

# The Discursive Significance Of Violence: An Analysis of Four Popular Twentieth Century Films

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**The Discursive Significance Of Violence:  
An Analysis of Four Popular  
Twentieth Century  
Films**

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**Submitted For the Degree of PhD  
Queen Mary College  
University of London**



## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the discursive significance of violence in twentieth century popular culture. It explains the desire and demand for representations of violence by analyzing their dual role as a force of subjectivation and subjugation. I argue that modern subjectivity is historically constituted and delimited by violence but that recognition of this is prevented by an overly instrumental understanding of its role. The reduction of violence to simple blunt force figures prominently within cultural and social theory, leaving the armature of cultural analysis ill equipped to explain the demand for violent representation. By providing a genealogy of the political violence once expressed in examples of public torture and execution but transmuted into the more minute expressions integrated within discursive regimes, this thesis argues that State violence produces a Janus-faced consciousness; a subject split between its performance of political Sovereignty and its political subjugation. The thesis progresses through historical-textual analysis of four phenomenally popular films that were, or continue to be, noted for their excess of violence [*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919); *The Sheik* (1922), *Once Upon a Time in The West* (1969); and *Deliverance* (1972)]. While a subject divided by violence explains the dynamic of attraction and repulsion characteristic to violent narratives, these films also comment directly on the relationship between violence and subjectivity. Each film, in its own way, is concerned with subjectivity understood as a force of violence as well as an object of violence. Their continuing significance suggests a more general practice of the cultural exploration of violence; a desire to understand and know its elusive terms. These narratives, and so popular representations of violence in general, can be understood to provide a focus for audiences to imagine (however momentarily and however questionably) a shared sense of subjectivity and cultural bearings.

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis, and the research to which it refers, are the product of my own work, and that any ideas or quotations from the work of other people, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices of the discipline.

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David Hansen-Miller

Date:

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the discursive significance of violence in twentieth century popular culture. The examination itself is carried out through an initial theoretical discussion which is then developed in more specific detail via an examination of four outstandingly popular films of the twentieth century. The thesis maps the integral role that violence, and ideas of violence, play in the formation of the consciousness of modern democratic subjects. In line with contemporary cultural theory and critique, it assumes that subjects define and redefine themselves, in part, through their consumption of cultural objects and their participation in wider cultural negotiations informed by those objects. Specifically, the thesis is concerned with the historical legacy of violent spectacle as a mechanism of social regulation and political domination in the production and consumption of filmic texts. In the first chapter, which is a theoretical extension of this introduction, I draw out the links between the progressive dissolution of State authorized public punishments, for example, those of the scaffold so famously discussed by Michel Foucault, and the proliferation of violent representation and narrative accompanying the expansion of mass cultural forms within 'Western' democracies.



A primary aim of this thesis is to produce an integrated theoretical and methodological framework, appropriate for understanding the cultural demand for violence and its complexity within the cultural sphere. This is accomplished, in the first instance, by a critique of the shortcomings in existing social and cultural theories which have traditionally understood violence in solely instrumental terms. Such an understanding implicitly suggests that violence is a politically neutral tool at the disposal of competing forces. This instrumental view of violence cannot explain the viewing pleasures in violent representations, as it fails to account for the specific appeal of violence over alternative methods of resolving conflict.

The first chapter provides a genealogy of the political function of violence in relation to historical understandings of subjectivity, agency and political community. I argue that the central significance of violence in the social and cultural organization of the absolute State did not abate in the long and ongoing cultural transition to civil democratic rule, but rather that this transition was aided by a diffusion and relative concealment of violent forces. While less spectacular than the scaffold, the modern State's use of violence is widespread. Its micro-political application is both real and imaginary, in the sense of a consistent threat that directly endangers the pathological subject, and importantly, also indirectly endangers the centred subject. The problem is that in their performance of discursive regimes, the democratic subject becomes both the agent and the object of modern dispersed forms of violence. I shall argue that the authority of violence both subjugates and subjectivates, producing a Janus-faced consciousness. The threat thus needs to be fetishized and displaced in order for a bounded subjectivity to remain intact.

The historical transition from one form of spectacle to the other accompanies the professional bureaucratization, specialization, and diffusion of regulatory power. As various offices that serve State interests evolve their own professional grammar

for understanding the world, and as the population becomes increasingly, but differentially, invested in those perceptual frameworks, violence, an undeniably real limitation on the subjective dimension of human life, gains significance as a common ground for cultural recognition. Looking at this history allows us to understand that the violence represented does not simply bond culture in response to fear. Instead, violence represents a defining axis, mediating subjectivity. It therefore provides a common ground, however mobile and unstable, on top of which community or a common culture can be articulated. Throughout the thesis, I develop the idea that popular film is one important location, where the pedagogical legacy of Sovereign violence finds its modern bio-political form of expression. This modern fictional spectacle, compared to the scaffold, provides an infinitely more complex text through which subjects seek to understand and participate in modern regimes of power and authority.

Violence is not simply an instrument of crisis management, utilized by the State or the individual acting outside the authority of the State; it is also a material-discursive system, which, in its reiterations, produces social meaning. Since this is bound to fail – violence cannot sustain any democratic notion of community – we addictively attend to, view, read and watch violent representations for the momentary foundations they provide. In effect, a profound historical link exists between the demand for violent imagery and failures in the subjective practice of democracy. The more this is utilized in lieu of alternative principles of organization, the more we must reproduce it for the purposes of common ground.

### *The Films*

The second chapter places the Weimar era film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, in the context of its initial reception and then maps the dimensions of its ongoing



popular and critical evaluation. *Caligari* is an appropriate starting point, as it is a story about the history of Sovereign power, violence and medical authority. It presents a psychologist who is trying to unlock the secret of a mystic's violent powers by exploring his own ability to make others kill for him. Its director famously rewrote it in order to minimize the film's implicit criticisms of government doctors who tried to detect those affecting war neurosis, during and after World War 1. From its first screenings, audiences and critics alike took sides on whether or not the film's 'hero' was insane, or essentially correct, in his evaluation of the relationship between institutional practices and violence. Interpretations of the film were closely aligned with political positions in Germany at the time of the film's release and pivoted on the relative faith in democracy. The importance of the film resides in its demonstrative participation in a popular debate about the role of violence in culture and society.

The relationship between violence, culture and the role of civil democratic institutions is so explicit and so popular in *Caligari*, that we might ask why debates on the political significance of violence do not actively continue into the present era. *Caligari* is also instructive in this regard as its narrative of violence and institutional authority competes directly with the critical understanding of Sigmund Freud, who was also an active voice in the clinical debates about war neurosis and simulation. The analysis points to the extensive range of commonalities in *Caligari* and Freud's early work, as another indication of the recognizable debates about violence and authority which were at issue in disparate cultural arenas. *Caligari's* lasting appeal can be understood in terms of its offering of fundamental lessons about violence that have been obfuscated or forgotten.

The third chapter builds further on the issues explored in the first two, by exploring the inter-relation among violence, sexual development and sexual desire,



as they were discursively interwoven in post-war British and American culture. *The Sheik*, starring Rudolph Valentino, instituted the cultural mythology of 'the Latin lover', linking romantic passion with a physically aggressive masculinity. It is a story that represents rape as a corrective to perceived confusion and disorder in the state of gender roles. I argue that this extraordinarily popular film functions to transfer the symbolic power of political violence to the field of sexual relations, at the same time as Western governments were increasingly concerned with the family and eugenics, as a method for preserving the health and longevity of the State. Although still controversial, the film provided spectators with an instructive fantasy for the reconstitution of subjectivity and regulatory power in the post-war democratic state. The enjoyment of the film indicates that spectacles of violence can help to redirect public perception, while they also structure new areas and methods of social regulation in line with recognizable historical narratives.

Having laid these foundations, the thesis moves on to a consideration of the Western mythology via *Once Upon a Time in the West*. This chapter looks at how and why critics and audiences have characterized Leone's film as one of the greatest Westerns of all time. Despite this status, *Once Upon a Time in the West* has also had a curious effect on the genre; fans and critics tend to agree that there have not been any 'good' Westerns since. Instead, the last thirty five years of production in the genre have been marked by box office failures, whimsical representations mocking the history of the genre, and the growth of the 'anti-Western', in which the productive technology of violence, historically understood as just and noble, is disavowed by a reformed gunslinger. I argue that Leone's film has produced this effect by subverting the mythology of Sovereign violence outlined in the first chapter. *Once Upon A Time In The West* is almost didactic in its insistence that the gunfighter, a fetish for the compromised subjectivity of modern bio-politics, is a



myth with no identifiable legacy in the contemporary world. The film's wry commentary on the fantasy world of frontier violence demonstrates that the pleasure of violence rests in an obsessive reiteration of the uncompromized historical power denied modern subjects. In pointing up this truth, *Once Upon A Time In The West* actually undermines the historical pleasures of the genre.

The fifth chapter returns to the relationship between gender and violence in modernity through an examination of John Boorman's 1972 film *Deliverance*. *Deliverance* is a narrative about modern masculinity and has been the object of significant critical analysis. The film is a staple on the shelves of even the smallest video stores, as it seems to straddle the line between a 'Hollywood great' and a 'classic', in either the horror or adventure genre. At the centre of discussion and analysis of the film is its graphic depiction of male rape. This chapter seeks to extend the analysis provided within the existent critical literature on *Deliverance*, but contextualizes that analysis via its uses, which is to say the widespread popular citation of the film.

The story focuses on a group of suburban middle class men who go on a river-rafting trip in an attempt to overcome the implicit effeminacy of their modern domesticated existence. In the backwoods of America the men do not rediscover rugged and responsible frontier masculinity, but find themselves locked in battle, real and imagined, with a predatory group of backwoodsmen. The aggression and sexual ambivalence of these backwoodsmen represent a historical discourse of failed civilization and pathological forms of subjectivity. The film instructively represents conflicted relationships between modern bio-political subjectivity and the exclusions of the political-economic periphery. Against this background, the chapter discusses the widespread cultural citations of the violence in *Deliverance* and its use as a signifier to indicate perceived crises in the composition of contemporary subjectivity.

### *Method*

This thesis is an initial step in a larger project that seeks to establish violence as a critical idiom of research, one that begins to provide a framework for communication across the range of research on cultural violence. It is, therefore, strongly interdisciplinary, drawing on social and cultural theories of violence, the subject and democracy, social and cultural history, semiotics and the emerging field of audience research. While methodologically historicist, it is also a heuristic effort to resolve shortcomings in the existing critical analysis of violence. This approach is dictated by the need to overcome what, I maintain, is a counter-productive separation between disciplinary sub-fields and to foreground the problem of violence in the study of culture and society. For example, the distinction between real violence and ‘symbolic violence’ is important, but disciplinary divisions between the empirical social sciences and the theoretical humanities tend to oversimplify that distinction. As a result, the interaction between real and symbolic violence, a dynamic that I argue is critical to the role of violence in modern consciousness, is consistently overlooked. It is through interdisciplinary attention to that interaction that my framework for ‘reading violence’ emerges.

Building on the critical and theoretical foundations detailed in the first chapter, the thesis explores and develops the argument through a critical-historical examination of four violent films: Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919); George Melford’s *The Sheik* (1921); Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1969) and John Boorman’s *Deliverance* (1971).<sup>1</sup> These films were

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<sup>1</sup> *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* dir. Robert Wiene, perf. Conrad Veidt, Werner Krauss and Lil Dagover, Decla, 1919; *Deliverance* dir. John Boorman, per. Jon Voight, Burt Reynolds, Ned Beatty and Ronny Cox, Warner Brothers, 1972; *The Sheik*, dir. George Melford perf. Rudolph Valentino, Agnes Ayres and Frank Butler,



selected at the outset of the project. At that point the goal was simply to explain the subjective desire for violent representation. To accomplish this, I chose four films that were, and are, remarkable for their violence and their continuing relevance, despite the passage of years. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, for example, is considered one of the first horror films, from the start its original, artistic representation of violence was a success with audiences. *The Sheik* offered audiences a sexually explicit narrative of violence, which broke new ground in a number of controversial ways. The violence in *Once Upon A Time In The West* was considered excessive in its day, even if to our contemporary eyes it now appears somewhat tame. *Deliverance* offered, and continues to offer, audiences a controversial and disturbing portrait of male rape.

*Once Upon a Time In The West* is the only film in this list that was not a hit upon its release. As I discuss, it has since become one. *The Sheik* is the only film in this list which did not open to any significant critical appreciation, nor receive it since its release. In distinctive ways, each violent film has had a significant cultural impact, producing a number of imitations, if not whole genres of similarly violent texts. The films represent German, English, Italian and American production contributions, respectively, and variations in genre and setting, as well as a significant time span. Most importantly, in one way or another each film has retained audiences of one kind or another in the years since their release. They are milestones and signposts in the canon of popular culture. While I do not think they should be understood as a significantly *representative* sample of violent representations, their popularity and ‘staying power’ provides a strong foundation through which to identify persistent historical themes in the demand for, and

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Paramount Studios, 1921; *Once Upon A Time in the West* dir. Sergio Leone perf. Henry Fonda, Claudia Cardinal and Jason Robards, Paramount Pictures, 1969.



'enjoyment' of, violence in the twentieth century. In addition, their variation from each other allows for the identification and analysis of significant differences in the contemporary manifestation of discourses of sovereign violence. Accordingly, these texts are particularly well suited for the development of a theory which could be applied to a wider range of materials.

This is not a project in film history, but a project which seeks to map the dynamic cultural discourse on violence through the particularly useful example of popular films and their continuing relevance. The analysis I propose initially focuses on the violence of each film and the social-historical context of the representation at the time of the film's release. I chart historical shifts in attitude towards each film, and to ideas about its cultural significance in relation to changing ideas about the acceptable and unacceptable application of violence as a means of regulatory power. Accordingly, they are well suited to an analysis which can inform us about the specific discursive dimensions of the demand for violence.

# ONE

## **VIOLENCE, SUBJECTIVITY AND CULTURAL DISCOURSE**

### *Introduction*

In this chapter I shall detail the manner in which the expanding apparatuses of the modern State were authorized and structured through the authority of violence. I shall explain how ever more complex and intricate systems of government did not ‘civilize’ and dispense with violence as a method of rule, but gradually disseminated the concentrated power of spectacular forms into the minutia of localized procedures and signs. Far from being detached or attenuated from the procedures of modern social and cultural regulation, violence is thus discursively integral. The regimes of bio-power which displaced the regime of alliance derive their ultimate authority and their effective force from violence. For anyone familiar with Max Weber or Walter Benjamin, as well as a number of other social theorists, such an argument is perhaps uncontroversial.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1968) pp. 253-264; ‘Critique of Violence’, *Reflections*, trans. by Edmund



What I wish to add to such an understanding is an analysis of violence as a force of subjectivation. If, through dispersed violence, discursive regimes produce modern subjectivity then violence is not simply an instrumental force at the disposal of the state. Instead, violence is interiorized, signifying through and within those discourses of individuality, autonomy, sovereignty, agency, *etc.* which authorize and found modern subjectivity. However effaced or mitigated, violence is at the heart of subjectivity; in more poetic terminology it is what resonates in discourse. Michel de Certeau wrote: violence is ‘not in the first place a matter for reflection nor is it an object that can be put before the eyes of an observer’. Instead, ‘violence is inscribed in the place from which we speak of it. Violence defines that place’.<sup>2</sup> I believe this can be taken a step further to say that violence defines subjectivity; we do not simply speak of violence from a place defined by violence, but the agency of speaking is itself defined or structured by violence.

Such an analysis seeks to provide a genealogy of our present dependence on violence. It is not an attempt to explain the causes of violence but to explain why violence is so essential to our cultural discourse. I intend to explain our divided interests in violence, its push and its pull, our discursive repugnance for something that endlessly draws our attention. Such an effort will inevitably be written close to the boundaries of psychoanalysis as it invokes concepts like ‘split subjects’, as well as the psychical territory of ‘subjectivity’, ‘identity’, ‘individuality’ and ‘agency’. Given that such issues are so firmly defined by psychoanalytic inquiry, it is not surprising that this analysis should address sex and violence as the twin obsessions of

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Jephcott (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1978) pp. 277-300; Max Weber, ‘Politics as a Vocation’, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. trans. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 77-128.

<sup>2</sup> Michel de Certeau, ‘The Language of Violence’, in *Culture in the Plural*, trans. by Tom Conley (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) pp. 29-36 (p. 29).



contemporary culture. The familiarity of the very couplet ‘*sex and violence*’ seems to name some implicit and intractable cultural relationship -- discursively incongruous yet preternaturally linked. My argument works against the convincing critical elaboration of the technology of sexuality and its productive effects, one that continues to explain the demand for disclosures, representations, investigations, analyses, the general commodification and the general reproduction of sexual discursivity in contemporary culture. I assume that it is perfectly fitting that ‘sex’ has received all the critical attention that it has. The fact that violence has not achieved any parallel status as a critical idiom can, in part, be attributed to a somewhat optimistic psychoanalytic understanding of violence as a manifestation of repressed sexual drives. Numerous efforts drawing on the Freudian legacy conceptualize violence as a kind of love gone wrong.<sup>3</sup> The reality of violence has been analytically subjugated to the unreal content of fantasy, such that analysis of the complex material force of violence has largely been sacrificed to the abstractions of the symbolic.

This is not to imply that violence is un-researched. There are countless efforts taking the problem of violence as the, or as one of the central objects. The problem I am concerned with is that violence remains somewhat bound to discipline (e.g. criminology, psychology, politics, literature) and is often a key term for investigating another more essential problem (e.g. the violent offender, the abuser or the abused,

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<sup>3</sup>Beyond Freud the most obvious and arguably the most relevant examples would be Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., trans. by Victor Carfagna, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970) Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* 2 vols. trans. by Stephen Conway Vol. 1, Erica Carter and Chris Turner Vol. 2, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987-1989). Also see Andrew Hewitt, ‘The Frankfurt School and the Political Pathology of Homosexuality’, in *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism & The Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996), pp. 38-78 for an outstanding critique of Adorno’s reliance on such constructions.



patriarchal power, sacrifice). Indeed, these are all significant problems and there is undoubtedly some truth to Roland Barthes' assertion that 'one must choose one's key to discuss violence'.<sup>4</sup> The object here is to investigate the potential relevance of a more lateral analysis. Admittedly, to accomplish this I am necessarily tying my own research to two additional lateral terms: subjectivity and culture.

I shall return to Freud's legacy later - for the moment, suffice it to say that Freud was inconsistent and sometimes contradictory in his understanding of when aggression and violent expression were born of sexual impulses and drives, and when sexual impulses and desires were borne of aggressive and violent drives. While Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* explains how the discourse of sexuality became a dominant concern in the political regulation of subjects, and while that analysis is widely understood as a critique of the psychoanalytic project, it can also explain why the analysis of sex would supersede, if not entirely displace, violence within that armature.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as we will see, prominent attempts to negotiate the gap between Foucault and psychoanalysis reproduce omissions of violence, despite its glaring significance. While my critical and methodological sympathies are with Foucault, this is less an attempt to critique psychoanalysis, and more an effort to assert the centrality of violence, most particularly where it is overlooked. I seek to explain that the critical subjugation of violence to sexuality is an error, an inversion of what is at stake in the procedures of subjectivity and reception. However, the critically impoverished discussion of violence does not only define psychoanalysis; Foucault's central criticisms are similarly marked by the errors they purport to address. His emphasis on the discursive complexity of sex is accompanied by an

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<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, 'On the Subject of Violence', in *The Grain of the Voice; Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 306-311, (p. 308).

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978).



instrumental and residual picture of violence manifest in a version of the law that 'always references' the startlingly discreet singularity of 'the sword'.<sup>6</sup> What is sometimes less clear is that this instrumental picture lies at the heart of the prevailing views on sexuality, rather than within Foucault's critique of those views. A more complex and subtle elaboration of violence, which can and should be emphasized, can be identified in his broader critical project.

In almost every significant critical discussion of violence it is consistently reduced to its instrumentality and understood as exterior to discourse and subjectivity.<sup>7</sup> A civilizing narrative of historical alleviation and moderation, and an almost charming faith in the modern State's reluctance to utilize violence, pervades understanding in a startling range of critical texts. In media research this is taken to an extreme where behaviourist assumptions predominate, and real people (apparently a completely peaceable and caring species) are subject to the negative fictional influence of violent representation. Medical bodies issue warnings about the distorted perception produced by media violence and the negative effects on the psyche.<sup>8</sup>

Questions concerning the desire and demand for violent representations are generally neglected or casually connected to latent and primitive aggressive drives.

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<sup>6</sup> Foucault, p. 144.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to Max Weber and Walter Benjamin I am thinking particularly of Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970); Franz Fanon, 'Concerning Violence', in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963) pp. 35-106; Georg Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. by Thomas E. Hulme (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Pierre Clastre, *The Archeology of Violence*, trans. by Jeanine Herman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1994); Rene Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (London: Athlone, 1988) represents an exception to be covered (though only implicitly) in the second chapter. The more considerable exceptions of Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault are discussed below.

<sup>8</sup> David Walsh et al., *The American Medical Association's Physicians Guide to Media Violence* (Chicago: AMA, 1996), <<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/3548.html>> (accessed 4 August 2004).



The survey introduction of one recent book on televisual violence attempts to engage the problem of ‘attraction’, but the answer instantly moves to a collation of the empirical base for asserting that yes, people are attracted to images of violence. By way of explanation, we are predictably informed that ‘[a]ttraction to violence in entertainment has a history that predates the modern mass media and can be traced back to the popularity of violent sporting spectacles in Greek and Roman culture’.<sup>9</sup> It is unclear if this is meant to suggest that the matter of attraction is so trans-historical that it is beyond the purview of cultural sociology, or if it is merely a nod to the reference points of a more appropriate Freudian enquiry.

Despite the popularity and pervasiveness of violence in real and imaginary forms, the idea persists that it is an ancillary and residual cultural and social technology. Some more sophisticated forms of narrative cultural analysis, many of which are referenced or discussed throughout this thesis, engage with the complex signification of violence at the same time that they respect the rules of its instrumentality. In these readings violence is a tool in the service of some more operative signifier in the regimes that govern subjectivity: class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, *etc.* Such readings seem to force questions regarding the prominence of violence: why does this technology feature over so many others? Why is violence featured at the centre of our understandings about so many forms of identity? How can we continue to respect the clean instrumentality of such a pervasive cultural signifier?

Elaine Scarry’s text *The Body In Pain* is an important exception to the critical neglect of violence; it provides a different explanation for the failure of understanding concerning violence. For Scarry, pain ‘does not simply resist language

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<sup>9</sup> Barrie Gunter, Jackie Harrison and Maggie Wykes, ‘Violence on Television: The Parameters of Concern’, in *Violence On Television: Distribution, Form, Context, Themes* (London: LEA Publishers, 2003), pp. 1-16 (p. 11).

but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned'.<sup>10</sup> While Scarry's analyses are focused primarily on the exceptional contexts of torture and war, she points to the abolition of the subject promised by violence: 'our interior states of consciousness are regularly accompanied by objects in the external world ... we do not simply "have feelings" but have feelings for somebody or something' whereas pain 'has no referential content'. Pain 'is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language.'<sup>11</sup> Understanding this, we can recognize that violence represents the potential annihilation of our physical and linguistic subjectivity, and that the annihilation of the latter is not simply a result of the former. Scarry's argument suggests a form of signification that is disrespectful of the boundaries governing definitions of the material and symbolic as well as subject and object. In this way, she provides useful pointers to the simultaneously obvious yet obscure nature of the role of violence in modern culture.

### *Making an Example*

As is well known, Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* begins with the gruelling and telling 1757 torture and execution of Damiens the regicide.<sup>12</sup> The example is widely and rightly understood to illustrate the dominant techniques of power under the old regime, as well as their instability before they were superseded by the disciplinary regimes of modern justice. Damiens' execution sets the stage for

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<sup>10</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body In Pain; The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Scarry, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> See Michel Foucault, 'The Body of the Condemned', in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Vintage, New York, 1977), pp. 3-31.



one of Foucault's more important analyses of modern discursive regimes. Following Scarry's insights on torture I propose to walk through this familiar territory to emphasize aspects of Foucault's analysis that are either underdeveloped or under-read in relation to violence. Most significantly, Foucault's rejection of the distinction between the material and the symbolic in his account of *discursive* regimes, pivots on the mutating significance of violence. While this aspect of Foucault's critique is arguably incomplete, it does call our attention to the role of violence in the subject effect of discursive regimes. Starting from the Damiens example and the principles it illustrates, I shall move into the macro-political history of violence informing the decline of the scaffold, returning to Foucault for an understanding of the micro-political appropriation of violence and subjectivation.

The execution was to be enacted through a series of excruciating punishments:

the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt away with sulphur, and on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, was, and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered.<sup>13</sup>

The torturous spectacle of the scaffold performs the rite and right of the Sovereign's power through the exercise of violence upon the body of the subject: 'in the darkest region of the political field the condemned man represents the symmetrical inverted figure of the king'.<sup>14</sup> Regicide, an act that represents the reversal of the power relation governing the categories of the Sovereign and the subject, logically demands the ultimate display of force and authority. Accordingly, the tearing, burning, and severing prescribed for Damiens leave the reader with the impression that the *amende honorable* seeks to simply deliver the most excruciating trauma possible. As

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 29.

Foucault writes, ‘the very excess of the violence employed is one of the elements of its glory’; the logic of torture required the guilty to ‘moan and cry out’. The object of torture was forced to manifest the very linguistic de-subjectivization identified by Scarry. This was not ‘a shameful side effect’ but the ‘very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all its force’.<sup>15</sup> However, when Damiens’ body did not come apart as cleanly as planned the series of punishments became something more awful, something unintended. It is to this ‘problem’ that I now turn.

The readings on Damiens cited by Foucault call attention to the technical complications of the execution. The four horses’ initial failure to successfully quarter the body required that they be given new direction and this was then further corrected by the addition of two more horses. The quartering also required the assisted destruction of sinews as well as a helpful ‘hack at the joints’. ‘Bouton, an officer of the watch’, described the fact that even the flesh tearing went a little awry when the executioner, ‘a strong and sturdy fellow’ still found it difficult such that he had to ‘set about the same spot two or three times’.<sup>16</sup> These accounts indicate that some kind of failure undoubtedly occurred or was at least perceived to occur. As far as the intent of the punishment was to cause excruciating pain, to extract from the criminal body the price of the violation and reiterate the symbolic relation of ‘the power of certain individuals over others’, we cannot say that the punishment itself failed.<sup>17</sup> Instead, a distinction emerges between discursive regimes performed in the spectacle of public torture; the punishment succeeds as a display of violent authority but fails as a similarly important demonstration of technical precision. That the methodological shortcomings of the execution are so notable within that framework suggests the emerging significance of technical precision in the State’s performance

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 130.



of its own authority; the Sovereign's violence is proscribed by method. Therefore we could say that the object of the '*amende honorable*' was not just to cause pain and thus extract a price, but it was also to do it spectacularly well.

The public execution, Foucault wrote, was 'a ritual of armed law in which the prince showed himself indissociably as head of justice and head of war':

The justice of the king was shown to be an armed justice. The sword that punished the guilty was also the sword that destroyed enemies. A whole military machine surrounded the scaffold: cavalry of the watch, archers, guardsmen, soldiers. This was intended, of course, to prevent any escape or show of force; it was also to prevent any outburst of sympathy or anger on the part of the people [...] but it was also a reminder that every crime constituted as it were a rebellion against the law and the criminal was an enemy of the prince.<sup>18</sup>

The macabre theatre of the scaffold demonstrated the continuity between the Sovereign's foreign and domestic authority. It called to the entire apparatus of force that protected and determined the kingdom's external boundaries as well as its internal order. The technical skill required on the eighteenth century battlefield finds its domestic representation in the techniques of punishment, as demonstrated on the scaffold. Torture and its effects, Foucault writes, are 'not an expression of lawless rage'. Torture was subject to a regime of criteria, the first of which is that it must 'produce a certain degree of pain which may be measured exactly, or at least calculated, compared and hierarchized [...] Torture rests on a whole quantitative art of pain.'<sup>19</sup> The torturer should have the capacity to survey the body and calculate its limits such that the severing would not demand a repeat effort and the quartering would not demand the redirection or addition of horses. Such an understanding of torture suggests that technical precision was as central to the performance as the

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 50; See pp. 73-74 for Foucault's discussion of the opposition.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 33-34.

demonstration of sheer force. When the performance is seen to fail, and fail in the act of rectifying a previous failure, the machinery of rule is seen to fail.

The foundational relationship between the Sovereign's violence and the order of the domain itself means that the error potentially signifies deep instability in the regime and the general order of subjects and subjectivity that it guaranteed. As witnesses to this demonstration the spectators were effectively asked to perform what Foucault called a sort of 'scaffold service', where they would ratify the authority of the Sovereign at the same time that they were made subject to its challenge.<sup>20</sup> The scaffold required its spectators to serve simultaneously on both sides of the law, to be both the king's agent and his object. The scaffold then seems to produce, simultaneous with its effort to police, a divided subjectivity. Not so surprisingly a technical fault sways the affect of the assembled crowd as it demonstrates the precariousness of an apparatus with profound responsibilities. Foucault writes that:

in punishment-as-spectacle a confused horror spread from the scaffold; it enveloped both executioner and condemned; and, although it was always ready to invert the shame inflicted on the victim into pity or glory, it often turned the legal violence of the executioner into shame.<sup>21</sup>

The *Gazette d'Amsterdam* observed that as Damiens' torture carried on, 'the spectators were all edified by the solicitude of the parish priest of St. Paul's who, despite his great age, did not spare himself in offering consolation to the patient'.<sup>22</sup> The witness of the Sovereign's power becomes witness to his excesses and is therefore accompanied by the transfer of affection to the realm of the spiritual. That church provides at least an imaginary constraint on the Sovereign, but also promises solace in spectators' own deaths. The distress we might wish to ascribe to a

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<sup>20</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 4.



transcendently humanistic empathy for a body in pain is constituted by the insecurity and peril of potential destruction, glimpsed in a technological error.

Having introduced the concept of a divided or split subject, it seems necessary to address the issue of 'ratification'. Punishment is not just punishment but a lesson in the rules governing the distribution of punishment. As I shall explore below the constitution of the Sovereign's ability to instruct is already based on the historical violence which installed him, or his forbears, into that position of power. In this way, the scaffold represents a kind of tautological pedagogy in respect for domination. Such a regime can only ever throw down a challenge to the objects of its rule. 'Ratification', as distinct from submission before a challenge, would therefore be meaningless without reference to some other quarter. Technical precision in violence utilizes a discourse of skills, or talents, or aptitudes for violence that can suggest divinity or destiny. The technical detail of Damiens' execution operationalizes a distinction between brute force and technical precision. Though the fundamental dependency between both categories remains intact, the performance serves to re-distribute the weight of authority; announcing and emphasizing skill over sheer violence draws attention to mastery over the technology of power as well as the challenge offered by power itself. The proper response to the performance is seemingly, 'I respect the King's skill and power - to do otherwise is to risk injury to my person'. Such a response requires the King's competent demonstration of skill; if that demonstration fails, the opportunity for ratification is denied and all that is left to the spectator is the state of unqualified subjection.

The Damiens example illustrates the basic and inescapably direct communication of violence, but it also illustrates the degree of complexity that violent spectacle had achieved by the mid-eighteenth century. The ratification of Sovereignty demanded by violent demonstrations of technical skill points to a



subject that must, paradoxically, accept the perspectives of a dominant power as an act of embodied resistance. One must respect the Sovereign's skill for violence to prevent oneself from becoming a potential object of those skills. The performative effort places its subjects on both sides of the law, such that the Sovereign's violence institutes a fissure between the body and the psyche of those subjects. The example also suggests a relatively elaborate bureaucracy of violent authority. The 'whole military machine' that surrounds the scaffold is the material agent of the Sovereign's authority; in the elaboration of the State the military apparatus represents an attenuation of the Sovereign's powers of violence. A general economy of divided subjectivity is extended through differential positioning before the law.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault attempts to explain the relatively rapid transition in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century from the spectacular use of scaffold justice to the more discrete and less bloody methods of modern discipline. Foucault notes that moving into the eighteenth century punishment lost some of its intensity as crimes lost some of their violence: 'it was as if there had been a gradual lowering of the level' and violent impulses had generally been curbed. He rightly situated this lowering of the level within general increases in the standard of living, including, but not limited to, increases in wealth and property as well as 'demographic expansion' that spurred the demand and respect for security. On the most basic level an alleviation of scarcity meant less of the malnourishment and overwork that could bring about violent interactions. More efficient policing broke up 'the great gangs of malefactors' and crime became more concerned with 'the direct seizure of goods' than with assaults on the person.<sup>23</sup>

His primary concern was that, as the eighteenth century progressed, scaffold justice was increasingly contested and the assembled crowd was increasingly

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<sup>23</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, pp. 75-76.



volatile. For reformers it was as if spectators were moving to take up the challenge that was implicitly thrown down by the Sovereign. A movement toward ‘the gentle way in punishment’ responded by dispensing with those excesses of punishment that represented the restitution of the Sovereign’s greater share of power.<sup>24</sup> Rather than seeing crime as an assault on the Sovereign that needed to be avenged, reformers moved towards a method that sought to balance the punishment with the transgression. Foucault’s analysis is characteristically elliptical, but such ellipsis lends to a sense that he is unconcerned with the link between a ‘lowering of the tone’ and the volatility of the assembled crowd. I would point out in contrast that there is an intrinsic link between these two things, and while the issue may not have been high up on Foucault critical historical agenda, the relationship between the ebb of social violence and the volatility of crowds assembled before the scaffold is essential to the development of the bio-political discourses that would supersede the Sovereign regime.

These material shifts are aspects of the increasingly corporate modes of State and culture within modernity.<sup>25</sup> The expansion of State agencies, charged with the care and protection of the population, including but not limited to policing and agricultural management, necessarily authorized larger and larger numbers of people to act in the name of the Sovereign. The increasing stability of an increasingly absolute State was produced in part by the power invested in the ministries and its functionaries. Such administrative regimes carried out their work in the name of the Sovereign thus referencing, in real and symbolic ways, the regime’s capacity for

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<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, pp. 104-131.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory’, in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980: 1997), pp. 31-49. While I think Foucault resolves most of the critical problems in William’s cultural materialist framework, the critical vocabulary of ‘emergent’, ‘dominant’, and ‘residual’ formations of the corporate body remains entirely useful.

violent coercion. The prototypical attenuation of Sovereign power, represented by the military nobility or the executioner, is carried over into any number of administrative offices and their functionaries. This progressive dispersal of Sovereign power across object bodies served to fortify the State, but to displace the singular authority in whose name it functioned. In this realignment of forces, the challenge implicitly thrown down on the scaffold communicates itself to a population increasingly invested with that demonstrated authority. More and more subjects assumed positions of agency and served to ratify the Sovereign's authority while their underlying objectness continued to be reiterated on the scaffold. The performance that once produced ratification and acceptance comes to suggest a contravention of the same. The violence of the scaffold serves as little more than a reminder of the contradiction at the heart of Sovereign power. That practical demonstrations of the affection for democracy, otherwise known as demonstrations, insurrections and revolutions, should temporally coincide with the demise of the scaffold is therefore not terribly surprising. The political contradiction that divides the subject demands a political resolution.

### *The Diffusion of Violence and Modern Subjectivation*

The subjectivating power of violence did not come to an end with the emergence of a democratic subject and those revolutions or declarations concluding or curbing the Sovereign's greater share of power. The modern institutions and discourses that were once authorized by the violence of the Sovereign still reference juridical and extra-juridical forms of violence to accomplish their goals. More importantly, the signification of violence is wholly integrated within bio-political regimes such that subjectivity itself is a reiteration of the power relations constituting the democratic impulse. To elaborate the relationship between the history of violence



and modern subjectivity, it is necessary to explain the productivity of violence within modern discursive procedures. While it is easy to assert that Foucault's histories describe a transition from the positive subjugations of class rule in the *Ancien Regime* to the bio-political self-regulation of democratic regimes, the proposition that violence remains central and productive within that bio-political context demands further explication. Specifically, it is essential to explain the manner in which violence is cited and performed by all the attenuated offices of the State and not simply the obvious examples of executioners or modern police forces. By understanding the diffuse potential or threat of violence within discourse, we can set aside the modern conceit of those ideologies that render violence as a residual or instrumental technology, one largely peripheral to contemporary modes of cultural hegemony.

As illustrated by the intent behind scaffold justice (rather than the conflicts that accrue to it), the regime of power that precedes the era of bio-power does not rest on the effectiveness of the representative institutions, but on the Sovereign's capacity for violence. The scaffold also illustrates that this reality was not hidden or disavowed but was to some degree exalted. Competing European feudal warriors achieved their seat as well as their land and holdings through the direct application of their military capacity. As social historian Norbert Elias explains in *The Civilizing Process*, the Sovereign's titular authority was historically stable only as long as his military alliances and accompaniment were superior in strength to any pretender. 'The monarch was, to begin with, no different from a great feudal lord. The means of power at his disposal were so small that medium and even lesser feudal lords – in alliance - could successfully oppose him.'<sup>26</sup> For this reason, the authority of the

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<sup>26</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Blackwell: London, 1978), p. 258.

emperor over the people of the empire within the Middle Ages was relatively nominal, as his ability to apply violence directly throughout the land was significantly limited. Citing the example of Charlemagne's empire, Elias explains that an emperor achieved his domain through conquest, and unable to control the land himself, he 'rewarded the warriors who followed him with land [...] He sent trusted friends and servants into the country to uphold the law in his stead, to ensure the payment of tributes and to punish resistance.' Further,

He did not pay for their services in money; this was certainly not entirely lacking in this phase, but was available only to a very limited extent. Needs were supplied for the most part directly from the land, the fields, the forests and the stables, produce being worked up within the household. The earls or dukes, or whatever representatives of the central authority were called also fed themselves and their retinue from the land with which the central authority had invested them.<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, the practice of the feudal empire required that 'all ruling functions' of a particular domain be 'drawn together' in the hands of the warrior. This meant that the agent of violence within a given domain was the functional Sovereign of that domain. Their rule referenced the ultimate authority of the emperor, but in practical terms this was little more than a sign of deference to a more capable military leader and the superior authority of the military alliances that were at his disposal. In practical terms regional distinctions and differences remained, as there was little to drive corporate efforts; even the ruling families had relatively little contact with an emperor in times of peace.

The instability of such a system, based on what Elias calls 'centrifugal forces', indicates a 'low level of cohesion' throughout the empire.<sup>28</sup> In essence, whatever cohesion did exist was determined by exterior threats to the domain - an alternate regime of violence - as they represented the only practical unifying force. In

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<sup>27</sup> Elias, pp. 197-198.

<sup>28</sup> Elias, p. 197.



the face of an external enemy, the territorial warlord required the military capacity of the empire, the other noble representatives like himself: their resources as well as the superior military skill of the emperor. This was what made his region a dependency. As military skills and affinities were what determined appointments and gradated the positions of power within the empire, it followed that once the emperor's effectiveness within that military role declined the empire itself threatened to, and often did, come apart as new alliances were formed in relation to the emergent masters of the arts of war.<sup>29</sup>

Elias sought to understand the changes, from the fifteenth century onward, which alter the precarious power structures of the Middle Ages and so 'finally gave the central authorities preponderance over all the centrifugal forces', thus conferring 'on the territories a greater stability'.<sup>30</sup> This centralization of power represents the first stage in the corporate process that effects the 'gradual lowering of the level' described by Foucault. The objects of Foucault's analysis are located within the greater territorial stability of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and represent the second stage. As discussed, he attributes the decreasing tone of violence to changes in demographics, an increase in the general wealth, and a better cared for population. The State's institutions of care appear to be at work behind the assertion that murder and physical aggression are displaced by crimes against property: 'the criminals of the seventeenth century were "harassed men, ill-fed, quick to act, quick to anger, seasonal criminals"; those of the eighteenth "crafty, cunning, sly, calculating criminals on the fringes of society"'.<sup>31</sup> For the moment it is enough to say that Foucault is not incorrect, but that Elias attributes a similar lowering of the tone to the centralization of authority, specifically the absolute monarchy, rather than

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<sup>29</sup> Elias, p. 258; pp. 198-199.

<sup>30</sup> Elias, p. 197.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, p. 75.



displacements of authority onto a matrix of institutional practices charged with the care of populations. In this way Elias mirrors Foucault, focusing on similar changes in demographics and alterations in the regime of accumulation that function to concentrate authority in the hands of a central power. The more power that flows to the hands of the Sovereign, the more capacity they hold to pacify various threats.

When these two stages are taken together, we find that the diffuse violence of the feudal regime is practically gathered up and re-distributed through the State's representative institutions: an ever greater charge of power flows to the center and is converted to authorize a new method of regulatory representation. It is crucial to link Foucault and Elias this way, in order to take forward a model of power that connects an increased concentration of violent authority in the figure of the Sovereign and its co-extensive dispersal in the bio-political procedures authorized by such a figure.

The general movement from feudalism to absolute monarchies spanned centuries and moved at different speeds in different locations.<sup>32</sup> As the occupation and control of lands within Europe increased, so grew the population and the division of labour within those territories. The expanding division of labour resulted in the expansion of the money system; by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries this had significantly expanded the possibilities for taxation. Under this new regime, tribute could flow more directly to the ultimate Sovereign, the Emperor, helping to codify his authority. Similarly, an ascendant class of town dwellers, which historically had been enrolled for war duties, 'came to offer the territorial lords money instead of war services so that he could hire warriors. They commercialized war service; and to the kings and the other great feudal lords this was not unwelcome.'<sup>33</sup> In the transition

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<sup>32</sup> See, Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974); Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15<sup>th</sup>-18th Century*, 3 vols, trans. by Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, 3 vols. (London: Academic Press, 1980)

<sup>33</sup> Elias, p. 346.



from barter economy to money economy those who were advantageously positioned could only consolidate their power. The transformation to an absolutist monarchy that was previously inconceivable is summarised by Elias as follows:

*The territorial property of one warrior family, its control of certain lands and its claim to tithes or services of various kinds from the people living on this land, is transformed with the advancing division of functions, and in the course of numerous struggles, into a centralized control of military power and of the regular duties to or taxes over a far larger area.*<sup>34</sup>

The more expansive the holdings, the more the money flows into the hands of the central authority and the more ability there is to maintain the ‘monopoly of military force; while this in turn maintains the monopoly of taxation’. For Elias ‘the society of what we call the Modern Age is characterized, above all in the West, by a certain level of monopolization’.<sup>35</sup>

As the local warlords who learned to move effectively within the money system eventually came to employ mercenary soldiers and expand their holdings, it followed that lords who moved less effectively were gradually dispossessed. As Immanuel Wallerstein writes:

the mercenary armies strengthened the princes. By the same token, they weakened the traditional nobility not only by establishing forces strong enough to enforce the royal will but also by creating an employment vacuum for the lesser nobility. There was of course an alternative for impoverished knights in many areas. They could join the king’s service.<sup>36</sup>

The multiplicity of regional rulers are thus liquidated and absorbed by the singular figure of the monarch who is the ultimate administrator of violence. No longer holding ‘all ruling functions’ within a given domain, this warrior class increasingly become functionaries at the disposal of the Sovereign: what Wallerstein calls

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<sup>34</sup> Elias, p. 344. Italics in the original.

<sup>35</sup> Elias, p. 268.

<sup>36</sup> Wallerstein, p. 143.

‘military entrepreneurs’.<sup>37</sup> We might ask whether this is the genesis of the highly instrumental view of violence dominating twentieth century social and cultural theory.

In the context of monopolization, the relative lack of cohesion or common identity among the regions gave way to a newly defining common attention to the central authority. This alteration in the political economy of violence has wide-ranging effects on both social structures and subjects; it alters the entire cultural orientation of the region in question. As Elias writes:

If relatively independent social functions are increasingly replaced by dependent ones in society -- for example free knights by courtly knights and finally courtiers, or relatively independent merchants by dependent merchants and employees – the moulding of affects, the structure of drives and consciousness, in short the whole social personality structure and the social attitudes of people are necessarily changed at the same time. And this applies no less to those who are approaching a monopoly position than to those who have lost the possibility to compete and fallen into direct or indirect dependence.<sup>38</sup>

To understand this moulding of affect Elias provided a rather extensive genealogy of courtly etiquette. While the ideology of the divine right of kings emerged in the sixteenth century to legitimate the absolute monarchy, instruction manuals detailed the practical contours of the emerging regime.<sup>39</sup> The rise in available material from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century alone attests to the gradual process of normalization in conduct. Elias quotes the first seemingly obvious instruction from one set of fifteenth century instructions: ‘Learn these rules.’<sup>40</sup> Such rules instruct subjects to behave in a fashion that will not repel anyone at court and, notably, if a number of these instructions were failed frequently enough in

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<sup>37</sup> Wallerstein, p. 140.

<sup>38</sup> Elias, p. 270.

<sup>39</sup> Wallerstein, p. 144.

<sup>40</sup> Elias, p. 75.



contemporary contexts, the subject would likely invite examination from any number of institutional authorities concerned with the care of the population: 'Do not spit on the table'; 'It is unseemly to blow your nose into the table cloth'; 'Do not touch yourself under your clothes with your bare hands.'<sup>41</sup>

As a given central authority became more significant, the demand to perform within the codes at work in the centre of power became more urgent and a discourse of proper social and cultural conduct evolved among the Western upper classes. The more extensive the regime of authority, the further and deeper the reach of those codes of cultural conduct, as those with business before the court sought to put their best foot forward in an effort to gain advantage or influence. Conversely, a further uniformity evolved as various courts competed for the favour of powerful merchants, the visitations of artists and, importantly, the significant 'military entrepreneurs' who could help consolidate power.<sup>42</sup> In effect, a lesser but ambitious court had to impress as a significant one and signs of provinciality invariably marked a lower courtly ranking. The success of such a moulding has everything to do with the 'whole movement of interpenetration of the patterns of conduct of ever wider circles'. At the centre of those circles are the 'great courts, the administrative centres of the key monopolies of taxation and physical force':

Even long distance trade links into which urban commercial centres are interwoven here and there, never prove lasting and stable unless they are protected for a considerable period by strong central authorities. Correspondingly [...] the strict control of conduct which this central organ demands of its functionaries and of the prince himself or his representatives and servants are greater than at any other point [...] Directly or indirectly, the intertwining of all activities with which everyone at court is inevitably confronted, compels him to observe constant vigilance, and subject everything he says and does to strict scrutiny.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Elias, pp. 110-130.

<sup>42</sup> Wallerstein, p. 140.

<sup>43</sup> Elias, p. 388.



