how I believe the film's narrative addresses its audience and presents its problems in a differently-gendered way, outside of the obvious decision to depict central women characters. It became clear that I was not providing a satisfactory response (the discussion was not about whether the film succeeded or failed to do this). It only occurred to me some time after the conversation why, from his perspective, I wasn't answering the question, and therefore why, from my perspective, we were having a frustratingly circular conversation.¹²

Women characters are almost invariably present in narratives that center on male characters and male psyches, often taking up prominent roles as love interest, threat, object of desire, and so on. It is much more difficult to physically segregate women into a separate genre and still tell stories about heterosexual men, for whose narratives women characters are almost always necessary. This has resulted in an apparent inability within the independent film industry to recognize women as a specialized audience at all. Women are, and always have been, present as characters on the screen and as members of the audience. Therefore, there is no necessary or sufficient "hook" for an audience who is presumed to already exist. Why work toward building an audience one already has?

The ability to argue for other representations, then, becomes more difficult and hinges less on the presence of women characters than on the ways stories are told and in the ways audiences of women are addressed. This is a much more complex argument and, I believe, an important distinction for all marginalized groups. It is also a fundamental aspect of the concept of multiculturalism that the independent film industry, as currently constructed, has not yet grasped. If, "the political force of our representations must be taken seriously for it is in the aesthetic realm that we test, explore, and imagine our reality," then much is at stake here.¹³

In a recent article in *Afterimage*, Manthia Diawara draws a distinction between "oppression studies," which seek to



Stills from *Orlando* (1993) by Sally Potter.

identify and specify the exclusion of blacks, and "performance studies," with their focus on how blacks create and reinvent themselves within the context of American culture. "This broad cultural shift to a new black public sphere set the stage for an environment in which books, films, the visual arts, and music no longer principally exhibit an interest in the project of integration [or "the cross-over dream"]. Instead, seeing one's life reflected at the center of books, films, visual arts, and music takes precedence."¹⁴

This shift is occurring in women's projects, too. There is less of a concern (although the concern is ongoing) to delineate patriarchal structures, and more emphasis placed on depicting women's lives, relationships, perspectives, desires, and truths. The dominant project is no longer to solely explain how groups are oppressed or forever argue against that oppression, but rather to portray and understand one's own experiences. Less energy is spent convincing a dominant other, and more attention is devoted to one's own community and its meanings.

The question is how does this approach, centered on one's own concerns, coincide with an industry still representing its dominant members and their modes of thought. Judging from the non-emergence of a women's cinema, the distribution history of *Daughters of the Dust* with its "performance studies" narrative and specifically targeted viewers, and the independent community's conceptualization of women audiences, the answer is discouraging.

The independent film industry, many of whose members are ideologically self-identified in the liberal to left spectrum, and whose economic and philosophical justification lies in providing a much needed alternative to Hollywood films, continues to expect and demand "oppression studies." Those are the terms through which most of its members understand political difference, and the foundation upon which the industry has been established. The institutional structure dictates a much greater receptivity toward films dealing with the relationship between men and women, or narratives about women that replicate male paradigms, than towards stories by, about, and for women, performatively imagined and told.¹⁵ A corollary but not coincidental factor is that the institutionally inscribed version keeps male subject and viewer at center-stage.

Although I have focused on American films in this discussion, I would like to turn to Sally Potter's visually exquisite *Orlando* (1993) as an example of the performative narrative. Like Lizzie Borden prior to *Working Girls*, British filmmaker Sally Potter is also known as a prominent figure in the feminist avant-garde (Potter for *Thriller*, 1979; Borden for *Born In Flames*, 1983). *Orlando*, based on Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) is the story of a person who lives for 400 years, part of that time as a man, prior to changing into a woman. Scheduled for release here in 1993 by Sony Pictures Classics, the film details the altered circumstances of Orlando's life due to her/his altered gender.

The film is sparse in its narrative. Instead, its subject is played out upon surfaces and looks. Wardrobe, behavior, and gesture become the central elements in the story's elaboration. Although the film hinges on Orlando's physical transformation from man to woman, the gender distinction is not emphasized; it is intriguingly underplayed. Orlando, in the early portion of the film, during her/his years as a man, is barely disguised as such to the audience. We know throughout the film that this character is a woman, Tilda Swinton, playing a man. We are not led to believe or taken in by her masculinity. For instance her costuming is equally resplendent and excessive as a man or as a woman. This pact or game between actor and viewer is punctuated by Orlando/Swinton's intermittent direct-camera looks or address. Potter herself describes the technique as "not naturalistic acting." Not only does Swinton's acting style and physical presence ignore her change of gender, but this gender blurring is emphasized throughout the film in other ways, for instance, by having the elderly Queen Elizabeth I portrayed by Quentin Crisp.