By the end of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the processes that had started in the 'eleventh or twelfth century' had gradually transformed the relatively autonomous warrior class into courtiers. The unrestrained violence of warriors and war in the Middle Ages, as well as the casual acceptance of its horrors, became increasingly untenable as indiscriminate murder and pillage could endanger the monopoly.<sup>44</sup> In their monopoly form the courts 'compel', 'directly or indirectly', the warrior, and by implication all subjects in attendance, 'to observe constant vigilance, and to subject everything he says and does to minute scrutiny'.<sup>45</sup> This is the backbone of Elias' critique of Freud, this social and economic self-scrutiny is nothing less than a social and historical "super ego", but we should also note its rather explicit echo in Foucault's account of surveillance. Through different means Elias and Foucault describe the same seventeenth and eighteenth century trend of pacification, but neither explication suggests a rejection of violence. Instead, they describe the social and political delineation of a technology of domination in the face of its increasingly unpredictable effects; violence is itself becoming disciplined.

The reciprocal moulding of affects is an effect of a general corporate movement that reaches beyond the successful warriors and important merchants. The Sovereign's capacity to engage the services of the most powerful agents

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<sup>44</sup> Elias, p. 388. A degree of inconsistency emerges in Elias's analysis on this point. On the one hand, it is the monopoly that increasingly restrains the drives and affective outbursts; tempers and passions are controlled as they become dangerous; we get the impression that Elias is pointing to some primal urge or orientation in his construction of 'drives'. At the same time, he gives economic reasons for the unrestrained practices of pillage and murder. Scarcity in general may have made life itself relatively cheap, but it made it extremely uneconomical to take prisoners. In mutilating an opponent the warrior denied the opposing lord a capable soldier, but gave him a non-productive dependent. Similarly, in killing and destroying the labour and stock of an immobile agricultural economy the warrior dealt an additional blow to the opposition. In short, there were reasons to engage in what we understand as horrifying actions and for a long time no reason not to.

<sup>45</sup> Elias, p. 388.



similarly relies on the increasing significance of an expanding network of dependents. A mercenary army, for example, must be fed and so the Sovereign begins to require a degree of responsiveness from his farmers.<sup>46</sup> With its increasing size and complexity, the domain throws up more and more tasks requiring administration and so demanding the appointment of ministers on whom the Sovereign can depend. Elias continues:

Whether it is a question of land, soldiers or money in any form, the more that is accumulated by an individual the less easily it can be supervised by this individual, and the more surely he becomes by his very monopoly dependent on increasing numbers of others, the more he becomes dependent on his dependents [...] The more comprehensive the monopolized power potential, the larger the web of functionaries administering it and the greater the division of labour among them.<sup>47</sup>

If grain specialization were required to support an army, its necessary administration had to be backed by the army who could stifle any objection. The same is true of the tax collection that funds the entire expansion. This means that the same movement that pacifies the warrior nobles works to authorize a regime of ministries charged with the care of the domain. As Immanuel Wallerstein writes of the monarchies: ‘ “Absolute” conveys the wrong tone, the one of course kings hoped to convey. Absolutism was a rhetorical injunction, not a serious assertion.’ Wallerstein recommends a critical de-emphasis on the King, in favour of a focus on the general bureaucracy or ‘the state of more “stateness”’.<sup>48</sup>

In this way, the centripetal movement of a growing monopoly reliant on legitimate violence, serves to authorize a secondary centrifugal movement of administrative power. The more complex the State, the more intermediaries needed to serve its purposes and perform their tasks in the name of the Sovereign. For an

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<sup>46</sup> Wallerstein, p. 141.

<sup>47</sup> Elias, p. 270.

<sup>48</sup> Wallerstein, p. 146.



unreconstructed materialist like the Wallerstein of *The Modern World System*, the absolute monarch amounts to little more than a conspiracy of the cadres, a self interested and rational, if corrupt, agreement between the ‘the king, his bureaucracy and courtiers, the rural landowners (large and small), the merchants’, such that opposition to the regime is unviable or counter-productive.<sup>49</sup> What that materialism conceals is the distribution of a potent discursive authority carried by the terms of Sovereignty. As Ernst Kantorowicz demonstrated in his text *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study In Mediaeval Political Theology*, there was a legal-political articulation of a distinction between the king’s natural body and the king’s political body, produced simultaneously with the development of the absolute monarch. The king’s political body includes all the actions of government carried out in his name and so encompasses the acts of his administrators. It is in Plowden’s Reports, ‘collected and written under Queen Elizabeth’, Kantorowicz argues, that we find ‘the first clear elaboration of that mystical talk with which the English crown jurists enveloped and trimmed their definitions of kingship and royal capacities’. The political theology of the king’s two bodies asserted:

that by the Common Law no Act which the King does as King, shall be defeated by his Nonage. For the King has in him two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like of Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the Public weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this

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<sup>49</sup> Wallerstein, p. 144. Wallerstein’s own understanding of discursive and/or psychological influences has changed since; see: Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class* (London: Verso, 1991), and/or Immanuel Wallerstein *After Liberalism* (New York: The New Press, 1995).



Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body.<sup>50</sup>

This legitimating ideology of an inviolable subject, divinely or naturally invested with the authority to rule, is the same discourse of authority conferred upon those subjects who serve in the name of the king. The historical authority of violence invested in ministries and ministers served to subjectivate the increasing numbers that served the State. Subjects would become agents of the crown, performing the office of authority and psychically interiorizing the power underwriting such positions. The experience of subjugation was traded for the experience of agency. While that agency was in the first instance delimited by the terms of office, the bodies in question proved less than capable of the compartmentalization essential to maintain such a system of authority. In other words, the agents of the crown who represented the Sovereign could not resist the temptation to think of themselves as sovereign in their own right. The division between body and office was brought to logical conclusions that would ground the Puritan Revolution in the form of the ‘Declaration of the Lords and Commons of May 27, 1642’, where authority is wholly removed from the body of the Sovereign into the regime of sovereignty:

It is acknowledged that the King is the Fountain of Justice and Protection, but the Acts of Justice and Protection are not exercised by his own Person, nor depend upon his pleasure, but by his Courts and his Ministers who must do their duty therein, though the King in his own Person should forbid them: and therefore if Judgement should be given by them against the King’s Will and Personal command, yet are they the King’s Judgements. The High Court of Parliament is not only a Court of Judicature...but it is likewise a Council... to preserve the publick Peace and Safety of the Kingdom, and to declare the King’s pleasure in those things that are requisite thereunto, and what they do herein hath the stamp of Royal Authority, although His Majesty [...] do in his own Person oppose or interrupt the same.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The Kings Two Bodies: A Study In Mediaeval Political Theology*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Kantorowicz, p. 20.



By the end of this chapter it should be clear that the sovereign democratic subject is a descendant of this political division.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps less obvious, and still in need of explication, is the way in which the sovereignty of this subject is pitted against the pathologies of their own organic body. As it is an agency of the State, the authority of the subject requires that they must act against the deviant manifestations of their own embodiment.

### *The Civilizing Myth*

That these points of commonality between Foucault and Elias are not already significantly elaborated within cultural theory is, perhaps, due to little more than a cosmetic discrepancy between the genealogical analyses of Foucault and Elias. Foucault's ambivalent, sometimes dystopian, account of subject formation insists upon, yet repeatedly underplays or under-analyzes, the significance of violence in modern power formations, whereas Elias, who sought to assert its significance, is, I believe, wrongly accused of a troubling optimism. As Ian Burkitt explains in his article 'Civilization and Ambivalence', contrary to the critique of Elias's apparently un-ironic and unambiguous celebration of the progressive march of civilization practised by Christopher Lasch or Zygmunt Bauman, Elias's genealogy is deeply ambivalent about 'civilization' and the changes it has wrought.<sup>53</sup> Burkitt rightly insists that in Elias's account of 'civilization' the noun names a figuration and the verb names the corporate extension of that figuration. There is no explicit value judgement in Elias's account, as his object is to convert the mythic and transcendent into a mutable construct. Elias's target is the individual or egocentric conception of

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<sup>52</sup> I shall use a lower case 's' to distinguish the sovereignty which the State confers upon its subjects from the singular and exceptional status held by *the* Sovereign.

<sup>53</sup> Ian Burkitt, 'Civilization and Ambivalence', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 47 (1996), 135-150.



the subject, which, he argues, is as outdated as the ‘geocentric picture of the physical universe’.<sup>54</sup> His excavation is not a history of improvements to the human species, but an argument for a more communal or ‘interdependent’ conception of human consciousness, a preference for the analysis of social ‘figurations’ over that of individual forces. It is perhaps Elias’s failure to deploy the critical vocabularies of anti-foundationalist thought, at the same time that he focuses on some of the most cherished faiths of Enlightenment rationality, which confuses our ability to understand the degree of historicization that he asks of his reader.

The irony is that such a failure serves to conceal the more disturbing insight of Elias’s work; that the overall structure of affect ultimately references the State’s monopoly on violence. To quote Elias, ‘the social invention of the monopoly of the means of violence is...ambiguous. It is a dangerous instrument.’<sup>55</sup> The monopoly should not be taken as a sign of any real dissipation of violence, but as a sign of its pacification. Aggressive affect remains, but its constitution and performance is altered by the burgeoning disciplinary framework. As Burkitt argues, Elias was not convinced by the self representation of the absolute state: ‘he is certainly not saying these were more civilized ways of behaving’. Rather, Elias saw courtly society ‘riddled with rivalries, hatred and spite. It is just that conflict is now settled in a different way, one that has come to be labelled by those who practice it, as more “civilized”.’ Contrary to Zygmunt Bauman, Burkitt rightly argues that far from celebrating increased security and the mitigation of violence, Elias actually sought to analytically ‘balance out’ the ‘Janus faced character of the civilizing process’.<sup>56</sup> He sought to restore our understanding of violence as a significant force within the regime of civilization that seeks to disavow its role. The monopoly does not indicate

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<sup>54</sup> Elias, p. 481.

<sup>55</sup> Burkitt, p. 139-140.

<sup>56</sup> Burkitt, p. 139.

an absence of violence, but rather finds a pervasive threat that has come to pivot on an axis of legitimate and illegitimate use, rather than superior and inferior force.

Curiously, Burkitt aligns himself with Bauman on the critical status of 'barbarism' in Elias's work, arguing that his usage of the term falls into 'the etiological myth of civilization because it is claiming that what we call barbarism is something other than civilization'. In the face of Elias's argument that the Nazi horrors are the outcome of a long process of disintegration, Burkitt argues that this 'is not just the return of the repressed or a showing of the other side of the Janus face, but a return of the banished and the almost completely forgotten'. Burkitt thereby reinstalls the egocentric subject (a subject that can forget and forget completely) within the critique he already acknowledges has dispensed with that subject. If we continue to respect Elias's account of social and cultural 'figurations', and therefore reject the egocentric subject, then we should understand 'barbarism' as the constitutive outside of 'civilization'. Barbarism is not the repressed or forgotten but the threat against which 'civilization' constructs and represents itself. Civilization is a discursive practice, a discipline opposed to alternate methods of organization. Barbarism is the name of those discursively repudiated forms of violence that give shape and meaning to acceptable applications of violence.<sup>57</sup> Barbarism is a politics of might making right where civilization is a politics of legitimate use. The disintegration of civilization is not a regression to an anterior historical state, a state of chaos, or a collapse into base instincts from the heights of refinement, but the failure of the distinction between superior force and legitimate use. The Futurist's notoriously and emblematically fascistic appreciation of war on

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<sup>57</sup> See Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) pp. 278-294.



aesthetic grounds is but one precise example. In the discourse of barbarism the administrator-subject articulates their fear of the Sovereign's return.

In Elias's ambivalently progressive account of civilization, violence does not disappear but becomes an object of discipline. On top of the obvious similarities found in their common genealogical methodology, this provides a significant link between his work and that of Foucault. The elaboration of those codes and procedures governing the uses of violence is also the elaboration of the institutional matrix composing the modern State. The regime's increased monopoly on violence serves to authorize the discursive institutions, which then develop and expropriate the authority historically performed by the exercise of violence. Imagined in quantifiable terms, the State absorbs more control over violence at the same time that it comes to reject the spectacular and concentrated demonstrations of its strength in favour of minor, dispersed, local demonstrations governed by necessity. Remembering the Damians example, we can understand that once the regime becomes dependent on too many functionaries, the spectacular reiteration of the Sovereign's authority fails to be effective as it ceases to demonstrate the mode of violence on which authority increasingly depends. The micro-political instances of coercion have multiplied exponentially, while the Sovereign's challenge has become a pantomime of his historical authority.

### *Violence, Sovereignty, and Subjectivity*

For readers of Foucault, a general and progressive integration or insertion of subjects into the machinery of the State is a familiar theme. So is the idea that this integration determines the contours of subjectivity and shapes modern understandings of individuality and agency. In many respects Foucault's genealogy of the modern subject links cleanly with Elias's history of State formations and the

moulding of affect. The discourse of Sovereignty and the historical signification of violence suggest a genealogical development of the modern subject that is not as disjunctive as Foucault's account would suggest. The example of 'the king's two bodies' indicates that Sovereignty is not simply a title, redefined with every political reorganization, so much as it is a name for that form of agency authorized by the recourse to legitimate violence. In this way the history of subjectivation, particularly any aspect of the population's gradual appropriation of sovereignty, is readable as a progressive appropriation and introversion of authorial violence by those subjects integrated into the machinery of the State. The historically subjected body takes up and enacts the very armature of subjection, performing the role of the Sovereign, and thus initiates the potential recognition of their own Sovereignty.

Presumably, one could counterpose an argument in which the expansion of the administrative apparatus constitutes a rationality as well as a rational subject opposed to violence within a more general struggle determined by the will to power.<sup>58</sup> Unable to oppose the *noblesse d'epée* upon the historical basis of power, the *nobles de robe* simply propose an alternative authority they deem superior.<sup>59</sup> The class interests of an emergent authority girded by a healthy *ressentiment* thus instantiated an onto-political break in the order of subjectivity.<sup>60</sup> Such a Nietzschean inflected materialism seems to be exactly what motivates Etienne Balibar, when he argues that the dialectic between subjection and subjectivation produces the late eighteenth century revolutionary moment as an onto-political break, inaugurating a new subjectivity that is 'identified not with a *given* or an essence, be it natural or

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<sup>58</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge 1930:1992).

<sup>59</sup> Elias, p. 361.

<sup>60</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals*, trans. by Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).



supra-natural, but with a *practice* and a task: the task of self-emancipation from every domination and subjection by means of a collective and universal access to politics'.<sup>61</sup> Balibar defines modern subjectivity, the modern subject, as the product of democracy. No longer a *subjectus*, no longer obedient to the law, 'the subject is someone who is responsible or accountable because he is (a) legislator, accountable for the consequences, the implementation and non-implementation of the Law he has himself made'.

The subject is identified with the practice and task of politics which is liberation from domination. Contrary to the Idealist philosophical tradition, 'the men of 1776 and 1789', as well as their followers, did not become 'citizens' (and citizenship is the very definition of modern subjectivity) because 'they had become conscious (in a Cartesian, or Lockean, or Kantian) way [sic]' of a birthright that was 'always already destined', but 'because they had abolished the principle of their subjection'.<sup>62</sup> In this narrative, democracy, however far it may be from a complete realization, represents a triumph of collective administration over the legacy of violent domination. While Balibar argues that the citizen does not discover an idealist birthright, the dialectical accession of rationality constitutes an equivalent assertion. Rationality appears pre-given in its oppositional independence from violent authority.

In relation to my own argument, Balibar's account of the democratic subject, particularly the argument that it is identical with the practice and task of political emancipation, would hold true as far as it referenced the subject's constitution in violence. Embodied resistance does not only provide a material motive for pitting rational administration against the violence of the Sovereign, but serves to structure

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<sup>61</sup> Etienne Balibar, 'Subjection and Subjectivation', in *Supposing the Subject*, ed. by Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 1-15. (p. 12).

<sup>62</sup> Balibar, p. 11.

and mobilize the discourse of modern rationality itself. The appropriation of Sovereign power subjectivates, but the dissolution of the Sovereign necessary to any faith in citizenship first requires that violence be wholly appropriated by discourse itself. An inversion must occur in which the violence that historically authorized the administration must, in turn, be subjected to the terms of the administrative discourse. Once this inversion or appropriation of power is complete, discourse can be imagined to derive from trans-historical ideals and therefore possess political autonomy. In that moment the rational argument is no longer necessarily in the service of the Sovereign, but can be pitted against him to effect his final dissolution and give the human subject into the same transcendent ideals. The outstanding complication is that any such autonomous subject has achieved their autonomy through their performance of the Sovereign mission, and has done so on the basis of a historical resistance to the denigration of being the coerced object of State subjection. The confluence of resistance and agency constitutes a subject that is identified with the State so to avoid becoming its object. The modern subject becomes 'free' by practicing the arts of administration upon himself as well as the objects he is charged with. This is a subject that is folded back on itself or *split* by its divided interests in political violence.

Balibar's incomplete account also refers his reader to Foucault's enquiry into the 'forms of subjectivation inasmuch as they correspond to certain forms of subjection', so as to elaborate the programme of philosophical anthropology which he advocates over the misadventures of idealist philosophy.<sup>63</sup> I am in complete agreement with the proviso that such attention to Foucault should be similarly guided by attention to the historical violence constituting those forms of subjectivation. This is the key to the explanatory details that Balibar believes are to be found there.

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<sup>63</sup> Balibar, p. 13.



Foucault provides the more complex and subtle detail of the power relationships governing Sovereignty, the body, rational political discourse and, ultimately, the fictions of political autonomy which continue to inform practices of modern subjectivity. That detail helpfully extends beyond Elias' effectively historico-discursive account of the super ego to elaborate the deeply conflicted consciousness of a subject who is the principle of their own subjection. After an exploration of the subject so constituted, it will be possible to discuss the psychological consequences of violence in discourse.

In the historical movement away from the scaffold, violence was initially taken up as sign within the associative relationships of justice and communication. Torture was applied symbolically so that 'the tongues of blasphemers were pierced, the impure were burnt' and 'the right hand of murderers was cut off'.<sup>64</sup> As 'the gentle way' advanced, the forces that drove the criminal to the crime would be the forces set against the criminal: if, for example, 'pride led to the committing of a crime, let it be hurt, let the punishment disgust it'. Where executions had once served as a response to severe crimes, such a fleeting expression of retribution was replaced with extended punishments remarkable in their own duration and thus pitting one notion of extremity against another. Punishment was linked to crime in the form of an institutional poetics. While the fact remained for the Constituent Assemblies that 'if incorrigibles there be, one must be determined to eliminate them', even the apparent reversion was still inscribed within the terms of a symbolic relationship.<sup>65</sup> The behaviour of the incorrigible defies the pedagogy of the State and the raw agency of criminal defiance meets with the raw agency that historically underwrites State power; like is matched with like and the ultimate resort to violence again performs an

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<sup>64</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 45.

<sup>65</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 107.

appraisal by marking the extremity and irredeemability of the criminal involved. The apparatus of punishment does not glory in its own abilities, but instead proclaims to all that it has been left with no choice but to revert to this most terrible method in the face of the most terrible resistance.

Foucault argues that the administrative apparatus came to see the spectacular punishments of the Sovereign as useless and pointless expressions of an increasingly dubious form of authority. In turn, that apparatus sought the requalification of the disqualified and thus the recodification of administrative authority. Even as such an institutional poetics was superseded by the concealed world of the prison and ever expanding regimes of discipline, Foucault was clear that he did not ‘mean to say that the law’,

fades into the background or that institutions of justice tend to disappear, but rather that the law operates more and more as a norm, and that the judicial institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory.<sup>66</sup>

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argued that the ‘law cannot help but be armed ... the law always refers to the sword’, but the law is an aspect of the regime that must distribute ‘the living in the domain of value and utility’. Such a power must ‘qualify, measure, appraise and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendour’.<sup>67</sup> While Foucault was often this explicit about the continuing relevance of violence, his emphasis upon integration and concealment is still hampered by a lack of specific attention. This means that any specific considerations concerning the role of violence within the emergent regimes of bio-politics are easily lost and so need to be elaborated.

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<sup>66</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 144.

<sup>67</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 144.



Where the historical use of violence sought to foreground its spectacularly dramatic and totalizing force, its particular ability to glorify the power of the Sovereign, an increasingly minor and embarrassed application of the technique not only abandoned a quantity of physical force, but also abandoned its historical *raison d'être*. Sovereign violence so revelled in its brutality and horror that the continuum running between major and minor instances of violence was not simply expanded, it was ruptured. As minor and directive expression of violence (like those fleeting acts of disciplinary violence between a parent and child) did not seek to demonstrate absolute force, but rather served more attenuated objectives they could be distinguished from violence altogether. Put another way, acts of violence which no longer sought to directly affirm the right of the Sovereign could then be interpreted as an instrument that belonged in some altogether different category. Such violence is not violence but simply a corrective technique within a whole armature of corrective techniques. Today such minute gestures and procedural measures are often accompanied by a disavowal of their very nature (“It doesn’t *really* hurt.”) and thus represent near perfect examples of violence integrated within modern discursive practices.

Another example from *Discipline and Punish* illustrates this administrative complex and the way in which violence is taken up within it. In his discussion of ‘the control of activity’ in the chapter ‘Docile Bodies’, Foucault details the various methods for inscribing a regime of standardization and regulation for the body. These regimes will eventually contribute to the production of normative ideals governing the understanding of bodies, as well as their pathological variations. Foucault quotes the eighteenth century educationalist J-B LaSalle on the discipline of good handwriting, which relies on a constant correction of form by the instructor and a ‘gymnastics- a whole routine’ on behalf of the pupils who must



hold their bodies erect, somewhat turned and free on the left side, slightly inclined [...] elbow placed on the table, the chin can be rested upon the hand [...] the left leg must be somewhat more forward under the table than the right.

The catalogue of correct form continues and LaSalle asserts that ‘the teacher will place the pupils in the posture that they should maintain when writing, and will correct it either by sign or otherwise, when they change position’.<sup>68</sup> Foucault’s attention is focused on the manner in which ‘a disciplined body is the prerequisite of an efficient gesture’, but the example also illustrates the simultaneous invocation and denegation of violence. While we can understand a ‘sign’ to encompass the broadest range of methods, the accompanying reference to an even more ambiguous ‘otherwise’ paradoxically distinguishes, in its concealed reference, the potential use of physicality and force. The ambiguity of ‘otherwise’ foregrounds the method that is renounced with the rise of disciplinary regimes: the authoritarian violence of the Sovereign. Such methods remain at the disposal of the instructor, but they are tainted by their historical citation of Sovereign power. LaSalle’s words, or lack of them, signify a reluctance to utilize violence, and in reiterating the shame of it, those words give violence over to a quality of desperation. The shame of violence is thus, in fact, redoubled, as its use shows up the gaps and failures of the administrative regime, belying a continued dependence on the old methods of rule. The otherness of violence, its imaginary extrinsic quality is part of its discursive service. Reference to violence, the threat of it, and its application all come to signify grades of failure on behalf of its object as well as its agent. Rather than merely punish, such applications serve to ‘qualify, measure, appraise and hierarchize’.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 152.

<sup>69</sup> See Ivor Goodson and Ian Dowbiggin, ‘Docile Bodies: Commonalities in the History of Psychiatry and Schooling’, in *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge*, ed. by Stephen J. Ball (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 78-104.



The LaSalle example suggests another aspect of the shame of violence that reaches beyond the rational political consciousness and into the affective realm. While the Sovereign's challenge grew increasingly unacceptable, the failure of the criminal, or even an unruly student, represented failures in an emergent collectivity characterized by national political responsibilities. As Foucault writes,

a power to punish that runs the whole length of the social network would act at each of its points, and in the end would no longer be perceived as a power of certain individuals over others but as an immediate reaction of all in relation to the individual.<sup>70</sup>

The criminal who was once an object of the Sovereign's will and site of the Sovereign's pedagogy, became an experience of collective disappointment. The violence enacted upon the criminal came to signify his history of failure before a regime that proclaimed its desire to integrate and harmonize. As the denegated violence that ran the whole length of the social network came to signify a reversion to the old regime, did violence perhaps come to signify humiliation and shame irrespective of its context and poetic construction? In contemporary contexts, indeed, violence against a person cannot simply be understood as a raw expression of physical power over another, serving to inflict damage that extends well into the psychological and emotional realm. Most prominently, the violence we associate with hate crimes, from domestic violence, rape and gay bashing to racial assaults, seems to strive for a profound level of humiliation over and above the level of physical harm. The question remains how, in a context where violence is denegated, the actions of the violent should be able to produce humiliation and shame on top of all the other trauma? If we follow the LaSalle example, while the application of violence may be renounced it is still reserved for, and applied in, instances of subjective failure. Violence is redolent with the signification of a last ditch correction. Through their profound procedural integration in modern bio-political

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<sup>70</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 130.



regimes, acts of violence signify the failings of the object within an expansive and collective discursive register. If that political machinery is also the regime of subjectivation then violence retains a potential to momentarily disqualify or abolish modern subjectivity.

The manner in which bodily resistance to violence constitutes a subjective desire to be free of the failings that mark one as the potential object of corrective violence, needs some elaboration. As the power to punish ran ‘the whole length of the social network’, the potential sites of violence necessarily multiplied and began to contour subjectivity in line with the demands of administrative agendas. Under such conditions the resistance to violence functioned to articulate forms of activity and embodiment that should be free from threat and therefore ideal. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault explains the manner of that articulation; less directly, he explains how the appropriation of Sovereign power and the meanings of violence were necessary to that articulation.<sup>71</sup> In shifting from regimes of punishment to regimes of care it is also possible to explain the positive production of modern subjects within such alignments of power. Violence incurs resistance and so determines the subject in essentially negative terms. The clinical context, the care of doctors and psychologists and those administrations concerned with the biological well being of the State, can better illustrate the appropriation of violence and the positive articulation of a subject who has an ambivalent share in political sovereignty.

Such a bio-political articulation of the subject still owes its form, method and content to the politics of the old order. Foucault reminds his readers, in *Madness and Civilization*, that the clinical practitioner, could, for a long time,

exercise his absolute authority only in so far as from the beginning he was Father and Judge, Family and Law—his

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<sup>71</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1973).



medical practice being for a long time no more than a compliment to the old rites of Order, Authority and Punishment [...] it is by bringing such powers into play, by wearing the mask of Father and Judge, that the physician, by one of those abrupt shortcuts that leave aside mere medical competence, became the almost magic perpetrator of the cure.<sup>72</sup>

The statement is a quick and dirty description of the appropriations of Sovereign power I have outlined so far. The growth of the medical apparatus occurred within an reactive effort to preserve those alignments. As we have seen, the historical ordination of power sought and achieved in combat had given way to the bureaucratic expropriations of power and renunciations of violence. The very notion of the ‘divine right of kings’ only emerged in the sixteenth century as a legitimation of absolute States and their Sovereign whose power was less and less dependent on military victories.<sup>73</sup> The French historian Yves-Marie Bercé notes that ‘in this period of reduced mobility’ noble lines died out or disappeared due to accidents of war at the same time that ‘parvenues and favourites got hold of their fortune and entered their ranks. Such set-backs and usurpations proved all the more scandalous in that they were relatively infrequent.’ In the seventeenth century a whole literature developed to express ‘the resentment of those, who supposedly born to lead and conquer, found themselves reduced to obscurity, poverty and humiliation’.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, and for a long time after, corresponding alterations in the discourses of sex moved towards a medicalization of the aristocracy. Concerns regarding bodily and reproductive health became increasingly central as the regime of alliance sought

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<sup>72</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988) pp. 272-273.

<sup>73</sup> Wallerstein, p. 144.

<sup>74</sup> Yves-Marie Bercé, *Revolt and Revolution in Early Modern Europe: An Essay on the History of Political Violence*, trans. by Joseph Bergin (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1987) pp. 46-48.

to preserve the right to rule by emphasizing ‘caste distinction’, asserting ‘the special character of its body’ and the value of its blood.<sup>75</sup>

We can turn to *The Birth of the Clinic* for an excavation of the shifts in medical perception that served to disestablish the authority of the nobility within such a movement. Specifically, Foucault elaborates the scientific invention of ‘Western man’ and the inception of a natural body with aptitudes and abilities that exist independently of birthrights.<sup>76</sup> This discursive termination of inherited power serves centrally in the transition from the regime of alliance to the modern regime of ‘bio-politics’.<sup>77</sup> One impetus for this discursive evolution was the outbreak of ‘disease effecting livestock’ and a host of other epidemiological concerns that arose with higher concentrations of people and resources in smaller areas. For Foucault such concentrations result from the course of industrialization progressing from the eighteenth century. As discussed Elias, Wallerstein, and others, would attribute such concentrations, and the infrastructure that responded to it, to the establishment of seats of absolute power. Nonetheless, epidemics, and so the medicine of epidemics, troubled the dominant nosological model of medicine in its uniqueness, as well their failure to respect the notional boundaries of titled bodies within common spaces. Pathogens, much like the infirmities referred to in Plowden’s Reports, quite simply failed to recognize the Sovereign as well as holdings designated by the title. The entire hierarchy of alliance and its modes of accumulation were threatened. Foucault argues that this constituted the demand for a clinical apparatus that reached well beyond individual practitioners.

The response required the coordination of an intersecting gaze built through multiple institutions. The doctors, the ‘police’, the priesthood, anyone with a

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<sup>75</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 124.

<sup>76</sup> Foucault, *Birth*, p. 197.

<sup>77</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, pp. 77-131.



relevant role, needed to communicate towards ‘an effective cross-checking of viewpoints’.<sup>78</sup> That cross checking facilitated further transfers of authority and power from the policing mechanisms of the Sovereign regime to the medical apparatus and related administrations. Foucault cites ‘a double check’ established in 1776 in France, through which ‘political authorities have control over the practice of medicine’ in the traditional manner, but within which ‘a privileged medical body’ is also set up ‘over the practitioners as a whole’.<sup>79</sup> In this instance, the institution of medicine doubles its concentration of Royal authorization, thus laying a quantifiably larger claim to the violence it can call upon to effect its program. Medical science takes the lead in this attenuation of Sovereign power and the authority of the origin is displaced into a political body no longer synonymous with the body of the king. In establishing such techniques for the preservation of the ordained hierarchical order of bodies, the Sovereign authorizes a knowledge regime that can function under the illusion of its own autonomy and begin to produce knowledge imagined to transcend the interests that established it.

Specifically, the authorities coordinate their activity through facts. Foucault describes the way in which institutions and affiliations sanctioned by the State, or the Royal Societies, moved towards a reciprocal validation and systematization of legitimate medical knowledge. ‘What defines the act of medical knowledge’, he writes,

is not [...] the encounter between doctor and patient, nor is it the confrontation of a body of knowledge and a perception: it is the systematic intersection of two series of information, each homogenous but alien to each other - two series that embrace an infinite set of separate events, but whose intersection reveals, in its isolable dependence, *the individual fact*. A sagittal figure of knowledge.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Foucault, *Birth*, p. 26.

<sup>79</sup> Foucault, *Birth*, p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> Foucault, *Birth*, p. 30.

*The fact* is not discovered, and so integrated as the point of agreement between competing and disparate knowledge systems. Instead, the fact achieves its status because it signifies across those systems that are compelled to communicate. Signs that function similarly across administrative agendas provide nodal points for the incorporation and co-ordination of forces demanded by and authorized by the Sovereign. Such signifying 'independence' gives the sign an appearance of autonomy as it functions within and without each knowledge regime. In discourse it serves the same role as that of the Sovereign. Its structure bears more than a coincidental resemblance to the Sovereign exception that Giorgio Agamben, in his essay 'The Logic of Sovereignty', describes as the 'fundamental localization' that not only distinguishes inside from outside, but 'traces a threshold (the state of exception) between the two, on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those complex topological relations which make the juridical order possible'.<sup>81</sup> At the behest of the Sovereign the fact orders discourse, suturing and coordinating competing administrative interests. In its mimicry of the Sovereign the fact looks sovereign and serves to efface the authority by which it was constituted.

A kind of discursive loop was formed where the Sovereign's authority was no longer co-extensive with the enforcement of an edict. A more diffuse network of power was formed, dislocating the origins of authorization in micro-political practice. Through facts the functionaries of the Sovereign came to hold a discursive interest in those regimes of authority that were not historically their own. The multi-vocal bureaucracy began to speak a common language--a meta-discourse--where all available authorizations could be utilized by any singular office. Through the facts a

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<sup>81</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'The Logic of Sovereignty' in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 15-63, (p.19).



clinical office could draw on the authority of the priesthood to communicate its needs, taxation to direct efforts and disciplinary regimes to restrict potential deviation. The violence, the sword of the law, that stood behind each administrative complex now ran through and across each and every administration. Accordingly, political power becomes increasingly fluid and mobile, but remains subject to the specific circuits of common facts.<sup>82</sup>

Foucault identifies the birth of what he calls ‘Western man’ in the moment of the clinic’s epistemological incorporation of death. In pathological anatomy death allowed the clinical practitioner to discern the undeniable abolition point of both disease and patient. With death properly in hand the anatomo-clinical method, ‘this structure in which space, language and death are articulated’, could finally become ‘positive’.<sup>83</sup> ‘Death’ was ‘the great analyst’ that showed ‘connections by unfolding them’ and bursting ‘open the wonders of genesis in the rigour of decomposition’.<sup>84</sup>

With death the limit had been reached and truth fulfilled and by the same breach; in death the disease reached the end of its course, fell silent and became a thing of memory [...O]nce the non-variable phenomena and the variable manifestations of death are known and mastered, one may reconstitute, by means of this opening onto time, the evolution of a whole morbid series.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> This history provides one basis for a critique of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s ‘rhizomatic’ conception of power, specifically, a conception of power that suggests ‘there is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object or divide in the subject’ and that ‘there are no points or positions ... such as those found in a structure, tree or root. There are only lines.’ They understand the disestablishment of the center, but they fail to see the specific and dispersed structural relationships that made that disestablishment possible. Overall, my argument also suggests a critique of their untenable assertions regarding the ‘exteriority of the war machine’, but these will have to be developed elsewhere. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 8, and pp. 351-423.

<sup>83</sup> Foucault, *Birth*, p. 196.

<sup>84</sup> Foucault, *Birth*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>85</sup> Foucault, *Birth*, pp. 140-143.

The positive nature of the disease could be classified, its distinct progress in a body could be detailed and the organic body free of pathology was retrospectively established as it was abstracted from a catalogue of pathological manifestations. Against the limit of death the ideal state of the organic body was positively established. Where bodies had once been individuated along axes of conditions and symptoms, spaces and climates, moral and immoral practices, as well as imagined blood inheritances, they could now be individuated by their specific negotiation of a distinct disease. For Foucault, this is the inception of the modern subject:

Western man could constitute himself in his own eyes as an object of science, he grasped himself within his language, and gave himself, in himself and by himself, a discursive existence, only in the opening of his own elimination: from the experience of Unreason was born psychology, the very possibility of psychology; from the integration of death into medical thought is born a medicine that is given as a science of the individual.<sup>86</sup>

Citing Holderlin, Nietzsche and Freud, he argues that ‘the experience of individuality’ in modern culture is irretrievably ‘bound up with that of death’. Death ‘prescribes to the universal its singular face, and lends to each individual the power of being heard forever; the individual owes to death a meaning that does not cease with him’.<sup>87</sup>

Foucault’s analysis of death borders on the mystical, but the relevance of death was pre-determined by its role in the old order. The exceptional status he ascribes to death abrogates the political constitution of its significance. Elsewhere, he is clear that the old order was characterized by a power that functioned mainly through a mechanism of subtraction. Power was ‘essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies and ultimately life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize

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<sup>86</sup> Foucault, *Birth*, p. 197.

<sup>87</sup> Foucault, *Birth*, p. 197.



hold of life in order to suppress it'.<sup>88</sup> The ultimate authority to suture discourses, and so imagine political independence, is found in death because death is structurally, symbolically, poetically and discursively pre-destined for the role. The discursive regime can only codify the autonomy of its discourse through the incorporation of the same 'threshold' controlled by the Sovereign. The potential political death of the subject before the Sovereign is reciprocated in the natural death of the political ruler. Death subjects the Sovereign in his body, underlining his common organic composition. While this was always true, it is only when power is sufficiently transferred to the administration such that it is no longer dependent on the will of the Sovereign that he is left with nothing but a common organic humanity. Tandem consideration of the 'Mad King George', and equality of birth in past and present discourses of the American revolution, represents one explicit example of such a relationship.

The 'bourgeois revolutions' officially recognized that sovereignty had long been dispersed throughout a mass of political operatives and dissolved the origin of Sovereign power that had become little more than titular. Following Elias, I have been arguing that the agents of the sovereign State were not only designated by office, but also by their relative integration through administrative regimes, and the collective recognition of their political value. The problem is that such a form of sovereignty is far from permanent or transcendent, as it depends upon the subject's ability to fulfil the role of political citizen so defined. The articulation of an untainted organic body, facilitated by death, occurred within and consolidated the larger networks of discursive authority, necessarily producing a multi-vocal articulation of that organic potential. Such a notional body was not just free of disease, but necessarily free of every infirmity that that would or could manifest as a failure

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<sup>88</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 136.

within any given administrative regime. It was organically healthy at the same time that it was the perfect student, the perfect teacher and the perfectly disciplined follower and practitioner of law. The organic perfection that lurks in the biological substratum of every human is the potentially perfect agent of the State. Far from a statistical average, the 'Western man' conceived in discourse is a norm, inflected by the needs and demands of the State which produced it: it is more an ideal, a model or an image of the subject in its optimized form. In its imaginary performativity, such a body reproduces and extends the clean operations of the regime without need for correction or restriction; this is a civilized body that is neither agent nor object of violence. This technological abstraction was founded by the material forces which could pursue its production.

While the history of violence does not figure in Balibar's argument it supports his critical conclusions. Balibar reminds his readers that 'citizenship', that form of subjectivity no longer 'identical with subjection', posed a formidable problem as so few could wholly achieve the form. He further argues that being human, in the modern democratic sense, means participation within 'the collective or transindividual construction of' one's 'individual autonomy'.<sup>89</sup> His position could be extended by elaborating that it depends upon two distinct modes of political liberation. Balibar's subject is sloughing off the chains of the old order by articulating a commonality in subjection. If, as we have seen, the subjectivations which come to displace and dissolve the old order are also the subjectivations effected by participation in the old order, then the subjectivity of the individual, who should be liberated from such a regime, is a kind of remainder. It is that remaining part of the subject, that cannot assume activity within the corporate body, that must be liberated from political domination as understood by Balibar.

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<sup>89</sup> Balibar, p. 12.



What makes that liberated subjectivity so impossible to imagine, and still less achieve, is that discourse intends an ideal body and so constitutes the specificity of the individual, the 'I', as a series of failures to assume the ideal. That impossibility is the pivot upon which our subjectness and objectness rest. The echo of the Lacanian mirror and the Lacanian other are perhaps unavoidable, but such psychic relationships are profoundly dependent on the confluence of history and sociological context.<sup>90</sup> 'I' only exist to the extent that 'I' embody a form, or many forms of alterity from the imagined norm, or more aptly, due to its dynamic significance, the *optimum* body. The 'I' is the difference from the incorporative body ideal sought by discourse in its practices of objectification. The subject's apperception of self, of their own subjectivity, and then a need for political liberation, is therefore already dependent upon the subject's interiorization of the discursive mechanisms of disqualification. The subject is divided against itself, longing for liberation from the political domination it practices upon itself.

The experience of subjectivity is the mediation of approximations and failures of the ideal embodiments that circulate in discourse. The experience of individuality, the experience of difference, is the experience of discursive disqualifications. As those disqualifications are the potential object of correction and regulation, they are historically suffused with the threat of violence. Such embodiments are the basis of counter-discursive appeals to the renunciation of violence carried in the vocabularies of civilization, humanity and justice.

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<sup>90</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1977), pp. 1-7. See also Joan Copjec, 'The Orthopsychic Subject; Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan' in *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Boston, MIT, 1994), pp. 14-38.

### *Incorporations*

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault maps the diffusion of these discursive relationships throughout ever-expanding sections of the population. The diffusion of the concern for sex follows sovereignty's line of descent from the Sovereign, through the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, and finally into the 'exploited class'. His emphasis on the discourse of sexuality critically preserves the historical lineage of Sovereign violence. As discussed, the initial concern of the discourse of sex 'was not the repression of the sex of the classes to be exploited, but rather the body, vigor, longevity, progeniture and descent of the classes that ruled'. Through 'a technology of power and knowledge it had itself invented' the bourgeoisie effectively misappropriated the concern for sex, as it was utilized to 'underscore the high political price of its body', while it lost sight of historical significance of 'blood'. 'The bourgeoisie's "blood" was its sex.'<sup>91</sup> Sex circulated as an object within the clinical regime and was broken down into an empirical and organic relationship. Its significance was constituted by the Sovereignty it carried, and yet this history of power is exactly what it came to obscure and elide.

The next chapter will discuss the role of classical psychoanalysis in that elision but here I intend to show that sexuality, reimagined as the organic possession of every individual body, necessarily became a premier site of incorporation. The power of sexuality is not fraudulent so much as it is an excellent vector for the installation of a corporate consciousness. Foucault argues that it is no surprise that the ruling classes took so long to grant the 'exploited classes' a body and sexuality, in that it was for so long a matter 'of little importance whether *those* people lived or died'. The italicized 'those' emphasizes the exploited classes' historical exteriority from the sovereignty of discourse, their exclusion from any administrative role. For

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<sup>91</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, pp. 123-124.



*those* bodies to achieve a sex, a collection of ‘economic emergencies’ had to occur, further developments in the same industrial transitions that earlier constituted the elaborations of clinical discourse. In this later industrial transition, the exploited class became relevant to the bourgeois State, due to the requirements of industry and its need for productive bodies as well as the ever-increasing concentration and proximity of urban subjects.<sup>92</sup>

Such a far-reaching social transition required, ‘a whole technology of control’ which kept that body under surveillance. Technologies such as ‘schooling, the politics of housing, public hygiene, institutions of relief and insurance’ and ‘the general medicalization of the population’, were all essential in the ‘entire administrative and technical machinery that that made it possible to safely import the deployment of sexuality into the exploited class’.<sup>93</sup> All of these institutions form the network of potential punishments that contour modern subjectivity. Their prescriptive and proscriptive modes are all suffused with the threat they propose to circumnavigate or overcome as institutions of care. The dangers they seek to moderate and alleviate are the potentials that compel an interiorization of a normative, or optimising, gaze. Within this, the particular resonance of sexuality can be ascribed to the individuating capacity of its concentration on a specific body. Unlike the institutional discipline of the school or the clinic, discourses of sexuality are particularly well suited to enter domestic and intimate relations between subjects, as well as the private world of individual concern.<sup>94</sup> The policing and enforcement of

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<sup>92</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 126.

<sup>93</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 126.

<sup>94</sup> See Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke, 1995, 2002); Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women Touch and Power in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2003); Tom Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (New York: Palgrave, 1997); Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000).

sexual health and morality conferred the responsibilities of national reproduction upon all those who would participate in its discourse: mothers as well as fathers, friends as well as lovers and finally individuals.

In addition to a concern with the 'the regulation of the population', sexuality was concerned with the particular 'disciplines of the body: the harnessing, intensification and distribution of forces, the adjustment and economy of energies'.<sup>95</sup> Along both these axes sexuality gave 'rise to infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or psychological examination, to an entire micro-power concerned with the body'. Within these terms sex was 'tracked down in behavior' and 'pursued in dreams'. As a 'means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species' sex 'became the stamp of individuality'.<sup>96</sup>

Foucault uncharacteristically asserts that once conceded such a sexuality, the exploited class 'no longer risked playing an assertive role opposite the bourgeoisie', but would therefore 'remain an instrument of the bourgeoisie's hegemony'.<sup>97</sup> Such a statement only works if we reduce the matter of sex to economics. However it occurred, as the exploited class took on a concern for sex and sexuality, they began to achieve political sovereignty. The barriers that could keep them from power were significantly eroded as they began to perform the terms by which everyone achieved legitimate political authority. One could definitely argue that such an appropriation or interiorization of the corporate tendency was not in the interests of the exploited class, but it was an effective repetition of at least some of the methods by which the bourgeoisie came to power. The progressive democratization of Western industrial societies demands the progressive sexualization of those to be enfranchised. The

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<sup>95</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 145.

<sup>96</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 145-146.

<sup>97</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, pp. 126-127.



oversexualization of black, female, and working class bodies imports the idea of an excess into those contexts where the subject is slated for one kind of corporate integration or another.<sup>98</sup> This is how the subject becomes invested in the State and radical opposition to it becomes untenable.<sup>99</sup>

It is a misconception to assert that the exploited class simply becomes an instrument of bourgeois hegemony, in that what is being achieved is the progressive inclusion of the exploited body into the dynamism of normative social regulation. As the needs of the corporate State change, so changes the fantasy of the sovereign discursive body, the optimum subject. As the State incorporates the physically productive body of industrial capital into its ideal, as it takes up new dimensions of the 'exploited class', the relevance of particular qualities of the aristocratic or bourgeois body threaten to become residual and devalued.<sup>100</sup> The power of the bourgeoisie is shared out among the bodies of the exploited class, as far as they can practice its technology, as far as they can occupy the gaze. The relevance of a term such as 'bourgeoisie' must thus be historically located within a particular relation of transitional power, the rule of the bourgeoisie and its near monopoly on democratic participation. Democratic enfranchisement both affirms and symbolically finalizes the State's incorporation of the subjected into the technology of a modern split subjectivity.

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<sup>98</sup> Sander Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, 12, (1985), 204-238.

<sup>99</sup> See Bland; see also Robyn Wiegman, 'The Ends of "Man": The Anatomy of Lynching' in *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 81-113 for an elaboration of the policing of the American Black male body in relation to enfranchisement.

<sup>100</sup> The aristocracy, as far as it holds onto its money, may have every reason to laugh at such transmutations; however, proposals for dis-establishment and various forms of re-distribution can be registered on the downward escalator of the aristocracy's and the bourgeoisie's valuation.

Again, the authority attributed to sexuality is not fraudulent. Sexuality is not a screen for the true power which operates underneath it. Instead, in sexuality the historical basis of State power, long since decentered, diffused and distributed throughout the ranging mechanisms and procedures of discursive regimes, finds a privileged site of expression. A range of discursive regimes gel in the discourse of sexuality and bring to bear the collective might of the potential violence they carry. The power and significance of sex is only overemphasized to the extent that it clouds our recognition that the successful acquisition of a sexuality means successful integration within those procedures. That integration is both subjugation before violence and subjectivation through violence.

Our judgements and views on sexuality are inextricably bound up with our Janus-faced attachments to, and refusals of, sovereign power. Sexuality is charged with the spectre of violence, discoursed upon as violence, represented and performed violently, irretrievably linked to violence, because sexuality is a privileged site in the reiteration of the subject's constitution in violence. Its obsessive relationship to violence is not so much a mystery as a confused enactment of the forces reiterated within its discursive operations. In the discourse of sexuality, physical resistance to the diffuse micro-political dangers of the corporate state are melded with physical desire. Foucault was right to assert that sex is not 'repressed', as it is contoured towards the reproduction of the corporate body. In the disqualified practices of sex and sexual embodiment, one risks losing the claim to sovereignty; the subject is potentially abolished, and must mobilize counter-discursively. The subject must appeal to the shared experience of disqualification, the potential object of violence in everyone, and claim the right to exist free of violence.



In the essays collected within her book *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler urges her readers ‘toward a psychoanalytic critique of Foucault’.<sup>101</sup> Referring to Foucault’s famous assertion, in *Discipline and Punish*, that it is the soul that imprisons the body, Butler asks if this means ‘that the soul pre-exists the body that animates it?’ She argues that Foucault ‘appears to treat the psyche as if it received unilaterally the effect of the Lacanian symbolic’ and therefore cannot identify the source of resistance in Foucault’s account of the subject. In the alternative Lacanian model, the psyche is ‘what exceeds the imprisoning effects’ of the ‘discursive demand to inhabit a coherent identity’.<sup>102</sup> Further, she argues that ‘one cannot account for subjectivation, and, in particular, becoming the principle of one’s own subjection without recourse to a psychoanalytic account of the formative or generative effects of restriction or prohibition’.<sup>103</sup>

This critique of Foucault is found in the work of a range of critics and partisans of Lacan are the most prominent among them.<sup>104</sup> It also lines up with some of the more baffling Humanistic criticisms of Foucault. Bryan Turner argues that, ‘despite protest’ Foucault is clearly within a ‘deterministic structuralist position whereby the knowledgability and agency of individuals are firmly denied and systematically precluded’.<sup>105</sup> Nancy Hartsock argues that ‘Foucault’s is a world in

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<sup>101</sup> Judith Butler, ‘Subjection, Resistance, Resignification: Between Freud and Foucault’, in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 83-105, (p. 87).

<sup>102</sup> Butler, p. 86.

<sup>103</sup> Butler, p. 87.

<sup>104</sup> See Joan Copjec, ‘Structures Don’t March in the Streets’, in *Read*, pp. 1-13; and ‘Orthopsychic’; Slavoj Žižek, ‘Whither Oedipus’ in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso 1999), pp. 313-399.

<sup>105</sup> Bryan S. Turner, ‘The Rationalization of the Body: Reflections On Modernity and Discipline’ in *Max Weber: From History To Modernity* (Routledge: London 1993), p.129. However, Turner is only guilty of stating the argument so clearly and precisely. This understanding of Foucault seems fairly widespread, in part because it has been articulated by significant writers across a number of disciplines.



which things move rather than people, a world in which subjects become obliterated, or, rather, recreated as passive objects, a world in which passivity or refusal represent the only possible choices.<sup>106</sup> Such readings proceed from the uncritical assumptions of the civilizing myth, mistaking the historical denegation of violence for an actual rejection of violent methods. They cannot understand the motive for resistance to discourse, as they have emptied discourse of its physical force and turned it into something barely distinguishable from ideology or the symbolic. To the extent that such criticisms run counter to Foucault's assertions regarding the legacy of the old regime and the continuing presence of violence, they suggest a remarkable investment in the imaginary absence of violence. I shall pursue these problems through Butler as I think she offers the most compelling of these critiques, but also because the progression of her argument in *The Psychic Life of Power* represents a turn away from the historical-discursive perspectives she was once allied with.

The next chapter of this thesis deals more explicitly with the relationship between discursive and psychoanalytic projects, but for the moment it is necessary to remember that understandings of the modern subject, as the principle of their own subjection, already owe a debt to the insights of psychoanalysis. The central issue at stake in Butler's argument is the generative effects of restriction or prohibition. For her, the psychoanalytic understanding of such a paradox ultimately refers to a sexual aetiology, or more precisely an account of formative passionate attachments. Butler comes to oppose Foucault's near complete emphasis on social or institutional contexts by arguing that the subject is formed through the intimate bonds of childhood dependency. The lost or disavowed love object instituted by heteronormative imperatives instantiates the generative prohibition of sexual subjectivity,

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<sup>106</sup> Nancy Hartsock, 'Foucault on Power: A Theory For Women?', in *Feminism and Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda Nicholson (Routledge: New York, 1990), pp. 157-175.



and thus psychic resistance to the symbolic. While the homosexual subject can acknowledge and mourn such a loss through embodiment and resistance the heterosexual subject is precluded from mourning and therefore affects a melancholy characterized by 'hyperbolic identifications'.<sup>107</sup> Heterosexual gender is constituted and maintained via the pervasive disavowal of a love object.

The model Butler elaborates is attractive because we can easily redescribe it in terms of the historical politics of violence. The homosexual subject, having accepted their vulnerability before the violence of discourse, counter-mobilizes their subjugation through the language of rights. In such activity we could say that the subject acknowledges the loss of their ideal embodiment at the same time as they recognize that any such embodiment is already impossible. The mourning of that lost subjectivity, that Sovereignty which can never be achieved, is then reproduced in an ironic performance of heterosexual gender. The heterosexual subject, however, could be said to maintain their attachment, at least in the discourse of sex, to the potential for ideal embodiment that I discussed above. The hyper-identifications of heterosexual gender are anxiety ridden attempts to perform embodiments free of the threat of violence.

In effect heterosexual gender is a discourse of identification that has failed to find the solace that counter-mobilizations provide for the disqualified self. Nonetheless, the specificity of such a model is limited to those forms of embodiment not otherwise disqualified. While sexuality may be powerfully significant, such hyper-identifications assume a subject that has not already counter-mobilized some other category of difference historically marked by violence. If Butler's account of gender seems to occlude the problems raised by the resistant articulations of ethnic

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<sup>107</sup> Butler, 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification', in *Psychic*, pp.132-150, (p. 147).



and racial difference, or any number of other marginalized aspects of subjectivity, this is why.<sup>108</sup>

One problem with Butler's formulation is its failure to understand the link between the potentialities of violence and the passionate attachments she turns to for an explanation of the generative effects of a prohibition. It is not that Butler does not acknowledge the violence which can occur in parent child relations, it is that she discounts the dependency of the child as a form of political subordination. For Butler, 'the situation of primary dependency conditions the political formation and regulation of subjects and becomes the means of their subjection'. The parent child bond takes the place of the Sovereign exception, both within and without, and so guarantees the political order. It is a curious displacement; one in which the political framework of the old regime is invoked and the exceptional position is recast as a relationship between bodies rather than a person. In making this move, Butler seeks to mark the child, at least momentarily, as outside of the regime of subjectivation. However problematic that exteriority is, one cannot help but be sympathetic to such an account of subject formation. The trouble is that the relationship also smuggles the adult outside of that regime in a way that is critically untenable, as the adult performs the bio-politically determined parental subjectivity. By doing this Butler

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<sup>108</sup> Angela Davis's discussion of the inclusions/exclusions of African-American women from the political category of 'women' in American suffrage debates provides one excellent account of how these politics have played out historically. The authority of gender identifications are necessarily subservient to racial subjugation in a context where the determinant coding of a threat is racial. See Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage, 1981) These debates have also played out in the many critiques of Butler's essay on the film *Paris is Burning*. See Judith Butler, 'Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion', in *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) pp. 121-140; Coco Fusco, 'Who's Doin' The Twist? Notes Toward a Politics of Appropriation', *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion In The Americas* (New York,,: New Press, 1995), pp. 65-78; bell hooks, 'Is Paris Burning?' 'Sisters of the Yam Column', *Z Magazine*, June 1991, p. 61; Jacquelyn N. Zita, *Body Talk: Philosophical Reflections on Sex and Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).



casts the violence of parent-child relations as some altogether different kind of violence.

I have already discussed the more than problematic disavowals of the violence that can manifest in discourses such as parenting. But what is startling about Butler's assertion is that she appears to ignore Foucault's argument that the articulation of sexual discourses and the psychoanalytic project has everything to do with the profound politicization of that primary dependency. He argues that the discipline, health and sexuality of the child, all integrated discourses, become paramount as the administrative apparatus becomes concerned with the reproduction of the population. As discussed, that administrative apparatus has wholly altered the signification of violence and thus the methodology of political subordination. Butler avoids direct engagement with Foucault on this point by suggesting that childhood is 'not a political subordination *in any usual sense*'.<sup>109</sup> Her unqualified 'usual sense' circumnavigates the historical reconstitution of subordination and subjection, returning us to the outmoded operations of the old regime and the spectacularly legible physicality of subordination that it practiced. In other words, Butler's turn to psychoanalysis depends on a wholesale acceptance of the civilization myth. Foucault complimented the tendency of psychoanalysis to suspect the presence of the old order, working within the regime of bio-politics; Butler's psychoanalytic turn thus seems both to suspect the old order, and simultaneously to reproduce it.

The consistent excision of violence from the operations of discourse reduces discourse to an immaterial relationship between signs. In such accounts, Foucault becomes paraphrased as little more than an historian of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), providing us with the elaborate detail of specific interpellations.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Butler, 'Introduction', in *Psychic*, pp. 1-30, (p. 7).

<sup>110</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 127-188; see Warren Montag,



Butler takes matters a step further arguing that, for Foucault, the subject is formed and then invested with a sexuality by a regime of power.<sup>111</sup> This is entirely contrary to Foucault's account of historical modulations in regimes of subjectivation; the subject is not given a sexuality, the body is invested with a mode of subjectivity via the discourse of sexuality. This complete mischaracterization installs the structural *a priori* of the subject within discourse and renders it historically transcendent: Foucault is made indistinguishable from Althusser. Such readings of Foucault betray a deep complicity with, and need for, the comforts of the Althusserian framework. As Butler states, 'Althusser's doctrine of interpellation continues to structure contemporary debate on subject formation, offering a way to account for a subject who comes into being as a consequence of language, yet always within its terms.'<sup>112</sup> Is it possible that by turning Foucault into an historian of the ISA one invokes, at least in a concealed fashion, the presence of its counterpart, the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), and unwittingly betrays nostalgia for the politics that are implied by the spectacular recuperative violence of the old regime? In Althusser's theory the ISA is only buttressed by the violence of the RSA. While the ISA and RSA can be said to need each other one can make a distinction between the two, based on the subjective exteriority of the RSA and the interiority of the ISA: the RSA messes with your body where the ISA messes with your mind. Althusser writes that the ISA 'ultimately, but only ultimately' references violence in manner that is 'very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic'.<sup>113</sup> This distinction preserves the historical and spectacular relationships of political violence characteristic of the old regime, at

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"'The Soul is the Prison of the Body': Althusser and Foucault, 1970-1975", *Yale French Studies*, 88 1995, 53-77, for an discussion of the contests between Foucault and Althusser.

<sup>111</sup> Butler, 'Between', p. 103.

<sup>112</sup> Butler, 'Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All: Althusser's Subjection', in *Psychic*, pp. 106-131. (p. 106).

<sup>113</sup> Althusser, p. 145.



the same time uncritically asserting the narrative of civilization. Althusser's conception of the RSA represents an astonishingly outdated account of State violence, but the textual presence of the RSA always suggested the potential for resistance that is missing from his ideological apparatuses.

In her essay 'Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All', Butler's own critique of Althusser progresses from the problem of guilt. She argues that Althusser's famous example of a subject hailed by the police, and so interpellated by the police, is not tenable if there is not already a 'self ascription of guilt' on behalf of that subject.<sup>114</sup> The act of turning indicates that the subject has already interiorised some notion of guilt in relation to the law:

There would be no turning around without first having been hailed, neither would there be a turning around without some readiness to turn [...] How and why does the subject turn, anticipating the conferral of identity in the self-ascription of guilt? What kind of relation already binds these two such that the subject knows to turn, knows that something is to be gained from such a turn? How might we think of this "turn" as prior to subject formation, a prior complicity with the law without which no subject emerges?

Butler's question is undoubtedly the right one, but her answer again turns to her conception of 'passionate attachments' and the 'guilt' internal to child-parent relations. As is probably apparent by now, discursive violence seems to insist itself in making sense of this 'turning'.

In the face of the Repressive State Apparatus we become the wholly resistant subject, always interpellated and never interpellating, innocent before the ugly face of power. Is the guilt which preoccupies Butler not the guilt of disavowal, but the guilt of practising the discursive arts of violence upon ourselves and those we love? The RSA is a sign that the interpellations of the ISA are never complete, and beneath it there lurks a potential for resistance that could reach cataclysmic proportions,

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<sup>114</sup> Butler, 'Conscience', p. 107.

resistance *en masse*. The idea of the RSA holds out the possibility of political redemption for a population integrated within contemporary political machinery. We seem to fetishize the political ‘innocence’ of those who were subjugated by the old regime.

Does not a contemporary subject recognize the conventional discursive impropriety of, ‘Hey you there!’?<sup>115</sup> Could the subject which turns in both Butler’s and Althusser’s texts not be understood as turning to respond to a ‘voice’ representing a possible threat? Before anyone even arrives in this space subjects have already been formed and reformed through an interiorization of policing mechanisms. The turn is constituted by a shared recognition of the law and the threat that accrues to a violation. Compelled by violence, the subject takes their own body as an object. What Butler reads as ‘guilt’, and so takes to indicate a nodal point for looking at relations of intimacy, can as easily be read as an ambivalent submission to a recognized authority. The threat of violence in the hailing of the policeman, or more likely, the threat of violence evoked by the violation of the discursive conventions (It seems that, outside of the police, ‘Hey you there’ is likely to be followed by something along the lines of ‘you dropped your wallet’ or ‘I don’t like the look of you.’) and harnessed to the bodies of the subjects within its reach. Turn or ‘what’?

What are the consequences of not turning? To take this a stage further, how do we differentiate between the alterity of the criminal, say a petty thief in this instance, and the alterity of any number of subjects? Althusser argues that the policeman almost always hits his mark, that the person who turns is the intended subject. In the moment of Althusser’s writing, we are textually rendered as passers-by, watching the event. On what basis do we understand that the policeman has hit

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<sup>115</sup> Althusser, p. 174.



his mark? As passers-by how have we turned to recognize the event itself? Did we recognize the person being hailed as a criminal? If we did what forms of knowledge did we apply? Did we perform the gaze of the State? Or did we also turn out of some kind of vulnerability only to find that the person being hailed was someone more 'guilty' than we were? Does everyone who turns, turn out of a 'guilt' that is aligned with a general and mobile definition of pathological embodiments? Does everyone who recognizes, recognize through a gaze that is aligned with State authority? Does the recognizing subject not see a kind of criminality in the person hailed? Does the hailed subject not recognize the recognition of the police as well as the assorted passers-by?

The scene actually suggests a range of subject positions within the discourse of the law. The knowledge of what is taking place is mediated through the experience of subjection before the law *and* subjectivation through it. Violence is then a discursive history as well as a possible future that delimits subjectivity. We are all made anxious by the scene and we all participate in it. If there is a prohibition involved here it is that which prohibits the subject from failing to see what the authorities see. In this instance of hailing, the subject is subject, not through the recognition of authority as such, but through the interiorization of the authorizing perspective. The rupture of propriety demands attention to the range of ruptures that could be the object of State correction. The subject might turn, out of the knowledge that they are indeed marked as criminal through a recent act, or the subject may turn out of the recognition that they are often marked as criminal by social-historical discourse. To introduce the unconscious here is a problematic issue – does the subject recognize the legitimacy of the hailing? Or does the subject 'recognize' that the authority performing the hailing has the means of 'the sign or otherwise' at their

disposal to achieve the codification of the discursive relation they perform? Is this not how one becomes the principle of their own subjection?<sup>116</sup>

How many of us have stayed to watch the conclusion of such a scene? Why do we do it? Are we motivated by our own political vulnerabilities to take up the position of political responsibility? In our identification with the subjected do we find solace in our subjectivation? Is this our chance to take on the role of witness and police the police, restricting the potential for violence that makes us vulnerable in the first place? Or do we seek the chance to deny our vulnerability? Do we hope to exorcise it by becoming a witness for the police? By performing the role of helpful citizen, do we embed ourselves in the State apparatus and momentarily abolish the 'guilt', that part of ourselves which is not complicit with the State and made us turn in the first place? The proliferation of video cameras at political demonstrations, pointed at the police who have their own cameras pointed back, and the willingness of the police to target cameras when those protestors turn violent while demonstrators 'mask up' to do the same, attests to the complicated interpenetration of subjection and subjectivation in contemporary politics.

What is the historical 'experience' or narrative of not turning in that moment? The possibility of violence conditions the subject's submission to the law. The pervasive discourses of a normative State, seeking to optimize its public, binds up the identity of criminality in the mobile relations of normal and pathological embodiments. The differentiations between the alterity of criminality and the criminality of alterity are less clear than one might hope. The citizen knows the terms of disqualification, such that those who turn may indeed be 'guilty' of an alterity both recognized and reiterated in the moment of being hailed. Those who have failed

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<sup>116</sup> See n. 65.



to interiorize the gaze that polices difference are inevitably on the periphery of ‘citizenship’.

Towards the end of her discussion of Freud and Foucault, grounded by her understanding of guilt, Butler asks how we are supposed to understand ‘the disciplinary cultivation of *an attachment to subjection*’. She then wonders if ‘such postulation raises the question of masochism—indeed, the question of masochism in subject formation’.<sup>117</sup> The proposed psychoanalytic model grounds her return to the analysis of subjectivity and symbolic injury that she developed in *Excitable Speech*.<sup>118</sup> She states ‘I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially... only by occupying --- being occupied by --- that injurious term can I resist and oppose it, recasting the power that constitutes me as the power that I oppose.’ The ‘alienated narcissism’ of such a dynamic secures ‘a certain place for psychoanalysis’. Finally, it is not that this represents an ‘unconscious outside of power’ so much as it is the ‘*unconscious of power itself, in its traumatic and productive iterability*’.<sup>119</sup> With that, I think Butler unintentionally provides a near perfect characterization of discursive violence, and indeed a place for psychoanalysis may be secured as far as the relations of violence are concealed from the subject that performs, and is constituted by them. Nevertheless, the degree of such concealment is not entirely clear. Violence is a crudely conscious phenomenon. What subtends Althusser’s structuralism and Butler’s carrying forth of the question of ‘guilt’, without an analysis of its ‘fraud’ and dependency on violent force, is that the history of violence is rendered as *only history*, a past that is not present in the consciousness

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<sup>117</sup> Butler, ‘Between’, p. 102.

<sup>118</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997); see also Wendy Brown, ‘Wounded Attachments’, in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 54-76.

<sup>119</sup> Butler, ‘Between’, pp. 103-104. My italics.

of the subject hailed. In Butler's turn to guilt as the key term for an analysis of subjection, she overlooks the contemporary reiterations of violence, real acts of violence, the cultural discourses of 'real' violence, or representations of violence both real and fictional. She completely ignores the *other* contemporary cultural obsession.



**T W O**  
**VIOLENCE AND CLINICAL AUTHORITY IN *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI* AND ‘THE AETIOLOGY OF HYSTERIA’**

This chapter seeks to delineate the role Freudian psychoanalysis plays in the critical elision of violence, as well as the more everyday denial of its continuous subjective productivity. As discussed in the last chapter, major critics, like Joan Copjec and Judith Butler, have stayed with, or turned to, psychoanalysis due to a perceived deficiency in the theoretical tools provided by Michel Foucault. They have argued that Foucault’s account of the subject does not allow for resistance and thus cannot sufficiently account for the psychical conflict of the modern subject. As discussed in the first chapter, this argument is underwritten by a failure to take account of the role of violence in the constitution of the subject. An attentive reading of Foucault’s work, aided by the historical background provided by Elias, draws out that dimension of his analysis in a manner that allows for a complex discursive understanding of subjection and psychical conflict. This chapter suggests that the Freudian enterprise is not so much explanatory of the gaps or limitations that critics have attributed to discursive analyses, as it is productive of them.

Paradoxically, no theory of the subject is more essential to the contemporary disavowal of violence than Freudian psychoanalysis. This can be ascribed to the

manner in which Freud provides a means of disavowing violence in the guise of analyzing its significance. Within the Freudian project, violence is not understood as a productive technology within modern culture, but as a primal, raw, and unelaborated force that manifests in a complex of symbolism ultimately removed from material relationships. Freud's account in 'Why War?', which has the advantage of coming late in his production, as well as being something of a summary statement, holds that the tyrannical father of an ancient past is 'overcome by the transference of power to a larger unity which is held together by the emotional ties between its members'.<sup>1</sup>

While Freud did not dismiss the instrumental role of repressive violence within the modern State, the corporate violence of the tyrannical father, which was historically constitutive of an original community's emotional ties, was gradually reconfigured, vitiating an aggressive and destructive instinct to 'destroy and kill'.<sup>2</sup> With this, the violence that originally structured relations and produced the emotional bonds that structured only more complex social relations became something potentially chaotic and un-directed. Freud's theory provides an earlier and more fundamental instance where the modern subject is detached from its historical constitution within the complex and integrated technologies of violence.

In contrast to idealist theories that propose a conscious subject who has abandoned their history in violence, Freud folds the narrative of violence over on itself and so elides the material transitions to modernity. While this fold continues to reference violence, its mutating historical role is disavowed in favour of seeing violence as a symptom of the primal. Witness the inescapable metaphorization of the democratic revolutions as found in *Totem and Taboo*:

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Why War?', in *Civilization, Society and Religion, PFL Vol. 12* (London: Penguin Books, 1964, 1985), pp. 341-349 (p. 352).

<sup>2</sup> Freud, 'Why War?', p. 356.



One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end to the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually. (Some cultural advance, perhaps command over some new weapon, had given them a sense of superior strength.) Cannibal savages as they were it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one acquired a portion of his strength. The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable criminal deed.<sup>3</sup>

The historian Henri Ellenberger argues that Freud was most likely inspired by neighbouring Turkey, 'an anachronistic empire' which was

ruled by the "Red Sultan" Abdul Hamid II. This despot had the power of life and death over his subjects, kept hundreds of wives in a harem guarded by eunuchs and from time to time massacred entire populations of his empire. In 1908 "the sons banded together against the cruel old man," the Young Turks rebelled and overthrew the Sultan.

Ellenberger sums up by asserting that, '[a]s Hobbes gave a philosophical myth of the origin of absolute monarchy, Freud gave one of its dissolution'.<sup>4</sup>

As we have seen, the process of deposing the 'tyrannical father', over the span of nearly six hundred years of European history, is what we find described in the work of Elias and Foucault. An aspiring class of the Sovereign's agents imitate the Sovereign in style and taste.<sup>5</sup> They master the technologies of their respective offices such that their collective strength is understood as commensurate with the

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<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1950, 1989), pp. 176-177.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 526.

<sup>5</sup> Norbert Elias, 'Civilization as a Specific Transformation of Human Behavior', in *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott. (London: Blackwell, 1994, 2000), pp. 45-172.



Sovereign, and from this material sharing of power grows a nascent democratic sensibility. Although Freud did not state that his story is little more than a metaphor for the transition to modern democracy, he did qualify it by suggesting that the time span of its accomplishment is arguable and the degree of violence necessarily involved was similarly indeterminate.<sup>6</sup> Freud's totemic narrative appears to contain the democratic revolutions as well as political wars of attrition between monarchs and their parliamentarians. Nevertheless, any such gesture towards history is undermined by the understanding that this allegedly ancient happening is at the heart of castration anxiety and the Oedipal complex; it is at 'the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art'.<sup>7</sup>

The manner and details of this elision are the object of this chapter, although the intent is not simply to correct an imaginative falsification of history. The intent is to highlight the way in which the Freudian project produces and reiterates an elision of violence which has become crucial in the maintenance of the modern subject's fantasy of individuality and autonomy. The Oedipal narrative founded a break from the problematic history of violence, and provided the best possible escape from recognition of its modern significance. That break therefore consolidated the same Liberal Humanism that Freud is celebrated for criticizing.

Yet Freud's role in the dislocation of violence is so significantly overlooked that even Foucault's own characteristic hostility to psychoanalysis curiously gives way to qualified appreciation on precisely this point. In the closing pages of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault writes:

It is to the political credit of psychoanalysis—or at least, of what was most coherent in it—that it regarded with suspicion (and this from its inception, that is from the moment that it broke away from the neuropsychiatry of degenerescence) the

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<sup>6</sup> Freud, *Totem*, pp. 176-177 (n55).

<sup>7</sup> Freud, *Totem*, p. 194.



irrevocably proliferating aspects which might be contained in these power mechanisms aimed at controlling and administering the everyday life of sexuality: whence the Freudian endeavour (out of reaction no doubt to the great surge of racism that was contemporary with it) to ground sexuality in the law—the law of alliance, tabooed consanguinity and the Sovereign-Father, in short to surround psychoanalysis with the trappings of the old order of power. It was owing to this that psychoanalysis was—in the main, with a few exceptions—in theoretical and practical opposition to fascism.<sup>8</sup>

In this rendering, Freud is someone who reminds us of the Sovereign's history and influence within the context of emergent bio-political technologies. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault rightly points out that clinical efforts focused on heredity and degenerative illnesses are the concerns of the Sovereign 'regime of alliance'. They are discourses born from a 'blood politics' concerned with the preservation of the 'body, vigor, longevity and progeniture of the classes that "ruled"'.<sup>9</sup> The concern for the preservation of Sovereign power proliferated and mutated into the range of sexological, psychological, and biological regimes of inquiry, which govern what comes to be known as the population. For Foucault, Freud's intelligence resides in his ability to discern and mark the force of the old order within the alleged modernity of 'blood politics' and the bio-politics it engenders. Freud's applied suspicion is commendable, to the extent that it returns questions of motivation and interest to such elaborate mechanisms of power. Foucault's understanding here hinges on the perception that, by the time Freud breaks with the tradition of neuro-psychiatry and its effectively eugenic concern with degeneration, the violent rule of the Sovereign has become irretrievably effaced and diffuse within discourse.

In this formulation, Foucault fails to address *how* the history of Sovereign power and its legacy of violence was ever forgotten. What were the terms of such a

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<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1984), p. 150.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, *History*, p. 123.

forgetting? Was it ever as complete as such an analysis would propose? As the horrors of various political revolutions can be ascribed to attempts to exorcize historical demons, it seems strange that democratic culture would be so specifically forgetful. Our suspicions of Freud himself should be raised to the extent that the Norbert Elias of *The Civilizing Process*, and so much of Michel Foucault's work, reads in the style of a talking cure. By unfolding Freudian mythologies both authors therapeutically walk us into the knowledge of subjection and subjectivation that we are alleged to have once refused. Underneath the fantasy of a modern subject we are asked to observe the expanse of history and its transmutations of consciousness. Much like Foucault, Elias asks us to pause and give credit to Freud for toiling so long in that expanse and coming so close to the reality of things, with his attempts to explain the complicated and conflicted relations between private 'libidinal drives' and the elaborate regimes of social constraint.<sup>10</sup> 'This [...] is clearly the state of affairs which Freud tried to express by concepts such as the "superego" and the "unconscious".'<sup>11</sup>

Both these masters seek to undo Freud and adjust our consciousness, on the basis of the knowledge that has been denied us. But neither linger too long on the idea that it might be the Freudian narrative that papered over such an understanding with its opaque mythology. It follows that the need or demand for, and so the use of, Freudian narratives are relatively unexplored. I would suggest that the answers, at least partially, lie in the critiques of Foucault and Elias proffered by so much psychoanalytic criticism. Such critiques insist that the historical narrative of

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<sup>10</sup> Elias, *Civilizing*, p. 410.

<sup>11</sup> Elias, *Civilizing*, p. 160.



subjectivation provides little or no equipment for an engagement with the problem of psychical conflict.<sup>12</sup>

In very different ways, Foucault and Elias understand the modern subject as split against itself. However, their explanations have been challenged, insofar as they seem to reduce the whole range of complications that we understand in terms of fear and desire, as well as self and other, to an effectively rational problem. The implication seems to be that proper historical knowledge provides us with the capacity to objectify our own psychical conflict so that it is reduced to the status of a logic problem. If we understand these histories and wade through the confusions and obfuscations are we better equipped to deal with the conflicts wrought by such a history? Does the experience of psychical conflict evaporate? More importantly, why would anyone resist such knowledge? In what ways are we compelled to believe or reject these narratives?

Placed in context, the subjective disavowal of violence can be understood as a particular and interested strategy within early twentieth century regimes of power and knowledge production. Freud's narrative of the subject amounts to a strategically clever performance of a subject caught within competing and conflicting regimes of subjection and subjectivation. What *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* reveals is that this was not the only strategy available at the time. More importantly, debates regarding power, violence, and the subject were at the centre of culture.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In addition to Butler, see Joan Copjec, 'Structures Don't March in the Streets', and 'The Ortho-Psychic Subject', in *Read My Desire; Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 1-14, and pp. 15-38.

<sup>13</sup> *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, dir. Robert Wiene, perf. Conrad Veidt, Werner Krauss and Lil Dagover. Decla, 1919 (Eureka Video, 1999).

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*

To understand Freud's disavowal of violence, it is essential to contextualize his narrative alongside other attempts to engage a similar set of problems. In what follows, I set the narrative displacement of violence found in classical psychoanalysis alongside two competing narratives of violence that are contemporary with it. The first is the 1919 release of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. The second is Freud's own essay, 'The Aetiology of Hysteria', also known as 'the seduction theory'.<sup>14</sup> The relationship between 'The Aetiology' and the development of Freudian theory is fairly straightforward. Freud's rejection of 'The Aetiology' and the terms of that rejection, which constituted a virtual about face, are generally recognized as the inaugural moment of modern psychoanalysis.<sup>15</sup> Peter Gay, drawing on Freud's own account, writes that the rejection meant that 'Freud could now leap forward to the psychoanalytic theory of the mind. The way to the Oedipus complex lay open.'<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Masson, attempting to clarify the stakes in Freud's rejection of 'The Aetiology', quotes Anna Freud's correspondence: 'Keeping up the seduction theory would mean to abandon the Oedipus complex, and with it the whole importance of phantasy life, conscious or unconscious phantasy. In fact, I think there would have been no psychoanalysis afterwards.'<sup>17</sup> The opposition between and the dependency of the two texts are well established. More importantly, the competing understandings of sexual abuse offered by the two texts continue to be a theoretical and methodological problem. This has resulted in an ongoing critical and

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<sup>14</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol.3* trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 1962, 2001), pp. 189-224.

<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'September 21, 1897', in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fleiss 1887-1904*, trans. and ed. by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1985), pp. 264-266.

<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989) p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth; Freud and Child Sexual Abuse* (London: Fontana, 1984, 1992), p. 113.



methodological battle, one that prominently spilled over into the cultural controversies over Recovered Memory Syndrome and/or False Memory Syndrome, where Freud is pitted against Freud.<sup>18</sup>

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* forms the third point in this triangle due to its contemporaneity and similarity with the development of Freudian theory. My analysis rests on the insistence that the striking mimesis between the Freudian project and *Caligari* is not a coincidence, but an effect of their all too similar negotiation of the same problem. Specifically, both texts rewrite the role of violence in scientific practice. However, the importance of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is not that it provides an alternate psychiatric theory, and so resolves the tensions between the early Freud and the later Freud, but that it represents the foundational, yet unacknowledged, problem contested by the two Freuds.

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* claims the titles for the first modern horror film, the first “art film”, and the first critical success, indicating its central cultural relevance. It is also one of a small number of films where critical questions have been resolutely focused on the social-historical context of production choices, to the relative neglect of questions concerning the textual web of the final product or its

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to Masson’s all important shot across the bow see: Janet Malcolm, *In the Freud Archives* (London: Papermac, 1986, 1997); *The Memory Wars: Freud’s Legacy in Dispute*, ed. by Frederick Crews (London: Granta, 1995, 1997); Laura Davis and Ellen Bass, *The Courage To Heal* (London: Vermilion, 2002) has been at the centre of such arguments. John Forrester’s ‘Dispatches From The Freud Wars’ in *Dispatches From The Freud Wars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 208-248; and *Whose Freud?: The Place of Psychoanalysis In Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Peter Brooks and Alex Wooloch (London: Yale University Press, 2000), provide the relevant, if pro-psychoanalytic, academic post-mortem on these debates. Such oppositions all tend to overlook the essential contribution of Jean Laplanche’s *New Foundations For Psychoanalysis* (London: Blackwell, 1989), which manages to chart a credible, if problematic, path between ‘the seduction theory’ and Freudian psychoanalysis.



seduction of the audience.<sup>19</sup> This is largely because *Caligari* can be read as a straightforward story about power and authority, corruption and madness made in Weimar Germany. That the film had two treatments -- an original script by Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz, which is taken to indict authority in the figure of Caligari, and the film which was produced by Dr. Robert Wiene and taken to affirm authority -- only lends to the demand for emphasis on historical context.<sup>20</sup>

It is Siegfried Kracauer's essential reading of the film, in his 1947 *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, that not only shaped the future of film theory and criticism, but also set these issues at the centre of all *Caligari* discussion to come.<sup>21</sup> For Kracauer, *Caligari* was a

premonition of Hitler [...] a very specific premonition in the sense that (Dr. Caligari) uses hypnotic power to force his will upon his tool—a technique foreshadowing, in content and purpose, that manipulation of the soul which Hitler was the first to practice on a giant scale.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Which is to say that the film has almost entirely escaped the Metz/Mulvian paradigm of film criticism. I think this is a matter of the contradiction promised by analysing the seductions of a narrative that critiques the terms of seduction. This reading will go some ways towards that analysis. See Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), and Laura Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, ed. by Screen (New York: Routledge 1992), pp. 22-34.

<sup>20</sup> See: John D. Barlow, *German Expressionist Film* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982); *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, ed. by Mike Budd (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Paul Coates, *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism and the Image of Horror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: from Caligari to Kuhle Wampe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); David Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr. Caligari* (London: Bfi Press, 1997). All these discussions focus on the framing story in relation to politics, but also reference Kracauer at the centre of such productions. The only notable exception is Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952, 1969), which is not particularly concerned with the political implications of *Caligari*, outside a general discussion of expressionism and competing claims of responsibility for the *Caligari* aesthetic.

<sup>21</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

<sup>22</sup> Kracauer, p. 72.



Within the large body of critical literature on *Caligari*, the film's two treatments have come to represent the divergent and conflicting political aspirations of post-war Germany. Competing state formations hang over the film's interpretations, to the extent that the few methodological exceptions have to announce themselves as such. Thomas Elsaesser's recent work, for example, only temporarily plays the devil's advocate by daring to suggest that 'one *can* construct for Caligari's behaviour a motivational logic that derives from the terms of the story itself and remains within its textual boundaries'.<sup>23</sup> In *Caligari* one cannot escape what amounts to allegedly self-evident interpretations of the film's two oppositional treatments. Critical and interpretive practices then examine the conditions of production for both narratives, and generally lament the choices ultimately made by Wiene.

I am guilty of reproducing this laboured tradition here, of course, but am perhaps saved by a shift of emphasis towards the elements of the narrative that have been largely overlooked. The criticism on *Caligari*, but for one notable exception discussed below, overlooks or ignores the significance of the film's medico-clinical setting and its central dramatization of what Michel Foucault termed 'the will to knowledge'. While there is no shortage of analysis that subjects *Caligari* to the Oedipal framework of the later Freud, this is more symptomatic of the predictable aspects of so much film criticism, than it is illuminating. The imposition of Freudian analysis on *Caligari* can only consolidate ignorance of those dimensions of the film which sought to criticize psychiatric practices. By focusing on the clinical setting of the film, the historical dimensions of bio-political technologies and their significance are returned to the text.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.

77. My italics.

<sup>24</sup> See Foucault, 'The Right of Death and Power Over Life', in *History*, pp. 135-159.

*The Cabinet Of Dr. Caligari* opens in a courtyard where an older man with a maniacal visage says to a younger Francis, there are ‘spirits all around me’. Francis, in turn, points out his ‘fiancé’, who is wandering nearby in bedclothes (thus providing our second clue that all is not right with this particular courtyard). He assures his older companion that the story he has to tell is stranger than whatever spirits he might be referring to. It then fades to the now famous jagged lines and distorted perspectives of the expressionistically rendered set, which is the German town of Holstenwall. The simple, but off kilter, lines of the painted canvases, ‘instead of the more orthodox settings of perpendicular house walls and trees that look like trees’, would eventually become the mark of innovation and artistic genius attached to the film.<sup>25</sup>

As David Robinson points out, *Caligari* ‘brought German film culture unprecedented international prestige, and helped to re-open overseas markets which had been closed since the World War and the economic ostracism that followed’. Robinson continues, it was exactly this prestige that contributes to ‘an accumulation of legend and conflicting evidence’ in the matter of the film’s production, as ‘for those artists driven into exile after the advent of Nazism [...] it was often especially important to be able to stake a claim in the creating of *Caligari*, an infallible calling card’.<sup>26</sup>

While this translated into arguments over who played more of less significant roles in the production of the film’s ground breaking aesthetic, it did not produce arguments over who was or was not responsible for the film’s now notorious ‘framing story’.<sup>27</sup> This was the work of the producer Robert Wiene; while Mayer and Janowitz had given up legal control of the script when they contracted to do any

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<sup>25</sup> ‘An “Expressionist” Film. German Melodrama. Desire For Simple Fare’, *The Times*, 23 March. 1920, p.12.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Though there were two different framing stories. I will return to this.



desired rewrites, major changes were apparently made without their knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

The narrative of events in Holstenwall comprises the story of the original script, which in diegetic terms at least, is offered as true. The courtyard scenes frame this 'true' story so as to render it a fantasy.

The story that Francis recounts consists of the experiences of himself, his friend Allan, and their mutual love interest Jane, relating to a travelling fair that comes to Holstenwall. A 'Dr. Caligari' has bribed his way into the town clerk's office where, after some dismissive treatment at the hands of the clerk, he is able to purchase a permit for the fair. The next day the town clerk, Dr. Luders, who was so impatient with Caligari, is found murdered. Meanwhile, the two students, Francis and Allan, together with a number of others, are drawn to Caligari's tent. He has promised they can all see the fortune telling somnambulist Cesare, who sleeps in a cabinet when he is not being controlled in a trance by Caligari. Allan, apparently overcome with excitement, asks Cesare to tell him how long he will live. Cesare declares that Allan will be dead before dawn the next morning. That night Allan is murdered in his sleep. With the assistance of, and sometimes in defiance of, police efforts, Francis pursues his suspicion that Caligari and Cesare are responsible.

Eventually, Cesare dies fleeing his attempt to murder Jane while she sleeps alone in her bedroom. Caligari's implication in the murder and attempted murder are clear when Allan and the police discover his ruse of a replacement dummy inside Cesare's cabinet. Caligari flees and Francis follows him, discovering that he leads a double life as the head of the asylum. The junior doctors assist Francis in his investigation, and they collectively discover the evidence that the head doctor has, for some time, been studying the possibility of turning a somnambulist towards evil

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<sup>28</sup> Robinson, 'The Making of "Caligari" – "The Story of a Famous Story" Revised', in *Das Cabinet*, pp. 7-23; For the original treatment by writers Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz see David Robinson, "'Caligaris" - A Comparison of the Scenario and the Completed Film', in *Das Cabinet, Des Dr. Caligari*, pp. 59-74.

deeds. The Doctor has drawn the persona of Caligari from an academic history of somnambulism, which recounts the activities of a mystic, Calligari, and a subservient somnambulist in 1703. As Allan and the doctors pour over texts and diaries, it becomes clear that this modern Dr. Caligari has become obsessed with unlocking the secrets of the mystic 'Calligari' for the purposes of science. The arrival at the asylum of the somnambulist Cesare is the moment the doctor had been waiting for. The mania of the doctor is illustrated in the film's flashback scenes, where he chases letters and words forming 'Du Musst Caligari Werden' ('You must become Caligari.') around the streets of Holstenwall.

When Dr. Caligari returns to the asylum, unaware of the investigation, he is captured, put in a straitjacket and placed in a cell. This narrative, from the coming of the fair to the imprisonment of the Doctor, is faithful to the intentions of co-writers Mayer and Janowitz.<sup>29</sup> But this is not the end of the film. Wiene places the entire story in the context of the asylum, with Francis as its paranoid anti-hero. Returning to the 'framing story', where Francis recounts his experiences, we realize that the woman wandering through the courtyard is the model for Jane; a fey flower-caressing Cesare appears as well. Francis wanders through the courtyard, clearly part of the asylum, and the entire cast of Francis' fantasy is re-cast as attendants or inmates. Eventually, the head of the asylum, the Dr. Caligari of Francis' delusion, appears, sending Francis into a fit of anxiety and fear. The doctor realizes that Francis has cast him as the eighteenth century mystic Calligari and announces to the junior doctors that he therefore knows how to cure him. The film ends.

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<sup>29</sup> There were some minor modifications of the narrative, but none that qualitatively alter the story. I shall discuss the one potentially significant alteration below. The various alterations and competing accounts are the subject of Robinson's precise and authoritative effort.



### *Critical Controversies*

The controversy around the film developed after significant popular success following release, and with its wide international critical acclaim. In the arguments and claims of responsibility that followed the film for years, the film's co-writer, Hans Janowitz, drew the most famous battle line. Janowitz would write that he believed the addition of the framing story dishonoured the drama that he and Mayer had written. In rendering their 'symbolic story' as a story told by someone who was mentally ill, 'the tragedy of a man gone mad by the misuse of his mental powers' is turned 'into a cliché, in which the symbolism was to be lost'.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, he would extend those comments to suggest that the alterations were 'an illicit violation, a raping of our work'.<sup>31</sup> Janowitz recounted that both he and Mayer had protested the changes loudly, making their 'contempt' known.

Such objections are translated into the critical literature through Kracauer's *From Caligari To Hitler*. There Kracauer reiterates Janowitz's objections, identifying the rewriting of the film as representative of an inward-looking conservatism, characteristic of German culture after the failed ambitions of the empire. For Kracauer, the framing story 'perverted, if not reversed' Mayer and Janowitz' 'intrinsic intentions'.<sup>32</sup> He writes:

This change undoubtedly resulted not so much from Wiene's personal predilections as from his instinctive submission to the necessities of the screen: films, at least commercial films, are forced to answer mass desires. In its changed form CALIGARI was no longer a product expressing at best, sentiments characteristic of the intelligentsia, but a film supposed equally to be in harmony with what the less educated felt and liked.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> From Hans Janowitz's *Caligari: The Story of a Famous Story*, quoted in Robinson, *Das Cabinet*, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Robinson, *Das Cabinet*, p.13.

<sup>32</sup> Kracauer, p. 66-67.

<sup>33</sup> Kracauer, p. 67.

Kracauer argued that Mayer and Janowitz's script offered a significantly more positive, even 'revolutionary meaning' than the film that was produced.<sup>34</sup> Wiene's alteration 'glorified authority and convicted its antagonist of madness', so turning the story into a 'conformist one—following the much used pattern of declaring some normal but troublesome individual insane and sending him to a lunatic asylum'.<sup>35</sup>

Kracauer's argument that the film is at least complicit with the styles of National Socialism, and so prefigures its emergent political formation, is so compelling it cannot be overlooked. Its centrality as an interpretative lens in critiques of *Caligari* thus makes complete sense. Bruce Murray is more explicit than most when he argues that 'the juxtaposition of order and chaos in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* almost certainly motivated associations with the struggle between republican and anti-republican forces [...] and privileged the anti-republican position by valorising authority'. Murray takes the "hypodermic effects model" to its ultimate conclusion, arguing that, on the basis of *Caligari's* success, companies move to 'produce similar films', so discouraging audiences from contemplating 'democratic forms of social interaction'. The tendency towards Expressionist film after *Caligari* 'drew attention away from everyday reality' and 'focused it on psychological phenomena', promoting an 'irrational, conservative and sometimes apocalyptic world view'.<sup>36</sup>

When the film's complicity with the rise of German fascism dominates perspectives on the text, the subtlety of Kracauer's own argument, and some of the issues raised within it, are lost. While Kracauer did indict the film for its compromises, he was not unqualified in his support for the original script as some kind of revolutionary text. He argued that the original script was marked by its

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<sup>34</sup> Kracauer, p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Kracauer, p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> Murray, p. 27.



limited capacity to imagine 'freedom' which, represented by the fair, 'is not freedom but anarchy entailing chaos'.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, he was not so clear on the finality of the film's conservative framing story. In the denouement, the asylum does not shake off the Expressionism of Francis' story; chimneys remains slightly askew when, 'from the philistines' viewpoint perpendiculars should have been expected to characterize the revival of conventional reality'.<sup>38</sup>

There are a number of other narrative overlaps between the fantasy and reality spaces that need to be mentioned. First, the three prominent staircases which signify the relations of institutional authority, remain the route to the head doctor's office. Second, the head doctor in the denouement is the only slightly more kempt Werner Krauss who played Caligari in Francis' story. Third, the good doctor is aware of the obscure and murderous mystic from the early eighteenth century. Fourth, the fey, flower-petting Cesare who resides in the asylum is in the same black, out of time, body-hugging clothing that he wears in Francis' fantasy. One then understands Kracauer's observation that, 'intentionally or not Caligari exposes the soul wavering between tyranny and chaos'.<sup>39</sup> In the regime of voyeuristic desire, or in a regime of identification, the ambiguity between totalitarian and democratic or even anarchic interpretation is not completely resolved.

There is a separate and significant continuity between the film's two treatments which escapes Kracauer's attention. This is Jane's status as the object of desire. Thomas Elsaesser's attempts to read within the 'textual boundaries' of the film settle on the competition over Jane so as to produce such readings. Within these terms, Caligari's 'behaviour towards Jane' can be read as 'that of the "dirty old man" exposing himself'. Therefore, the film is about a 'pathological relationship to

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<sup>37</sup> Kracauer, p. 73.

<sup>38</sup> Kracauer, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Kracauer, p. 74.

sexuality and political power'.<sup>40</sup> Alternatively, Francis and Allan are both suitors who have a gentleman's agreement to defer to Jane's choice in the matter. It follows that the story is potentially about Francis as the denied suitor, whose double in Cesare 'kills the rival and abducts the bride, acting out Francis' secret desire'. This reading also leads us down a certain path, where 'the investigation of the series of crimes culminates in the visual statement that the criminal is the alter ego of the detective story, the story of Oedipus in other words'. Realizing what he has done sends Francis into madness. These are, in part, valid readings, but Elsaesser adds to this a third reading where it is potentially Jane's story; in such a reading Caligari and her father are doubles, and 'Cesare' is the 'disavowed phallus-fetish'.<sup>41</sup>

Elsaesser's first two readings stand in an un-ambivalent relationship to the patriarchal predation of young women, but in an ambivalent relation to the Oedipal template. Jane does not desire the dirty old man nor does Allan's horror derive from incestuous desire. The third reading relies on something of an over reading to affirm the Oedipal template; he writes, 'Jane is motivated to visit Caligari by "her father's long absence"'.<sup>42</sup> In both the script and the film Jane goes to search for her father at the fairground. In the film, when she discovers her father is not at Caligari's tent, she turns to leave. This is when Caligari makes every effort to convince the reluctant girl to enter the tent and view Cesare in his cabinet. It appears that Caligari exploits Jane's care for her father, and her anxiety of his loss, to insinuate his own predatory desire, whatever that may be. Elsaesser's reading can only substitute Caligari for Jane's father by attributing a textually unfounded voluntarism to Jane.

As stated earlier, Elsaesser is not eager to defend these readings, so much as he wishes to point out that it is possible to produce them, and so read the text outside

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<sup>40</sup> Elsaesser, p. 78.