While little is made of Orlando's reversal of sex at the level of "realism," much occurs around surface structures,

particularly the changed behavior of others toward her. The film portrays gender distinction as based not upon the body itself, but on appearances and social expectations¹⁶—that is, Orlando's transformation is an issue of gender, not sex, a result of social and cultural construction, not biology.¹⁷

The distinguishing/non-distinguishing treatment of gender renders *Orlando* a performative women's film. But equally, so does its elaboration of story at the level of surface and appearance rather than through the more traditional devices of plot or character development. For viewers whose subjectivity is too often determined by dress and gesture, ordained as recipients of the look, there is something recognizably right about *Orlando's* mode of storytelling. However, criticism of the film describes it as visually rich but thematically rather "slight." In one interview Potter's heated response is: "Is that slight? The predicament of men and women: are our identities determined by our biological gender or not? . . . And people do tend to say that pictures that have a central female role are slight . . ." ¹⁸ This exchange indicates the difficulties facing a performative work within a systematized context. The work must first be understood by others, and second, be taken seriously. There is a third factor as well: how the film is articulated and explained by its makers or proponents.

In a recent documentary, *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (1992), Chomsky analyzes why he has so rarely been invited as an expert guest on television shows such as *Nightline* (only once for Chomsky, versus numerous appearances by Henry Kissinger, *Nightline's* most frequent attendee). The issue is not simply intentional exclusion (or inclusion) of someone based upon their politics, but is a problem embedded in the very structure of the medium. A show such as *Nightline* demands that a person describe often complex ideas and opinions in a brief space of time before turning to an "opposing" view or a commercial break. In other words, the institutional structure necessitates discussion by sound bite. Those representing prevailing ideology, Chomsky argues, can follow the format of the show much more readily. For instance, "family values" or "free enterprise" are catch phrases that hail or signal whole concepts and complex cultural arguments. Because these phrases represent dominant ideology they are familiar and understood. By necessity, those arguing alternative positions must also follow the sound bite formula. Because phrases like "manufacturing consent" mark unknown or less familiar concepts, they make little sense to viewers of *Nightline*, and require much more time to explain than the format dictates. Therefore, those presenting opposing stances to the dominant norm function poorly as guests. On the basis of being untelegenic interviewees they are not invited back.

Chomsky's example is a striking instance of how institutional privilege functions in television news programming. No individual is required to make a conscious decision to exclude a person representing a differing political view. The structure of the institution does it for them, and individuals can continue to lay claim to lack of bias. A similar situation exists within the independent film industry, regarding performative work. By definition, these films will not easily fit into a hook. An industry that requires them to do so, or only promotes the ones that do, pursues the formulaic or follows established paradigms. In establishing its case for what amounts to exclusion, the institutional structure of independent film reverts to the "realities" of audience and box-office. However, an industry that relies on known and quantified audiences with whom previous films have succeeded reinforces the idea of the familiar hook, premise, or paradigm. An institutional structure economically and ideologically dependent on what has worked in the past regulates what will succeed in the future, and in the process, excludes other audiences and other films. Therefore, myths like "there is no audience for it" or "it won't sell"—the filmic equivalent to "untelegenic"—become industry realities that put the responsibility for the failure to cultivate audiences on the institution, not on the individual.

Pressure on the independent film industry to distribute films made by, made for, or made about those excluded from positions of power is not in itself sufficient. A fundamental change in the institution must occur so that it no longer simply identifies audiences when forced to, or once they've already

been made obvious. Instead, the industry must embody a much better conceptualization of the variety and complexities of communities, at the same time as those communities are articulating and exploring the variations and range of their own experiences. If diversity is to be more than lip-service to a political slogan, it must be accepted as a concept with implications, including audiences who must be actively sought and reached, and films that are "hard sells" in part because their meanings vary for differing cultural groups.