<sup>41</sup> Elsaesser, p. 79.

<sup>42</sup> Elsaesser, p. 80.



Kracauer's emphasis on 'German military dictatorship and its demonic, mesmerizing hold over an unsuspecting, somnambulist population'.<sup>43</sup> What I find curious is that an effort to read the film outside the historical relationships that govern its consumption, so quickly finds its way into the Oedipal morass.<sup>44</sup> The more Freudian, yet more questionable, third reading is meant to define the first and second readings as internal to the text and less plainly defined by historical forces. The Oedipal myth is used to displace the question of historical context and we are left to wonder why it is that male sexual predation of young women, or sexual competition between men, should indicate the narrative's independence from histories of fascism.<sup>45</sup>

By insisting on the significance of Jane within Kracauer's reading, Elsaesser raises a number of questions he cannot answer. In the film, it is Cesare's attempt to kill Jane which represents his first failure and so the first failure of the Doctor who controls him. The somnambulist draws his knife, but is then so overcome by Jane's beauty, or otherwise attracted to his object, that he drops the knife and touches her. While that touch never loses its sense of menace (it may even be an attempt to

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<sup>43</sup> Elsaesser, p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> Obviously, Freud's analysis of female sexuality was not strictly Oedipal. I think Elsaesser is inconclusively applying the template for an analysis of Jane, in much the same way that Freud inconclusively reworked the template for an understanding of female sexuality. See Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality', in *On Sexuality, PFL Vol. 7*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1977, 1991), pp. 367-392.

<sup>45</sup> There is, in fact, a considerable body of work on gender and fascism that makes the links Elsaesser does not here. See: Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Umberto Eco, 'Ur-Fascism', in *The New York Review Of Books*, 22 June 1995, pp.12-15; Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism & The Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996); Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *The Politics of the Visible: Writing Women, Culture and Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 vols., trans. by Stephen Conway (Vol. 1), Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Vol. 2) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 and 1989); Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder In Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).



strangle her), it inaugurates a rupture in the link between himself and his master Caligari. Jane's resistance sets off the alarm, and so causes Cesare to carry her off. Pursued by so many, he eventually sets her down to preserve himself. This also fails and, while running away, Cesare collapses and dies. This scene gets scarce attention in the critical literature and its elision seems essential to the maintenance of the dominant critical opposition between Wiene's conservative *Caligari* and Mayer and Janowitz's radical *Caligari*.

In Allan's fantasy or in filmic reality, Caligari's power over the somnambulist fails at the point where Cesare comes into contact with Jane. In that moment, however limited it might be, Cesare achieves some form of independent agency and takes possession of Jane's body. By ignoring this, Kracauer can paint and maintain a relatively uncomplicated portrait of the somnambulist masses. If we attend to Jane's significance under Kracauer's formulation of Cesare as a sign of the German masses' violence under hypnosis, then is Jane anything other than a sign for the Jews? And, if so, what becomes of the relative innocence that is ascribed to the masses when we understand them as somnambulists? Does the sleepwalker find his agency, does he accomplish his identification with the Sovereign, in his subjugation of the Jews? Alternatively, if Cesare does hold some limited agency within his somnambulism, and that agency is over the woman he desires, then should we read this as a comment on the role that patriarchal power has as an exception in the otherwise deep sleep of fascism?

Catherine Clement's 'Charlatans and Hysterics' is one of the few texts which attempts to engage with the complications presented by Jane's central role in the film. Her analysis focuses on the scene with Jane and Cesare:

There is, however, a bedroom in *Caligari*. It is a woman's bedroom, or rather a young woman's bedroom, the doctor's daughter. It is in the setting of this bedroom, filled with veils and transparencies, that the kidnapping will take place.



She continues:

the apparition in the window frame, the look of the monstrous being onto the sleeping young woman, the kidnapping and the act: so many of these signs are spread through the *Studies on Hysteria*, in the section titled *Histories of Patients*, in which stories abound, bits of feminine texts, filled with nocturnal terrors in stifling bourgeois bedrooms.<sup>46</sup>

Pointing out the glaring relationship between *Caligari* and the early Freud, or as she rightly calls it, the ‘common dramaturgy of *Caligari* and the dawn of psychoanalysis’ should be an essential contribution.<sup>47</sup> Disappointingly, Clement’s discussion sees Jane and Cesare’s interaction as the vector for an uncritical de-realization of narrative, where Jane’s story is broken down into a miasma of semiotic associations. While Clement identifies the common signs of the early Freud and *Caligari*, that tension is resolved in favor of the Freudian unconscious. While sexual abuse is understood as real in the early Freud, we are asked to read Jane’s story as fantasy, and rather ironically search out the figure of the ‘demoniac bourgeois’ in these fragments of text, stories and nightmares of a young girl. The diegesis is disregarded in favor of the associative displacements of dream interpretation.

Within the narrative terms of the two treatments, Jane is either the object of an actual assault by Caligari or by a fantasy assault in Allan’s troubled mind, but the evocation of the later Freud serves to authorize a reading that makes the assault *Jane’s* fantasy or dream. Clement invokes the early Freud only to enact a doubled displacement that effaces any history of patriarchal violence. Disconcertingly, Clement then proceeds to search for the hysteric’s knowledge of violence and patriarchal power, yet it is her own epistemological framework that has hidden it away. The arguments levelled against critics like Jeffrey Masson and Alice Miller,

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<sup>46</sup> Catherine Clement, ‘Charlatans and Hysterics’, in Budd, p. 195.

<sup>47</sup> Clement, p. 194.

that the later Freud does not assist in the denial of sexual abuse, begin to look significantly strained.<sup>48</sup> In a film narrative where a man's fantasy of violent assault, or another man's actual assault, is overt and uncontested, psychoanalytic approaches to the text manage to hide the violence away, so that they might discover it again in the realm of fantasy.

While Clement rightly identifies the glaring similarities between the early Freud and *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, their common subject matter grounds a patently uncritical assumption that the later Freud is the master narrative through which we should read *Caligari*. Despite the common dramaturgy, the idea that *Caligari* might suggest a reading of Freud is not even momentarily considered. The possibility that the early Freud and the original script of *Caligari* are providing radically different and competing interpretations of similar sets of issues, common to the experiences of their writers, is sidestepped. Similarly sidestepped is the question of why both these 'stories' required rewrites which cast the doctor as the therapeutic force in someone else's troubled mind, after the original narratives inscribe the doctor so firmly within a set of dubious practices. Like other critics, Clement's reliance on Freud hampers her ability to deal with the problems that exceed both texts and their rewrites, which is the doctor's historical relationship to power and authority.

These issues return an analysis somewhat insistently to Kracauer, who attempted to identify what was at stake in the figure of the doctor. In his patronizing discussion of the fulsome review of *Caligari* in *Vorwärts*, 'the leading Democratic Socialist Party organ' at the time of the film's release, Kracauer calls attention to the review's emphasis on the kindness of the doctors. The reviewer reads the doctors in

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<sup>48</sup> See Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1984).



terms of their selfless care for the mentally ill. For the *Vorwärts* critic, the film is 'morally invulnerable inasmuch as it evokes sympathy for the mentally diseased, and comprehension for the self-sacrificing activity of the psychiatrists and attendants'. Kracauer argues that the party chose to 'pass off authority itself as a paragon of progressive virtues', rather than recognize that Francis' critique 'harmonized with the Party's own anti-authoritarian doctrine'.<sup>49</sup>

Echoing Walter Benjamin's famous critique of the Social Democrats, in 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Kracauer suggests that the Social Democrat's response, similar to the film itself, replays the same 'psychological mechanism: the rationalized middle class propensities of the Social Democrats interfering with their rational socialist designs'.<sup>50</sup> Where Kracauer has the privilege of hindsight the Social Democrats were blinded by their faith in progress, which, in this instance, is understood as the humanistic advances of medical sciences and their institutions of care. The problem with Kracauer's analysis is that it does not investigate the specific alignments of the clinical framework within the very conflicts of power he cites. The doctor is, then, only a metaphor for the ideological conflict between socialist rationalism and ideological rationalizations. Doctor Caligari is only the filmic representation of the Marxist meta-narrative of material determination.

In both Clement and Kracauer's readings, the doctor functions as a representational conduit for competing ideas about ultimate authority. The material role of the professional and the institution in the production of those ideas is overlooked. Kracauer comes close to considering the matter, when he asserts that what must be rationalized rather than rationally defended, is the privilege of the professional classes, but this too quickly slides into general class terminology. On the

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<sup>49</sup> Kracauer, p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> Kracauer, p. 71; Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp253-264 (pp.258-259).

other hand, an assertion that the narrative of *Caligari* might function as little more than a commentary on the boundaries of medical authority, merely recommending that a doctor is not immune to the disorders that he cares for, is not viable. The film signifies within generalizable political discourses, since Caligari struggles with the very problem of rational authority. As I shall detail, Caligari pursues his inquiry into the possibilities of control over the somnambulist to overwrite the mystical power of the original Calligari with the authority of scientific knowledge. In this way, the text is most certainly about a general issue of rationality and truth, but it is also about the specific institutional constitution of such terms.

The death of Dr. Luders, the dismissive town clerk, so early in the film is instructive. Luders dies first because he failed to recognize the authority of the scientist as superior to that of his own bureaucratic office. As we will see, the argument is between science and violence not the scientist versus the bureaucrat. The death of Luders also complicates any critical reading that would render Caligari on the side of a conservative nostalgia for Sovereign rule in Germany. In killing the representative of governmental authority, Caligari seeks to depose the state or, at least, the state's restrictions on his own conduct. Taken further, the anachronistic Biedermeier costume of so many fair attendants places us somewhere in the nineteenth century. As Francis is also recalling these events from the past, the story reads as a memory from sometime before, so that one could read Caligari's murder of Luders as effectively rejecting the authority of the Kaiser.

In relation to this, one could recommend a reading of the film where Dr. Caligari is understood as an agent of the 'conservative modernism', which characterized National Socialism and fascism, rather than the sovereign rule of the emperor. In such a reading, Caligari might represent a tyrannical scientific authority,



a potential bio-political dictator.<sup>51</sup> This reading would support the interpretation of the original script's 'democratic' intent, as the tyrant Caligari's excesses are corrected by the investigation of citizens, doctors and police. Thus, the singular and dictatorial authority of science and its unimpeded, annihilating progress are curtailed by the co-ordination of social institutions, and Caligari is rightly imprisoned. What would make this narrative 'radical', as Kracauer and some critics after him have suggested, rather than simply Liberal, is less clear. At best, the film portrays a quite charming and naive faith in the co-operation of everyone involved. The police, the doctors and the citizens all work together, with little concern for their own bureaucratic territory or hierarchies of authority. The junior doctors of the asylum virtually surrender it to Francis when he registers his suspicion that the murderer and the director are the same person. We could take this to suggest a radically democratic co-operation between the people, but this interpretation is inconsistent with Francis' need for the assistance of Dr. Olfens, Jane's father, to get the attention of the authorities at all. Francis and Dr. Olfens function as Jane's representatives before the authorities. Thus, the film portrays a power distribution that ultimately rests on designations of social rank. As John Barlow writes:

the attendants of the institution scarcely rise above the conception of "little men in white suits." The other minor characters are just as typical: outraged citizens excited in apprehending a public enemy, authoritarian police who are properly deferential in the company of the respectable, a town clerk who is a pompously harassed bureaucrat. The supporting characters behave as prescribed by their social roles.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> On fascism and 'conservative modernism' see Eco; Mark Neocleous, *Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991); and Stanley G. Payne, 'Review Article, Historical Fascism and the Radical Right', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35 (2000), 109-118.

<sup>52</sup> Barlow, p. 43.

All of this occurs in an environment where such hierarchies are symbolically rendered in the sets, from the staircases to the differential seating heights of policemen or town officials.

Dr. Caligari does not advocate or demonstrate any social or eugenic agenda for his medical authority. Dr. Luders undoubtedly failed to show Caligari respect and was killed, but there is little else to recommend reading Caligari as signifying the authority of a government in waiting. Instead, the film could hardly be more explicit about the fact that Caligari was singularly overcome by the demands of scientific inquiry; he pursued the authority of science itself. Somnambulism was ‘his special field of study’; it was ‘the irresistible passion of [his] life’ which was being fulfilled in the chance to ‘unravel the psychiatric secrets of this Calligari!’ His goal was not to put violence in the service of his own extra-professional interests, nor even to put violence in the service of science, but to discover the truth about the violence enacted by the mystic.

When Cesare arrives in the institution, the Doctor proclaims:

Now I shall learn if it is true that a somnambulist can be compelled to perform acts which in a waking state would be abhorrent to him [...] whether in fact, he can be driven against his will to commit murder.

The test should function to uncover the mystic’s ability, either as a fraud or as an undiscovered psychiatric skill of manipulation. In unlocking such powers of manipulation, the Doctor also revises the historical record and effectively expropriates the authoritative power and terror of the mystic. The demand for such an act does only originate in the already demented mind of the doctor. To the extent that the story of Calligari is found in the academic tome “‘Somnambulism’: A Compendium of the University of Upsala’, which has a publication date of 1726, the mystery already resides within the field of empirical enquiry. He has even hidden the relevant research on somnambulism away in an office cabinet, doubling the title’s



point of reference; one cabinet conceals Cesare's murderous actions and the other conceals the need for, and motivation behind, the murders. Only when Cesare is admitted, and the diagnosis of somnambulism made, is the director of the asylum overcome with the demands and conflicts of what is implied by the necessities of scientific investigation.

The shame signified by the act of concealment derives from the need to violate the taboo of violence, in order to resolve the investigation. Without Cesare, sovereign rule and the monopoly on violence sit in an uneasy balance with the authority of empirical enquiry. Once Cesare is admitted, the Doctor now possesses the necessary tools for an experiment in authority over violence itself. It follows that he should struggle with himself so profoundly when the somnambulist first arrives at the institution. His arm pulls away from his body and is beyond his control. He is divided against himself until he submits to the idea that he 'must become Caligari'.<sup>53</sup> The inter-title makes clear what is at stake: 'I must know everything, I must penetrate the heart of his secret, I must become Calligari'.

Kracauer notes that the slogan 'You must become Caligari' provided the basis for Decla's pre-release promotional campaign in 1920.<sup>54</sup> To an audience that has not yet seen the film, such a 'puzzling' campaign pre-emptively offers the discursive sign of the asylum director's madness as interpretation before the event

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<sup>53</sup> It is noteworthy that Peter Sellers repeated this gesture in his performance of the title character of Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove*, and essentially made it famous. The former Nazi and nuclear physicist, a confluence of scientific and violent authority, is an advisor to the President of the United States and is similarly divided against himself. His mechanical arm engages in involuntary Nazi salutes that the rest of him attempts to suppress.

<sup>54</sup> Kracauer, p. 71. This aspect of the campaign was also significant to the *The Times*' Berlin correspondent, who similarly suggested that all Berlin had been 'puzzled' by the campaign: 'An "Expressionist" Film. German Melodrama. Desire For Simple Fare', *The Times*, 23 March, 1920, p.12.

itself.<sup>55</sup> The promotional decision, made by people familiar with the script, if not the film itself, can be said either to recognize or attempt to produce some kind of discursive resonance in the phrase. How are we to become Caligari? We cannot adopt the specific madness of the scientist in question, but we can find ourselves implicated in the battle of modernity contra mysticism.

The mystic Caligari represents an anomaly in the discursive cohesion of modernity, and Doctor Caligari's efforts represent an unbridled attempt to resolve that anomaly. It would be a mistake to understand this as a minor anomaly. The importance of this particular conversion is that the power of violence is at stake. We are not unfamiliar with the need to subject anything mysterious to the authority of rational explanation, but here the subjection that must occur is that of embodied violence and its uses for the authority of bio-political discourse.

Allan's murder, effectively unmotivated, only represents the purest experiment in this order. The murder of Dr. Luders and the attempt to murder Jane, understood as revenge upon her interfering father Dr. Olfens, are less perversions of the experiment, and more choices already inscribed within the logic of the investigation. To establish the authority of science over mysticism, any questioning of the scientific apparatus is impermissible. Science must achieve an unquestionable status. It must colonize and discipline those exceptional forms of pre-modern power understood as mystical or religious, before they can take the form of the Sovereign exception, thus guaranteeing the social order.

Dr. Caligari seeks to establish the autonomous authority of scientific thought through the appropriation of violence. The film thus narrates a specific transfer of power, from the discourse of religious or mystical authority underwriting the emperor, to the discourse of rational scientific inquiry, which underwrites the

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<sup>55</sup> Kracauer, p. 71. Kracauer calls the slogan 'puzzling'.



authority of the professional classes and the bourgeoisie under democracy. What is so exceptionally demonstrative about *Caligari* is the way it represents a space and time in which the enclosures of scientific discourse are by no means codified. Not only does Francis suspect the Doctor on the basis of his own empirical witness, but the town clerks also dismiss him; indeed, his own underlings do not hesitate to investigate his dubious actions. The social authority of the scientist is relatively unestablished and demands consolidation.

The violence in question is not put in the service of an individual, but put in the service of an idea. The asylum director's work does not represent a megalomaniacal pursuit of power, but the pathological dimensions of a scientific rationality which pursues its own ends, independent of any primary social-political mediation. Subjected to discourse in this way, the director becomes both agent and instrument. In the moment when he is overcome by obsession and loses his own sanity, Dr. Caligari loses all agency as a scientist and becomes the experiment itself. The command that '[he] must become Caligari' is literally written in the air around him as he flees his office into the park. The meta-narrative he serves visually materializes. Caligari is so subject to rational scientific discourse that he is stripped of all agency external to that discourse. With each attempt to seize the hallucinatory command that torments him, the words disappear only to reappear elsewhere outside his grasp.<sup>56</sup> Agency resides in discourse and its appropriation of violence, not in the body of its practitioner.

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<sup>56</sup> In the original script, Caligari chasing the elusive words, only finally to get hold of them. That this should suggest an original intent to mark his agency is troubled by the fact that the film has Caligari grabbing the letters and placing them one by one into the pocket of his lab coat, patting the pocket and then going happily on his way. In effect, rather than subverting the command, he only incorporates the idea that torments him, and he is no longer tormented. If that happiness signified a humanistic agency over scientific discourse, then we would not be able to explain why he carries on with his 'experiment'. See Robinson, *Das Cabinet*, p. 72.

The film is not a simple text on authority, but a complicated narrative about the appropriation and modulation of violence through discursive technologies. The film represents anxieties of subjectivity within an emergent bio-political regime. The original script makes an explicit link between the professional, sovereign power, and an encroaching bio-political order of things. Francis' suspicion can be said to demonstrate a radical critical agency against a discursive regime that would subordinate the subject to the meta-narrative force of scientific rationality, rather than subjugating science to the political force of human communities.

The framing story, the film that is finally made, recasts that narrative, so that the legitimacy of scientific enquiry is affirmed through the installation of a caring humanism at its centre. Francis' delusional horror does not simply affirm a generic authority, which can be ascribed to the Emperor or any new master. Instead, the framing story affirms the specific form of discursive authority that constitutes the democratic subject. The framing story affirms the humanist ethics of care that underwrites the advancing bio-political state, whereas Francis' fantasy, however clumsily, attempts to inscribe a trans-historical relationship between violence and authority, within the body of the bio-political practitioner. The mad delusion from which Francis suffers is one where the authority of the clinical practitioner rests on the appropriation of the power of violence.

### *The Aetiology of Hysteria*

As we have seen, what Clement rightly identifies as the 'common dramaturgy' between the early Freud and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* has functioned implicitly and explicitly to invite Freudian interpretations of Caligari. Such readings have managed to overlook the central role and significance of the clinical institution in Caligari. If, in attending to the clinic, we find a narrative about the relationships



between history, violence and scientific knowledge, it is more than reasonable to return that analysis to the common dramaturgy. In other words, we know what Freud does to *Caligari*, but the commonalities between the texts demand that we ask what *Caligari* does to Freud. Against the backdrop of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, and its explicit attention to the place of violence, we can perceive the more concealed engagement with violence found in Freud's paper, 'The Aetiology of Hysteria'. The 'Aetiology', however clumsily or unintentionally, serves to inscribe the historical relationships between violence and authority within the body of the clinician. As with *Caligari*, it follows that Freud's 'Aetiology' would similarly be re-written, with a heroic doctor as the agent of a positive resolution, a retelling which would serve to found modern psychoanalysis. The purpose of this comparison is two fold. In the first instance, the fictional representation of Dr. Caligari, as we have seen, foregrounds the relationship between scientific epistemology and sovereign violence. The second point builds on the first. Presenting the narrative of the 'Aetiology' in line with *Caligari* helps to contextualize the Freudian project as a dramatization of historical discursive relationships.

At the time Freud that set out to explain his own theory of hysteria, the dominant scientific view was that the disorder derived from a genetic inheritance.<sup>57</sup> A genetically weak and susceptible subject would react to negative stimuli with hysterical symptoms, whereas a stronger subject would properly cope. Against such views, which were held by the luminaries of his field such as his own mentor the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, as well as the sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Freud argued in 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' that hysteria was the result of a 'psychical conflict'. More specifically, hysterical symptoms manifested as part of the

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<sup>57</sup> See: Sander Gilman, *Freud, Race and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Elaine Showalter. *The Female Malady* (London: Virago 1987).



subject's attempt to eject the 'incompatible idea' from their consciousness. In his own words hysteria is the result of a '*psychical conflict* arising from the presence of the "incompatible idea" in the subject's consciousness. This conflict sets 'in action a *defence* on the part of the ego calling up a demand for repression'.<sup>58</sup> Freud argued that '*without exception*' '*no hysterical symptom can arise from a real experience alone*'. Instead, the real experience at the onset of hysteria, usually in adolescence, awakens the memory of earlier experiences through association.<sup>59</sup> Hysteria manifests when '*infantile sexual scenes are present in the (hitherto normal) subject in the form of unconscious memories, and if the idea to be repressed can be brought into logical or associative connection with an infantile experience of that kind*'.<sup>60</sup> This means that the adolescent develops hysteria when some word, act, sight, *etc.*, signifies in logical relation to the unconscious memory of the infantile sexual scene, thus threatening to surface the memory of an early sexual trauma. The hysterical symptom represents the subject's unsuccessful but ongoing battle to keep the memory repressed.

In this respect, the seduction theory is more complex than is sometimes allowed. Rather than proposing some sort of natural revulsion to sexual abuse that is strong enough to rupture the activity of an essential human consciousness, it is the associative relation that is operative in Freud's theory. The struggle to repress the memory of sexual abuse first requires that the subject have a particularly strong degree of revulsion to the idea of their subjection to sexual abuse. That revulsion is not part of an essential humanity, but is learned. In this way 'the Aetiology' is steeped, from the outset, in the discourse of class and the civilization process. The subject that is repulsed by sexual abuse is the subject acculturated in a context that

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<sup>58</sup> Freud, 'Aetiology', pp. 210-211.

<sup>59</sup> Freud, 'Aetiology', p. 197.

<sup>60</sup> Freud, 'Aetiology', p. 211.



understands sexual abuse to be an unacceptable violation. For Freud an understanding that would assume anything less fails to explain why it is that,

in the lower strata of the population hysteria is certainly no more common than in the highest ones, whereas everything goes to show that the injunction for the sexual safeguarding of childhood is far more frequently transgressed in the case of the children of the proletariat.<sup>61</sup>

Freud reproduces the bio-political prejudices common to the late nineteenth century European middle classes. As political and economic competition between nations and the expanding industrial machinery fostered a concern for the health of the under-classes, the clinical apparatus was imported into hitherto ignored socio-geographic contexts. Philanthropic and governmental agencies produced a database of maladies among the poor and sought to treat them. As Foucault argues, ‘the medicine of perversions and the programs of eugenics were the two great innovations in the technology of sex of the second half of the nineteenth century’. The circular logic of “degenerescence” provided for a self-referential series of associations, where the presence of sexual perversion indicated the familial inheritance of physical infirmity; this physical infirmity was the result of sexual perversion’s ‘depletion of one’s line of descent’.<sup>62</sup> Without the aid of comparative reporting on the middle and upper classes, fantasies of widespread proletarian sexual infraction circulated amongst the professional classes.<sup>63</sup>

Freud’s theory, then, needs to explain the predominance of hysterics amongst the middle and upper classes. If hysteria was the result of a direct trauma then one would, logically, find widespread cases in line with the widespread degeneration of

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<sup>61</sup> Freud, ‘Aetiology’, p. 207.

<sup>62</sup> Foucault, *History*, p. 119.

<sup>63</sup> See Foucault, *History*; Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York: Pantheon, 1979) Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000). See also, Masson, ‘Freud at the Paris Morgue’, *Assault*, pp. 14-54.



the under-classes. Against the ideological perception of prevalent proletarian sexual abuse, the distinction of middle class patients is their acculturation, in a context where sexual abuse is completely unacceptable. The middle and professional classes are precisely constituted through their revulsion against violence. Freud thus concludes that hysteria is a pathology of the norm. Its manifestation depends on the subject's rearing in moral contexts, where their sexual assault at the hands of family or servants is not simply physically traumatic, but discursively inadmissible. It follows that the older child, once faced with the sign that surfaces the unconscious memory stored from early childhood, cannot incorporate that memory into consciousness and continue to function. In effect, the memory of abuse threatens to tear apart the very fabric of consciousness and identity.

Rather than debate the relative clinical validity of Freud's theory, I am interested in how his theoretical framework places the medical profession in question. Freud's attempt to detail and explain his theory of hysteria, and the apparent contradiction that resides at its heart, functions to draw tighter and tighter circles around the bourgeois doctors, eventually rendering their subjectivity inescapably suspect. One might say that the narrative of 'The Aetiology' progresses in a predatory fashion. Sander Gilman's work has demonstrated why such an assertion would not be entirely speculative. His analysis of the young Jewish doctor's place at the turn of the century in Vienna also suggests that Freud was not unconcerned with redressing the discourses of degeneration, specifically those that described the alleged inheritances of racial pathology. Arguments such as those concerning the inferior nervous disposition of the Jews were not simply a racist affront, but they also threatened the value of his scientific contribution.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See Gilman, 'Freud and the Epistemology of Race', pp. 12-36. See also, Sigmund Freud, 'Preamble' in *The Interpretation of Dreams, PFL Vol. 4*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 217-218, where he recounts the anti-Semitic discrimination of the Minister of Education.



Gilman points out that ‘the language of race within’ the scientific discourses of the period, ‘underlies the rhetoric and structure of Freud’s discourse about difference. Especially in the medical faculty [Freud] found himself “expected to feel [...] inferior and an alien because” he was a Jew.<sup>65</sup> Even Freud’s own mentor, Charcot, identified Jewish bloodlines as particularly susceptible to neurotic pathology.<sup>66</sup> Such a racial hierarchy ambiguously includes Freud within the rational scientific regime of objective enquiry, at the same time that it qualifies his ability to carry out properly the protocols necessary for the development of objective knowledge. As early as 1889, ‘Freud attacked the widespread assumption that “nationality, race and geographical latitude” of a scientist attested to the truth or falsity of his or her science’.<sup>67</sup> For Gilman, these issues largely constitute Freud’s drive to transmute the era’s ‘rhetoric of race into the construction of gender’ -- ‘Freud translates the complicated pejorative discourse about the “dark” Jew with its suggestion of disease and difference into a discourse about the “blackness” (the unknowability) of the woman’.<sup>68</sup>

The above discussion indicates the presence and force of a racial discourse implicating hysteria and general pathology as determinate signs in ‘the great chain of being’.<sup>69</sup> The implied integrity of an inviolable national-religious boundary, with racial identity underwriting anti-Semitic discourses and their manifestations in scientific institutions, indicates the insistent presence of what Foucault refers to as the *ancien regime* and the more unrefined dimensions of its ‘blood politics’. For Gilman, Freud’s

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<sup>65</sup> Gilman, pp. 16-17.

<sup>66</sup> Gilman, p. 87.

<sup>67</sup> Gilman, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> Gilman, p. 38.

<sup>69</sup> See Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of An Idea* (London: Harvard, 1936).

dismissal of heredity as the cause of the neurosis provides a rationale for restructuring the concept of trauma, removing it from the world of daily life and centring it in the world of the sexual. Jews no longer will suffer from [...] signs of neurasthenia [...] purely because of their heredity, but because of sexual practices, such as masturbation, that are universal rather than particularly Jewish. By moving hysteria to the realm of the incestuous, Freud eliminates the trauma of circumcision, the most evident, “*precocious experience of sexual relations with actual excitement of the genitals, resulting from sexual abuse committed by another person,*” from the aetiology of the neurosis.<sup>70</sup>

Understanding the motive described by Gilman in terms of a contest of power within the discourse of blood politics, but one still underwritten by the Sovereign, we can see the way in which the clinical regime becomes a locus for struggles in subjection. To effect a ‘universal subject’ that includes the Jewish scientist, the Sovereign regime that automatically authorizes the gaze of the Aryan subject over the Jewish one, must be dissolved. ‘The Aetiology of Hysteria’ can be read as Freud’s first real attempt to displace the historical regime of Sovereign power in the way that Gilman describes.

Freud presented his argument to the Viennese Society for Psychiatry and Neurology in 1896, and so to an audience formed on the basis of exclusions along the axes of class and education. Freud’s own deployment of these exclusions is essential to an understanding of what took place. He continued his analysis into the social specificity of hysterical manifestations, its relative frequency amongst the ‘highest’, by asserting that it is ‘certain that *our children* are far more often exposed to sexual assaults than the few precautions taken by parents in this connection would lead us to expect’.<sup>71</sup> The use of ‘our children’ is provocative, to the extent that it makes an equivalence between Jewish bloodlines and ‘European’ bloodlines within a medical framework. More importantly, it marks the beginning of a gradual process,

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<sup>70</sup> Gilman, p. 89.

<sup>71</sup> Freud, ‘Aetiology’, p. 207.



where Freud strips the man of science of an unmarked subjectivity and progressively marks the ascendant bourgeoisie within a network of grotesquely primitive forms of behaviour.

Moving back in his discussion to the possible terms and severity of the secondary trauma necessary to the inception of hysteria, Freud lists the following:

an attempted rape, perhaps, which reveals to the immature girl at a blow all the brutality of sexual desire, or the involuntary witnessing of sexual acts between parents, which at one and the same time uncovers unsuspected ugliness and wounds childish and moral sensibilities alike, and so on.<sup>72</sup>

In this string of associations, demarcated only by commas, Freud casts what one might hope to understand as disparate sexual acts into a realm of similar, if not entirely commensurate, force relations. His construction of sexual acts assigns brutality to the natural order of a generalizable sexual desire. In his rendering, ‘rape’ only concentrates and focuses such brutality to deliver its significance within a single instance. Rape is a revelation of the brutality that is only more diffuse in normal sexual congress. Yet that brutality is not so diffuse that it cannot still be witnessed in sexual acts between parents. This ugliness wounds ‘childish *and* moral’ sensibilities. The reading that would seek to associate this ‘ugliness’ with some notion of Victorian prudishness appears, at best, incomplete since ‘moral sensibilities’ signify as repugnance for brutality. Brutality is what makes the sex act ugly.

If any ambiguity between the ugliness of violence versus the propriety of aesthetic exposure is left open, Freud moves swiftly into the critique of a hereditary disposition to hysteria. He argues that the idea that hysteria manifests in people who are ‘physically inadequate to meeting the demands of sexuality’ is necessarily threatened by the fact that it ‘of course, leaves hysteria in men out of account’.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Freud, ‘Aetiology’, p. 200.

<sup>73</sup> Freud, ‘Aetiology’, p. 201.

Which is to say that the theory cannot explain hysteria in men, as men are not subject to the demands, the brutality, of sexuality. It is men who enact that brutality of sexuality and women who are subject to it. Freud's constructions intervene on all sides to mark an act, which might otherwise reside in the natural biological order of things, within relations of violence and power. The objectivity derived to frame the act in such a manner is a humanistic empathy with the suffering object, the subject-to-violence. Such discursive alignments further support Gilman's argument about the transmutations of race into gender. In 'The Aetiology' Freud is placing himself in opposition to dominant discursive frameworks, through identification with the subject-to-violence.

Jeffrey Masson makes this the heroic act that Freud eventually betrays. For Masson the publication of 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' is 'an act of great courage'.<sup>74</sup> Where others had dismissed the stories of their hysteric patients, Freud listened empathically. For Masson, the refusal of the learned men of the society is an act of patriarchal arrogance and a conspiracy of silence.<sup>75</sup> Much like the critiques of *Caligari's* rewrite, little attention is paid to the specific scientific implications of Freud's narrative, despite the theatre of presentation. By naming sex as essentially demanding for women and more generally 'brutal' and 'ugly', Freud irretrievably inscribes male sexuality within a regime of violent domination. What could have been supposed as a natural patriarchal order, and so not characterized by intent, becomes a kind of sadism. If one were to accept Freud's terms then morality, understood partly in terms of repugnance for cruelty and violence, would rebound on the men of the Society for Psychiatry and Neuropathology, implicating their relations with women. Female sexuality becomes the compulsory submission to masculine

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<sup>74</sup> Masson, *Assault*, pp. xxx-xxxii.

<sup>75</sup> Masson, *Assault*, pp. 189-193.



violence and the civilized man of science is not so much the deserving subject of modernity as he is its tyrant.

Freud explained the prevalence of hysteria in the higher classes through reference to various sources, supporting the assertion that 'nurses and nursery maids' carry out dubious acts 'even on infants in arms'; he also takes step-by-step care to undo the necessary ascription of such horrors to the trespasses of the proletariat. In doing so, Freud, intentionally or otherwise, implicates his audience, the scientific community, in more than general terms. He divides his cases into three groups, marked by the distinct origin of the trauma. The first group are single, isolated instances of assault 'mostly practiced on female children, by adults who were strangers, and who, incidentally, knew how to avoid inflicting gross mechanical injury'.<sup>76</sup> The word 'incidentally' focuses our attention more than it indicates a negligible aside; Freud seems to be describing a kind of training or skill. One could surmise that he is imagining skills of predation shared by such assailants, or imagining that such the skills come with knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the human body, necessarily shared by the Viennese scientists. Furthermore, the singular and isolated aspects of the assault carried out by strangers does not solely describe the types of interactions that generally characterize relationships between clinicians and patients, but does to some degree select for such forms of contact.

The second group closes the circle even tighter. This 'consists of the much more numerous cases in which some adult looking after the child -- a nursery maid or governess or tutor, or unhappily all too often, a close relative -- has initiated the child into the sexual intercourse and maintained a regular love relationship with it'. The

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<sup>76</sup> Freud, 'Aetiology', p. 208.

third group consists of relations between two children of different sexes, 'mostly a brother and sister' who often continued relations 'beyond puberty'.<sup>77</sup>

While the three categories arguably allow the bourgeois doctor some leeway to disavow any personal implications of the theory, Freud effectively shuts down the opportunity for the prevalence of multiple aetiologies. He follows his set of distinctions with the assertion that 'in most of my cases I found that two or more of these aetiologies were in operation together; in a few instances the accumulation of sexual experiences coming from different quarters were truly amazing'. In the expanding network of abuse, if one finds a dubious servant assaulting a child, one is as likely to find a dubious stranger or relative victimizing the same child. Further, if the third group leaves the doctors out of account, he makes sure to point out that in such cases of brother-sister relations the boy, who usually 'played the part of the aggressor--had previously been seduced by an adult of the female sex'. It follows that 'children cannot find their way to acts of sexual aggression unless they have been previously seduced'.<sup>78</sup> The requirement of a perpetrator in every instance extends the pathological presence of sexual perversion in the given family by at least one. The chain of abuse works its way through the family almost as a kind of training; efforts to inscribe the practice of sexual abuse in the province of constitutional otherness are prevented. Anyone with a hysteric in the family is immersed in a self-perpetuating web of sexual abuse; they are as likely to have been the object of abuse as they are likely to be its agent.

We can debate the problems and the merits of these claims, as many have done, with reference to the empirical evidence, or we can examine the field of power that Freud has ventured into. Kraft-Ebing's telling dismissal of 'The Aetiology', 'It

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<sup>77</sup> Freud, 'Aetiology', p. 208.

<sup>78</sup> Freud, 'Aetiology', p. 208.



sounds like a scientific fairytale', provided an early indication of where things were heading.<sup>79</sup> His choice of words evokes the familiar theme of children who meet with evil figures and horrible consequences, but they also locate such horrors in a mythical, even mystical history of 'once upon a time'. The comment does not represent a cross-examination of Freud's theory, but a dismissal based on the theory's ambivalent position between the mythological past and the ever-so-modern scientific present. In this way, it captures Freud's co-residence in the regime of alliance and the modern regime of bio-politics.

As Foucault identified, the discourse of racial biology was the central mechanism in the self-preservation of the regime of alliance. The drive behind eugenic concerns and discourses of bodily health was a concern to preserve the ruling class's distinct capacity for that position. It represents the absolutist state's ideology of divine rights transmuted into biological discourse. It followed that the expanding concentration on sex was due to the fact that 'analysis of heredity was placing sex [...] in a position of "biological responsibility" with regard to the species'.<sup>80</sup> In Freud's aetiological schematic, a family riddled with illness does not bear out the importance of heredity in the development of hysteria. Rather, it affirms a '*pseudo-heredity*' resulting from the frequent contact between 'brothers and sisters and cousins'.<sup>81</sup> Freud seizes upon the tactical importance of sexual perversion as a pathological vector, and attempts to convert a biological inheritance to social pathology. If accepted, that conversion would displace the specific authority of the Christian-European species and so the implicit and explicit discursive limits on a Jewish doctor's access to objectivity.

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<sup>79</sup> See Masson, *Assault*, p. 9. [Kraft-Ebing's comment was recounted by Freud. Masson references Max Schur, *Freud: Living and Dying* (New York: International University Press, 1972), p. 104.]

<sup>80</sup> Foucault, *History*, p. 118.

<sup>81</sup> Freud, 'Aetiology', p. 209.

Or perhaps not. Freud's proposed progression of abuse not only challenges the integrity of the doctors assembled before him; his construction of hysteria abstractly challenges the pretensions of a whole class. Rather than consolidate a universal human species, Freud threatens the entire project by re-inscribing histories of power within the discourse of science. For Freud, hysteria is a pathology of the norm; it manifests in the subject who is the object of abuse, but has been acculturated to believe, not only that sexual abuse is wrong, but that it could not happen to her. The children of the under-classes are marked by their more or less routine subjection to violence, sexual or otherwise; they exist at the periphery of the civilizing process and, as violence represents no surprise, it represents no distinctive psychological danger. As detailed in the last chapter, the authority of the professional classes rests on the transmutation of regulatory violence into non-violent forms; their distinction is their lack of violence. The bourgeois child who manifests hysteria not only attests to the existence of violence where it should not be, but attests to the lie that underwrites bourgeois authority.

In this way, the discursive structure of 'The Aetiology' not only includes everyone in the perpetration of violence, but in a self-interested regime of intellectual fraud and criminal collusion. Rather than break down the boundary that excluded the Jewish doctor from objectivity, every doctor was inscribed within the history of violence. Every doctor had a touch of the hysteric in him, and so none could claim access to an uncorrupted objectivity.

On another level, Freud's theory also consolidated his own intellectual marginalization. The only exception in the web of perversion is Freud himself. His investigation starts out from an inclusive 'we', the bourgeoisie, only to discover that there is violence among 'us' that is unexpected and unacceptable. His discoveries of the frequency of the transgression show Freud as previously unaware, and therefore



innocent, at the same time as he proclaims everyone else's secret. Discursively invested in inclusion, Freud only reverses the terms of his exclusion. His ability to see what is taking place rests on a prior exclusion from the social networks of abuse. His analytical innocence mimes his ethnic marginalization, and, speaking from his affinity with the oppressed, he represents to the Society the distress of a subject that is discursively precluded from representing itself.<sup>82</sup>

Freud's eventual renunciation of 'The Aetiology' was based on a set of integrated problems, not least of which was 'the surprise that in all cases, the *father*', including his own, 'had to be accused of being perverse'.<sup>83</sup> With this recognition Freud re-assimilates himself into the scientific community and the Viennese bourgeoisie. His claim could only stand if he was not a member of the social networks he described. On an objective level, if every scientist was caught in the web of hysteria, then so was he. His own access to objectivity is potentially precluded, hence his claims are potentially invalid.<sup>84</sup> From the standpoint of the oppressed, his theory is about the mechanics of power. From the standpoint of science, his theory is self-cancelling.

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<sup>82</sup> It is necessary to acknowledge the critical influence of Gayatri Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 271-309, (p. 296).

<sup>83</sup> See Freud, 'September 21, 1897', p. 264.

<sup>84</sup> It is wrong to suggest, as Masson does, that this is merely a matter of Freud's careerist ambitions. The point is that Freud's careerist ambitions are inextricably locked into the marginalization and/or assimilation of the Jews. If we momentarily put debates about the merits of assimilation aside, it is as easy to understand Freud as a self-interested power-monger, as it is to understand him as a heroic, and immensely clever, fighter in the struggle for the cultural acceptance of Jewish...er um...men.

*You Must Become Caligari*

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was a major international success upon its release, and continued to be successful for a number of years. It is now (notwithstanding its hallowed place in the sub-cultural repertoire of “Goth” devotees) less specifically noted as a popular cultural reference point, when compared to the other films discussed in this thesis. Today, *Caligari* is remembered more for its groundbreaking stylistic impact than for its narrative content. Nevertheless, it continues to run globally in repertory cinema and new video editions are released regularly.<sup>85</sup> Its popularity persists in part due to students of film itself, whether these are the fans of the horror genre who have become students of the genre, the film history buff, or formal film students suffering compulsory classroom screenings. One recent DVD release of the film is even packaged within a 12 DVD box set of silent films that are not so much “classics” as they are ‘The History of Cinema’.<sup>86</sup> *Caligari* is proffered as foundational and as a relic. At the same time historical readings accrue to *Caligari* in such a way that it has become a cherished object for film historians. *Caligari* is a text framed by the demand to objectify it aesthetically and historically.

I suggest that the demand for its objectification has more to do with the narrative than is often allowed. While *Caligari* lacks the didacticism of films like *The Birth of a Nation* or *Battleship Potemkin*, it clearly engages with the issue of fantasy, and seems to rebel against the psychoanalytic templates of film spectatorship and analysis.<sup>87</sup> In her seminal essay, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Laura

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<sup>85</sup> In addition to the Eureka Video edition (1999) used for this chapter, the last few years have seen at least another two editions for European release, one by Delta Music (2004) and one by Image Entertainment (1997).

<sup>86</sup> ‘The History of Cinema’ dir. various, perf. various. Delta Music Inc. (2004). The set includes other essentials like *Battleship Potemkin*, *Metropolis* and *The Birth of A Nation*.

<sup>87</sup> *Battleship Potemkin*, dir. Sergei Eisenstein, perf. Aleksandr Antonov, Vladimir Barsky, Grigori Aleksandrov,



Mulvey acknowledges cinema's ability to assist in the articulation of resistance, but insists that this resistance is the exception.<sup>88</sup> She argues that a 'politically and aesthetically avant garde cinema' is possible, but 'can still only exist as a counterpoint' to 'mainstream' production.<sup>89</sup> The mainstream or classical mode of film is defined in terms of a screen identification which hinges on the dissolution of self effected by the context of a darkened theatre.<sup>90</sup>

*Caligari* holds both the fantasy identification and its critique within the same text. The spectator is asked to grapple with the violence that historically constitutes the very regime of care they are asked to affirm by the denouement. In its ambivalent attempt to expose the role of violence in the history of the clinic, *Caligari* implicates the structure governing the fantasy of modern subjectivity itself. The spectator is forced to look up and take notice, as the narrative bars the potential for screen identification and produces a momentary dissolution of the self. It is, in this way, a mainstream narrative, which is also its own avant-garde counter-point. The dialectic itself is cradled within the narrative, demanding a form of objectification that extends well beyond aesthetics or history.

In his conversations with the French theorist Paul Virilio, the Canadian film maker, Atom Egoyan, argued against the classical mode of film spectatorship, insisting that it was

now possible to find that same level of excitement and transcendence through an identification of the screen as something which is *objectified*. Because that is closer to our experience now and it answers more vitally a question which I

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Goskino, 1925; *The Birth of a Nation*, dir. D.W. Griffith, perf. Lillian Gish, Mae Marsh, Henry Walthall, David W. Griffith Corp. 1915.

<sup>88</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22-34.

<sup>89</sup> Mulvey, p. 23.

<sup>90</sup> Mulvey, p. 25.

think is invited by the screen image: why do we need to look? Why do we need to watch anything? In a world where we are overwhelmed by images, what is the purpose of seeing something else?<sup>91</sup>

I wonder whether one could apply the same understanding to those who experienced the screen image of *Caligari* as something novel and new. *Caligari's* audiences were not versed in classical cinema such that they should come to objectify a regime of spectatorship, simply because it saturated their lives. Instead, could they have approached the text with the same set of questions precisely because it was so new? Did they ask of the text, 'what does it want from me?' And if it wanted the spectator to become Caligari, were they not also asked to make peace with the violence that subtended that position?

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<sup>91</sup> Atom Egoyan and Paul Virilio, 'Video Letters', in *Atom Egoyan*, ed. by Carol Desbarates and others, trans. by Brian Holmes (Paris: Edition Dis Vior, 1994), pp. 105-117, (pp. 114-115).



### THREE

## VIOLENCE, SEX AND GENDER IN *THE SHEIK*

#### *Introduction*

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was closely followed by an American production with a slightly more appreciative view of violence. George Melford's 1922 film, *The Sheik*, did not so much critique the appropriations of violence that underwrite the civilizing process as suggest the value of Sovereign despotism.<sup>1</sup> In both the film and the book upon which the film was based, the narrative revolves around the young English aristocrat Diana Mayo, who has rejected men and marriage only to haughtily pursue masculine interests.<sup>2</sup>

The story begins in the colonial Algerian city of Biskra, where the orphan Diana, who is in the charge of her older brother, has reached majority, and despite the objections of the men in her life, has decided to travel unescorted into the desert. 'Unescorted' here refers to a lack of Western male companions; Diana does travel with a complement of north-African servants. Once in the Sahara she is kidnapped, imprisoned and raped by Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan. While Diana initially resists the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sheik*, dir. George Melford, per. Rudolph Valentino, Agnes Ayers. Famous Players/Lasky Corporation, 1921. (This chapter has used the 2002 DVD edition published by Image Entertainment Inc.)

<sup>2</sup> E.M. Hull, *The Sheik* (London: Virago Press, 1996). All my citations will refer to this edition.

Sheik, she eventually falls in love, at the same time that the Sheik is beginning to have doubts about the rectitude of his actions. After a few twists, such as an extended visit from the Sheik's Western school chum, the French novelist Raoul de Saint Hubert, and then Diana's kidnapping and rescue from another Arab who, though considerably less attractive than Ahmed, has essentially the same plans for Diana, the mutual devotion of the captor and captive is declared and cemented.

While *The Sheik* is not the first example of such a dire narrative, its phenomenal success served to popularize what is now nothing less than a narrative cliché. More than this, *The Sheik* is firmly situated within pre- and post-war discourses of Western over-civilization and crises of gender definition. In *The Sheik* Western culture is marked by its failure to violently enforce historical codes of conduct, particularly gender codes. Western culture is in danger of forgetting the necessity of violence and so threatens to come undone. In contrast to this, totalitarian violence promises to rein in and correct the unfettered excess of enlightenment rationality, namely in the area of gender equality and ambiguity. Nonetheless, *The Sheik's* use of the Oriental despot does not directly propose a return to historical modes of rule, but serves rather to transfer the authorial violence of the absolute state to the field of sexual relations. As I shall argue in this chapter, the integration of the despot into a modern romantic love narrative represents a significant popular manifestation of the conservative modernism at the heart of fascism.<sup>3</sup>

Where *Caligari* narrated the violent authorization of scientific discourse, *The Sheik* reconstitutes gender as a relation of power, violence and modern romance. Modern love is re-understood as an expression of a primitive and transcendent desire

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<sup>3</sup> See Mark Neocleous, *Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991); Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).



that modern civilization potentially perverts. In this way, *The Sheik* enacts the same elision of historical-political conflict as Freud and the German Social Democrats, but where they saw violence as an unfortunate and undesirable force in modern life, *The Sheik* enacts a perverse nostalgia for its utility and exactitude. The Orient serves as a reservoir of the primitive, the Romantic and natural culture the West has abandoned or lost, and the despot rests at the boundary as the inverted image of the democrat. That he should exercise his power in the field of sexuality and gender is symptomatic of the bio-political transfer of authority to the micro-political realm of the domestic; the narrative resides within the discursive interstices of the regime of alliance and the regime of bio-politics. The film is, of course, famous for its insistence on the priority of a masculinity that retains a touch of the savage. As I shall demonstrate, in its re-inscription of the primitive and naturalization of gendered power relationships, *The Sheik* is productive of a modern heteronormativity which renounces the same violence that it encodes as the natural determinant of its categorizing axis.

### *The Sheik as Popular Phenomenon*

George Melford's 1922 film not only instituted the stardom of Rudolph Valentino, but also represents one of the most popular cultural phenomena of the twentieth century. E.M. Hull's 1919 novel was advertised as 'a story of the desert' which 'will startle Mrs. Grundy', and it attracted controversy as it broke sales records in England.<sup>4</sup> Alison Light writes that the book's sales surpassed 'all other best-selling novels in the (inter-war) period put together', running into 108 editions between 1919 and 1923.<sup>5</sup> Nicola Beaman describes the book as 'the nearest thing to

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<sup>4</sup> 'Nash's New Novels', *The Times*, 14 November 1919, p.18.

<sup>5</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 175.

pornography written by any of the inter-war female writers'.<sup>6</sup> Condemned as 'poisonously salacious' in *The Literary Review*, the book was one of a number of post-war sex novels Radclyffe Hall's future tormentor James Douglas decried in *The Daily Express*. Books such as Hull's 'turned marriage into a mockery' and 'glorified lust and lechery' in a manner that did nothing less than make 'the world safe for pornocracy'.<sup>7</sup> Such 'Vendors of Vice', 'Hookworms of Salacity' and 'Literary Lepers' were part of 'the ten plagues let loose upon' England by the war.<sup>8</sup> *The New York Times* received the book with more tepid condescension. It noted that though written with a 'high degree of literary skill', such skill was applied in a manipulative manner to produce a 'preposterous' story that could only appeal to the 'unthinking young misses' with 'undeveloped tastes'.<sup>9</sup> For other critics it was 'low' and base: 'Q.D. Leavis typified the class contempt in her judgement of it as 'a typist's day dream'.<sup>10</sup> The successive print runs, with lower and lower cover prices, brought the book to more and more women, though supply could still not keep up with demand.<sup>11</sup>

Hull's novel was released in the US in 1921 and became the year's sixth best selling work of fiction. In 1922, the year of the film's release, it finished as the second best seller.<sup>12</sup> Despite the vitriol and the condescension heaped upon it, the novel is now one of a handful generally considered to have inaugurated the modern

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<sup>6</sup>Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-1939* (London, Virago, 1983), pp.188-189.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Karen Chow, 'Popular Sexual Knowledges and Women's Agency in 1920's England: Marie Stopes's *Married Love* and E.M. Hulls *The Sheik*', *Feminist Review*, 63 (1999), 64-87 (p. 81).

<sup>8</sup> Chow, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> 'Latest Works of Fiction: *The Sheik*', *New York Times*, 1 May 1921, p. 51.

<sup>10</sup> Light, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Chow, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Lois Gordon and Alan Gordon, 'The 1920's', in *The Columbia Chronicles of American Life, 1910-1992* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 96-189 (p.115): (p. 124).



romance genre.<sup>13</sup> The contemporary best selling romance writer Jayne Ann Krentz, who is also something of the genre's recognized organic intellectual, is quoted on the cover of the most recent American reprint of *The Sheik*: 'This was the first real romance novel I ever read and it changed my life.'<sup>14</sup> Underneath her words there is a still from the film in which Valentino glares at a fearful Agnes Ayers.

*The Sheik* represents an origin within an industry that still managed to generate \$1.63 billion in American sales for the year of 2002. To put such a figure in context, it should be noted that the romance industry accounts for 53.3% of 'all popular paperback fiction sold in North America' or, if, one excludes children's books, 18% of *all* books sold.<sup>15</sup> Within this, even now proliferating genre, the desert captive theme is more than persistent, representing an effective sub-genre. Recent titles include *The Sheik's Kidnapped Bride*, *Sheikh's Ransom*, *The Falcon and the Dove* and *Desert Man*, among countless others all containing plots that borrow in part, if not entirely, from the original.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Chow; Patricia Raub, 'Issues of Passion and Power in E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*', *Women's Studies*, 21 (1992), 119-128; Evelyn Bach, 'Sheik Fantasies: Orientalism and Feminine Desire in the Desert Romance', *Hecate*, 23 (1997), 9-40.

<sup>14</sup> E.M. Hull, *The Sheik* (New York: Pine Street Books, 2001); Jayne Ann Krentz ed. *Dangerous Men & Adventurous Women: Romance Writers On The Appeal of the Romance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> 'RWA Industry Statistics', Romance Writers of America, (2002) <<http://www.rwanational.org/statistics.cfm>> [accessed 15 March 2004].

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Faith, *Desert Man* (New York: Silhouette, 1994); Susan Mallery, *The Sheik's Kidnapped Bride* (New York: Harlequin, 2004); Alexandra Sellers, *Sheikh's Ransom* (New York: Silhouette, 1999); Bonnie Vanak, *The Falcon and the Dove* (New York: Dorchester Publishing, 2002). One can also refer to the remarkably well maintained site *Sheiks and Desert Love: A Database of Romance Novels* (2004) <<http://sheikhs-and-desert-love.com/index.htm>> [accessed 1 March 2004], to get a picture of the extent of the genre. Also, my use of the word 'countless' should be taken somewhat literally here; 'series romances', such as those typically published by *Harlequin and Mills and Boon*, are essentially disposable and the titles go out of print almost as fast as they come in. According to the Romance Writers of America, there were 2,169 romance titles published in 2002 alone.



Perhaps predictably, the film and its sequel, also an adaptation of a Hull sequel novel, had to contend with an audience of what *The Times* referred to as the ‘Hullites’, who are ‘careful for the text of their prophet’.<sup>17</sup> In the event, the film made over \$3 million for Paramount Pictures, which was a significant amount for a film at the time.<sup>18</sup> More importantly, its mythic status was instant and massive. Reports of women fainting in the aisles quickly became part of its reputation and police across the US were said to be searching for numerous young runaways reportedly heading for the Sahara.<sup>19</sup> Libraries tried to cope with a ‘sudden rush’ of popular interest in Arabs and Arabia.<sup>20</sup> The very word ‘sheikh’ was popularized by the phenomenon, earning itself a second entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as it came to designate ‘a type of strong romantic lover; a ladykiller’.<sup>21</sup> As Marjorie Garber points out, the tag line on the film’s American poster campaign ‘Shriek – For The Sheik Will Seek You Too!’ made ‘sure audiences knew how to pronounce the new term’ and may also explain the differences in American and British

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Evelyn Bach’s article provides a very good summary of the desert captive subgenre and while it acknowledges the prototypical significance of *The Sheik*, her analysis is focused on the genre and therefore ignores any particular significance of the original. Also see, Jan Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1991) for a wider reaching discussion of the genre.

<sup>17</sup> ‘The Son of the Sheik, Mr Valentino’s Last Film, A United Artists Picture From A Novel By E. M. Hull’, *The Times*, 22 September 1926, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> *The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse* actually did better than *The Sheik*, making \$9 million and finishing the 1920’s as the second highest earner. See Russel Ash, *The Top Ten of Film* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2003), p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> Much like the number of suicides at Valentino’s funeral, one can only assume that although exaggerated, such stories were not completely without foundation.

<sup>20</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 233.

<sup>21</sup> See ‘Sheikh’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition on Compact Disc (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).



pronunciations.<sup>22</sup>

Although the overacting in the film was greeted with laughter by audiences on its re-release in 1930, it was still one of the major hits of the silent era, ranking forty first on the list of the top grossing films in 1935.<sup>23</sup> In addition to contributing to, if not inspiring, an early twenties craze for ‘Arab’ fashions, it also inspired ‘Sheik’ brand condoms which are still marketed by Durex.<sup>24</sup> Together with the sequel, *Son Of The Sheik* (1926), it inevitably spawned a slate of imitations such as *Arabian Love* (1924), *The Arab* (1924), *Song of Love* (1923, 1928), and *Burning Sands* (1929). It also spawned spoofs, such as *She’s A Sheik* (1927), *Whistling Lions* and *Two Arabian Sights* (1927) as well as *Felix The Cat Shatters The Sheik* (1926).<sup>25</sup> Later re-workings include a second world war American radio adaptation for *Dangerously Yours*, and the plot of *The Pure Hell of St. Trinians* (1960).<sup>26</sup>

While Rudolph Valentino had already been noticed in *The Four Horsesman of the Apocalypse* (1921), *The Sheik* consolidated his stardom and constituted his mythic title as “the world’s greatest lover”.<sup>27</sup> His cult of stardom would culminate five years later in one of the most notorious funerals in American history, at which

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<sup>22</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 309-310.

<sup>23</sup> *Rudolph Valentino: The Greatest Lover, The Sheik* (London: BFI Filmographic Services, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Garber, p. 310.

<sup>25</sup> Jack G. Shaheen, ‘The Sheik’, in *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Gloucestershire: Arris Books, 2003), pp. 422-425. The number of parodies suggests audiences were more than capable of looking slightly askance at the phenomenon. *She’s a Sheik*, for example, featured a half Arabian heroine ‘Zaida’ who’s ‘motto is: “When I see a [Christian] man I want, I take him.”’

<sup>26</sup> *Dangerously Yours, Episode 10: The Sheik*, dir. Richard Sanville, writ. Jean Holloway CBS, 1944 (airdate 3 September 1944); *The Pure Hell of St. Trinians*, dir. Frank Launder, perf. Irene Handel, George Cole, Sid James, Julie Alexander, British Lion Film Corp, 1960.

<sup>27</sup> Emily W. Leider, *Dark Lover: The Life and Death of Rudolph Valentino* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 172.



police were called in to control crowds in excess of 80,000. The rioting women left police dumbfounded and the commissioner took personal charge of the operation, still failing to prevent hundreds of injuries to young women as well as police officers, as the latter charged the crowd on horseback in an attempt to restore order. The funeral home was pillaged for mementos and more than one fan reportedly attempted suicide.

*The New York Times* was drawn into reporting that Benito Mussolini had dispatched a detail of North American Fascisti to lay a wreath and watch over the Italian born actor's coffin.<sup>28</sup> *The Guardian* reported that 'No monarch or war hero ever aroused more sympathetic interest anywhere than Valentino' during his illness.<sup>29</sup> The significance of *The Sheik* needs to be understood in the context of such adulation; while successful, it was also immediately and expansively iconic, as well as contested.

As Miriam Hansen writes, Valentino's stardom tapped into the possibilities of female spectatorship in a manner previously unseen. In part this was due to the emergent mass audience of female consumers in the post-war era: 'Never before was the discourse on fan behaviour so strongly marked by the terms of sexual difference and never again was spectatorship so explicitly linked to the discourse on female desire.' She further notes that:

The particular historical constellation that made him as well as destroyed him includes the upheavals of gender relations during the war, such as the massive integration of women into the work force and their emergence as a primary target in the shift to a

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<sup>28</sup> 'Thousands In Riot at Valentino Bier; More Than One Hundred Hurt', *The New York Times*, 25 August 1926, p.1; In actuality the appearance of the Fascisti was staged. With the outpouring of grief and sensational tabloid response to Valentino's death the studio saw an opportunity and poured fuel on the fire by hiring a group of actors to play the part. The Italian government eventually denied sending the wreath. See Leider, pp. 391-392.

<sup>29</sup> 'Death of Rudolph Valentino, Hero of American Girls, Emotional Scenes in New York', *The Guardian*, 24 August 1926 < <http://century.guardian.co.uk/> > [accessed 10 April 2004] (para 2 of 4).



consumer economy; the partial breakdown of gender specific divisions of labour and a blurring of traditional delimitations of public and private; the need to redefine notions of femininity in terms other than domesticity and motherhood; the image of the new woman promoted along with a demonstrative liberalisation of sexual behaviour and lifestyles; the emergence of companionate marriage.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the awkward problem of his role as the totalitarian, rapist, sheik Valentino's body was explicitly offered to a female gaze. A Pathé short, *The Sheik's Physique*, begins with Valentino arriving at the beach by car and moving to the back seat to undress. As he unhooks his suspenders, he seems to remember the audience and gazes straight into the camera with a knowing and apologetic smile as he pulls the shade down. This is followed by a sequence where Valentino sits or sleeps on the beach in bathing attire, with no pretence of narrative context. In the feature *The Sheik*, Valentino repeatedly leers at Diana; these scenes are rendered in cuts where Valentino's face is head on and in full screen close up, effectively meaning that he is leering at the audience. In Hansen's words, Valentino 'inaugurated an explicitly sexual discourse of male beauty' and sat outside the traditional 'instrumental' masculinity of silent film stars.<sup>31</sup> In 1925, *The Literary Digest* claimed, 'we hear almost nothing more of the matinee idol anymore [...] the 'sheik' has taken his place'.<sup>32</sup> Valentino became the iconic object of female desire, at the same time that the film 'initiated the much publicized rejection of Valentino by male moviegoers'.<sup>33</sup>

In 1926, an editorial in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* famously charged Valentino with effeminizing American masculinity. The author had discovered a powder vending machine in the men's restroom of a new public ballroom, and

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<sup>30</sup> Miriam Hansen, 'Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship', in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 226-252 (p. 226).

<sup>31</sup> Hansen, p. 243.

<sup>32</sup> *The Literary Digest*, 14 February 1925, cited in, 'Sheikh', in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

<sup>33</sup> Hansen, pp. 238-239.

decided Valentino's iconographic style was to blame: 'A powder vending machine! In a men's washroom! Homo Americanus! Why didn't someone quietly drown Rudolph Guglielmo, alias Valentino, years ago?' Understanding that 'Rudy, the beautiful gardener's boy, is the prototype of the American Male', the writer hazards a guess as to the reasons for the trans-national phenomenon of 'effeminate' masculinities, like Chicago's 'powder puffs', London's 'dancing men' and the 'gigolos' of Paris. He pointedly wonders whether 'this degeneration in effeminacy' constitutes 'a cognate reaction with pacifism and the virilities of the war?'<sup>34</sup> *The Guardian* noted that in response to this editorial a 'wave of indignation in (Valentino's) favour rushed from millions of American women'.<sup>35</sup> In his own defence, Valentino challenged the writer to a boxing match, a challenge which the editor(s) studiously ignored. The editorial's play on words, 'Homo Americanus', instantiated Valentino as an object at the centre of a range of competing discourses that resonated well beyond the war: particularly those tying the relationships of effeminacy and homosexuality to the era's nativism. As George Chauncey has observed, the emergent heterosexual self-definition of white-collar American men in the early twentieth century was largely determined against the real and imaginary sexual transgressions of immigrant labourers.<sup>36</sup> The white collar editorialist's masculinity, the desire of Valentino's female fans, the masculinity of the powder puff men of the ballroom, and the masculinity of immigrant men, all are called up for contestation in relation to the body of the Italian-born immigrant, Valentino.

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<sup>34</sup> Garber, p. 361.

<sup>35</sup> 'Death of Rudolph...'

<sup>36</sup> George Chauncey, 'The Forging of Queer Identities and the Emergence of Heterosexuality in Middle Class Culture', in *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (London: Flamingo, 1995), pp. 99-130.



It is not my intention to ignore the specifics of Valentino's stardom in this chapter, but such critics as Miriam Hansen, Gaylene Studlar and Marjorie Garber have already discussed the Valentino phenomenon in considerable detail.<sup>37</sup> To a degree, their analyses rely on the semiotic relationships emanating from the icon or problems in the theory of the masculine gaze, when confronted with a male object so conspicuously offered to the female film spectator's desire. This chapter focuses instead on the narrative of *The Sheik*, in part because this narrative is in fact productive of the icon. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* may have been an outstandingly successful film, but it was the less profitable *The Sheik* that consolidated his stardom and defined Valentino's reputation, however fought over and contested this stardom was.

Further, Valentino's iconographic status, while not limited to the US, was to a degree US specific. As *The Guardian* argued, Valentino 'was to American flappers generally almost what the Prince of Wales is to the English'.<sup>38</sup> Yet while *The Sheik* was successful in the US, it also drew crowds in the UK, and managed a forty-two week run in France.<sup>39</sup> While Valentino remains in the pantheon of stars, he does so as a signifier of romance that works predominantly through a discourse of nostalgia. One might even argue that he transcends mostly as a relic of a particular era of female desire. Yet while *The Sheik's* appeal persists, partly, yes, as a relic of the romance genre's origins, it also survives in variously retooled forms throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Gaylene Studlar, 'Valentino: Optic Intoxication and Dance Madness', in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema*, ed. by S. Cohan and I.R. Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 23-45.

<sup>38</sup> 'Death of Rudolph...'

<sup>39</sup> *Rudolph Valentino: The Greatest Lover*.

<sup>40</sup> See Raub, and Bach.

*Novel and Film*

In general, reviews of the film were mixed. On the positive side, *The Times* could, nevertheless, only define the film as the exception that proved what an otherwise unexciting week it had been: 'well above average' was the damning faint praise.<sup>41</sup> The success and appeal of the film was determined largely by E. M. Hull's novel, which not only provided a ready-made audience, but also informed interpretation of the narrative. *Photoplays'* enthusiastic review argued:

Here is romance. Red-hot. If you read the story you will go to see the filmization. If you haven't, you will go anyway. This is popular entertainment -- that and nothing more. But that is enough. The best-selling story by E.M. Hull, scoffed at by the higher-browed critics, but read and re-read by two-thirds of the women in this country, has been made into a very exciting, very old-fashioned photoplay.<sup>42</sup>

The periodical *Motion Picture Classic* called the film 'banal'; the film certainly does plod towards its conclusion in a fashion uncharacteristic of the era's adventure films. The American periodical *Motion Picture Magazine* asserted that 'almost everyone has read *The Sheik*' and 'if there is anybody out there who has not read' it, 'they'll probably enjoy the picture far more than they otherwise would'. This critic's disappointment references the excision or effacement of the novel's explicitly controversial aspects; 'remembering censorship' he writes, 'we wondered why they ever bought the motion picture rights in the first place'. The critique goes on to mock Melford for the sanitization of the script in ways that assume his reader's familiarity with the novel: '(Melford) made statements declaring that there would be no cause for censorial complaint. *There isn't.*'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> 'Films of the Week "Paddy the Next Best Thing"', *The Times*, 24 January 1923, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> "'The Sheik: Starring Rudolph Valentino and Agnes Ayres", *Photoplay Magazine*, January 1922', *Silents Are Golden*, <<http://www.silentsaregolden.com/reviewsfolder/sheikreview.html>> [accessed 3 March 2004] (para 1 of 2).

<sup>43</sup> *Rudolph Valentino: The Greatest Lover*. My italics.



Diana meets the sheik before he abducts her and makes her his prisoner in his desert village. As a matter of fact she dresses up in the native costume and steals into the casino where he is stopping while in Biskra. Except for this, and the fact that the sheik repents once he has her in his striped tent, and acts for all the world like a continental gentleman, the screen story coincides fairly well with the novel.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, a veneer of similarity between novel and film exists, but the narrative core of sex and violence has been removed, so that the film is a profound disappointment of expectations. Such sarcastic appreciation of the film is repeated by *The New York Times* critic, despite his proud confession that he has managed to avoid the novel altogether, in part because he knew the film would be inflicted upon him at some point: 'Isn't that enough?' The humorous intent of his review hinges on his, and his reader's, knowledge of the book, as he is sure that the film's tame narrative 'is not exactly the idea of Mrs. Hull's novel as reported in the book reviews'. 'But never mind', he continues, 'here is the picture tale of a nice sheik and his agreeable English girl'.<sup>45</sup>

Though the film's title frame has 'Passed by the National Board of Review' printed across the bottom, these alterations to the text are not as definitive as the critics of the period would have us believe. As the cultural historian Gail Bederman writes, 'because actual on-screen rape was still not acceptable to the American public, Valentino never actually violates Diana, although several times he very nearly does. Nonetheless, his character is clearly a barely restrained version of the savage rapist.'<sup>46</sup> For Bederman this is a matter of semiotic associations between the popular racial stereotypes of the era and the leering fiendishness of Valentino's character in which audiences would be well practiced. However, even Bederman's argument reads the sexual violence in the film as more coded than it actually was.

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<sup>44</sup> *Rudolph Valentino: The Greatest Lover*.

<sup>45</sup> 'The Screen', *New York Times*, 7 November 1921, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> Bederman, p. 233.

The novel did not, after all, provide 'sex scenes' in pornographic detail, so much as it is simply clear about what is taking place. Chapters end with lines such as, 'His eyes were fierce, his stern mouth parted in a cruel smile, his deep slow voice half angrily, half impatiently amused, "Must I be valet as well as lover?"' or, ' "Oh, you brute! You brute!" she wailed, until his kisses silenced her.'<sup>47</sup>

The chapters which follow such lines begin with Diana on her own - broken, humiliated and despairing. Through all this the Sheik's business of raising horses, and the requisite process of breaking them, serves as a metaphorical backdrop. In its own right, the novel already represents the effacement of explicit Victorian pornography such as *The Lustful Turk*, one of a number of possible origins or influences for the novel. Measured against the film, the idea that the book is explicit in ways the film purported not to be, is perhaps a more direct reference to the literary heritage of Victorian pornography and sensation novels from which it evolved and so evoked.

In its movement to the screen, an imaginary critical break occurs, since the moving picture supplies the very imagery, which a reader's imagination would supply on its own. For those willing to fill in an imaginative gap, the cinematic Sheik was really only as gentlemanly as one wanted to believe. The multiple implied rapes of the novel are reduced to one ambiguous scene in the film, where the sheik crushes Diana in his arms and kisses her; but the camera cuts to the horses running loose in a sandstorm. It then cuts back inside the tent to a different room where Ahmed Ben Hassan is carrying Diana, who has apparently fainted. One of the Sheik's minions interrupts and we cut to yet more scenes of horses running around in the sand storm. As Diana lies sobbing against a divan, in a manner entirely evocative of the scene after her first rape in the novel, the Sheik returns to pick up where he left off, only to

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<sup>47</sup> Hull, p. 76, p. 50.



be overcome with shame for his actions. He then sends a slave girl to tend to Diana and the two women hold each other in an empathic embrace. For anyone with knowledge of the novel there would be little trouble making a translation. For those who had not read it, the inference would still be clear enough.

Later in the film, Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan is challenged by his Western friend Raoul de Saint Hubert, a French novelist, for forcing himself upon Diana: ‘ “Does the past mean so little to you that you now steal white women and make love to them like a savage?” ’ The Sheik does not rebut the charge, but defiantly declares, ‘ “When an Arab sees a woman he wants, he takes her.” ’ For those few spectators who had overlooked the implications of the earlier scene, this dialogue amounts to a retrospective reconstruction of events as rape. In this way, the ‘pornocratic’ atmosphere of the novel is translated to the film so that it can be ‘credited as having started the whole “sex picture” vogue in American cinema’.<sup>48</sup>

### *Fantasies of Liberation*

A number of critics have pointed out in relation to both the film and the novel, that the rape narrative allowed a generation of women access to an emergent, yet restricted, sexual subjectivity. Caught between religious and reproductive imperatives of sexual restraint and the power of newfound social and economic freedoms, the romance narrative, where sex was initially forced upon the heroine, allowed the reader or spectator to bypass the complicated problem of moral responsibility.<sup>49</sup> As Karen Chow argues, we should ‘ultimately’ understand that ‘it is not Diana the character but the woman, *reader, writer and filmgoer* in the material world who is liberated by reading these steamy passages and creating a sex symbol

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<sup>48</sup> Rudolph Valentino: *The Greatest Lover*.

<sup>49</sup> See, Bach, Chow, and Raub.

in the figure of Rudolph Valentino'. Chow argues, 'we can overlook the limits of the text to see its effects'.<sup>50</sup>

It is not my intention to dismiss this argument in its entirety, but I do seek to suggest that it might be over-sanguine when applied to *The Sheik*. Such an understanding represents a retrospective application of critical discourses concerning contemporary romance fiction and the politics of female pleasure, to a context in which such discourses were not yet available to female audiences.<sup>51</sup> More importantly, such arguments concerning the politically regressive or progressive potential of more contemporary romance fantasies, generally apply to novels with more ambiguous, if still problematic, stories than the kidnapping, imprisonment and rape represented in *The Sheik*. For example, one 1991 offering from Mills and Boon entitled *Desert Destiny*, includes a seduction scene involving a sheik. During a discussion about fantasy, he asks if the heroine has seen the film 'about a sheik and a beautiful blonde English woman' and whether or not she liked it. Her affirmative response represents a form of consent within sexual interaction already defined as the play of fantasy.<sup>52</sup>

While *The Sheik* was a precursor to the modern romance, it was also an event in the cultural articulation of post-war sexuality and gender. Its popularity and

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<sup>50</sup> Chow, p. 73. Such arguments focus on the sheik's love for Diana and his repentance to make their point. I do not think that such a position is convincing, as it does little to undo the idea that the alleged 'ideal of erotic reciprocity' is not simply an incidence of 'Stockholm Syndrome' (See Hansen, 'Valentino', p. 598). Tania Modleski's discussion in 'Disappearing Act: Harlequin Romances', in *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 35-58, is perhaps a more balanced attempt to take account of the scene's libidinal potential.

<sup>51</sup> See Jan Radway, 'Romance and the Work of Fantasy: Struggles over Feminine Sexuality and Subjectivity at Century's End', in *Feminism & Cultural Studies*, ed. by Morag Shiach (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 395-416. Radway's article provides a good summary of an essential debate within Cultural and Gender Studies.

<sup>52</sup> Bach, p. 10.



attendant controversy means that it is not so easily absorbed into the general body of twentieth century literary and film romance, and deserves attention as a specific phenomenon which structures the genre and its attendant controversies. I shall argue that if Valentino's sheik enabled the expression of a previously constrained yet emergent subjectivity, it did so because it offered a discursive trajectory, an articulation, a performance of desire that was more viable than any number of alternatives, yet similarly constrained, performances available at the time. That articulation did not appear out of nowhere to bridge a "repressive" Victorianism and libertine consumer capitalism, but served to negotiate a complex of political-discursive forces. In this way, the fantasy in question can be better understood as a kind of inter-subjective negotiation of existing political conflicts than as a transgressive and transformative fantasy.

Whatever dimensions of fantasy the film played upon, it did so within an expressly political repertoire that was consciously contested. Film and book utilize an extensive range of signifiers, instantiating the narrative within the articulated controversy and debate of the era. As a number of historians have discussed, in the years leading up to the war, England was plagued with a sense of its own decay. In his survey history of the British Empire, Dennis Judd writes:

Both the external threat and the internal divisions that racked Edwardian society seemed to indicate that Britain was losing her vitality and strength. The shockingly high level of unfitness which had been discovered among volunteers for the Boer War [...] only confirmed prophecies of national decay and degeneration.<sup>53</sup>

There was no shortage of deviant sites on which the blame could be placed, and it fell upon everything from Jews and the trade union movement, to Suffrage and the 'New Woman'. Arguments over the access and manner of political power in the

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<sup>53</sup> Dennis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience From 1765 to the Present* (London: Fontana, 1997), p. 205.

public sphere would rhetorically ground themselves in a shared concern for the nation, the Empire and its rejuvenation. Institutions like the Boy Scouts were intended to stop the rot, and hopes were placed in the burgeoning discourses of Eugenics, as ideas about the relationship between a healthy body and a healthy nation were taken up within right wing and left wing political ideology.<sup>54</sup>

Critics like Olive Schreiner would denounce the idle aristocratic male ‘with his devotion to the rarity and variety of his viands’, and his endless search for pleasure that represents his ‘severest labour’ as an effete and failed masculinity, a sign of national decline that can only be remedied with the franchise.<sup>55</sup> In the first paragraph of the novel, ‘Lady Conway’ condemns Diana’s planned trip into the desert as an act of ‘recklessness and impropriety that is calculated to cast a slur not only on her own reputation but also on the prestige of the nation’. This frames the narrative and places Diana within the political ferment of personal responsibility and national decay. For Lady Conway, the ‘English cannot be too careful of (their) behaviour abroad’.<sup>56</sup>

The political stakes are raised when we learn, almost as quickly, that Diana is an orphan who was raised by her irresponsible older brother, Sir Aubrey Mayo. Diana is the unwitting product of the actions of a man who is sarcastically referred to by others as ‘Sir Egotistical Complacency’, an effete aristocrat who has shirked national, political and social duties in his selfish and questionable leisure pursuits.<sup>57</sup> Diana’s irresponsibility and impropriety therefore represent a similarly unwitting

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<sup>54</sup> Carolyn Burdett, ‘The Hidden Romance of Sexual Science: Eugenics, The Nation and the Making of Modern Feminism’, in *Sexology and Culture*, ed. by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (London: Polity, 1998), pp. 44-59.

<sup>55</sup> Olive Schreiner, *Women and Labour* (Minneapolis: Dover Books, 1911:1998).

<sup>56</sup> Hull, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Hull, p. 4; See Judd for a discussion of Edwardian ideas concerning the aristocracy’s political failings and neglect of responsibility.



national public, neglected, and so betrayed, by its own elite. Much like Lady Conway's oratory, various discussions of moral propriety and sexual indiscretion are put into the mouths of minor characters. Aubrey's failings, which include raising the orphaned Diana as a boy, are marked by a series of allusions to his closeted homosexuality, such as his intention to take a house in Newport, Rhode Island. This town had become notorious by 1919, due to a U.S. government investigation of the homosexual subculture that had established itself through the Naval Training Station during the war.<sup>58</sup>

In this way and others, the novel deploys discourses of sexual perversion and gender ambiguity in an effort to render the leisure class suspect and evoke their political failings. While this chapter focuses on the film, to the extent that the novel clearly informed consumption of the film, the fact that the novel so explicitly references the socio-political signposts of the early twentieth century and the Post-War era is significant in understanding the popularity of the film. This suggests that audience expectations of a political aspect would accrue to the film.

The narrator's tendency to polemic, as well as the detailed gossip and discussion which occur in the novel, is stripped down and rendered in allusions and references that are less structured in the film. For example, in the novel, Diana's refusal of marriage is based on her desire to maintain her independence, but the modern appeal of that desire is rendered suspect by the gendered and sexual ambiguity that underwrites her position. She rebukes one suitor as follows:

I was born with the same cold nature as [Aubrey]. I was brought up as a boy, my training was hard. Emotion and affection have been barred out of my life. I simply don't know what they mean. I don't want to know. I am very content with my life as it is. Marriage for a woman means the end of independence, that is, marriage with a man who is a man, in spite of all that the

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<sup>58</sup> Chauncey, p. 145; Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary History* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1983, 1994), pp. 398-399.



most modern woman may say. I have never obeyed anyone in my life; I do not wish to try the experiment. You have been a splendid pal but that side of life does not exist for me [...] A man to me is just a companion with whom I ride or shoot or fish; a pal, a comrade, and that's just all there is too it. God made me a woman. Why, only he knows.<sup>59</sup>

The modern woman in question is the era's advocate of companionate marriage as an institution of equals.<sup>60</sup> For Diana, the independent woman who enters into marriage only retains her independence if she marries a man who is not a man, a feminized and/or damaged example, that as we have seen and as I will return to, was hardly an obscure point of reference in Post-War British and American culture. In the film, this speech is broken up and distributed throughout the narrative, yet the opening scenes, which are not found in the book, include an introduction to the 'children of Araby who dwell in happy ignorance that civilization has passed them by'. There are also scenes of a 'marriage market', which we are informed, 'is an ancient custom by which wives are secured for the wealthy sons of Allah'.

Later, in Biskra, when a European suitor declares his interest, Diana is repelled by the advance; by her reaction, the very idea of it is shocking and disconcerting. After they are both briefly distracted by the Sheik's arrival, she offers her suitor a sporting handshake, declaring, 'Marriage is captivity--the end of independence. I am content with my life as it is.' Where the novel puts female independence at odds with authentic masculinity, the film frames the issue in terms of a modern female struggling against primitive patriarchy. However, in both versions of the narrative, the practical implication of Diana's disconsolate reaction to male desire, as well as her rejection of marriage, is that she has rejected the

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<sup>59</sup> Hull, pp. 9-10.

<sup>60</sup> Ellen Kay Trimmerger, 'Feminism Men and Modern Love, Greenwich Village, 1900-1925', in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Pres, 1983), pp. 131-152; Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000).



possibility of heterosexual relationships. Add to this Diana's preference for masculine clothing, and the evocation of what was the increasingly prominent image of the female invert is relatively inescapable.<sup>61</sup>

Lady Conway is similarly replaced in the film by two women who are less explicit in their condemnation of Diana's irresponsible trip into the desert. The first one thoroughly disapproves 'of this young madcap's wild scheme'; the second can only declare her indignation with the very 'idea of Diana Mayo planning a tour alone into the desert, with only native camel-drivers and Arabs!' The reference to Diana's youth invokes generational conflicts over moral responsibility that were at the core of the contests between the Flappers and their parent generation.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, 'the idea' of unescorted travel would not have been so obviously reckless to spectators, as it comes after a long history of women's travel writing where 'little conflict' was mentioned. In her analysis of the genre Sara Mills writes:

many of the texts present the female narrator as travelling alone without protection and without coming to harm; this seems to signal the reader that the colonized country is so much under British control that *even* women can be represented travelling through it without the natives daring to approach her. In many ways they present the colonial country as *empty*, or populated by harmless, loving children.<sup>63</sup>

Against such a backdrop, Diana's folly more readily conjures concerns about the sexual impropriety of a generation of women who had escaped domestic control and surveillance, through paid corporate (rather than domestic) employment, and the anonymity of the urban contexts in which those jobs were found. Similarly, as the

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<sup>61</sup> Martha Vicinus, "'They Wonder To Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of Modern Lesbian Identity', in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 432-452.

<sup>62</sup> Billie Melman, *Women and Popular Imagination In the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1988)

<sup>63</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 22.



lack of menace attributed to the colony means that the Sheik's sexual violence is all that more terrifying when it does occur, we are compelled to wonder whether the Arab is, in the first instance, metonymic for all the racial others to be encountered in the urban environs of post-war America.<sup>64</sup> The social and economic changes which attracted young white women to the city, were echoed in the US by the abundance of well paid employment available to African-Americans in northern cities.

The war itself was the impetus to 'The Great Migration' that established, expanded and consolidated large African-American communities in the urban north. As Eric Garber and George Chauncey have documented, the appeal, for white tourists and pleasure seekers, of a black neighbourhood like Harlem, was partially the promise of sexual license represented by jazz clubs and speak easies.<sup>65</sup> The question of unsupervised young women did not simply reference traditional parlour culture removed to a new space, but conjured a new world of social interactions and possibilities of which miscegenation was only one. The film's comparatively vague allusion to wildness and irresponsibility transfers the book's political discourse on class to a more generalized political discourse on female propriety in the Jazz age; the aristocratic female desert traveller stands in for the popular female urban adventurer.

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<sup>64</sup> Hazel Carby, "'On the Threshold of Woman's Era": Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Thought.' *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. by Henry L. Gates (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 301-316; Revathi Krishanswami, 'The Economy of Colonial Desire', in *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, ed. by Rachel Adams and David Savran (London: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 292-317. This cuts both ways; in both contexts rape was the imagined revenge of the (ex)colonial and the ex-slave.

<sup>65</sup> Eric Garber, 'A Spectacle In Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem', in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. by Martin Duberman et al. (New York: Meridian, 1990), pp. 318-331; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (London: Flamingo, 1994).



In 1913, the periodical *Current Opinion* famously declared that it was ‘sex o’clock in America’.<sup>66</sup> By the mid-twenties, the notoriety and mythology of sexual transgression in Harlem’s rent parties, drag balls and risqué blues performers was so widespread that it became something of an industry in its own right. The attractions it promised to white tourists, the role they played in the profile of the Black community, as well as more general discussions about the significance of sexual behaviour, were vehemently contested by Black people and white people, conservatives and bohemians, right and left.<sup>67</sup>

The American dance crazes of the 20’s that held the power to scandalize some, were often slightly sanitized versions of the unapologetically sexualized dancing that had been popular in working class youth culture ten years earlier. As Kathy Peiss shows, some of those dances were already parodies of the manners and bodily distance of the dances performed within more genteel circles.<sup>68</sup> The era’s discourses of sexual change, confusion and conflict were saturated with political significance and written closely to the formal demands for rights and political equality. The scandal of the Flapper’s “petting parties” had everything to do with sexuality, but their presence was inextricably linked to the political radicalism of birth control activists like Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger, whose first arrest was for Industrial Workers of the World activism. As Christine Stansell discusses, in the run up to the war, the ‘plebian edge’ of the New Woman found its expression in the “Rebel Girl”:

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<sup>66</sup> ‘Sex O’Clock in America’, *Current Opinion*, 55 (1913) p. 113. See also Mara L. Keire, ‘The Vice Trust: A Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare In the United States, 1907-1917’, *Journal of Social History*, 35. (2001), pp. 5-41.

<sup>67</sup> See Chauncey, Stansell and Eric Garber.

<sup>68</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), pp. 101-102.

Like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn herself, implicitly deemed their representative, rebel girls were sexualized figures, seen as erotically adventurous and disregarding of marriage. They were “girls” not only of the picket lines [...] but of the dance halls and nickelodeons [...S]uch young women could conceivably want birth control for the same reason that bohemian women needed birth control—in order to have premarital sex without getting pregnant.<sup>69</sup>

This is not to suggest that the public sexuality of a generation was a statement of political radicalism, but to point out that the public discourse of sexuality was contested in ways that were anything but attenuated from the programmatic political ideals of the era. The film version of *The Sheik* signifies within this constellation of issues in a manner that is more than simply the product of such political saturation. The condemnation of Diana by the older generation is consistently followed by a range of allusions to the available signs of sexual perversion and gender ambiguity of the era. As so many critics, following Edward Said, have discussed, the Arab Orient had ‘become a psychic screen on which to project fantasies of illicit sexuality and unbridled excess’.<sup>70</sup>

*The Sheik* does not settle for vague allusions to the generalized Orient of a Western imaginary, however. Diana’s suitors are pursuing a mannish woman and they undertake such efforts in the French Algerian city of Biskra, referred to in an early inter-title as ‘a city of adventure where the new civilization rubs elbows with the old’. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Biskra itself was established as a homosexual tourist destination and would only be displaced by Tangiers and Morocco in ‘the first two decades of the twentieth century’.<sup>71</sup> The notorious lives of its denizens, Wilde, Douglas and Gide, even Alistair Crowley, contributed to a general understanding of

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<sup>69</sup> Stansell, p. 237.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph A. Boone, ‘Vacation Cruises: or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism’, *PMLA*, 110, (1995), 89-106, (p. 101).

<sup>71</sup> Boone, p. 99.



the significance of such a setting.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the inter-titles inform us that that an early scene involving the Sheik in Biskra, is ‘like a page from the Arabian nights’, placing the narrative firmly within Burton’s psuedo-scientific ‘Sotadic Zone’, the geographical latitudes where sodomy was tolerated, if not rampant, and gender roles were similarly ambiguous.<sup>73</sup>

Even the improbable personal histories of Diana and the Sheik had real world reference points. As Marjorie Garber points out, T. E. Lawrence is the barely disguised ‘phantom presence behind the figure of the western aristocrat in exotic “fancy dress”’. By the summer of 1919, Lawrence had been made famous in the US and the UK by Lowell Thomas’ immensely popular travelling lecture/show ‘Lawrence of Arabia’. The phantom presence behind a cross-dressing female aristocrat on the loose in the North African desert was the less famous, but still somewhat notorious writer Isabelle Eberhardt. Eberhardt and Lawrence were the illegitimate children of Russian and British aristocrats, respectively. Eberhardt was raised as a Moslem and as a boy, in part by her ineffectual brother.<sup>74</sup> Any spectator who had a passing familiarity with the stories and tabloid scandals of recent history, knew the constellation of sexuality and gender at issue in the film.<sup>75</sup>

As Bach writes, ‘almost every desert romance’ employs the device of the *Arabian Nights*:

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<sup>72</sup> Robert Aldrich, ‘The French in North Africa’, in *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, (London: Routledge, 2003) pp. 329-363 (pp. 360-361).

<sup>73</sup> Dane Kennedy, ‘“Captain Burton’s Oriental Muck Heap”: The Book of the Thousand Nights and the Uses of Orientalism’, *Journal of British Studies*, 39, (2000), 317-339.

<sup>74</sup> M. Garber, p. 309.

<sup>75</sup> See Lucy Bland, ‘The Trial of Madame Fahmy: Orientalism, Violence, Sexual Perversity and the Fear of Miscegenation’, in *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950: Gender and Class*, ed. by Shani D’Cruze (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 185-197.

this “fairy tale” text [comes to act] as a signifier of Arab culture, accommodating and legitimising the confusion of fantasy and rational observation that typically characterizes representation of the East. Like magic words we read *Arabian Nights* and instantly a dazzling, exotic and yet familiar world unfolds before our eyes.<sup>76</sup>

Biskra provides the imaginary geographical edge of the discourses of the era about sexual and gendered conduct, and thus the framework in which Diana comes to represent an excess of those terms. While at home in the milieu of Biskra, her lack of sexual interest means that she is no more a libertine than she is a conservative, but rather the indefinite object at the periphery of Western culture. Diana’s preference for masculine clothing figures centrally in the book but is less operative in the film. Hence, the lack of narrative deliberation on the meaning of her choice of attire leaves open questions about the masculine clothing she does wear. Is it an admirable transgression of restrictive codes, a kind of logical extension of the Flapper’s abandonment of the corset, or is yet another mark of excess, a sign of her self exclusion from political articulations of women and rights?

Diana’s personality seems pointedly split between admirable forms of determination, self-possession and independence and lamentable forms of arrogance and selfishness. Her response to the desire of Western men, combined with her commentary on marriage, represents a recognizable feminist independence, but it is also one that has crossed into unappealing asexuality. In a region imagined by Westerners as a place where the rules and codes of conduct break down and become something other, Diana proceeds to break whatever rules are left.

In the scene immediately following her marriage proposal, Diana is outraged by the fact that the Sheik has been able to close to the casino, described as ‘the Monte Carlo of the Sahara’, to Westerners. After watching the French officer, who has informed her of this fact, salute the Sheik she demands to know ‘why should a

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<sup>76</sup> Bach, p. 21.



savage desert bandit keep us out of any public place?' She is told that 'Sheik Ahmed is not a savage. He is a rich tribal prince, who was educated in Paris. In Biskra his slightest wish is law.' This apparent inversion of the colonial prerogative, where the French military, and all Western subjects, defer to the authority of the colonial subject, confirms the cultural discordance found in Biskra, and extends it to matters of State authority.

Annoyed by this inversion, Diana schemes to enter the casino in disguise as an Arabian woman and finds herself witness to the 'marriage gamble where brides are won on the turn of a wheel'. The inter-title informs us that 'to the cultured English girl this marriage fair was like the slave mart of the barbarous past'. When she is caught and asked on whose invitation she attends, she replies defiantly, 'I wanted to see the savage that could bar me from this casino.' As Diana had already seen Ahmed outside the casino, 'seeing the savage' here stands for seeing the inner-workings of the Sheik's culture from which the Westerner is excluded, inner workings that constitute the authority to institute the exclusion in the first place.

The secret of the Sheik's difference, his authorial superiority, it emerges, is nothing less than his practice of the barbarous patriarchy of the past. Accordingly, Diana is outside every relevant law; her attempt to exercise the colonial prerogative is an assumption of the masculine position that is only available to her as far as its practice has been forgotten or abandoned by the Western men in Biskra. In her defiance of the French officer and her brother, Sir Aubrey, 'who', the film informs us, 'for years has vainly striven to curb Diana's reckless spirit of daring', as well as her defiance of the rejected suitor who declared his love and asked that she postpone the trip so that he might escort her, she rejects the authority on which the colonial prerogative rests. She wants to have her cake and eat it.

If Diana represented Jazz Age femininity to Jazz Age women, the proposed identification foregrounds the real and imagined dangers of sexual violence that threatened the urban adventurer, as well as misgivings and conflicts regarding an alleged hedonism and irresponsibility. The rejection of moral strictures about sexuality and gender performances is linked to a more general rejection of authority, particularly of the patriarchal injunctions purporting to protect the white female body from the brutality so often attributed to the savagery of the colonial male in British culture and Black men in the United States.<sup>77</sup>

More importantly, the contradictions central to Diana's subjectivity, understood within a context already marked by disorder, suggest the need for corrective measures. Although the orphaned aristocrat, raised by the vain efforts of her elder brother, is a product of a damaged or dead patriarchal lineage, in her defiant independence she also becomes an agent of the disarray wrought by that lack. Her refusal of vestigial Western male authority performatively disrupts and discredits the very regime on which her security depends. Her unescorted travel into the desert refuses the knowledge implicit in her brother's condemnation of the 'insane trip', as well as her suitor's request that she postpone and marry him which would give him 'the right to go with' her. Thus, the trip not only demonstrates their lack of power, but also affirms her vulnerability, reinforcing the potential for her abduction. The representation of Diana serves to transfer the cultural-political discourse of the era on to an individual female body, and to transform it into an individuated discourse of personal responsibility, defined in terms of sex/gender embodiments. Diana carries the discursive shift from absolute power to personal responsibility detailed in the first chapter.

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<sup>77</sup> Inderpal Grewal, 'Empire and the Movement For Women's Suffrage in Britain', in *Home and Harem: Nation Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), pp. 57-84.