NOTES

1. The standard Hollywood criteria of box-office results applies less well to independent films, partly due to the nature of the independent business. A film can, for instance, receive a lot of attention without ensuring a box-office hit or sizeable profits. *Roger and Me* (1989), an independently produced film picked up for distribution by Hollywood major, Warner Brothers, at a large sum by independent standards, did not make a profit in its theatrical release.
2. Miramax also distributed Borden's *Love Crimes* (1991). I would have liked to include in this list Barbara Kopple's documentary *American Dream* (1992), picked up by Prestige/Miramax, but it has not, to date, received significant release.
3. As is so often the case. See, for instance, Hal Hinson, "Cool Chicks," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1993, pp. G1, G12-G13.
4. While these are central concerns in current feminist film theory and much work continues to be done around them, they have not yet been taken up in a more widespread and visible cultural context.
5. See for instance, "Gender Bender: A white-hot debate rages over whether *Thelma and Louise* celebrates liberated females, male-bashers—or outlaws," *Time*, June 24, 1991, pp. 52-57, cover story.
6. Recent examples include *Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1990, Greycat), *Reservoir Dogs* (1992, Miramax), *The Bad Lieutenant* (1992, Aries), *Laws of Gravity* (1992, RKO), and *One False Move* (1992, I.R.S.). *Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer* was described as an example of "art-shock" cinema—movies that combine visceral, in-your-face genre value with high-culture aspirations" in Judith Shulevitz, *Off Hollywood Report*, Vol. 5, No. 6, Winter 1990/1991, p. 7.
7. *Hollywood Shuffle* (1987, Goldwyn), *Sidewalk Stories* (1989, Island), *House Party, Hangin' with the Homeboys* (1991, New Line/Fine Line), *Straight Outta Brooklyn* (1991, Goldwyn).
8. *Boyz N the Hood* (1991, Columbia), *New Jack City* (1991, Warner Bros.), *The Five Heartbeats* (1991, 20th Cent. Fox), *Juice* (1992, Paramount).
9. This quote, and much of the information on the distribution and promotion of *Daughters of the Dust*, from Rebecca Godfrey, "Straight Outta Sea Island," in *Off Hollywood Report*, Vol. 7, no. 1, Spring 1992, p. 17.
10. Again, the discussion here is not focused on the merits of any specific film, whatever the worthiness of *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.*, but rather, on the mechanism and issues of independent film distribution. In an extension of this argument, it appears that Miramax followed a distribution strategy similar to that successfully employed with films aimed at African American urban male teenagers. *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* was initially screened in mainstream theaters rather than art houses, presumably in the hopes of capturing a wider and younger audience, often inclined to repeat viewings of favorite films. This observation was made to me by Vanessa Williams of the Philadelphia Inquirer. The question remains whether this releasing strategy helped or rather contributed to the film's fairly warm reception.
11. Jan Breslauer, "Hangin' With the Homegirls," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1992, Calendar, p.3. Additional information on gas, food, lodging from Alison Johns, "Girlz N the Hood," *Millimeter*, November 1992, pp. 42-46.
12. I recently heard Don Bellisario, creator and executive producer of *Magnum, P.I.* and *Quantum Leap* say that after he had pitched the idea for *Quantum Leap* to Brandon Tartikoff, then head of NBC and later at Paramount, Tartikoff responded with, "Could you tell me that in 20 seconds so that my mother could understand it?"
13. Melanie Morton, "Don't Go For Second Sex, Baby!," *The Madonna Connection*, Westview Press, 1992, p. 216.
14. "Black Studies, Cultural Studies: Performative Acts" *Afterimage*, October 1992, pp. 6-7.
15. The discussion which developed around *Thelma and Louise*, with its focus on the film's treatment of men and whether that was male-bashing, rather than on what the film might be saying about women's desires and lives, was based on oppression studies. This is in contrast to *Daughters of the Dust* whose narrative design and concerns can be viewed as an example of the performative.
16. My thanks to Christine Lake for first pointing this out to me.
17. I am footnoting this for anyone who hasn't yet seen *The Crying Game* (1992, Miramax), in which, in contrast to *Orlando*, the reversal of sex is based on the audience being taken in by Jaye Davidson as a woman, prior to the revelation that he is a man. One could argue that in *The Crying Game*, unlike *Orlando*, everything changes because of its biological disclosure.
18. Quote and other information on *Orlando* from *Time Out*, London, March 10-17, pp. 16-18.