That, in the end, Diana should find love with the Sheik makes the process of her becoming a prescriptive one. The Sheik succeeds in re-ordering the subject that had come to stand for the political disorder and confusion of modernity. He does not provide Diana with a simple introduction to the politically contested pleasure of desire, but circumnavigates the range of discursive conflicts regarding the conduct of men and women, the nature of marriage and sexual propriety. He does this by inscribing her within an idea of hetero-patriarchal devotion, produced through savagery and uncivilized barbarity, which stands for the primal that is 'lost' to contemporary Western subjects. The Sheik takes charge of Diana where Western men have done nothing but throw up their hands (Aubrey), or shrug their shoulders (the French officer) and walk away in despair or indifference. After escorting her out of the casino, Mustafa, her guide, announces himself to the Sheik and they confer. A plan is hatched and the morning after, or as the film calls it, 'dawn with the Arab under the allure of the defiant English girl', the Sheik steals into her room while she sleeps and renders the ammunition in her pistol harmless. Later, from a desert vantage point along with his small army, he watches and waits for Aubrey's departure and then sets upon Diana.

When he captures her, his first words to her are 'Lie still you little fool.' Her defiance, ridiculous yet charming, is her allure and the object of conquest. Once in his tent, in answer to her question, 'Why have you brought me here?', the Sheik asks, 'Are you not woman enough to know?' In response, Diana's face drops down, split between confusion and modesty while she holds her collar. It is not clear what she does or does not understand, aside from the fact that her body is his object. Nevertheless, the Sheik's question also implies that if Diana is 'woman enough to know', then she would also understand that her defiant actions in the casino the night before invited his conquest. Her feminine challenge to his masculine authority has

already implied a response where his masculine authority would be proven. This is the source of her foolishness; in the primal order of the Sheik, Diana was “asking for it”.

As the Sheik awakens the romantic and sexual desire in Diana, he also awakens her subservience and self-sacrifice. At the end of the film, after Diana’s love for Ahmed has been established and the latter is near death, following his fight with ‘the bandit Omair’, Diana is stroking his hand: ‘His hand is so large for an Arab.’ In the final twist of the film Raoul reveals that Ahmed’s lineage is actually Spanish and English. With the complication of miscegenation finally dispensed with, Diana can fully express her devotion: ‘Pray God, dear friend, to save his life. Oh, if he would only accept my life in exchange for his.’ With this Ahmed awakes and Diana is immediately on her knees tending to him. ‘Diana, my beloved’, he says, ‘the darkness has passed - and now the sunshine’.

The final inter-title in the film declares that ‘All things are with Allah’, and the destiny of racial and gendered biology is joyously confirmed. Erotic attachment and feminine submission and devotion are retrospectively melded, allowing Diana’s initial lack of desire to be re-understood. Her perversion turns out to be normality; she rightly and only lacked desire for the emasculated subjectivity of Western men. The errors of embodiment turn out to be symptoms of civilization’s abandonment of the violence that does not simply maintain order, but is the principle of order itself. *The Sheik* enacts a representational unification of Sovereign power and masculine domination and then, via a fantastical historical ellipsis, where ‘the new civilization rubs elbows with the old’, asserts patriarchal violence as the trans-historical essence of civilization.



The discourses of masculinity and over-civilization, that would make Valentino such an object of cultural contest, were considerably developed by the time of *The Sheik's* release.<sup>78</sup> In the United States, 'neuresthenia' characterized the lack of energy or virility suffered predominantly by white middle and upper class males who had allegedly developed their brains and neglected their bodies. The psychologist George Beard's diagnosis was originally of a man's disease: 'the price exacted by industrialized urban societies, competitive business and social environments, and the luxuries, vices, and excesses of modern life'.<sup>79</sup> In addition to a sexual aetiology, as well as the negative impact of things like the telegraph and steam power, Beard argued that the practices of civilized restraint, the 'constant inhibition', 'keeping back', 'covering', and 'holding in check', were exhausting exercises in themselves and contributed to the prevalence of the disorder.<sup>80</sup> While the diagnosis of neurasthenia would gradually lose its gender specificity as it was popularized across America and Europe, the link between over-civilization and masculinity was retained in anxieties of effeminization.

The source of such anxieties was an erosion of paternal significance and it ultimately produced what John Tosh has labelled 'the flight from domesticity' where men sought real and imaginary spaces free from the burden of feminine influence.

He writes that,

the early Victorian model of domesticity had rested on an implied contract of master and protector in relation to dependent and subordinate. Fifty years later that contract no longer seemed to hold. The husband still had the undivided duty of

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<sup>78</sup> See Bederman; Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures In A Man's World* (London: Routledge, 1991); John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle Class Home in Victorian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>79</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987).

<sup>80</sup> Bederman, p. 87.

maintaining and protecting the home, but his domestic power and prestige were wilting.<sup>81</sup>

The middle class domestic space had been perceptually transformed into the locus of female authority, potentially eroding the husband and father's authorial significance.

In *The Policing of Families*, Jaques Donzelot describes the State's authorization of the paternal role:

Under the *ancien regime* the family was both a subject and an object of government. It was subject by virtue of the internal distribution of its powers: the wife, the children, and the other members of the household (relatives servants, apprentices) were answerable to the head of the family. Through him the family was inscribed within groups with a common adherence, whether in the form of *networks of solidarity*, as in the case of corporations and village communities, or *blocks of dependence* of the feudal or religious type, or, more often, both at once.<sup>82</sup>

The rule of the absolute state, therefore, found in the family, the 'smallest political organization possible'.<sup>83</sup> The French example translates more or less intact to the British context. Tosh details the way in which this was more than an abstract relationship; pre-Victorian 'middle class' culture was characterized by 'the fusion of domestic and business worlds'. With some localized exceptions such as London, farmers as well as merchants, lawyers, doctors and others conducted their business and practice from their households: 'customers were seen, and deals struck, in the front parlour; apprentices slept in the upper stories sometimes alongside bedrooms converted into workshops; goods were stored in the basement and cellars'. Within this environment wives took up the role of 'help-meet' or junior business partner to their husband. Wives were often in charge of accounts and purchasing or 'the dairy and poultry yard in a farm', an arrangement that explains the ease with which so many widows could take over the family business:

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<sup>81</sup> Tosh, p. 182.

<sup>82</sup> Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1979), p. 48.

<sup>83</sup> Donzelot, p. 48.



Children formed part of the family pool of labour too. They were at the beck and call of both father and mother to run errands and perform sometimes monotonous tasks. As for apprentices, they were attracted by the prospect of learning a trade, but there was usually nothing in their contracts to prevent them being set to housework, particularly when they were placed under the day to day care of the mistress.<sup>84</sup>

In much the same way that the apprentice held an indistinct service role within the household the father/manager role of the patriarch was dispersed across the care and management of all the members of the household. Crucially, this included the use of violence; ‘the head of household had the right to beat his children, as he did all other dependents under his roof. Inflicting punishment was the unequivocal demonstration that ultimate power resided with the father.’<sup>85</sup> In the domestic realm, the father’s role mimed that of the Sovereign; to the extent that he carried out his duties effectively, he was backed in every respect by the legal-political protections and guarantees of the absolute state. While such authority unquestionably functioned through the discourse of patriarchy, its authorization derived not from a universal principle of embodiment, but from a specific political investiture of the subject that performs the responsibilities of the State.

Donzelot summarizes this relationship as a ‘collaboration’, where the absolute state furnishes the patriarch with the necessary legal apparatus to enforce his household rule and in return the State gets an increasingly micromanaged population. Those who did not belong to a family potentially filled the hospitals, the almshouses, or worse, the ranks of the bandits.<sup>86</sup> With the motive force of the taxation necessary to operate or defend against such concerns (underwritten in part by the threat posed by agencies charged with collection), entire communities were collectively interested in questions of paternity to the extent that they determined responsibility for what

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<sup>84</sup> Tosh, pp. 14-15.

<sup>85</sup> Tosh, p. 92.

<sup>86</sup> Donzelot, p. 50.

would otherwise fall to the commons.<sup>87</sup> His responsibility for his charges therefore extended to regulating and policing the morality of an apprentice as well as an heir.

The lack of distinction between the running of a household and the running of a business ‘characterized the middling sort for some two or three hundred years’ until the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>88</sup> Donzelot argues that the failures of such a system can be seen in the storming of the Bastille, as the indigent, ‘those whom the socio-familial apparatus could’ no longer ‘keep in check’ by the late eighteenth century were the ones who instigated the revolution.<sup>89</sup> In a parallel manner, the English example is all that more indicative of the family’s place in the distribution of power; the Reform Act of 1832 limited calls for household suffrage by instating a rent threshold, thus extending democratic subjectivity only to the agents of the socio-familial apparatus.<sup>90</sup>

As industrialization and the rise of the town centre took men and breadwinning increasingly out of the domestic space, and thus began to fracture the authority of the father, the power attributed to this role was partially, if temporarily, consolidated by a ‘renewed emphasis on the effort and sacrifices of the breadwinner’.<sup>91</sup> In material terms, as the pre-industrial partnership was broken down into a distinction between paid and unpaid labour, the increasing dependency on the male breadwinner was accompanied by an increased ideological valuation of his function. At the same time, the significance of the domestic space was consolidated

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<sup>87</sup> Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women Touch and Power in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Yale, 2003).

<sup>88</sup> Tosh, p. 15.

<sup>89</sup> Donzelot, p. 51.

<sup>90</sup> As the demands of the Chartists, among others, would indicate, in 1832 Parliament was to some degree lagging behind some quarters in the discourse of democracy.

<sup>91</sup> Tosh, p. 25.



in what historians identify as an early Victorian ideal of domesticity.<sup>92</sup> Early 19<sup>th</sup> century definitions of masculinity that referenced the public quality of military, political, or commercial power were superseded by an emphasis on private demonstrations of ‘tenderness, love and care, the protection of the weak, especially women, and the education and cultivation of dependents’.<sup>93</sup> Such discourses were largely a reaction to the perceived ills of entrepreneurial capitalism and the harsh formal or industrial environments of business.

The experience of domestic life represented a form of respite from the less salubrious aspects of nineteenth century progress, at the same time that the performance of domestic authority often compensated for the subservience experienced in corporate environments. Those same corporate structures would be blamed for an incipient sense of destabilized social hierarchies. In this way, the home was valued and sentimentalized as ‘the last remnant of a vanishing social order [...] In the most ambitious version of this ideal the ennobling values of the home were destined to suffuse and transform the wider society.’<sup>94</sup> Parallel to the erosion of the middle class male’s public power, the domestic space was increasingly invested with the authority of national-political reproduction. The same ennobling of domestic space that sought to preserve the remnants of the old order, performed the very discursive transfer of authority to which it was opposed.

That transfer, along with considerable material alterations in the structure of the middle class home, also provided the conditions for the political subjectivation of middle class women manifest in organizations that agitated on issues as diverse as

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<sup>92</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1987).

<sup>93</sup> James A. Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth Century Married Life* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 150.

<sup>94</sup> Tosh, p. 31.

temperance and abolition, as well as suffrage. By the 1830's and 1840's 'a non working wife, a complement of servants and a tastefully furnished house reserved for domestic pursuits, might be a more convincing demonstration of class status than a man's business of profession'.<sup>95</sup> As business responsibilities were stripped from the household, the middle class came to define success partially in terms of the female head of household's distance from menial labour.

While such changes altered the value of the authoritative role, the middle class homemaker was still, for most of the day, practically responsible for the children and in charge of a domestic staff that expanded in line with family fortunes. In 1800 Britain's 100,000 domestic servants largely worked for the 'landed elite', but by 1851 they had become the second largest occupational group in Britain. By 1901 there were over 1.5 million domestic servants. S.P. Walker points out that the general perception was that a minimum of three servants was necessary to a properly functioning middle class household and under this regime a woman's accounting and managerial capacities took centre stage in the very definition of a good wife.<sup>96</sup> Divested of a role in business, middle class women were simultaneously charged with expanding managerial authority over the working classes they employed and increasingly took on managerial roles similar to those of their husbands.

Paradoxically, the patriarchal institution of *couverture* provided a legal framework for the political recognition of middle class women as administrative authorities. In assuming the practical management of the social-familial apparatus in the name of their husbands, middle class women mimetically performed the very relationship that conferred sovereign power onto their husbands. Where the patriarch

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<sup>95</sup> Tosh, p. 24.

<sup>96</sup> S. P. Walker, 'How To Secure Your Husband's Esteem: Accounting and Private Patriarchy in The British Middle Class Household During the Nineteenth Century', *Accounting, Organization and Society*, 23, (1998), 485-514 (p. 492).



once acted in the name of the King or in the name of the State, the matriarch acted in the name of her husband, the emissary of State power, and thus cited State authority while dissolving any individual claim to it. Such an unintentional appropriation of sovereign power, brought about by the material realities of transitions in the manner of labour, provides the impetus for an expanding medico-clinical surveillance of the household administrator and their domain. As Foucault writes, 'parents and relatives became the chief agents' for the sexual deployments of the old regime and, in calling upon the authorities of 'doctors, educators and later psychiatrists' to carry out that role, they aided the expanding articulations of normal and pathological manifestations.<sup>97</sup> Parents and relatives tied the familial regime to the clinical, religious and educational regimes and defined in detail the proper performance of State and individuated failures. The wife and mother achieved her own Janus-faced subjectivity, with recourse to the same authority of violence that threatened to subjugate her.

In tandem with the emergent political significance of the homemaker, 'children no longer' formed part of the household pool of labour, and 'their distinctive needs' were 'likely to attract greater attention'.<sup>98</sup> The public-private binary, engendered by industrial culture, instituted a new child-centred philosophy of domestic space. While drawing on the reservoir of eighteenth century sentimentality and Romanticism, the new child-centredness was managed through burgeoning discourses of sexuality. In Foucault's account, the importance of the domestic role of women and the significance of child rearing represent two of four points of primary significance in the deployment of sexuality. The 'pedagogization of children's sex' was ultimately concerned with the 'precious and perilous, dangerous and

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<sup>97</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 110.

<sup>98</sup> Tosh, p. 40.

endangered' sexual potential of the child and thus the social-political future of the nation. The 'the hystericization of women's bodies' was ultimately concerned with the mother's 'biologico-moral responsibility' towards such political subjects.<sup>99</sup> Through a household increasingly understood as a site of nation building, children's bodies and behaviours were increasingly invested with political significance. Children came to be seen as individuals 'whose distinctive character should be valued and nurtured'. Tosh notes that the form this child centred-ness took among the 'middling sort' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had its roots in the practices of the English elite, who were internationally notorious for their excessive attention to children 'as far back as the early eighteenth century'.<sup>100</sup>

This discursive colonization of the domestic sphere that subjectivated wives and mothers and created the "potential" of children, was also accompanied by a redefinition of domestic violence. In perfect alignment with the discursive qualification of domestic spaces, violence was abandoned as a *legitimate* technology of power. The clearly defined power relations of patriarchal marriage gave way to ideals of companionate marriage, where the co-operative dimension of the relationship could be emphasized. The new model was not originally egalitarian, but was offered as a hierarchical though complementary relationship of 'benevolent manliness and compliant femininity'.<sup>101</sup> The change of emphasis functioned to denigrate the historical prerogatives of patriarchal marriage, including the tempered application of violence, displacing them with ideologies of love and protection. The

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<sup>99</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 104.

<sup>100</sup> Tosh, p. 39.

<sup>101</sup> Hammerton, p. 78.



emphasis was thus on the productive over the repressive.<sup>102</sup> As if in recognition of the State's own denegation of violence and increasing emphasis on ideal embodiments, as well as middle class interests in that structure, the use of violence in the familial space was increasingly interpreted as a sign of irrational excess and administrative breakdown.

On this point, the middle classes underlined their own political authority by contrasting the unfortunate and obscure practice of violence in their own class with the barbarism imagined to be prevalent among the working classes and the poor. In fact, James Hammerton finds that the citation of cruelty in mid-century British divorce proceedings were roughly consistent across the class and professional status of petitioners.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, in their book *Family Fortunes*, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall document the extensive advice offered to middle class women on how to maintain the uneasy peace of companionate marriage.<sup>104</sup> As Anna Clark notes, the political fantasy of civilization extended the regulatory reach of the State, while denying political participation to its objects:

parliament overcame its long opposition to interfering in the private sphere of the home by defining wife-batterers as working class brutes who did not deserve the right to privacy and their victims as passive creatures who could not determine their own fates.

In 1855, *The British Workman* declared that there were two ways to govern a family: 'the first is by force and the other is by mild and vigilant authority [...] A husband deserves to lose his empire altogether, by making an attempt to force it with

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<sup>102</sup> Anna Clark, 'Domesticity And The Problem Of Wife-beating In Nineteenth-century Britain: Working Class Culture, Law. And Politics', in *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950, Gender and Class*. ed. by Shani D'Cruz (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000), pp. 27-40.

<sup>103</sup> Hammerton, p. 105.

<sup>104</sup> Davidoff and Hall, Chapter 7.

violence.’<sup>105</sup> Incidents of violence among the professional classes were thus interpreted as exceptional outbursts of domestic quarrelling, while press attention focused on the sensational and dramatic cases ‘exposing the sexual dalliance and brutality of the upper classes’.<sup>106</sup>

When women lost their petitions for divorce they were often accused of provocations, such as a slatternly failure to maintain the domestic space that gave rise to their abusers’ impatient outburst. Domestic management and productivity, or, at least, the lack of it, became the site of violent correction. The methods of the residual regime were thus linked with the goals of the emergent regime, constituting examples of excusable violence. Another frequently cited “cause”, where men were responsible, was alcohol, which was blamed for the failures of reason that constituted so many violent outbursts.<sup>107</sup> Women were quick to occupy this site, as temperance offered a kind of counter discourse that could offset the historical prerogatives of patriarchal authority. As Elizabeth Pleck argues, the mid century U.S. Temperance Movement was the first to publicly ‘depict the cruelty of domestic violence’.<sup>108</sup>

Mid-nineteenth century reformers were encouraged to appeal to their husband’s sense of responsibility, but by the late nineteenth century the discourses had shifted from the wife’s ‘duties and obligations to reform’ her husband, towards the influence a mother held over her sons.<sup>109</sup> Throughout, reformers emphasized the public costs of ‘custodial care of drunkards in state asylums, prisons and poor houses. Intemperance, they insisted, contributed to murder and caused property

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<sup>105</sup> Clark, p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> Hammerton, p. 123.

<sup>107</sup> Judith Rowbothom, “‘Only When Drunk’: The Stereotyping of Violence In England, 1850-1900”, in *Everyday Violence*, pp.155-169; Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>108</sup> Pleck, p. 49.

<sup>109</sup> Pleck, pp. 98-99.



damage, fires and shipwrecks.' Further, the children of drunkards were believed to be more prone to 'insanity, lunacy, pauperism and criminality'.<sup>110</sup> Through the discourse of temperance women could decry the violence of the old regime by speaking with authoritative responsibility for the bio-political State.

While the relationships between abolitionists, the Temperance Movement and feminism are obvious enough at the level of identity, they are also intertwined through the shifting discourse of violence. Temperance and abolition, in very different ways, both sought to remove the functional exceptions to the general denegation of Sovereign violence under the democratic State. The taboo of alcohol, as well as its eventual prohibition in the US, serves clearly to delineate the violent subjugation of women in terms of its juridical and extra-juridical manifestations. Properly pathologized, the practice of patriarchal violence places the agent of violence outside the law and therefore the object of legitimate State violence. For white women, at least, temperance severed yet another tether to the old regime by limiting the potential for violent restrictions on their behavior and expression, thus clearing a path for a more encompassing subjectivation.

The discourse of re-masculinization, wrought by the dispossession of household Sovereignty, did not initially propose the demonstrative physical domination of women. In fact, *The Sheik* is somewhat specific in this prescriptive dimension. Instead, various projects, implicitly and explicitly intended to retrieve the embodied vitality of Western men (and so the vitality of the nation or the Empire), were resolutely homosocial attempts to define a manly culture. Disproportionately represented among such projects were rough sports or quasi-militarist activities, for example the Boy Scouts, founded in the UK in 1907 and in the US in 1910.

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<sup>110</sup> Pleck, p. 51.

During the late Victorian era in the UK, sports clubs, by definition exclusively male, ‘grew with breathtaking speed’ and between 1870 and 1912, 2,329 new Masonic lodges were established. Taking their cue from the upper class tradition of a ‘library, smoking room, billiard room’ and or bachelor’s quarters for visiting friends, middle class men established the den or study in their own homes and set about enshrining a resolutely masculine culture.<sup>111</sup> Literary adventure fantasies provided imaginary spaces free from feminine influence. Allan Quatermain, for example, assures his readers that he can ‘safely say that there is not a *petticoat* in the whole history’ of *King Solomon’s Mines*, and apologizes for his blunt style of prose, asserting that ‘a sharp spear [...] needs no polish’.<sup>112</sup> As Chauncey states, ‘prizefighters, cowboys, soldiers and sailors became popular heroes heralded as paragons of virility’.<sup>113</sup>

As suggested earlier in this chapter, early twentieth century concerns about the condition of the British male body are often ascribed to the recruitment failures of the Boer War, when only 14,000 of the 20,000 volunteers could be deemed fit for service.<sup>114</sup> While the imagined threat to imperial interests should not be underestimated, in reality such concerns only merged with the existent discourse of masculine reconstruction. In fact, the recruitment numbers were interpreted as a sign of just how bad a recognized problem had become and so forced the issue on to the parliamentary agenda. In the US context, Theodore Roosevelt’s nationalist concerns were expressed in his 1899 speech championing ‘the strenuous life’. As Bederman

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<sup>111</sup> Tosh, p. 187; p. 182.

<sup>112</sup> Rider Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines* (London: Penguin, 1885: 1994), p.3; p. xi.

<sup>113</sup> Chauncey, p. 113; Christopher Breward, ‘Manliness as Masquerade: The Disciplining of Sartorial Desire’, in *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860-1914* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 240-262 (pp. 241-246).

<sup>114</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), p. 13.



notes, the speech was ‘explicitly discussing only foreign relations’, namely the imperative to build the US army and take Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. The speech itself never mentioned gender, ‘yet the phrase “the strenuous life” soon began to connote a virile and hard-driving manhood, which might or might not involve foreign relations, at all’.<sup>115</sup>

In the attempt to produce masculine distinction through the insistent delineation of an embodied masculine culture, the flight from domesticity reveals the emergent androgyny of State power. This is not to suggest that gender equality was established in the early twentieth century, but to say that the form of power that had historically constituted masculine authority, the performance of sovereignty, was no longer positively male and therefore could no longer underwrite or secure the subjectivity of individual men. The attempt to retrieve the lost vitality and virility of some earlier era is an unwitting confession of this circumstance, but it is also an unwitting confession of the extensive sexualization of power itself.

The increased focus ‘on the physical attributes of manliness’ represents an attempt to root ‘difference from women in the supposedly immutable differences of the body’, when other differences were no longer so certain. Still, the choice of the body as object was itself predetermined by the mode of power that such a focus was intended to resist. The nostalgia for the regime of alliance and its ‘symbolics of blood’, that included ‘the honor of war’, ‘the triumph of death’ and ‘the sovereign with his sword’, was enacted through an ‘analytics of sexuality’ concerned with ‘themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species’ and ‘the vitality of the social body’.<sup>116</sup> Increasingly dispossessed of a domestic object, the Sovereign’s

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<sup>115</sup> Bederman, p. 184.

<sup>116</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, pp. 147-148.

representative must take his own body as an object to perform the rituals of vestigial Sovereignty.

The geography of the colony and the frontier represent, as the next chapter will detail, a residual geography of potential lordship. Colonial and frontier identifications are fantasy identifications, constituted by the very impossibility of sovereignty. In the practices of identification, the subject seeks to re-embody the political foundations of the old order by inhabiting the discursive ephemera of violent conquest and domination. The bio-political order requires that he take his own body as an object, but as if to deny the implications of this modern mode of power, he does this via the styles and methods he identifies with the old regime. Dispossessed of the objects that could give the fantasy some realistic foundations: slaves, women, colonial subjects and children, the masculine subject transmutes what has become the *sadism* of the old regime into narcissistic masochism. The Janus-faced subject performs the role of Sovereign in an effort to eradicate his own pathological embodiments which are bio-politically determined.

It seems impossible to consider masochism without entering into the issues of eroticism, but this is exactly what I seek to recommend. The rugged masculine subject of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is sado-masochistic, but that sado-masochism does not hold a secret of eroticism as much as it seeks to exorcise the eroticism encroaching upon the male body. The signification of physical strength and the potential for battle is a practical refusal to accept the feminization of the body that is historically implied by the objectifying practices of the bio-political regime. As D. A. Miller instructively points out in the contemporary context:

only those who can't tell elbow from ass will confuse the different priorities of the macho straight male body and the so called gym-body of gay male culture. The first deploys its heft as a tool [...] As both an armoured body and a body wholly given over to utility, it is ultimately aligned with the unseen body of its bossman [...] The second displays its muscle



primarily in terms of an image openly appealing to, and deliberately courting the possibility of being shivered by, someone else's desire.<sup>117</sup>

In the bio-political era, to take oneself as an object is also to take oneself as an erotic object. By coding bio-political narcissism in discourses of competition and combat, the masculine subject refuses to accept the dissolution of Sovereign power and cleaves, however hopelessly, to an essentially violent authority over that of the discursive citizenship that supersedes it.

Such relationships explain the suspect sexuality and effeminacy attributed to Valentino, despite his role as a violently domineering absolute ruler. As discussed, Valentino's body was offered to female audiences as an erotic object. His close ups in *The Sheik*, and his knowing smile in *The Sheik's Physique*, accept and validate the discursive relations that underpin women's authority to eroticize the male body. Offered to the female spectator in this way, Valentino was understood to have accepted the very relationships of power that masculine subjects sought to resist. The role of a violent and totalitarian ruler undoubtedly vitiates the political dangers of what might otherwise be an unqualified acceptance of women as authorized subjects in the regime of erotic objectification. Nonetheless, it was apparently not enough to ward off his marginalization.

Within the discursive parameters I have outlined, *The Sheik* represents a set of reversals that ultimately re-inscribe the sovereign power of masculinity by returning it to the domestic spaces which men once fled. In this, I think we can understand the massive appeal that *The Sheik* held for female audiences. The emergent-cum-dominant regime of bio-politics does not slough off all the historical residue of Sovereignty. It would thus be idealistic to suggest that female audiences loved *The Sheik* solely due to the promise of bio-political equality carried within the

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<sup>117</sup> D.A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 31.

text. *The Sheik* validates the discourse of rugged masculinity and the male body as an instrument of violence, but that validation also proposes that such expressions of violence have their place in the institution of heterosexuality.

Prior to the Sheik's conquest, Diana's subjectivity does not simply suggest the end of masculine authority in the West, it also suggests the potential breakdown of heterosexuality. Diana's rejection of a properly gendered embodiment, along with her rejection of the institution of marriage, is a rejection of the sexual discourses that promise power to female subjects within, but not outside, the domestic realm. The bio-political sexualization of the male body which signifies the emergent androgyny of State power, requires male participation to effect its transitions. The reproductive couple is the focal point of power and its redistribution. Diana's own flight from domesticity represents her removal from the very category of woman and so heterosexuality. The fictional character represents an exception for women, but metaphorizes the dangers of male, as well as female, self-exclusions from the emergent modes of heteronormative subjectivation.

On this point the book was more clear than the film. On the morning after Diana is first raped by the Sheik, a scene which also entailed her first kiss, Diana is paralyzed with fear. 'It was not true! It was not true! It could not be – this awful thing that happened to her – not to her, Diana Mayo!'<sup>118</sup> Diana's refusal to believe that she has been raped elicits a primarily sympathetic response, but the form that it takes raises questions about the degree to which any reader is meant to identify with her righteousness.

While there would seemingly be no need to question 'this awful thing', the repetition in her thoughts belies the fact that Diana believes rape to be the province of other women. The repetition of the pronoun 'her' serves to increase the distance

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<sup>118</sup> Hull, p. 49.



from an undifferentiated her, woman, and the female Diana. When this culminates in her invocation of her own proper name, she is calling to the authority of her own specificity, her bodily performance, that is also the invocation of aristocratic privilege and excess. The horror of the rape is not a matter of what is inflicted upon a woman, in that Diana does not identify her body as female. The horror lies in the belief that the individual, Diana Mayo, exists outside of the realm of normal female subjectivity and the now certain knowledge that she does not.

In the first few pages of the book, on hearing Lady Conway's condemnation of Diana's behaviour, one of Diana's would be suitors in turn condemns Conway's ability to wreck reputations as lofty as 'the Archangel Gabriel ... let alone that of mere human girl'. A would be American suitor who is with him responds, while laughing, that Diana is 'not a very human girl'. 'She was sure meant to be a boy and changed at the last moment. She looks like a boy in petticoats, a damned pretty boy - - and damned haughty one.'<sup>119</sup> Such words make Diana's body an object of ever more complicated contests. The Englishman's indignant defense of Diana is softened and also turned to laughter with the two men's shared recognition of her bodily impropriety. Nonetheless, there is also an ambiguity in the exchange which complicates the relations of objectification and then implicates the sexual propriety of both of the men. Diana is 'like a boy in petticoats, a damned pretty boy'. The American vernacular 'damned' unfolds into a set of possible meanings and the repetition leaves us with an undecided question. Is the boy 'damned pretty' or is the 'pretty boy' damned? Diana looks like a very pretty boy, or Diana looks like a pretty boy damned for – what – sodomitical sin? Alternatively, she is a girl who looks like a very attractive boy and so the attraction is her boyishness. She is not a girl who is boyish and attractive, so much as she successfully performs the beauty of boys.

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<sup>119</sup> Hull, p. 2.

The desire for Diana is neither a desire for women or a desire for transgressive gender performances. The men's shared laughter is at once derision of Diana and recognition of their own questionable desire. It is their amused confession of participation in the very 'scandal' they originally sought to deny. They confirm the discursive framework constituting the disapprobation of Lady Conway and then laugh it off. Lady Conway has only miscalculated how pervasive the scandal is; these men are queer and what is more, it is a source of considerable amusement for them.

Diana, like the men in the colonies, and those men identified with the colonies, has rejected the domestic in an effort to affirm a form of subjectivity that is not dependent upon relationships of sexuality and gender. Such an effort fails to recognize the emergent-cum-dominant mode of subjective authorization and is therefore bound to failure, as it inevitably falls into the disqualification of pathological embodiment. The novel's semi-didactic approach to the suspect sexuality of the colonial male only makes the discursive relationships that constitute such suspicion explicit.

The film's slightly more vague allusions to the same issues facilitate apperception of the embedded discursive contradictions of homosocial cultures. With State power increasingly concentrated on the importance of heterosexual reproduction, the effort to retrieve the old regime via homosocial activities was destined to become suspect for its perversity. The self-disciplining and bio-mechanistic view of the male body represented in such pursuits, already implies the interiorization of the same authorizing regime that such practices were imagined to oppose. As such a gaze is applied to retrieve the very power that it undermines in the first place, it cannot provide any confirmation of the subject. It follows that the more hard nosed the attempt to build the body, and identify with the Sovereign's rule, the



more prominently the subject confesses to their own lack of power and therefore becomes suspect. As authority comes to rest on heterosexual manliness the zealous pursuit of manliness outside its heterosexual expression, necessarily suggests that the lack of power at issue is a lack of heterosexuality.

*The Sheik's* massive and devoted female audiences can be explained by the narrative's effective rejection of homosocial culture, as such a rejection is necessary to the democratic subjectivation of women. In the interstices of the residual Sovereign order and emergent bio-politics, the political authority of a woman is, at least in part, an operation of the political authority invested in the man *to which she is attached*. The power and authority that she can come to embody through the conduits of bio-political discourse, depend on the quantity of power and authority he carries over from the old order. The Sovereign image of the violent sheik not only represents the re-integration of the violent masculine body within the discourse of heterosexuality, but also the ideal vector of her subjectivation. The narrative of *The Sheik* demonstrates complete respect for masculine authority forged in violence, but proposes that the object of such violence should be the order of romantic love. Diana is tamed by the violence of the Sheik, but her subjection also serves to tame him. The romance genre consistently replays this narrative where the defiant object submits, and in submitting, achieves the reciprocal submission of her romantic master.

In this way, *The Sheik* represents a fantasy structure, through which women can imagine a quasi-voluntary submission to the violence that also founds their own subjectivation. It is important to emphasize that this is not a voluntary submission to the subjugations of patriarchy. While it suggests that men retain the authority of corrective violence, that violence is directed towards the maintenance of a discursive relationship upon which men and women both depend for their subjectivation. Male

authority is such that it is suspect without a female object. Its exercise is little more than an exhibition of -- to choose exactly the right word—impotence. However, her authority was always already his. Installed as the masochistic object of his narcissistic sadism, her subjection reconstitutes the relationship necessary to her subjectivation. The rude, and politically doomed, interruption of women's progressive bio-political subjectivation, however complicated it may be, is resolved in narrative fantasy.

Providing final, and ever more satisfying, closure for the female spectator, the film turns on its head the narrative fantasy of subjectivation 'elsewhere', the fantasy that this can only happen 'in the desert'. The closing revelation that the sheik is Anglo Spanish dispels the fantasy that female subjectivation can only happen in another time and place, and thus offers female audiences their own satisfying hope. The violent 'remnant' necessary to establish heterosexual subjectivation for women is revealed as lying at the centre of Western heterosexual relations after all.



FOUR  
**FRONTIERS OF SEX AND VIOLENCE IN *ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST***

A Train Is A Godsend, That's All I Have Learned  
 Now I'm Tired of the West, I'm Tired  
 --Franklin Bruno<sup>1</sup>

*Critical Contests*

In the last few decades Sergio Leone's 1968 Western, *Once Upon A Time In The West*, has been the subject of a significant reversal in critical and popular tastes. Before discussing the narrative and its significance, it is essential to frame that discussion in terms of the film's 35 years of contested reception.<sup>2</sup> Leone's earlier Westerns, like *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* (1966) or, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1967), introduced a degree of aesthetic revelry to cinematic depictions of violence, and proved to be very popular at the same time that they were understood as morally

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin Bruno, 'Tired of the West', on *A Cat May Look At a Queen*, Absolutely Kosher Records, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *Once Upon a Time In The West*, dir. Sergio Leone, perf. Claudia Cardinale. Charles Bronson. Jason Robards and Henry Fonda, Paramount Pictures/Rafran Cinematographica, 1968.

questionable and wholly without artistic merit.<sup>3</sup> With *Once Upon A Time In The West*, Leone attempted to break out of the B-movie ghetto.

Upon its original release in English-speaking markets, the film was the subject of conflicting and conflicted reviews.<sup>4</sup> *The New York Times*' Vincent Canby was condescending from the start: 'Once Upon a Time in Italy there lived a little boy named Sergio Leone who went to the movies quite a lot, particularly to see Hollywood Westerns.'<sup>5</sup> Canby's review offers representative complaints about the length and the 'absurdity' of the film, and derision of the narrative as 'an elaborate excuse for a series of classic confrontations between classic Western types'.<sup>6</sup> The manner in which Canby qualifies his criticism, stating that the film is 'almost always interesting, wobbling as it does, between being an epic lampoon and a serious *homage*', is similarly representative.<sup>7</sup>

In his exhaustive study of the 'spaghetti western', Christopher Frayling points out that the film was generally understood to be artistically impressive, but to falter under the weight of its formal ambition, squandering all narrative significance.<sup>8</sup> *Variety*, for example, praised the 'careful interconnection of set piece action', but argued that Leone is 'unconvincingly asking' for the Western mythology to be considered within a 'new moral light'. In the end, *Variety* argues, the 'running time

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<sup>3</sup> *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, dir. Sergio Leone, perf. Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef and Eli Wallach, Produzioni Europee Associati 1966. *For A Fistful Of Dollars*, dir. Sergio Leone, perf. Clint Eastwood, Gian Maria Volonte and Wolfgang Lukschy, Jolly Films, 1964.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Frayling, *Sergio Leone: Something To Do With Death* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Vincent Canby, 'Screen: Once Upon A Time In The West', *The New York Times*, 29 May 1969, p. 43. (This is a review of the original 165 minute version).

<sup>6</sup> Canby.

<sup>7</sup> Canby.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Europeans and the West from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: IB Tauris, 1981, 2001), p. 212.



may prove heavy going', and Leone's 'special talent for playing with film ideas gets lost in a no man's land of the merely initiative'.<sup>9</sup> In *The Times*, John Russell Taylor was amused by the simulacrum, and impressed by the 'complicated plot' of *Once Upon*, but found that the 'wearisom' film was 'much too long for its own good'.<sup>10</sup>

The original release of the film was quickly withdrawn from British and American markets. Twenty-two minutes were cut, and the cuts were deep, leaving behind an incoherent narrative and seemingly nonsensical scenes where the characters refer to events that never happened. *Time* magazine's review of the re-release was entitled 'Tedium in the Tumbleweed'.<sup>11</sup> The film essentially failed in the US, drawing only one sixth of the receipts of Leone's much cheaper film *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. By contrast, in the Italian market, the uncut version of the film made nearly four times as much money as it did in the American market, though it was still less successful than some previous Leone productions.<sup>12</sup> In Paris, *Once Upon A Time In The West*, which was in production during the May Events, sold over five times the number of tickets than previous Leone Westerns.<sup>13</sup> In 2000 it was still one of the all time biggest films at the French box office.

Christopher Frayling writes that 'preview audiences in America and those who went to see the film in the first weeks of its release, just thought the film too long and too slow'. At the same time, Frayling blames the failure of the film in the US and the UK on the editing that occurred in response to the initial critical negativity.<sup>14</sup> While those edits may have precluded any popular success in spite of

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<sup>9</sup> "'Once Upon A Time In The West", *Variety*, 23 May 1969', in *Variety's Film Reviews Volume 12 1968-197*, ed. by Derek Elly (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1983). (This is a review of the original 165 minute version).

<sup>10</sup> John Russel Taylor, 'A Western At Third Hand'. *The Times* (London), 14 August 1969, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 297.

<sup>12</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 297.

<sup>13</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, Appendix 4.

<sup>14</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 197.

the critics, they obviously cannot explain that initial critical reaction and the resultantly discouraged audiences.

In the mid-eighties, this conflicted Western became the object of rehabilitation.<sup>15</sup> Frayling's *Spaghetti Westerns: Westerns and Europeans From Karl May to Sergio Leone*, published in 1981, plays an important role in this.<sup>16</sup> *Once Upon* is singled out in an effort to challenge existing critical and popular insistence on cultural authenticity in the appreciation of the Western genre. That insistence had inevitably relegated European examples of the Western to a category of imitation, allowing even the worst American Westerns a favourable claim to authenticity. Frayling attributed the survival of *Once Upon*, prior to the impact of his own rescue efforts, to a fan base of cult audiences and a handful of European and American cineastes, who kept the English version of the film alive via repertory cinemas and film clubs.<sup>17</sup>

In 1984, the film was re-released with the full 165 minutes intact, and, as if influenced by a growing tide of appreciation, *The New York Times* critic Lawrence Van Gelder looked forward to the restoration of the film's 'coherence'.<sup>18</sup> By 1985, *The New York Times* was calling the film 'boldly dark' and 'jagged', tepidly suggesting that the spectacle of Henry Fonda as a villain at least merited a look.<sup>19</sup> In 1991, the review had changed yet again to, '[b]oldly dark, jagged western, the Sergio Leone way'.<sup>20</sup> By the late 90's, this had been further amended with the addition of a one word sentence, 'Captivating'.<sup>21</sup> *The Times* similarly altered its position, and the

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<sup>15</sup> See *Once Upon a Time: Sergio Leone*, dir. Howard Hill, Sound and Vision/Westbrook Films, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*.

<sup>17</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 296; p. 300; *Spaghetti*, p.197.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Van Gelder, 'At the Movies', *The New York Times*, 24 August 1984, p. C6.

<sup>19</sup> 'Top Weekend Films', *The New York Times*, 20 September 1985, p. C31.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Thompson, 'Movies This Week', *The New York Times*, 10 February 1991, p. T4.

<sup>21</sup> 'Movies This Week', *The New York Times*, 5 April 1998, p. TV6.



film is now an ‘exquisitely shot [...] symphonic farewell to the western’ that is ‘never sentimental about the passing of frontier lawlessness’. It is separated out from Leone’s earlier ‘spaghetti westerns’ as a ‘more ambitious cowboy drama’.<sup>22</sup>

Conversely, *Halliwel’s Film Guide* has failed, over its years of new editions, to revise its negative review, which still reads:

Immensely long and convoluted epic Western marking its director’s collaboration with an American studio and his desire to make serious statements about something or other. Beautifully made, empty and very violent.<sup>23</sup>

As Frayling recounts in his 2000 biography of Leone, such a failure now indicates the dubious critical quality of *Halliwel’s* generally:

Luca Morsella remembers going into a London bookshop and asking for a copy of *Halliwel’s Film Guide*, to which the assistant replied, “What do you want *that* for?” “What do you mean?” he asked. “Open it at *Once Upon A Time In The West* and see what you think of its judgments,” replied the assistant [...] “See” said the assistant. “It *can’t* be reliable.”<sup>24</sup>

Currently, *Once Upon A Time In The West* regularly battles two or three films for the subjective title of ‘greatest Western ever’: usually a competition that includes *The Searchers* (1956), Leone’s own *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (1968), and sometimes *The Wild Bunch* (1969) or *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (1962). The film ranks high on the *Internet Movie Database* (the IMDb), and the ‘best films of all time’ lists of assorted critics.<sup>25</sup> In 2003, a restored print was the centrepiece of the American Cinematech’s Leone retrospective. In the same year the BBC featured

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<sup>22</sup> ‘*Once Upon A Time In The West: Film of the Week*’, *The Times*, 5 January 2002, p. Television-33.

<sup>23</sup> *Halliwel’s 2003 Film and Television Guide*, ed. by John Walker (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), p. 619.

<sup>24</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 296.

<sup>25</sup> Howard Hughes, *Spaghetti Westerns* (Harpendon: Pocket Essentials, 2001), p. 36;

‘The IMDb Top 250 Movies As Voted By Our Users’, <<http://www.imdb.com/chart/top>> (accessed 3 July 2003); ‘Sight and Sound Director’s Top Ten Poll, 2002’, <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/topten/poll/directors-long.html>> (accessed 2 July 2003).



the film in a prime time Sunday night slot, rather than the weekday matinee slot, where classic and not so classic Westerns make near daily appearances.

Moreover, in 2003, Robert Rodriguez released his Leone homage *Once Upon a Time In Mexico*, and the year before, the British director, Shane Meadows borrowed various stylistic elements of Leone's Westerns for *Once Upon A Time In the Midlands*.<sup>26</sup> The hugely successful Indian film *Lagaan*, which revolves around a group of nineteenth century villagers resisting a ruthless agent of the Raj, had its title amended to '*Once Upon a Time In India*', for international English language markets.<sup>27</sup> More prominently, Tsui Hark and Jet Li have a global kung fu franchise, which is titled *Once Upon a Time In China* within English language markets. The original of the series revolved around a group of nineteenth century fighters resisting the colonial efforts of France, Britain and the US.<sup>28</sup> The one time box office and critical failure is now an unquestionably popular film, an object of significant critical appreciations, as well as a marketing device.

### *The Western Story*

*Once Upon A Time In The West* revolves around the late nineteenth century arrival of the railroad in Arizona and the closure of the frontier. Composed of majestic panoramas and an amusingly innovative musical score, the film announces

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<sup>26</sup> *Once Upon A Time In Mexico*, dir. Robert Rodriguez, perf. Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek, Johnny Depp and Mickey Rourke, Columbia Pictures, 2003; *Once Upon A Time In The Midlands* dir. Shane Meadows, perf. Robert Carlyle, Kathy Burke and Ricky Tomlinson, Big Arty Productions/Film Four, 2002.

<sup>27</sup> *Lagaan: Once Upon A Time In India*, dir. Ashutosh Gowaricker, perf. Aamir Khan, Grace Singh and Paul Blackthorne, Aamir Khan Productions, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> *Wong Fei-Hung (Once Upon a Time In China)* dir. Hark Sui, perf. Jet Li, Biao Yen and Rosamond Kwan, Film Workshop Ltd, 2001. The film's original English title was *Once Upon a Time a Hero in China*; the third instalment came to be known as *Once Upon A Time In China 3*, again in the English language markets. The first two were retrospectively retitled and all subsequent films in the series have the title (six in total).



itself as an 'epic'. The narrative plays out through five archetypal 'Western' characters: Jill McBain (Claudia Cardinale) is the whore with the heart of gold, who is leaving that life behind in New Orleans. She arrives in Arizona to join her new husband, the homesteader Brett McBain. Frank (Henry Fonda) is the ruthless hired gun dressed in black, who murders Brett McBain, along with his three children, early in the film. Frank has an uneasy relationship with his similarly ruthless employer, the railroad baron Mr. Morton (Gabrielle Ferzetti), who is desperate to get his railroad to the Pacific before he dies from tuberculosis. It is Frank's job to 'clear small obstacles from the track'; we eventually discover that Brett McBain was one of these obstacles. McBain had intentionally settled in the railroad's path. He named his homestead 'Sweetwater', his land holding the only well for miles, and he planned to build a town at the inevitable station stop. Frank attempts to frame the bandit leader 'Cheyenne' (Jason Robards) for the murder of the McBain family. Cheyenne, understandably unhappy with this, joins forces with the widowed and mystified Jill McBain, in an effort to explain the killings and find the murderer. Finally, they are assisted by a stranger, or 'man with no name' (Charles Bronson), who announces his presence by playing haunting notes on his harmonica, hence his nickname 'Harmonica'.<sup>29</sup>

While Harmonica clearly shares a history with Frank, one that Frank cannot recall, their relationship is only explained in the final scenes after they duel. In a powerful scene, that only just escapes being laughably overdramatic, the man with no name returns his harmonica to Frank, and in so doing, finally reminds Frank of the time he murdered Harmonica's older brother. By the end of the film Frank, Mr.

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<sup>29</sup> This part was originally intended for Clint Eastwood who played 'the man with no name' character in earlier Leone productions.

Morton and Cheyenne are dead. Jill has the beginnings of what is now her town and Harmonica rides off into the hills carrying Cheyenne's corpse. For Leone,

The rhythm of the film was intended to create the sensation of the last gasps a person takes just before dying. *Once Upon a Time in the West* was, from start to finish, a dance of death. All of the characters in the films, except Claudia, are conscious of the fact they will not arrive at the end alive [...] I wanted to make the audience *feel*, in three hours, how these people lived and died.<sup>30</sup>

In this chapter, I wish to explain the manner in which a violent film narrative can ascend from being ignored by audiences and critically dismissed as mediocre, derivative and empty, even unintentionally comic, to being one of the most important, acclaimed and influential films of its genre, if not its time. As I have already suggested, Christopher Frayling's work is at the centre of the discussion on Leone, due to the historical, biographical and semiotic arguments he has provided for an appreciation of the film. Frayling originally gave considered attention to what he took to be Leone's narrative of the capitalist incorporation, and destruction, of the frontier. He argued that Leone had skillfully 'digested the implications of the early writing of semiologists on *Mythologies*', and sought to defy the bourgeois compulsion to conceal code.<sup>31</sup> In this way, Frayling argued, *Once Upon* deliberately seeks to lay bare the material relationships that propelled the Western mythology.

While I shall discuss the narrative analysis of *Once Upon* provided by Frayling in his early book, it has to be noted that his more recent biography of Leone exhibits a significant level of skepticism regarding that analysis. Frayling draws back from such early claims, not because the text cannot sustain them, but because there is a lack of evidence regarding Leone's intellectual abilities in this regard. In the

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<sup>30</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 291.

<sup>31</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 213.



biography, Frayling is more content with a view that casts Leone's accomplishments in terms of an impressively intuitive, but unwitting, skill with cinematic form.

The genius of the film is an effect of that form. It 'can be seen as the first truly postmodernist movie, made by a cineaste for cineastes'.<sup>32</sup> Yet Frayling insists that Leone demands recognition, not for an exposure of code, or for other forms of cultural-political relevance, but because, and here he draws on Jean Baudrillard, he was 'the first to understand the hall of mirrors within the contemporary culture of quotations'.<sup>33</sup>

It follows that, for Frayling, the reasons for the film's rise to prominence, and its increasing fan base, are to be found in its method of pastiche and its inter-textual deployments. Such an explanation proposes an attractive and engaging dialogue between select critics and the film's detractors, as well as originally dismissive audiences, where reasoned argument and applied intellectual pressure brings us in line with the pleasures of inter-textuality. After 'fifteen years of lobbying', Leone's films finally began 'to attract the sort of critical attention they deserved'.<sup>34</sup> Frayling's narrative suggests that audiences have entered into the regimes of expertise formerly reserved for critics, while critics and audiences alike abandon their outmoded desire to preserve the formal authenticity of the Western, in favor of pastiche and the 'post-modern'. Here the term 'post-modern' remains unelaborated, but for certain stylistic elements, and so stands in for little more than the ultra-contemporary.

Frayling does not in so many words renounce his earlier reading, but rather updates his formal appreciation of the film, while leaving the matter of the narrative's cultural relevance to languish. What concerns me is that this formal

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<sup>32</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 266.

<sup>33</sup> Frayling, *Sergio* p. 257, p. 492.

<sup>34</sup> Frayling *Sergio*, p. xiii.

emphasis evacuates extra-textual considerations concerning the political economy of post-modern cultural forms, or the political subjectivity of its consumers. We are left with the self-evident pleasures of knowingness, which audiences have inexplicably grown into, but Frayling cannot explain where such a knowingness comes from. I do not seek to dismiss the pleasures potentially produced by the film's use of quotation or pastiche. Nonetheless, the explanatory significance of pleasure in quotation and pastiche is somewhat circular, never actually accounting for the shift. More importantly, as I discuss in detail below, quotation and pastiche are so central to Western mythology in general, that an attempt to tack *Once Upon's particular* significance to that distinctive post is bound to be incomplete. Within a genre that is defined by quotation, any particular appreciation of quotation demands attention to the specifics of the mythology those quotations give rise to; our attention necessarily returns to the matter of the narrative.

Through emphasizing the discursive context of the narrative, I am interested in moving beyond the critical dead-end of deciding between authorial intent, and the decoding processes of audiences, to extend and perhaps deepen Frayling's early analysis of the narrative's significance. I argue that the pleasures of knowledge, suggested by a critical emphasis on quotation, are better understood as the narrative pleasures of violence. The story undoubtedly delves into film history in a manner that is reflexive, but this history is also a history of the spectatorship of violence. I shall suggest that the pleasures that are supposedly derived from the formal aspects of pastiche might be more convincingly assigned to subjective investments in the discourse of violence carried by such quotations.

Similarly, the reflexivity commanded by the film's narrative deployment of quotation should be situated within a more general elucidation of the apparatuses of



subjective regulation within modern culture.<sup>35</sup> This is to say, the pleasure of recognizing a quotation is a fragment or surface effect of a more profound psychical pleasure, one derived from the experience of discerning previously indiscernible techniques of discursive power. In coming to see the Western as an object, we assume a position of power over its historical seductions. The growth of pleasure in quotation is indicative of the recognition that the effectiveness of the Western mythology, as a discursive procedure, is increasingly residual. Leone's film assists the modern subject in relinquishing the residual order of Sovereignty. The mythology of Sovereign subjectivity it obsessively reiterates is recognized as myth and finally laid to rest. This is accomplished by demonstrating the fetishism of the myth *as a fetish*, rather than the exposure of the material reality that constitutes the myth.

In line with, and in contravention of, more classically defined visual pleasures, I shall delineate the manner in which the film produces spectator identification with Jill McBain to accomplish such a task.<sup>36</sup> As Jill is the only one who lives on through this 'dance of death', she comes to stand for the modern subject who outlives the mythological regime of Sovereign violence represented by the Western. The rise of *Once Upon*'s fortunes is redolent of an emergent recognition that individual sovereignty is irretrievably compromised, if not altogether non-existent. Jill McBain's knowing subjection to, and negotiation of, frontier violence, embodies this emergent understanding of subjectivity in the age of bio-politics. Through Jill's position at the centre of the narrative, potential spectator identifications with the masculine frontier gunfighter are complicated, transposed

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<sup>35</sup> Michel De Certeau, 'Micro-Techniques and Panoptic Discourse: A Quid pro Quo', in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 185-192 (p. 189).

<sup>36</sup> I am thinking particularly of Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22-34.

and transferred to the impotent sexism of an undifferentiated masculine population. The film almost demands the recognition that masculine aspirations to the frontier qualities of individuality, freedom, and resourcefulness, are little more than the mark of that subject's subjection.

### *A History Of/In Quotation*

The film's heavy use of 'quotation', its collection and representation of scenarios, scenes and types drawn from across the history of the genre, was always part of the story team's (Sergio Leone, Bernardo Bertolucci and Dario Argento) original intent. As discussed, British and American critics did not exclusively condemn the imitative form, but occasionally found some tongue in cheek amusement within it. *The New Republic's* otherwise lukewarm review was appreciative of 'the brilliant Leone', who recognized that the 'the Hollywood Western, as a genre, is a realm of fantasy' and that '*Once Upon A Time In The West* is [...] a fantasy superimposed on that general fantasy.'<sup>37</sup> For others the film was derivative, if, perhaps, the inevitable result of the transatlantic exchange in genre production. Still, some unease regarding the legitimacy of so much borrowing continues to surface in more contemporary reviews.

The popular American film critic Leonard Maltin qualifies his review by stating that the plot is 'admittedly lifted from *Johnny Guitar*', before moving on to call the film 'exciting, funny and reverent'.<sup>38</sup> In 2002, a heavily illustrated coffee-table book, called *Cowboy: How Hollywood Invented the Wild West*, is sure to identify the film's 'visual, thematic, and/or character references' to '*High Noon*,

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in James R. Parish and Michael R. Pitts, '*C'era Una Volta Il West*', in *The Great Western Pictures* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1976), pp. 51-52 (p. 52).

<sup>38</sup> *Leonard Maltin's 2003 Movie and Video Guide*, ed. by Leonard Maltin (New York: Penguin, 2002) p. 1020.



*Johnny Guitar, Shane, The Iron Horse, The Searchers* and *Winchester '73*.<sup>39</sup> It further states that the film is Leone's 'unique' and 'ambitious' 'homage'. One must also note the credulity in the line, 'Leone later said the film was comprised of "quotes from all the Westerns I love"', as the 'later' at least raises the suspicion of a retrospective justification.<sup>40</sup>

Frayling's partial catalogue of *Once Upon a Time in the West*'s quotations includes: *The Iron Horse, Shane, The Pursued, The Searchers, Run of the Arrow, Fort Apache, Winchester '73, Warlock, The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence, Man of the West, Man Without a Star, Rio Bravo, Western Union, Jubal, The Magnificent Seven, Cemetery Without Crosses*, Leone's own films, *For A Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, and then the Monument Valley setting, as well as some minor cast members are an unavoidable homage to the oeuvre of John Ford.<sup>41</sup>

Within the question of legitimate and illegitimate borrowing, the issue of quotation implicitly asserts the possibility of a discernible origin for those repeated themes and motifs which constitute the genre. I do not mean to suggest that the film does not borrow outright from other Westerns, but it is important to question the discursive assumptions that would drive an attempt to discern the authentic texts within the genre. For most of us the very distinction of a 'bad' Western is marked by our inability to differentiate it from so many other Westerns. And then how many of us are sure which of those two films was *The Wild Bunch* and which was *The Magnificent Seven*, *High Noon* and *Gunfight at the OK Corral*? And how many of John Wayne's Westerns simply bleed together in the memory of those who have seen them? The difficulty of differentiating the style and content of Westerns is also on

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<sup>39</sup> Holly George-Warren, *Cowboy: How Hollywood Invented the Wild West* (New York: Readers Digest Association, 2002), p. 204.

<sup>40</sup> George-Warren, p. 204.

<sup>41</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, pp. 266-278; George-Warren, p. 204.

display in Will Wright's famous structural analysis of the genre. In 1975 he broke all Westerns down into 4 narrative structures: 'the classical plot'; 'the vengeance variation'; 'the transition theme'; and 'the professional plot'. Within this, he was compelled to supply a significant number of qualifications for the slippages and confusions between each structural framework.<sup>42</sup>

Understanding that such slippages constitute the 'original' as much as the 'copy', just what is the apparent reference to *Shane* that occurs in *Once Upon A Time In The West*? Is it the stranger theme identified as 'the classical plot' by Wright, or the funeral scene that lacks any particular distinction? What is drawn from *The Searchers*? Is it the story of so many years of a life dedicated to the accomplishment of revenge, or the American pioneer lore of a family massacre that also dates to Jamestown and the narrative origins of the United States?

For someone less dedicated to the genre, 'quotation' seems to be little more than a matter of arcane knowledge through which others can signify their attachment to the genre. Indeed, a large number of the critical books on Westerns start with some introductory note on the author's contemporary or childhood love of Westerns. Dedications are sometimes to fathers or grandfathers who introduced them to the Western, and opening paragraphs are routinely composed of laments for the lost heyday of the Western, usually the author's childhood at the matinees or in front of the television.<sup>43</sup> Such declarations would suggest that attachments to the genre are not convincingly explained through rational or aesthetic interests in formal composition. Instead, the Western is, or was, the object of a significant level of

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<sup>42</sup> Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971; 2002).

<sup>43</sup> See John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1980); Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London: I B Taurus, 1997); George-Warren; and Wright.



subjective investment. The relations constituting youthful or adult subjects must precede or exceed confrontations with the genre.

While *Once Upon* does borrow outright from prior Westerns, any assertion of origins within the narratives of 'the West' is profoundly questionable.<sup>44</sup> The *contemporary culture* of quotation, which Baudrillard and Frayling describe as a hall of mirrors, turns out to be anything but contemporary in the discourse of 'the West'. The web of quotations that compose the mythology of 'the West', quickly exceed those materials bounded by the genre, and move into more general regimes of semiotic or discursive mimesis.<sup>45</sup> The heavily touted 'authentic' western dress found in Leone's work was drawn from the nineteenth century photography of Matthew Brady, who consciously modeled his subjects on classical lines.<sup>46</sup> The classical era insinuated itself within other representations of the West; George Catlin, a prominent early painter of Native Americans, thought his subjects resembled 'the ancient marbles', so that he found himself 'irresistibly led to' the conclusion 'that Grecian sculptures had similar models'.<sup>47</sup> At the height of settlement, the Romantic Realism of 'Western' painting drew in turn on European depictions of colonial conquest. As

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<sup>44</sup> In the criticism on Westerns generally, there is a tradition of mapping the derivation of scenes or storylines as they come from prior examples, thus affirming the semiotic codes and the play of meaning that occurs within the genre. See, for example, Michael Coyne 'A Genre In Flux, A Nation In Turmoil: The Vietnamization of the Western in Mid-1960's America', in *The Crowded Prairie*, pp. 120-141; and Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly the most extensive analysis of the Western myth is found in Richard Slotkin's trilogy of books: *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the Frontier, 1600-1860* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996); *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: McMillan, 1985); and *Gunfighter Nation* (see n.44).

<sup>46</sup> Mary Panzer and Jeanna K. Foley, *Matthew Brady and the Image of History* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Brian W. Dippie, 'The Visual West', in *The Oxford History of the American West*, ed. by Clyde A. Milner and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 675-705 (p. 685).

Brian Dippie observes, Orientalist art ‘offered colourful Bedouins on horses and camels’ as models for European and American painters seeking to portray ““these Arabs of the prairie””.<sup>48</sup>

Obviously, all cultural forms are historically constituted. The point is that the cultural producers of the period understood the settlement of the West as historically important, and sought to produce representations that signified accordingly. The signification of that historicity was communicated and consolidated by ‘quoting’ what already constituted the canon of *the historic*. The narrative impact of the Western is then carried in part by its particular organization of signs, which evoke the import of human history and locate the drama of the frontier within it.

This tendency is instructively found in Walt Whitman’s 1865 lyric poem of manifest destiny, *Pioneers! O Pioneers!* With a sense of history that is utterly Hegelian, Whitman describes the settlers, who are busy felling primeval forest and stemming rivers, as an expression of all the ‘pulses of the world’ drawn together into the single beat of the ‘Western movement’.<sup>49</sup> The poem closes with the homesteader exalted and transcendent:

Till with the sound of trumpet  
Far, far off the daybreak call - hark! how loud and clear I  
hear it wind,  
Swift! to the head of the army! - swift! spring to your  
places,  
Pioneers! O Pioneers!<sup>50</sup>

The trumpet call, the break of daylight, the head of the army, all work to unite the most banal acts of the homesteader within a more general apparatus of conquest. For Whitman, the conquests of ‘the youthful sinewy races’ are the continuation of the

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<sup>48</sup> Dippie, p. 685.

<sup>49</sup> Walt Whitman, ‘Pioneers! O Pioneers!’, in *The Complete Poems* (New York: Penguin, 1975), pp. 257-261 (p. 259).

<sup>50</sup> Whitman, p. 261.



European civilizing mission, taken over from ‘the elder races’ who ‘droop and end their lesson ... over there beyond the seas’.<sup>51</sup> The quotation of lyrical form, and the not very subtle historical signifiers of divinity and Sovereignty, transfer the authority and subjectivity of European imperial power to the American settler. Whitman’s poem disperses the Sovereignty of ‘the head of the army’ throughout the mass. In a condensed fashion, Whitman’s seems to anticipate Foucault’s schematic of disciplinary power, as the mass of settlers and their respective agricultural practices become systematized and mechanized within a larger corporate military formation. In *Pioneers* everyone marches. The mass becomes a conquering and settling machine, and the march of modernity ghosts Native American genocide. The heraldic and/or angelic trumpet is only the quotation that marks the divine recognition of the democratic mass in its ascendance.

The mythology of the West is not a product of frontier realities but the discourse that conditions that conquest of the frontier. One of the earliest examples of Western narrative, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark’s expedition diaries of the early 1800’s, caught the popular imagination, partly due to what Thomas Lyon identifies as Lewis’ ‘historical eye or at least a sense of the momentousness of the expedition’.<sup>52</sup> For Lyon, widely read travel accounts, such as Washington Irving’s writings of the 1830’s, ‘helped solidify the romantic image of the West’.<sup>53</sup> Lyon points to a set of romantic tropes in Irving’s writings, where the natural beauty of the West is likened to the Gothic cathedrals of Europe. Mountain men are described as leading ‘a wild Robin Hood kind of life’, and the Osage Indians are described as

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<sup>51</sup> Whitman, pp. 257-258.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas J. Lyon, ‘The Literary West’, in *The Oxford History of the American West*, ed. by Clyde A. Milner and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 706-741.

<sup>53</sup> Lyon, ‘Literary’, p. 709.

having ‘fine Roman countenances’, codifying the ‘untamed West under the rubric of received aesthetic convention’.<sup>54</sup>

It only remains to point out that these early quotations of ‘received aesthetic conventions’ also signify divine authority and classical citizenship, as well as opposition to the tyranny of the Sovereign. From the outset the significance of Western narratives rest within their evocation of a history of political subjection and subjectivation. It is no coincidence, then, that ‘denizens of the new, urban-industrial America’ should be ‘so needful of the myths of open land, freedom, individuality, and progress’, such that a ‘resolutely frontier minded body of popular literature’ was flourishing by the 1860’s.<sup>55</sup>

‘The controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production’ required an extension of literacy that was accomplished in part through the introduction of compulsory education laws in the mid 1800’s.<sup>56</sup> Sections of the population were introduced to, or were integrated within, the emerging, extended bio-political state. The disciplinary frames of the educational institution deliver the subject to a historically determined regime of fantasy, at the same time that literacy allows for the mass production of, and participation in, that fantasy. Through the very absence of functional bio-political institutions in unsettled territory, the subjections of bio-power are narratively concealed, thus emphasizing the autonomous and powerful aspect of the Janus-faced subject. By the late 1800’s, representations and narratives of the West were a booming industry and notable personalities were selling their own mythologies. Within this context, the issue of quotation begins to take on an additional degree of complexity.

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<sup>54</sup> Lyon, ‘Literary’, p. 710.

<sup>55</sup> Lyon, ‘Literacy’, pp. 711-712.

<sup>56</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 141.



In his autobiography, Kit Carson recounts chasing the Jicarilla Apaches in 1849, only to discover that at least one of them was amusing him or herself by reading an account of Kit Carson's exploits as a heroic killer of Indians.<sup>57</sup> As Richard White observes:

Carson's reaction to finding the book, probably Charles Avrill's *Kit Carson, Prince of the Gold Hunters* (1849) was to lament his failure to live up to his fictional reputation. The fictional Carson becomes the standard for the real Carson, and the connection between the two goes beyond this, for the story comes to us in a book, written by the actual Carson, to capitalize on the market the mythic Carson had created for him. The mythic Carson partially shaped the actual Carson in his image.<sup>58</sup>

Carson is compelled to live up to a bio-politically constituted fantasy of frontier life, to assist in the political idealization of democratic autonomy. This instance of Western history, where the copy determines the real, is only the ultimate expression of the manner in which 'quotation', 'pastiche' and 'a hall of mirrors' is a constitutive and integral element of the entire discursive constellation called 'the West'.

The story of a Stillwater, Oklahoma grocer with the same name as the notorious outlaw Bill Dalton, suggests that frontier subjects could hold a bemused or reflexive attitude towards this hall of mirrors. In choosing to advertise in the 1890's with the proclamation that 'Bill Dalton's gang are after you and if you give them a trial you will be convinced that they keep the freshest & best goods in the city at the lowest prices', he demonstrates at least an intuitive sense that the motifs of the West can be deployed for commercial purposes.<sup>59</sup> The grocer seems to get the joke and understand the regime that it ultimately serves.

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<sup>57</sup> Richard White "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": *A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 616-617.

<sup>58</sup> White, *Misfortune*, p. 617.

<sup>59</sup> Richard White, 'Outlaw Gangs and Social Bandits', in *Major Problems in The History of the American West: Documents and Essays* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), pp. 222-237 (p. 225).



Such wry perspectives on myth making could in part explain Sitting Bull's admittedly short-lived alliance with William Cody, for the sake of 'Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of the Rough Riders of the World'.<sup>60</sup> The lucrative road show brought together, and constructed, the celebrities of the West. Sitting Bull's participation in the show followed his famed role in the "massacre" of General Custer at Little Big Horn, but obviously ended before his own similarly famed death in the "last stand" of Wounded Knee. Richard Slotkin argues that 'the ultimate financial failure of Buffalo Bill's Wild West', which occurred in 1917, 'should not obscure its unparalleled success as a myth making enterprise'. While film Westerns like *The Great Train Robbery* of 1903 would supplant the show,

From 1885 and 1905 it was the most important commercial vehicle for the fabrication and transmission of the Myth of the Frontier ... As many (European) immigrants testified the Wild West was the source of some of the most vivid images and expectations of the new land.<sup>61</sup>

Joy Kasson writes:

By transposing western melodrama from the already familiar venues of the dime novel and the proscenium stage to an outdoor arena, and by bringing audiences face to face with real cowboys, Indians, horses, steers, buffalo, stagecoaches and gun powder the Wild West blurred the lines between reality and entertainment, fact and fiction, history and invention...Its representation of American identity became a part of the national memory, creating a reservoir of images that filmmakers would tap from the flickering kinoscope images

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<sup>60</sup> It would not, however, explain the refusal of the future president, Theodore Roosevelt, to acknowledge that he had taken the nickname for his own volunteer cavalry, 'The Rough Riders', from the show. See Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, pp. 82-83, for an account of the dispute between Cody and Roosevelt. I would argue that the strange career of Theodore Roosevelt and his vigorous advocacy of 'the strenuous life' as an antidote to the 'over-civilization' of masculinity, means that he was the least suited to participate in any public reflexivity about the mythology he purveyed. For an extensive analysis of Roosevelt in this regard see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter*, p. 87.



through heroic mid-century westerns to the ironized anti-westerns of the late twentieth century.<sup>62</sup>

This 'reservoir' of signs was a component of a more generalized bio-political deployment. The raw violence of the frontier, by all accounts greatly exaggerated, represents the will to power unmediated by the will to knowledge. In the expansion of the American nation, itself an expansion of a more general European world system, the idea of the frontier promises everyone the irretrievable authority of Sovereignty.

### *Western Fantasies*

For Sigmund Freud, a fetish is a substitute for the mother's missing penis. A male child, to ward off the general horror of lacking a penis and the possibility of his own castration, adopts a fetish. The object is usually some part of the female body or an associated article that can be metonymically linked to the woman's genitals. In his ardor for the fetish object the male reiterates his disavowal of the mother's lack of the phallus: 'it remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it. It also saves the fetishist from becoming a homosexual, by endowing the women with the characteristic which makes them tolerable as sexual objects.'<sup>63</sup>

The fetish serves to preserve a fantasy world in which *all subjects possess the phallus* and the threat of castration is kept at bay. Presaging Lacan's dream material of 'fortresses' and 'fortified works', as described in 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I', Freud understands the fetishism of 'a grown man' as a response to the 'panic' that ensues 'when the cry goes up that Throne and Altar are in

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<sup>62</sup> Joy S. Kasson, 'Life-like, Vivid, and Thrilling Pictures; Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Early Cinema', in *Westerns; Films Through History*, ed. by Janet Walker (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 110-130 (p. 111). Also see, Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism', in *On Sexuality, PFL Vol.7*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 345-357 (pp. 353-354).

danger'.<sup>64</sup> The historical imagery found in Lacan and Freud cites the seat of Sovereign power and belies the unrealized political history of the psychological conflict they impute to structures of sexual difference. The Freud-Lacanian substitution of an abstract phallus for the modern subject's politically irretrievable Sovereignty illuminates the demand for the iterations of the Western.

Within the imagined 'West', Sovereignty, a unified or un-subjected 'I', is not entirely inaccessible as it has a geography, a period, values, and moral choices that can be emulated. This Western is a fantasy, but it is not another symptom of the traditionally defined psychoanalytic unconscious. Rather, the appeal of the Western, and its highly gendered terms of spectatorship, point to historical rather than structural relations of subjection. The discursive field of sexual difference plotted in psychoanalysis attempts to detail the relations of subjection that are disavowed by the democratic subject. It attempts to detail and explain the psychological conflict at work within the contradictions of self-surveillance as a condition of democratic freedom.

The Western dissolves the State monopoly on legitimate violence and equally distributes the subjectivating authority of violence across its subjects. The Western is a counter-narrative where our compromised subjection in discourse is traded for the uneasy peace of equality in violence. The narrative is a fantasy which adheres to the material history of violence and power, over the structural transcendence of sexual difference.

In his modest homestead, the settler, like the medieval Sovereign, gathers 'all ruling functions' of his particular domain together in his own hands.<sup>65</sup> The inextirpable history of quotation is also an elaborate construction through which the

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<sup>64</sup> Freud, 'Fetishism', p. 352; Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1977), pp. 1-7 (p. 5).

<sup>65</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. by Edmond Jephcott (London: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 197-198.



subject fantasizes an alternate history, one free from those modes of subjection that constitute and define modernity. At the same time, the bio-political reality that such a fantasy seeks to deny still asserts itself in the figure of the gunfighter, who mimes the dispersed and denegated violence of bio-political regimes. 'Strangers', such as the archetypical 'Shane', wander the frontier, dispossessed of land and subjects, reluctantly deploying violence to restore political balances only at the point that all other measures have been exhausted.<sup>66</sup> These wandering founts of justice, as well as their villainous doubles in black hats, represent the Sovereignty of violence minus a legitimate domain, and thus serve to displace the continuity of subjection under corporate regimes.

The homesteader inevitably takes the stranger on as an assistant or helper. The instrumentality of violence is yet again affirmed, and the complex circuits of subjection and subjectivation are denied. Such figures compose a world where the corporate forces of violence, which Elias and Foucault detail within the history of modern power regimes, are unelaborated. The fantasy world of the Western casts back to a time before 'centralizing forces', and their resultant institutional bureaucracies, held sway, to imagine an alternate historical progression where infinite lands are continuously parcelled out among equal Sovereigns. The corporate forces of the railroad barons, or the cattle ranchers, or even the outlaw gangs, are offered as antithetical to democratic subjectivation. The Western inverts the history that constitutes modern subjectivity, in an effort to deny the subjection inherent within it. This fantasy history hinges on the gunfighter as an instrumental, anti-corporate manifestation of violence.

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<sup>66</sup> See *Shane* dir. George Stevens, perf. Alan Ladd, Jack Palance, Brandon DeWilde, Paramount Pictures, 1953.

which is often understood as the archetypical "classic" western.

*Once Upon A Time In the West* could be read as playing with the bio-political subject's fantasy, by turning it back on itself, and implying that frontier subjects held a reciprocal desire for life in the urban industrial world. In a scene where Frank's own men, bought off by Mr. Morton, attempt to kill him, Harmonica watches over the actions of the would be assassins. To save Frank from his traitorous henchman, and thus preserve him for his own revenge, Harmonica fires the first shot of the gunfight. He kills one of Frank's henchmen who is hiding behind a banner that graphically echoes and inverts the posters and banners of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. In the frontier town of Flagstone, 'The Cosmopolitan Theatre' is advertising its own upcoming show entitled 'Metropolitan Life Unveiled', which promises '10 beautiful dancing girls' and 'Fantastic Foods from Paris'; the periphery gazes back, longing for a modernity marked by sexual objectification and cosmopolitan consumerism, therefore undercutting any idealization of the frontier. As the henchman's corpse falls through and tears the advertisement we are reminded of the cheapness of life under the old regime.

We are compelled to ask whether efforts to name original texts or sources in the discourse of the West are anything other than a displaced attempt to authenticate the Western fantasy more generally. Is it perhaps that in finding the original text or the true story one imagines that they will also find the model for, or at least the possibility of, an un-compromised modern sovereignty? Such an investment in quotation would undoubtedly explain the confusion and hostility to what emerges as *Once Upon's* wry and playful engagement with the genre. The fetish and its function are virtually mocked. The film revels in quotation so that previous Westerns are retrospectively cast, or reconstituted, as foolishly sincere. This is not due to the failure of these Westerns to have a sense of humour, or to play a set piece for all its worth, but due to their display of uncritical faith in the reservoir of American



mythology and the values imaginatively derived from it. *Shane*, *The Searchers*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* are all films that may or may not contain some reflexivity about the construction of the Western myth; they are all films that unreflexively plod towards a moral outcome that serves to consolidate the grand role attributed to the West in the construction of American values.<sup>67</sup>

*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* takes this the furthest, when the hero of the falsified Western legend, a man who sought to bring civilization and the rule of law to the frontier, becomes nothing less than a senator, while the true hero dies impoverished in the territories.<sup>68</sup> The myth is only questioned to the extent that Senator Ransom Stoddard, who rises to Washington on the basis of his false heroics, stands in for the illiterate and gun toting true hero, who could never take a place in such a power structure. The famous line from the film, where a newspaper editor admonishes a young reporter: 'If the facts don't fit the legend, print the legend', carries our knowledge that the West is as much fantasy as it is reality. Coextensively, it safely reconsolidates the reality of the West by suggesting that errors of the fantasy are as simple as a case of mistaken identity.

These classic Westerns, and others like them, desperately propose to teach the spectator moral lessons so simple that it becomes impossible to sustain a view of them as anything other than a sub-genre of children's movies. That moral simplicity is composed of little more than the honour and fairness essential to amicable relations between the imaginary Sovereigns of the frontier. Nevertheless, *Once Upon* quotes incongruously and questions the integrity of the frontier narrative, largely by placing characters and action in more complex arrangements of power.

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<sup>67</sup> There is an exhaustive literature on this idea which is generally called the 'Turner Thesis'.

<sup>68</sup> *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, dir. Jon Ford. Perf. John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, Vera Miles and Lee Marvin, Paramount Pictures, 1962.



Even the locational choice of Arizona, which utilizes the Monument Valley settings of so many earlier Westerns, complicates and confuses the traditional narratives of frontier settlement, when it is wedded with a story about the railroad. Trans-continental railroads were accomplished by joining up westward and eastward building projects; the Union and Pacific railroads were the first to meet at Promontory Point, Utah in 1869 and no railroads were built east to west.<sup>69</sup> If we understand this fact as part of the Western text which a spectator would bring to the film, Mr. Morton's doomed westward build through Arizona is central to the composition of the 'dance of death' that Leone intended.<sup>70</sup> We know that he will not make it, at the same time that we know the modernity of the railroads will eventually triumph over the pre-industrial landscape.

Mr. Morton's hopes of completion directly contrast with the age of Sam, the horse and buggy driver, and his resentment of the railroad. Hired by Jill, at the Flagstone train station, to take her out to Sweetwater, Sam recklessly drives through the railroad construction site, risking a collision that might injure or kill him and his passenger. The railroad workers hurry to clear a path in a manner that suggests they are familiar with this man's suicidal game of "chicken". Where Mr. Morton seeks to defer his inevitable death to tuberculosis so that he can see the advance of industry, Sam seeks to accelerate his own death in a way that would make his decline into historical redundancy materialize in wreckage. The railroad in Arizona frames the

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<sup>69</sup> Aside from the fact that such an approach to building seems simply logical, I would argue that popular history, such as the series 'Seven Wonders of the Industrial World' [Produced by Deborah Cadbury, BBC, 2003 (original airdate 25 November 2003, BBC2)], which included a documentary on the building of the Union and Pacific, means that such knowledge can be easily accepted as partly known by audiences. In the American context, the event is taught to schoolchildren as a key moment in the establishment of the United States.

<sup>70</sup> The specific effort to build the railroad westward through Arizona failed entirely, as Collis Huntington of Central Pacific fame clashed with, and eventually 'crushed', the westward builder Thomas A. Scott of the Texas and Pacific, to expand his already considerable empire through the southwest. See Bryant, p. 219.



narrative through a grand failure, suggesting from some of the earliest scenes that whatever happens is lost to history, rather than constitutive of modern American civilization.

Mr. Morton further confounds yet another Western trope of simple characters and simple morality. The tubercular railroad baron travels with and admires a painting of the Pacific Ocean. This painting evokes the motivating fantasies of more humble figures in the genre that move west, typically carrying letters, postcards, newspaper articles and advertisements as the material promising a better life “out west”. Also, the Pacific, coded through more contemporary ideas about ‘California’, renders Mr. Morton in near Dickensian terms as the tubercular, dreaming of taking the airs somewhere more hospitable. His impending death excepts him from the corporatizing agency of the genre’s land, cattle and mining barons, who desire to control more land than their fair share, by displacing villainy with more spiritual, if compromised, aspirations.

This confusion of the good and bad subjects of westward expansion extends to Mr. Morton’s antagonist Brett McBain. Unlike the stock character of so many Westerns, who is a homesteader and an even handed parent, reluctantly drawn into violence by a diabolical cattle rancher who refuses to see sense, McBain drinks whiskey in the afternoon and alternates between tenderness with his daughter and an explosive rage towards his son. Jill later comments that God is bound to encounter difficulty wresting her dead husband out of the ‘devil’s grip’. Through Jill we discover he was a regular, but exceptional, customer in the gambling halls and prostitution houses of New Orleans, the more likely haunt of gunfighters than sympathetic Hollywood family men. Finally, his rather large house on the homestead is not the one or two room log cabin more typical of the genre.

As a man and father McBain combines the character traits of Western hero and Western villain, and the same ambiguity arises in his business dealings. His homestead is not a humble effort to 'grow families' like the good, simple people in *Shane*, but an opportunistic effort to become a powerful land baron in his own right. Mr. Morton and McBain are not the antithetical forces of good and evil necessary to the traditions of Western mythology, but rather complementary persona's driven by capital interests.

This complication of types, constructed through juxtaposition, synthesis and inversion of the signifiers in the Western reservoir, disposes of the innocence more traditionally ascribed to the homesteader, as well as the pure villainy of a large corporate force, by suggesting they are only differing modes of a more general historical movement. McBain's homestead will potentially tie the various roles of local management, governance and commerce into the hands of one man, with relative local autonomy answerable to the central power only as far as he is subject to threats from competing nations.<sup>71</sup> Mr. Morton's desire to see the ocean is synonymous with completing the job of constructing the material infrastructure essential to the centralizing forces that historically ground modern democratic institutions. As the homesteader and the railroad baron mirror the decentralizing and centralizing tendencies of Medieval Sovereign regimes, the purely democratic, fair and egalitarian frontier subject dissipates or disappears.

### *The Death of the West(ern)*

Before progressing in a discussion of *Once Upon*'s reworking of the Western narrative and cinematic conventions, it would be helpful to discuss Christopher Frayling's critical about-face on Leone. In his first book, Frayling argued that *Once*

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<sup>71</sup> Mexico perhaps? Native America?



*Upon*'s exposure of the Western's code resulted in the 'destruction of comfortable fictions'.<sup>72</sup> He asserted that *Once Upon* addresses the Western's traditional 'divorce between myth and socio-economic context'.<sup>73</sup> Unlike traditional Westerns, Frayling argued, *Once Upon* rejects the Turner thesis and confronts 'the historical bases of the genre':<sup>74</sup>

Like all Sergio Leone's films *Once Upon a Time in the West* views the American frontier myth from an Old World, European cultural perspective [...] *Once Upon a Time* stresses the Brechtian (or perhaps Chaplineque) analogy between businessmen and gunmen, capitalists and bandits [...] the film seems to be as much concerned with an unending struggle in capitalism between victims and predators, as it is with the specific "Western" conflict between barbarism and civilization.<sup>75</sup>

Frayling also suggested that 'Leone seems to be saying' that 'fantasy violence' has a 'more direct relationship with "political" or "economic" violence' than other filmmakers have allowed.<sup>76</sup> Unquestionably, Frayling refers to, or touches on, the reading I am developing here. Frayling's renunciation of that critical direction hinges on critical-theoretical assumptions regarding authorial intent. His early analysis depends on Leone's drive towards an 'intellectual cinema', where images were 'linked', or 'collided', to 'expound', or 'create', an idea.<sup>77</sup> With respect to Frayling, his early attribution of materialist analytical intent assumes an embedded

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<sup>72</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 213.

<sup>73</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 213.

<sup>74</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 214.

<sup>75</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>76</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 213. (In this particular example Frayling references the destruction of the previously mentioned 'Cosmopolitan Hotel' banner. Frayling makes an error in asserting that Frank, rather than Harmonica, has shot the man who falls through the banner. He also ignores the banner's content to assert that the reality of Western brutality and its fictionalizations converge with the body falling through the theatre advertisement. The implication is that the banner is for something like a Wild West show, rather than an inversion of it.)

<sup>77</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 214.

framing structure, which ultimately justifies determined assertions in an analysis that is otherwise rather superficial. He therefore came to definitive conclusions about an exploration of the 'relationship between the mythology of the West and its objective history' which are less than definitely clear.<sup>78</sup> It is up to the audience, he argues, to read Leone's intent and 'make the connection'.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, by the end of the film,

the 'worn out stereotypes' which Leone and Bertolucci used to perform their 'dance of death', have no further use - all that is, except 'the pushy whore', who at last has found a role [...] Jill finally takes the initiative by adopting the role of matriarch to the thirsty workmen, ushering in a 'world without balls'.<sup>80</sup>

Jill should be the focus of critical attention, and I shall return to her role in the narrative, but first it needs to be pointed out that the exposure or unmasking of historical-material reality does not necessarily serve to dissect the myth. This is particularly true if the myth concerns some phenomenon other than the economic foundations of Western settlement. While the representation of McBain and Mr. Morton re-describes overly simplistic versions of competition on the frontier, and thus more firmly suggests a determinate framework of capitalist greed, *Harmonica* and *Cheyenne* remain intact as relatively unqualified manifestations of the genre's heroic and individualistic gunfighters. If the film calls our attention to the political economy of the West, it does so by leaving the myth of the gunfighter intact and reassigning him to the fight against Capitalism's systemic corruption, rather than the individualized moral corruption traditional of the genre. In effect, the would-be Marxist narrative does not use up the gunfighter as much as it rehabilitates him.

We should add to this the fact that the exposure of material reality fails to align with contemporary cultural trends, and would therefore do little to explain the

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<sup>78</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 213.

<sup>79</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 214.

<sup>80</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 213.



film's growing appeal. The anthropological racism and laissez-faire capitalist ethos that so many critics have delineated within the Western mythology are germane to the contemporary ideological dominance of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. Materialist analyses are hardly common to contemporary popular film criticism or the predilections of film fans. Indeed, the popularity of the post-moral stylistics of American filmmakers, like Tarantino and Rodriguez, who wish to claim Leone as their own would seem to evidence a more general trend away from those texts which would engage in such forms of political critique.<sup>81</sup>

Frayling's 2000 biography of Leone, in part, confirms such a trend. Lacking evidence for the intellectual skills he had attributed to Leone in *Spaghetti Westerns*, he backs away from claims about the critical-political significance of *Once Upon*, and Leone's work more generally.<sup>82</sup> After having criticized the 'heavy analysis' and 'leaden prose' of his first book, and distancing himself from the jargon of 'Linguistics, Marxism, and Psychoanalysis', he appreciatively turns to the joy of quotation. Implicitly rebuffing structural determinants of visual pleasure, the spectator's knowledge becomes the transparent source of enjoyment, thus affirming an idea of the self as a master of discourse.<sup>83</sup> The one time source of so much political and intellectual stimulation is now little more than a context for the self-validation of the anorak.

Rather than rejecting his earlier analysis due to the unconvincing intellectual portrait of Leone the man, Frayling could just as easily have abandoned the question

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<sup>81</sup> This 'Anglicization' of *Lagaan* and *Once Upon a Time in China* via their namesake Western could arguably serve to enforce the historical specificity, and so contemporary irrelevance, of the anti-colonial narratives they present. By taking what has come to stand as the elegy for, or closing text of a dead genre about the American frontier, it is possible the Indian and Chinese colonial frontier is rendered similarly residual and potentially de-politicized, and so made more palatable for Western neo-liberal audiences.

<sup>82</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 301.

<sup>83</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. xiii.



of Leone's intellectual competence altogether, and attempted to produce a discursive analysis of the film's effects. In his own anti-theoretical turn, he eventually settles on a position that claims people like the film because it is so much cutting and pasting of narratives they know and love, and because pastiche is hip! Either Theodor Adorno's worst fears about mass culture and the pleasures of mindless repetition are proven, and there is nothing to celebrate, or this argument is at least incomplete.<sup>84</sup> My suggestion is that the film could only become appreciated as so much cutting and pasting, once it had accomplished some demystification of the narratives it exploits.

In particular, I consider the film functions to dissuade the audience of any fantasy attachment to the gunfighter. By the end of the film, the only remaining gunfighter has accomplished his task, and he does not ride off into the ever more western reaches of a sunset. Instead, Harmonica recognizes the impending murder of his race by the Mr. Morton's of the world (a point I shall return to), and simply rides off to some undetermined location. The reign of the gunfighter, whatever it was, has come to a close, and the spectator is prevented from leaving the theatre with any confidence in his legacy. As the gunfighter represents the fetishized instrumentality of violence in civilized culture, the reified Sovereignty of the modern subject, which is dependent upon that fetish, is also undermined.

The distinction of the quotation in *Once Upon* is its reconstitution of the spectator's relationship to the genre. In foregrounding the fact that the West is a practice of quotation, those Westerns that have failed explicitly to acknowledge that fact suggest the spectator's own naïveté. They begin to look slightly insulting. While the precise nature of the naïve fantasy inherent within such Westerns may not be immediately legible, it becomes impossible to shake the knowledge that the

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<sup>84</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'On The Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, (New York: Continuum, 1988), pp. 270-299.



narrative has something to do with fantasy. Predictably, as that knowledge insinuates itself, the spell of the “classical” screen identification is complicated, if not simply broken.

The spectator’s detailed knowledge of the genre is not essential to such an effect. The aficionado may be drawn to the recognition that Leone is playing with the genre as a whole, but a less informed spectator is prone to recognize the re-narration of an achingly familiar story. Genre quotation and mythological reiterations are essentially non-distinct, as far as the service they perform. The fan of the Western may be a devoted fetishist, and the experience of genre quotation may denature the specific function of his replacement object, but all subjects inculcated within the Western mythology are similarly subject to the fantasy relation that the discursive formation serves.

In drawing together so many familiar tropes and archetypes, and placing them at the centre of the narrative, the film demands from the spectator the recognition that it is not simply one story among many that is being told or retold, but that it is the entire cultural formation of ‘the West’ that is being re-narrated. We could state this more crudely by saying that *Once Upon* attempts to narrate five or more lesser Westerns in the relatively narrow frame of 165 celluloid minutes. In this way, ‘the West’ is put forward as a construction with identifiable and malleable parameters.

Two potential effects arise from this. In the first instance, those Westerns that follow the classical template, and centre the action on a singular archetype rather than the collection of Western heroes and villains, are retroactively rendered, in formal terms, comparatively simplistic and unambitious. Second, such Westerns, in their simplicity, cleave to an uncritical or un-reflexive respect for the significance and grandeur of the mythology, seemingly positing that its scope is beyond narrative control. That assertion is made legible at the same moment that it is dis-proven by

*Once Upon a Time In the West*. Intentionally or not, it offers up a reified discourse of American history as an object for relatively easy re-examination, thus undermining any general veneration of such a discursive formation. Those of us who dislike Westerns, are vindicated by this Western.

Leone may have misunderstood the game, but he put together a collage of all “the best bits”, and in so doing failed to respect the grandeur of each piece in his composition. In retrospect, the classical Western assumes the existence of magical properties in those themes and motifs it reiterates with such banality. The film points out that for all the discursive pretence of the genre, for all its talk of nation building, justice and American identity, it deserves no more reverence as an object than the maligned and mocked melodrama, or ‘women’s pictures’, that are contemporary with it.<sup>85</sup> While a large proportion of ambivalent spectators did not need to be told about the banality of the Western, Leone’s film insinuates a general change of consciousness by dint of the fact that spectators try to enjoy themselves and so try to participate.

The condemnation of Leone and *Once Upon* provided by the film critic and historian David Thomson is telling in this regard:

I think Leone really despised the Western, and let smart mockery exploit his remarkable eye. Despite Monument Valley and the stars we never feel we are in America or with people who think in American. He makes fun of the very mythology and obsession that underlie the film art, and he knows too much about his tricks to be persuasive. Leone's films force you back from the screen with hieratic compositions and sly contempt for "il West."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Thanks go to David M. Halperin for letting me read, and thereby make use of, his unpublished work ‘Mommy Dearest: Joan Crawford and Gay Male Subjectivity’.

<sup>86</sup> David Thomson, ‘Sergio Leone’, in *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). (New York: Knopf, 2002), pp. 515-516 (p. 515).



Nothing less than being in America, and thinking in American, structurally requires a refusal to see the Western narrative as a reiterative construction. Thomson's recognition that Leone 'knows too much', indicates that Thomson's review is marked by the very damage he fears *Once Upon* can incur. The 'hieratic compositions' have forced him to objectify 'the West', and examine the terms of his faith in the value of those things drawn from the reservoir of American mythology. As if facing down the threat, Thomson asserts the value of the obsession and suggests that a proper Western is marked by a refusal to question the terms of that obsession. The obsession with the object, and the disavowal of its function, locates Thomson within the terms of Freudian fetishism and belies the historical-discursive uses of the genre which sustained it for so long.

The fetishism of the Western exhibited in Thomson's critique begins to explain why *Once Upon* can be found at the centre of claims regarding the death of the genre. It is not simply the myth that comes under scrutiny, but the spectator's desire to repeat the activity of viewing Westerns. In 1969 the German director Wim Wenders stated appreciatively that he did not want 'to see any more Westerns. [*Once Upon*] is the very end, the end of the craft. This one is deadly...'<sup>87</sup> Later the schlock horror master John Carpenter, who lifted a key line of dialogue from the film for his 1976 production, *Assault on Precinct 13*, argued that *Once Upon* was 'one of the classics of all time, a movie that states the essence of the western and the essence of mythology, and maybe finished off the genre'.<sup>88</sup> In 1985, John Boorman, the director of *Deliverance*, which is discussed in the next chapter, wrote:

In *Once Upon A Time In The West*, the Western reaches its apotheosis. Leone's title is a declaration of intent and also his gift to America of its lost fairy stories. This is the kind of

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<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 300.

<sup>88</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 490.



masterpiece that can occur outside of trends and fashion. It is both the greatest and the last Western.<sup>89</sup>

These claims reside within a more general understanding of the genre's decline. In 1976, only a year after the publication of his seminal analysis of the genre, *Sixguns and Society*, Will Wright declared in an article titled 'The Sun Sinks Slowly On the Western' that the few Westerns that had cropped up in the early 1970's,

seemed confused and directionless, without the assurance and moral conviction of their predecessors. Most of the films have tried to debunk the mythical assumptions of earlier westerns just as films like *High Noon* and *the Wild Bunch* used the western form to question itself [...] the old slipper seems to have burst at the seams, destroying its form fitting comfort and making adjustments difficult if not impossible.<sup>90</sup>

Such critical perspectives on the Western were consolidated in more material terms in 1980. *Heaven's Gate* failed significantly at the box office, and served as a signifier of the ultimate big budget flop until 1995, when it was supplanted by Paul Verhoven's similarly disastrous *Showgirls*. In *Film Quarterly's* roundtable on *Showgirls*, Eric Scheaffer wrote that 'Micheal Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* finished off the Western more effectively than any showdown at high noon'.<sup>91</sup> In 1995 *The Christian Science Monitor* declared that 'the western was killed off in the 1970's and 80's by science fiction'.<sup>92</sup>

The enthusiastic popular history of the genre, *Cowboy*, concludes by arguing that after Clint Eastwood's 1971 move into the 'Dirty Harry' role, 'the Western as a cohesive genre seemed to be reaching the end of its rope'.<sup>93</sup> George-Warren then

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<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 299.

<sup>90</sup> Will Wright, 'The Sun Sinks Slowly On The Western', *New Society*, 36 (1976) 292-294 (p. 292).

<sup>91</sup> See Eric Scheaffer, 'Showgirls and the Limits of Sexploitation', *Film Quarterly*, 56 (2003) 42-43 (p. 42).

<sup>92</sup> David Sterritt, 'The Quick and the Dead Takes Westerns Into the Postmodern Era In the Tradition of Sergio Leone, A Dark Poetic Look At The Frontier' in *The Christian Science Monitor*, 13 February 1995, p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> George-Warren, p. 213; *Dirty Harry* dir, Don Siegel perf. Clint Eastwood, Warner Brothers, 1971.



attempts to recover some hope for the dedicated audience. With barely a mention of critically or popularly successful ‘anti-Westerns’, like *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (1971) or *Dances With Wolves* (1990), she turns to the singular success of Clint Eastwood’s 1992 film, *Unforgiven*. While the film is a recognizable genre piece, it also appropriates the ‘anti-Westerns’ dystopian representation of the frontier within an otherwise typical narrative. Though the era’s dubious fabrication of legend is a central theme, and the lead character, William Munny, is tormented by his past exploits, the narrative only capitulates to the mythology it decries; the hero reluctantly deals out a justice-inducing dose of the violence that haunts him. Despite the film’s Academy Award for best picture, and massive success at the box office, George-Warren writes that *Unforgiven* ‘was the then 61 year old Eastwood’s farewell to the West’. That assertion sits uneasily with her assertion that *Unforgiven* demonstrates ‘that the Western is not an open and shut case that’s been clichéd, torn apart’ and ‘parodied in every way possible’.<sup>94</sup>

It is ‘the American Icon – that individualist range rider on horseback’ which George-Warren seeks to retrieve from the tattered genre, for as long as there are ‘new way[s] to look’ at this ‘there will continue to be great Westerns’.<sup>95</sup> Even George-Warren’s purposefully enthusiastic discussion suffers from the same anxieties about the gunfighter as Clint Eastwood’s farewell Western. The ‘individualist range rider on horseback’ is not explicitly a gunfighter; he is textually dispossessed of the weapon and skill that once made him heroic.

Like Eastwood, yet less intentionally, George-Warren appears to foreground a certain contemporary discomfort with the violence of the gunfighter. In his post-mortem, Will Wright similarly argues that Vietnam era America - post-Watergate

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<sup>94</sup> George-Warren, p. 221.

<sup>95</sup> George-Warren, p. 221.

America - has lost its faith in the image of the 'strong individual' who has 'always been superior to, and thus essentially independent of the organized society'.<sup>96</sup> In both arguments the life of the genre and faith in the gunfighter are inextricable, yet also effaced. Other critics manage to describe *Once Upon* as a 'symphonic farewell to the western' and a 'blood drenched elegy for the mythic Western gunfighter'. Thus, the film would appear to respect the terms of the Western fetish at the same time that it performs an effective repudiation.<sup>97</sup>

### *A Future of Subjection*

In considering the role of the gunfighter we can achieve a more detailed picture of the subjective investments engaged and reconstituted by the film. While the detail of the West's socio-economic context provides little clue as to the film's destructive capacity, much less its growing appeal, formalist considerations, independent of the narrative, are also incomplete. While Cheyenne and Harmonica are heroically intact and assigned to the fight against capitalism, they both invert the racialized history of frontier heroism. Their political re-assignment is carried within a more significant racial recoding.

While 'Cheyenne's' scripted name of Manuel Gutierrez never makes it into the final cut, his gang members speak Spanish, and for him, killing a kid is 'like killing a priest – a Catholic priest that is'. The native nickname and the Latin-American Catholicism work together to distinguish Cheyenne from Anglo, as well as Spanish Europeans. More potently, in the film's denouement, Harmonica's desire for vengeance is inscribed at the scene of conquest. It takes place at a gate that is not

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<sup>96</sup> Wright, 'Sun Sinks', p. 294.

<sup>97</sup> *AMC's Classic Movie Companion*, ed. by Robert Moses (New York: Hyperion, 1999), p. 347; *The Times* (London), 'Once Upon a Time In the West: Film of the Week', 5 January 2002, p. 33 (television pages).



connected to any fence, but simply marks entry into the vastness of Monument Valley, that immovable signifier of “the West”.

Frank emerges from the distance with the Grand Canyon behind him -- in real terms a geographical impossibility -- suggesting his arrival from the depths of Hell, and stepping up the scene’s significance to apocalyptic proportion. Frank’s very first scene in the film is a close up of Henry Fonda’s famously blue eyes. In Frayling’s biography of Leone, Fonda recounts reading the script and having himself fitted ‘for contact lenses that would make my eyes dark – because I didn’t think my baby blues would be the proper look for this heavy character’. Fonda then recounts Leone’s angry reaction when he arrived on set, ‘Throw away the brown eyes. Where are the big blues? That’s what I bought.’<sup>98</sup>

In the Monument Valley scene his approach is first a head on, point-of-view shot from Harmonica’s position at the gate, which is then oriented from screen right to left, signifying westward movement. As Frank comes into focus and approaches the gate, where his gang is lynching Harmonica’s brother, its elegiac, if sparse, metonymy for European conquest and genocide in the Americas is almost inescapable. Frank’s European features contrast with the indigenous features of the people he tortures. The older brother is placed in a noose and stood on the shoulders of the adolescent boy whose hands are tied. Frank places a harmonica in the boy’s mouth as they wait for him to collapse and therefore ‘fail’ to save his brother’s life. Harmonica, the aptly named stranger, or ‘man with no name’, is no stranger at all but a native, be it ‘Indian’ or ‘Mestizo’; in effect he represents a broader, complex problem of naming.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Frayling, *Something*, p. 270.

<sup>99</sup> See Gloria Anzaldua, ‘La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness’, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters 1987), pp. 77-98.

In earlier scenes the solitary notes Harmonica plays on the instrument haunt the film's landscape, present and not present, and so quote the threat of the native who, throughout the genre, is over the next ridge, in the mountains, behind the rock or in the next valley.<sup>100</sup> That Frank is unable to connect the adult stranger to the lynching at the gate so many years before, suggests the banality of the event in Frank's memory. Each time he asks Harmonica who he is, Harmonica only repeats a litany of names people who have died at Frank's hand, a remembrance of names we have come to associate with the memorial of war dead, the Holocaust and AIDS. It is an evocation and retrieval of the humanity denied the bio-political State's expendable and marginal populations.

These memorials also recall an earlier scene where Jill arrives in 'Flagstone' as the only readily identifiable 'Indians' who appear in the film are being filed off a stock car. Here the 'Trail of Tears', and the various long marches of relocation to southwestern reservations that were integral to the genocidal process, are linked to those signifiers of the Nazi's modern, industrial genocide in which audiences are cinematically trained. Continuity is established between the conquistador, the settler, and modern genocide, linking the mythological netherworld of the West with the mechanized violence of the bio-political era.

Frayling's biography points out that Leone explicitly 'quotes' a Nazi massacre of Italians in *Giu La Testa* (1971), as well as 'the Nazi concentration camps, with their Jewish orchestra which drowned out the cries of tortured prisoners' in *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*.<sup>101</sup> Leone's disposition to quote Nazi horrors within his Westerns, may constitute supporting evidence for the text's evocation of the Holocaust. It also suggests the distinction of his interpretation, one that is not

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<sup>100</sup> See Armando J. Prats, *Invisible Natives: Myth and Identity in the American Western* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>101</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 20.



helpfully understood merely as ‘a European Marxist’s view of the West’.<sup>102</sup> The association of the violence of the West with the violence of the Holocaust re-inscribes ‘the West’ within the very bio-political regime that the genre served to disavow. Where representations of war between natives and ‘Americans’ would propose a distinction between opposing regimes of Sovereign subjects, the reservation system includes the vanquished within the State, not as citizens, but as the subjugated exceptions that produce the category of the citizen as meaningful.<sup>103</sup>

In his analysis of the concentration camp as the ‘biopolitical paradigm of the modern’, Giorgio Agamben argues that ‘what we call “people”, is actually a ‘dialectical oscillation’ between the ‘set of the People as a whole political body’ and ‘the subset of the people as a fragmentary multiplicity of needy excluded bodies’. It is on the one hand ‘the total state of integrated sovereign citizens, ‘and at the other, the preserve—court of miracles or camp-- of the wretched, the oppressed and the defeated.’<sup>104</sup> For Agamben, the Jews ‘and others who could not be integrated’ ‘into the national political body’ of the German Volk, are the ‘representatives par excellence of the bare life which modernity necessarily creates within itself, but whose presence it can no longer tolerate’.<sup>105</sup> As discussed throughout this thesis, the democratic performance of such a bio-political oscillation gives the body of the sovereign citizen unto itself, as the object upon which acts of disciplinary correction are to be practiced.

The self-annihilation implicit in that relationship is momentarily displaced in the relations of visual pleasure that govern spectatorship of the Western. As

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<sup>102</sup> Though expressed by James Woods in the documentary, this is still a fair summary of Frayling’s influential understanding of Sergio Leone’s political film-making as it was discussed in *Spaghetti Westerns*.

<sup>103</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>104</sup> Agamben, p. 177.

<sup>105</sup> Agamben, p. 179.

suggested, the instrumental violence of the gunfighters, situated within the centrifugal movement of power represented by the homesteader, imagines an alternative history where the sovereign subject, if subjected at all, is only ever subjected to a violence he does not enact. When the image of genocide is installed within that narrative, the fantasy is effectively inverted, as the mechanical subjection of the modern State is writ large. As Foucault argues, genocide is the product of ‘the eugenic ordering of society, with all that implied in the way of extension and intensification of micro-powers’. Working backwards genocide implies ‘an unrestricted state control’, and the ‘oneiric exaltation of a superior blood’; the latter also implies ‘the risk of exposing oneself to a total sacrifice’.<sup>106</sup> Through the image of the native, the potential for a radical disqualification of the sovereign subject is raised.

Where declarations of rights marked the passage of ‘divinely authorized royal sovereignty to national sovereignty’, and so the unity between nativity and political sovereignty, for Agamben, the camp marks a lasting crisis in the relationship.<sup>107</sup> The structural role of the camp and multiplication of those spaces of interior exception, like asylum centres and ‘the *zones d’attentes* of our airports’, are ultimately demonstrations of the State’s dissociation of the body and the political subjectivity of the citizen. The bio-political state of emergency has full power over the body of the citizen. The citizen’s sense of their own political agency is subtended by the collective exercise of that authority. Where the declaration of a state of emergency would temporarily suspend the rights of citizenship for all, the camp normalizes the body as a potential object of internment: an included exclusion. Everyone’s bare life,

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<sup>106</sup> Foucault, pp. 149-150.

<sup>107</sup> Agamben, p. 128.



the organic existence of the citizen's body, is potentially subject to the zone of exclusion that allows the normal State to continue unabated.

A different project would contend with the history of the reservation system as a prototype of the concentration camp and its implications for Agamben's temporality. Does the Native-American stand as the original bio-political disqualification? Is the Native-American the object of transference, where the 'savage' body comes to stand for every failure of embodiment carried by the civilized sovereign subject? Whatever the historical-discursive complications of the relationship between the mechanized genocide of the modern state, and the combination of active and passive methods in the drive to exterminate Native-Americans, *Once Upon* visually and narratively conjoins them. The potential for violent subjugation at the hands of the State, which is synonymous with the bio-political disqualification and extermination of the subject, is written in at the scene of its imagined absence. *Once Upon's* narrative therefore undermines the function of the Western at its discursive core.

The refusal to countenance such forms of subjection, in an effort to preserve the integrity of the Euro-American's imaginary frontier Sovereignty, was articulated as early as 1890 by L. Frank Baum, the future author of *The Wizard of Oz*. In a notorious editorial on the death of Sitting Bull at Wounded Knee, Baum wrote:

He was not a Chief, but without Kingly lineage he arose from a lowly position to the greatest Medicine Man of his time [...] He was an Indian with a white man's spirit [...] In his day he saw his son and his tribe gradually driven from their possessions: forced to give up their old hunting grounds and espouse the hard working and uncongenial avocations of the whites. And these, his conquerors, were marked in their dealings with his people by selfishness, falsehood and treachery. What wonder that his wild nature, untamed by years of subjection, should still revolt? What wonder that a fiery rage still burned within his breast and that he should seek every opportunity of obtaining vengeance upon his natural enemies [...] With his fall the nobility of the Redskin is extinguished, and what few are left are a pack of whining curs who lick the hand that smites them.



The Whites, by law of conquest, by justice of civilization, are masters of the American continent, and the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians. Why not annihilation? Their glory has fled, their spirit broken, their manhood effaced; better that they die than live the miserable wretches that they are. History would forget these latter despicable beings, and speak, in later ages of the glory of these grand Kings of forest and plain.<sup>108</sup>

Baum's ultimate aim is the preservation of a temporal space, where Kingly subjects remain unsullied by the incipient decay of a post-frontier society. Without the heroism of warfare, a bleak portrait emerges, where treachery and servility threaten to hold sway over the honourable masculinity of the warrior nobility. Ironically, in the attempt to preserve the Sovereignty imputed to frontier violence, and disavow the subjection of bio-politics, Baum's language incorporates the style of a medical discourse. The original duplicity of the White-man mimes the action of disease severely infecting the weaker natives, those not heroic enough to die fighting, with an intolerable degree of servility. Extermination should cleanse the frontier imaginary, thus preventing the general slide into a life unworthy of being lived.<sup>109</sup>

After Mr. Morton dies face down in a puddle, that not so subtly mocks his desire to see the Pacific, the film immediately cuts to the continuing construction of the railroad. Mr. Morton's death is juxtaposed with the sheer number of workers and their assembly line movement, in a way that emphasizes the automation of the corporate structure and the interchangeability of its human and material parts. This is the setting for Harmonica's final confrontation with Frank. As Harmonica sits by a gate and gazes out over the construction, Frank arrives for the inevitable showdown:

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<sup>108</sup> See Mary Pierpoint, 'Was Frank Baum a Racist Or Just the Creator of Oz? Proposed Kansas Theme Park Has Ignited Controversy', in *Indian Country Today*, 25 October 2000, p. D4. Baum's commentary was distributed widely over the internet in 2000 in response to a proposal for a 'Wizard of Oz' theme park in Kansas. The "unrecognised" United Tribe of Shawnee Indians attempted to claim the disused federal land that was part of the proposal. The theme park project failed for "financial reasons".

<sup>109</sup> Agamben, pp. 136-143.



FRANK: Morton once told me I could never be like him - now I understand why – wouldn't bother him knowing that you were around somewhere alive.

HARMONICA: So you found out you're not a businessman after all?

FRANK: Just a man.

HARMONICA: An ancient race ... Other Mortons'll be along and they'll kill it off.

As Harmonica speaks, the camera pans in line with his gaze. Where whole towns would come to a standstill for the shootouts featured in other Westerns, here, the workers are oblivious to the exchange between the two gunfighters. They are dwarfed in visual and aural terms by the scale of the building project, in a way that renders their actions inconsequential.

With Frank's assertion that he is 'just a man', Harmonica's usual icy coolness gives way and his face drops as if he is surprised, or saddened, by Frank's words. The reaction suggests that, while Harmonica laments the death of men, he does not clearly assent to Frank's inclusion within the 'ancient race'. Earlier, when faced with Frank's transparent and doomed attempt to violently take over Jill McBain's land for himself, and thus gain control over the railroad, Mr. Morton criticized Frank's failure to understand that 'there are many different kinds of weapons', and that 'the only one that can stop' the gun is money. Frank is a gunfighter, but the violence he metes out serves Mr. Morton. His service to Mr. Morton represents the transitional Sovereign-turned-mercenary, dispossessed of a domain and in the service of a corporate movement. If Mr. Morton, and the barons like him, are agents of death, the death they bring is not even the servitude that the baron personally commands, but the subjection of all within the modern State. The 'ancient race' that is killed by Mr. Morton's progress is the nobility of the old regime that Baum desired to preserve in 1890, and so many Westerns have attempted to preserve in fantasy form after him.

As their exchange continues, a resigned Frank states that 'none of it matters anymore' and that he came to meet Harmonica, 'cuz I know that now you'll tell me

what you're after'. Harmonica responds, 'Only at the point of dying.' Once he shoots Frank, he places the instrument in Frank's mouth, as Frank had once placed it in his. In so doing, he returns the memory of his brother's death. The 'live by the sword die by the sword' motif further suggests that Frank is now, like Harmonica and his brother before him, an expendable object before the industrial-State's inevitable advance. Harmonica's long and deliberate effort to make the revelation available to Frank 'only at the point of dying', demands Frank's singular recognition that the death of Harmonica's brother is not a murder among many, but *the* murder that ultimately constitutes Frank's own death. One disqualification constitutes another.

The association of modern genocide with the fate of the native in *Once Upon* extends the film's significance beyond a didactic exploration of Western history, and into the psycho-discursive regulation of subjectivity. It interrupts the fantasy to re-install the incompatible idea that the fantasy sought to eject.<sup>110</sup> The final confrontation between Harmonica and Frank represents this in fairly explicit terms. In John Sayles recent film *Sunshine State* (2002), a series of legal arguments over land and real estate in contemporary Florida are battled out by a number of protagonists, until the first bulldozers uncover Native American bones, bringing all the historical claims and legal argument to an immediate halt.<sup>111</sup> Sayles' not so subtle point finds a predecessor in Harmonica's insistence that the blue-eyed villain remember the crime that brings him his own death.

### *The Femininity We Are Left With*

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<sup>110</sup> Jean Laplanche, 'Towards a General Theory of Seduction', in *New Foundations For Psychoanalysis*, trans. by David Macey (London: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 89-151.

<sup>111</sup> *Sunshine State*, dir. John Sayles perf. Edie Falco, Alex Lewis, Angela Basset, Timothy Hutton, James McDaniel, Anarchist's Convention Films, 2002.



While Harmonica and Frank settle their fate, Cheyenne tells Jill that Harmonica will eventually walk inside the house to get his things and say, 'adios'. For Cheyenne, Harmonica is bound to leave, as people like him 'have something inside - something to do with death'. The self-conscious import of the line echoes the end of the ancient race that Harmonica has already proclaimed. For Frayling, Jill 'comes into her own' at the point that the "'myths" dissolve'.<sup>112</sup> I want to discuss Frayling's analysis of Jill as he seems unclear about what to do with the ending and its narrative significance. While everyone else but Harmonica necessarily dies in this 'dance of death', and while 'Bertolucci and Leone may be misogynists', Jill McBain is still 'the only one [sic] to survive':

She is the only character who is not destroyed when history bursts in on the fiction: whereas the others play their parts, then bow out, she at last has a useful, purposeful role to fulfill when the railroad finally arrives. As the myths dissolve, she comes into her own.<sup>113</sup>

Frayling and others understand Jill as 'the water bearer'; she is 'a critique of American 'Momism' (from a European perspective) and a celebration of the 'great Italian earth mother'.

She adopts successive roles of whore, adoring wife, mother, whore again, and matriarch ... at no stage in the story, until the very end, does she take the initiative for herself; she is always being prompted or prepared for others.<sup>114</sup>

Frayling details the manner in which Jill McBain is 'stripped', 'pinched', 'raped', 'bargained for', and generally pushed around through the whole of the film, until she is the last one standing. When he wrote a new preface for the second edition of *Spaghetti Westerns*, he noted that if the book were to be rewritten, he would focus

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<sup>112</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 202.

<sup>113</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 202

<sup>114</sup> Frayling, *Spaghetti*, p. 202.

more attention on the representation of gender. Yet, in the Leone biography, he publishes a couple of years later, his early analysis of Jill is repeated almost intact.

Whereas the behavior of all the male characters impacts upon events, Jill McBain remains a rather passive, reactive figure. At no stage in the story, until the very end does she take the initiative [...] Leone was presenting her survival at the end with ambiguity.<sup>115</sup>

This is followed by an a quote from an interview with Leone:

From one point of view it is optimistic – in that a great nation has been born ... It's been a difficult birth, but all the violence has made the greatness possible. From another point of view it is pessimistic undoubtedly – because the West has given way to the great American matriarchy, the worship of “Mom”. American has come to be based on this and the arrival of the railroad ushers in a world without balls. The great force in American life – part of its success story – is based on women with iron balls, so to speak. I'm pretty sure that Rockefeller's grandmother came from a whorehouse in New Orleans.<sup>116</sup>

Jill the contradiction, is not actually a contradiction. The most remarkable aspect of Jill is the understanding with which she confronts the violence that subjects her. Faced with Cheyenne for the first time, still under the impression that he has slaughtered her new family, she goes about her business in an almost casual fashion only just concealing her contempt. When the opportunity to kill him presents itself, Cheyenne suspects as much, and warns her that if someone tries to kill him he can get ‘fired up’, and that this is not ‘a nice thing to see, especially for a lady’. Jill closes the knife drawer, but her composure does not suggest defeat. That fact is not lost on Cheyenne, who comments that she is too smart to ‘make him mad’. When Jill doesn't respond to Cheyenne's demands for information in the way that he wants, he tells her that it seems she ‘ain't caught the idea’. Jills responds:

Of course I have. I'm here alone in the hands of a bandit who smelled money. If you want to, you can lay me over the table and amuse yourself. And even call in your men. Well, no

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<sup>115</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 263.

<sup>116</sup> Frayling, *Sergio*, p. 263-264.



woman ever died from that. When you're finished, all I'll need is a tub of boiling water, and I'll be exactly what I was before. With just another filthy memory!

As the audience does not already know that Jill was a prostitute, her speech suggests that violent sexual subjugation is inherent in being female. Rape does not change character or even inflict psychic trauma, so much as it represents an additional instance in the history of sexual violence that informs her existence.

With Cheyenne she discusses her relationship with McBain as an escape from a world she completely understood, a world of 'no more surprises'. When Cheyenne, after convincing her that he is being framed, insists on his suspicion that the murders must have been about some hidden stash of riches, she tells him he is welcome to whatever he can find. 'Mrs. McBain', she states, 'goes back to civilization, minus a husband and', with unmistakable sarcasm, 'plus a great future'. Her story wins Cheyenne over and as he leaves he tells her that she 'deserves better'. She tells him that the last man to say such a thing is buried outside. Cheyenne responds, saying that she reminds him of his mother, who 'was the biggest whore in Alameida and the finest woman that ever lived'.

Later, Frank abducts Jill at exactly the point she understands her dead husband's plans. At his hideout in the desert, Frank rapes Jill but not through an obvious use of force. Instead, the threat of death hangs over the entire scene. As both Cheyenne and Harmonica have reminded her in earlier scenes, 'Once you've killed four, its easy to make it five.' Jill performs complete submission and her reaction to Frank's touch is an indistinct movement between disgust and feigned pleasure. Frank kisses her and she throws her head back in a manner as easily understood as repulsion as it is sexual ecstasy. That indistinct performance, which is narratively for Frank's benefit, also implicates the audience of the Western, which tradition would suggest is

male and heterosexual, and places, at least for a moment, the distinction between coercion and the general performance of feminine sexuality into question.

When Frank asserts that he is the one who killed her husband she kisses him passionately, and when they break the embrace he is almost breathless. He begins, 'What a...'. Whether this is almost an exclamatory, 'What a woman!', or some related confession to her sexual effect is unclear, as he stops himself, pauses, changes expression and declares, 'What a little tramp.' He asks her if there is 'anything in the world' she 'wouldn't do to save' her skin? In her only moment of unalloyed sincerity in this scene, she responds, 'Nothing, Frank.' Frank's question, and her response, belies the fact that belief in female sexual chastity and the abjection of prostitution are his ideological prejudices and not hers.

The only clear moment of Frank's domination is when he communicates to her that he knows her history in New Orleans. 'Great invention, the telegraph' he says, as he taps out Morse code on her naked back. The other great technological advance that unites the nation is thus introduced as a method of surveillance, compromising the prostitute's ability to flee her past. The opportunity for personal re-creation, which is so central to the frontier mythology, is disallowed, and, like Foucault's homosexual, the prostitute becomes a species, permanently branded with her deviation. The relays consolidating the corporate political structure strip from Jill the very possibility of self-determination.

Through Jill, the narrative lines up spectator sympathies with women and the project of liberation. The entire story moves forward through the discovery of, and battle over, McBain's legacy, which has fallen to Jill. When Cheyenne and Harmonica discover the plan to build the town, as well as the contractual clause that the station must be in place by the time the railroad comes through, they set down their guns and start building.



The “good guys” in this particular narrative are not at all the sanctified, heroically masculine subjects who defend their women folk and hetero-domesticity from the onslaught of whatever villainous force. Instead, they place themselves in the service of the bio-political regime’s denigrated object. Their reassignment to the fight against capitalism is more a reassignment to the fight against its primary axis of bio-political subjection, which is sexual difference. As Jill is violently denied the qualified subjectivation provided by the institution of marriage, as discussed in the last chapter, whatever future Jill has depends upon a violent circumnavigation of heterosexual subjection and subjectivation. The gunfighters’ contempt for the new regime finds its expression in a defense of the new regime’s oppressed.

In *Once Upon A Time In The West* the power struggles of the mythological West do not disappear, instead they visibly mutate into the politics of sexual difference and subjection. Jill’s thorough subjugation to the violent men of the lamented West passes into a more ambivalent and compromised position within industrial modernity. At the end, when her future has been secured, and just before Frank and Harmonica settle their own fate, Cheyenne recommends that Jill should go down to the railroad workers and ‘give those boys a drink’. Jill walks to the window to stand with Cheyenne. He continues, ‘You can’t imagine how happy it makes a man to see a woman like you. Just to look at her. And if one of them should pat your behind, just make believe it’s nothing. They earned it.’ Jill drops her head and walks away. Cheyenne’s words inevitably remind us of her rape at the hands of Frank, as well as all the other ‘filthy memories’ that compose her history. In the concluding scenes, the sexual violence that had put Jill at the mercy of gun toting men is now dispersed, but carried by the less menacing, though still compromising, gestures of unarmed labourers. The passage from explicit sexual violence to implicit sexual objectification mirrors the passage from gun violence to the implicit and immanent



violence of bureaucratized power. The subject-to-violence becomes the object of discourse. Cheyenne seems to be suggesting that she needs to make her peace with this new regime, that her escape is not going to be total.

It is through this qualified integration within the new regime that the film produces an ambivalent spectator identification with the equally ambivalent Jill, a subject whose sole motivation is to find some hope outside of her sexual subjection. The film does not seek to retrieve the myth of Sovereign violence to prop up contemporary fantasies of subjective autonomy, but laments the irretrievable passage of Sovereign violence. Rather than serve the purpose of a disavowal, the narrative places the gunfighter out of reach.

The manner of the lament is only more troubled and uncertain for the modern audience to the extent that the film's dangerous men with guns always presented Jill with the threat of rape. Like the early Freud, discussed in the second chapter, a Sovereign masculinity is difficult to separate from a barbarous authority over women. The misogyny attributed to Bertolucci and Leone, and captured in comments about 'a world without balls' is not so much a hatred of women, but a disdain for the compromised subjectivity of modernity that is mistaken for 'feminization'. Their lament of the West, like the Victorian 'flight from domesticity', represents a political longing for the Sovereignty of the old regime, at the same time that it asks the audience to acknowledge the limits that were always inherent within it and the impossibility of any return.<sup>117</sup>

While such lessons are not necessarily popular, the intervening thirty five years of political mobilization against those forms of cultural authority that are ultimately dependent on the old regime, be they patriarchal, white supremacist, or

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<sup>117</sup> John Tosh, 'The Flight From Domesticity', in *A Man's Place: Masculinity in the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 170-194; See also Bederman for a discussion of such issues in the American context.



aristocratic, means that such lessons are unavoidable. The inarticulate but building suspicion regarding the importance of Jill, exhibited in Frayling's collection of writing on the film, and the question of masculinity more generally, attest to this inevitable recognition. Ever more integrated within the disciplinary mechanics of the modern State, the spectator's faith in the imaginary autonomy of the imaginary gunfighter – the hope of Sovereignty uncompromised by the violence of bio-political discourse – becomes increasingly untenable.

As discussed, *Once Upon* does not treat that imaginary gunfighter as the forbear of the modern democratic citizen, but it does not completely destroy the fantasy either. Instead, the heroes of the Western die with the closing of the frontier, and their subjectivity is displaced with something less glorious. Jill, conscious and alone, stands at the threshold of the new era and then submits to its terms. She works up an impressive smile and carries water down to serve the railroad workers. In Freudian terms, Jill understands that now everyone is castrated, even if some are more castrated than others.

Where the gunfighter's roving instrumental violence promised Sovereignty and equality for everyone, his passing intimates the subjection of everyone. Jill provides the final expression of the knowingness that is rightly or wrongly attributed to Leone. She is the surrogate for the masculine spectator's recognition that modern masculine subjects bear no relation to the gunfighter masculinity that only ever existed on an imaginary frontier.

Conscious and alone, she represents the 'the tradition of the oppressed' and knows that the 'state of emergency is not the exception but the rule'.<sup>118</sup> To turn this recognition into little more than a politically empty celebration of quotation for

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<sup>118</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 253-264 (p. 257).

quotation's sake in the post-modern 'hall of mirrors' represents an effort to disavow that the fetish object ever had a magical function. The cathartic potential of identifying with Jill is rejected in favor of a vapid formalism that rescues the contemporary spectator from the lessons of history. The move suggests a certain inability to let go of the Sovereign fantasy, and understand that the feminized or subjected body could be the subject of liberation. In the hall of mirrors, one can play with the history of violence and exercise an imaginary degree of control over the discourse that subjects us.



## FIVE

### DELIVERANCE AND ITS USES: SUBJECTIVITY, KNOWLEDGE AND DISAVOWAL

That night I called my father. I was sick of the film, sick of the whole story. And I wondered why the hell he had to have this homosexual rape. "I had to put the moral weight of murder on the suburbanites," was what my father told me [...] I understood that was the way it was supposed to work. But I didn't think my father understood what had happened that day filming by the river. In the book you can read the rape scene and know it happened, but you get around it and go on, and get other things out of the novel. In the movie -- it was becoming what the movie was about, it was the thing everybody was going to remember. "Squeal like a pig!" Not Lewis's survivalism, not the climb up the cliff, not Ed's conquest of his own fear. It was all going to be about butt-fucking.

"You're wrong, son," my father said.

---Christopher Dickey, *Summer of Deliverance*<sup>1</sup>

#### *Introduction*

The 1972 film, *Deliverance*, stars Jon Voight, Burt Reynolds, Ned Beatty and Ronny Cox, as a group of suburbanites from Atlanta, Georgia who, approaching middle age, go on a weekend canoeing trip. As the film's tagline states: 'This is the weekend they didn't play golf'. They venture out on the wild, but soon to be

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Dickey, *Summer of Deliverance: A Memoir of Father and Son* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), pp. 170-171.

dammed, soon to be tamed, 'Cahulawasee' river, in the mountains of northern Georgia. The trip takes them deep into what James Dickey's original novel of the same name referred to as, the 'country of nine fingered people'.<sup>2</sup>

The story centres on Jon Voight's middle class everyman, Ed Gentry, and his relationship with Burt Reynolds's exceedingly sincere, but slightly contradictory suburban survivalist, Lewis Medlock. Bobby Tripp (Beatty), is juvenile and jocular and contrasts sharply with Drew Ballinger's (Cox) enthusiasm and brotherly civility. While the trip starts well enough, 'hillbilly' rapists confront two members of the party downriver. Lewis arrives too late for Bobby, but just in time to save Ed from the same fate, by shooting and killing one of the mountain men. The other mountain man escapes, and the confrontation inaugurates a struggle as the party journeys down the river, which ends with the killing, injuring, or "delivering" the various members of the canoeing party.

Both the novel and the film, *Deliverance*, were, and continue to be, relatively successful. The specific terms of that success are what this chapter seeks to explore. Dickey's novel lingered on *The New York Times* best-seller list for more than half of 1970 and then returned to the list, in paperback form, the next year. At the time the reviews were qualified but appreciative, complimentary of the acclaimed poet's first fiction outing, and generally impressed by what Dickey accomplished within the boundaries of what is essentially a genre piece. More recently, the Random House Modern Library board of editors ranked the novel forty-second in a list of the best 100 novels of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> The film, as Carol Clover has already discussed in detail, has spawned a sub genre of horror films involving urban people

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<sup>2</sup> James Dickey, *Deliverance* (New York, Dell Publishing, 1970), p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Modern Library: 100 Best Novels: The Boards List', <<http://www.randomhouse.com/modernlibrary/100bestnovels.html>> [accessed 15 May 2003].



in rural contexts.<sup>4</sup> It has also spawned a small collection of near duplicate narratives, involving whitewater rafting trips which get derailed by psychopaths.<sup>5</sup>

James Dickey adapted his novel for the screen, and while the film's director, John Boorman, fought to get a co-writing credit after adding and subtracting so many lines, he eventually lost his battle. Though the film was subject to similarly qualified critical reviews, it became a hit on its release. Critics noted their disbelief of the physical reserves that the suburbanites managed to draw on during their struggle on the river. Despite such exaggeration, *Deliverance* was eventually nominated for best editing, best direction, and best picture for the 1972 Academy Awards, the same year as 'The Godfather' and 'Cabaret'.<sup>6</sup> It was also a BAFTA nominee for best soundtrack, editing and cinematography. More recently the film was ranked forty-fifth by a Film Four viewers poll on the top 100 films of all time.<sup>7</sup> The AFI ranked it fifteenth on a list of the 100 most thrilling films of all time. Further, *Deliverance* has become a video store staple and is included on *Variety's* 1998, all time 'Rental Champs' list.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Carol Clover, 'Getting Even', in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender In The Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> See *Death Stalk* (1975), *River of Rage* (1993), *Dangerous Waters* (1999) and most prominently *The River Wild*, dir. Curtis Hanson, per. Meryl Streep and Kevin Bacon, Universal Pictures, 1994, which involves a mother who, while adept at white-water rafting, must save her family from assault at the hands of some very bad men!

<sup>6</sup> John Boorman, *Adventures of a Suburban Boy* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 202.

<sup>7</sup> 'The 100 Greatest Films', *Channel 4*, <<http://www.channel4.com/film/newsfeatures/microsites/G/greatest/index.jsp>> [accessed 15 May 2003].

<sup>8</sup> 'Rental Champs: Rate of Return: The Force Hits An Iceberg as Paramount Cleans Up With "Titanic"', *Variety*, 15 December 1998, p. 60. Films that were released before the dawn of home video are necessarily at a disadvantage on this list. Thus in the above article *Titanic* takes the top spot on earnings in the same year of its video release, while *Star Wars* and *ET* hang about in the second and third spot. The bottom entry on the list has made \$20,000,000 while *Titanic* had made \$324,425,520. In the words of the *Variety* editors themselves: 'Based on studio and industry estimates, the champs list represents one of the best yardsticks of a film's profitability,



However, as the film's somewhat ambiguous standing as the IMDb's two hundred and twenty-eighth most popular movie of all time would indicate, the popularity and success of *Deliverance* demands further contextualization.<sup>9</sup> The novel does not appear on the Modern Library's 'Reader's Choice' top 100 list: a list on which novels by Ayn Rand hold the number one and two spots. Similarly, this introduction could provide an even longer compilation of 'top' film or video lists on which *Deliverance* fails to appear at all. As for the 'Rental Champs' list, which has around 800 titles, *Deliverance* is closer to the bottom, having returned \$22,600,000 to the studio. That places it six spots below 1967's *Bonnie and Clyde* (\$22,800,000), and three spots above 1975's *Dog Day Afternoon* (\$22,500,000). Its position on the list is book-ended by *Nightmare Before Christmas* and *RoboCop 2*. Comparatively, the two hundred and twenty-eighth spot on the IMDb puts the film three places above *Moulin Rouge* (2001), and two places below John Wayne's dire film *The Quiet Man* (1952). Taken together, the critical and/or popular status of *Deliverance*, particularly the film, is in no way secure for even the immediate future.<sup>10</sup>

The questionable critical and popular status of *Deliverance* contrasts with the manner in which the film, or elements of the film, have become part of a contemporary cultural vocabulary. More specifically, some elements of the film have been widely taken up in English speaking, trans-Atlantic contexts to suggest the threat of, or to propose the symbolic perpetration of, male rape. The lines or music often achieve this in tension with a surface narrative, encoding male rape as a singularly public secret. The popularity of such citations would obviously rely upon

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since rentals are specifically the portion of a film's total B.O. gross that is returned to the studio (and, by extension, profit participants)'.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> 'The Top 250 Movies As Voted By Our Users', *Internet Movie Database (IMDb.com)*, <<http://www.imdb.com/chart/top>> [accessed 15 May 2003].

<sup>10</sup> By August of 2004, *Deliverance* had dropped off the IMDb Top 250.



the popularity of the film, but while more difficult to substantiate, it also seems fair to assert that such citations demand recognition, in a manner that would continue and extend the audience for *Deliverance*. In other words, it is not exactly clear whether the popularity of *Deliverance* is an effect of its uses, or if its uses are an effect of its popularity.

While I discuss these citations in detail below, I would suggest that this relationship of spectatorship and citation can work to elucidate the text, and its pleasures, in a manner not usually available. The film is remembered for its violence, and that violence sufficiently affects an audience for them to have come to reference it over, and over, and over... and over again. It follows that the film is more than well placed to tell us something about representations of violence and their cultural function. In calling attention to the banality of such citations and their reproductions, tethered to, or un-tethered from the text, I believe that we can understand citations of the film as a ritual in the cultural discourse of violence. By understanding its function as a ritual, we add to our understanding of the demand for violent representation.

As I will detail, the specific forms of citation that occur in relation to *Deliverance* would appear to evoke the discursive relations explored in the narrative, and then graft them onto real world contexts. In so doing, both the citation and the context are resignified. Most commonly, the citation marks a perceived threat to the discursive boundaries that give heterosexual masculinity a semblance of trans-historical stability. The threat that is surfaced by the citation of notes from 'Duelling Banjos', the phrase 'Squeal like a pig!', as well as other popular, but less prominent, lines from the film like, 'You sure got a purty mouth', and 'This river don't go to Ainty', suggest the potential collapse of heteronormative distinctions, which structure discursive conduct.<sup>11</sup> The citation seeks to render discursive instability as a

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<sup>11</sup> Popular references to the film do not always contain exact quotations.

manifestation of a pathological and backward, polymorphous perversity. The citation suggests that civil regression threatens from within moments of discursive instability, and that regression is partly characterized by a context in which sex, violence, and gender become indistinct.

The problem with such a 'read' of the situation is that these citations occur casually and in general conversation. The citations serve a particular demographic, with young, white, heterosexual men at its centre. As an object of examination, it is better suited to ethnographic method than to the textual-discursive analyses I am exploring here. (However, that would be a very long and difficult project of ethnographic observation). I consider that the terms of *Deliverance* and its uses can be satisfactorily explored through verifiable examples of citation drawn from popular culture, along with an analysis of the film itself. Furthermore, while the archive of uses that presents itself suggests that *Deliverance* may have a core audience, it also suggests that the film's referentiality is extensively recognized.

It follows that the referentiality of *Deliverance* must be fed back into the text, so as to understand the popular relevance of the film. The specificity of *Deliverance* and its citations mean that one cannot simply ask what *Deliverance* is about, one must also ask what *Deliverance* does. The film is not just a popular story; it is also a popular event that, at least for the time being, serves some cultural demand. While it is not necessary to limit possible readings of *Deliverance*, attempts which fail to utilize the available keys risk abdicating their critical relevance as symptomatic readings. Accordingly, in this analysis, I propose to map the function of the citation in and out of its textual origins, so as to delineate how the citation operates at the nexus of discourse and real violence. This is not to assert that *Deliverance* does something that no other film does; it is to assert that *Deliverance* provides a



particularly conspicuous example of a popular text providing the means to manage subjectivity at the boundaries of violence and knowledge.

### *Citations*

Before discussing the text I want to substantiate these claims by discussing a small set of *Deliverance* references. Later, after a discussion of the narrative, I shall return to more substantive or compelling citations. The uninitiated need to know that this chapter's epigraph, taken from Christopher Dickey's *Summer of Deliverance*, carries within itself a bittersweet amusement. *Summer of Deliverance* is Christopher Dickey's memoir about his estranged relationship with his notorious, larger than life, father. James Dickey's unqualified assertion that his son is wrong about the 'butt-fucking' in the film *Deliverance* is a moment, among many, that serves to mark the folly of the senior Dickey. Inherent in the story, and the reason that Dickey's assertion can sit so languidly in the white spaces, is our contemporary understanding that Christopher Dickey could not have been more correct.

Whatever *Deliverance* once was, or was intended to be, it has become a story, a bad joke, a clichéd shorthand for male rape. Even so, Christopher Dickey is not calling to some critical consensus. We cannot find some institutional agreement on the meaning of the novel or the film, and the irreducibility of male rape within those narratives. James Dickey's folly is found within some other register, and one that should be generally apparent to Christopher Dickey's readership. Christopher Dickey is referencing the semi-allusive citations of the film, as well as the film's reception as intimately experienced by some of those involved in the production.

Witness director John Boorman's answer to a relatively simple question in an interview for the online film magazine *The Context*:

**Context:** "*Deliverance* is probably your most widely-seen film. What do you think of it today?"

**John Boorman:** "I actually saw it on TV a couple of months ago, and was surprised. It's very spare and primal. I think it holds up. It's not a bad picture, I thought. I'm pretty distant from it now. Poor Ned Beatty - it's haunted him. Everyone sees Ned Beatty, they say, 'Squeal like a pig!' He's said that he feels like a rape victim".<sup>12</sup>

Ned Beatty's 'Bobby' is the only one of the four suburbanites who is raped, while his assailant demands that he 'Squeal like a pig'. One is aghast at the frequency with which this 'greeting' must occur, much less the manner of its deployment, such that Ned Beatty starts to understand himself as the subject of a rape via the repetition of this single line. In addition, what should we do with the complex of psychological conflict that must be at work in a fan engaging an actor in public contexts by repeating the rapist's line from said actor's famous rape scene? How does this compare with the more traditionally appreciative remarks that would be directed at a movie star? Ned Beatty's difficulty with his audience starts to indicate the recognition level of something at work in the rape scene, something that is appreciated at the same time that it retains a degree of menace in its recall and reiteration.

References to the rape scene in *Deliverance* are abundant and pervasive, but they are also fleeting and ephemeral. The simple repetition of a line of dialogue, or the sounding out of so many notes from the film's 'theme' music, 'Duelling Banjos', can easily pass notice. When I began this chapter I had a sudden moment of doubt regarding the extent of the citation. I wondered if I was not critically assessing popular culture but simply enacting a kind of queer paranoia; hearing or seeing something that looked 'homophobic' but was utterly obscure and perhaps not legitimately taken as a significant cultural sign. I asked around. Invariably, those that had seen the film agreed that this citation was constant, but also noted their

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<sup>12</sup> 'Merlin of the Movies: The Context Interviews John Boorman', *The Context*, 20 April 2001, <<http://www.thecontext.com/docsi/3164.html>> [accessed 16 May 2003] (para 10 of 19).



fleeting nature and the fact that they could not come up with a single solid example. Not sure what to expect I tried a 'Google' search for 'Squeal like a pig' and another for 'Duelling Banjos'. The prevalence of the citation was worse than I had imagined. While a search engine such as Google may be ineffective for tracking the passing moments of conversation, or the throw away jokes of bad comedians it does confirm absolutely that *Deliverance* has assumed the status of a cultural meme. The examples that presented themselves depend upon the citation's prior recognition, thus providing semi-empirical foundations that suggest wider popular usage.

One such example seems exactly designed to mock James Dickey's confident refusal of his son's concerns. Rock climbers, on Diablo Mountain in the San Francisco Bay Area, have named a rock 'Deliverance', and the recommended climbing route is the rapist's taunt, 'Squeal like a pig'. If James Dickey were to hope that, at the very least, rock climbers and white-water enthusiasts would be the groups most likely to 'get around' the rape scene, then such hopes were in vain. It is after all Ed's physical struggle with, and triumph over, a rock face, and then the rapids, that allows escape from potential further assault and murder.

On Mount Diablo, the rock itself becomes animated with the power to sexually subjugate its climber, thus collapsing the entire geography of film or novel into the violent sexual encounter between 'hillbilly' and suburbanite. Alternatively, the rocker climber must figuratively conquer the rock itself and make it 'Squeal like a pig', presumably marking the subjection of the physical landscape to a rugged and violent subjectivity. The rape scene again subsumes Jon Voight's struggle up the rock face and his struggle against the rapids.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Squeal Like A Pig', *Climbing Bay Area*,  
 <[http://www.climbingbayarea.com/rock/db/mount\\_diablo/deliverance\\_rock\\_\\_\\_pine\\_canyon/squeal\\_like\\_a\\_pig.html](http://www.climbingbayarea.com/rock/db/mount_diablo/deliverance_rock___pine_canyon/squeal_like_a_pig.html)> [accessed 29 May 2003].

A second example is an episode of 'The Simpsons' which involves a river-rafting trip where the characters' passage along a riverbank is accompanied by a rustling in the bushes, while 'Duelling Banjos' plays in the distance.<sup>14</sup> The faces of the cartoon's variously familiar characters are braced with fear. The music itself features in an early scene in *Deliverance* before the group sets out on the river. Drew plays his guitar along and in competition with a mentally disabled child who is master of the banjo. After that scene the music becomes the recurring theme of the film. Despite Warner Records' insistence that the record would not sell, a single was eventually pressed and went to number one in the US charts.<sup>15</sup>

The scene in 'The Simpsons' is fleeting and fits within the cartoon's general mould of providing a range of references to classic Hollywood films. The same episode, for example, has Bart, together with his friend Millhouse, performing a musical number based on Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly's *On The Town* (1949). Unlike the reference to the relatively wholesome *On The Town*, the reference to *Deliverance*, which accompanies a boatload of Boy Scouts floating down a river, would appear to operationalize more than the amusements of homage. One might surmise that jokes about male rape are so banal and routine in contemporary culture that even jokes about the potential rape of prepubescent boys are unremarkable. Such an understanding does not rest easily with the history of controversy and confusion concerning paedophiles in the Scouts and the impermissibility of gay scout masters.<sup>16</sup> In this case the citation seems to dare censors to defend a proposed cut by explaining

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<sup>14</sup> 'The Simpsons: "Boy-Scoutz N' the Hood", (Season 5, Episode 508)' dir. Jeffrey Lynch, perf. Dan Castellaneta, Julie Kavner, Nancy Cartwright and Yeardley Smith, Gracie Films/Universal Network Television, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Boorman, pp. 201-202.

<sup>16</sup> A ten year old public debate on these issues culminated in a 2000 United States Supreme Court decision, *The Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*, which ruled that the private organization was within its rights to discriminate against Gays and Lesbians.



what is wrong with the scene. In either case, the citation would rest on the possibility of failed recognitions for some audiences and the successful recognitions of others.

This operation of inclusion and exclusion that the citation performs will prove to be the standard trope essential to its humour.<sup>17</sup> While Christopher Dickey's writing would indicate that we all understand what has become of *Deliverance*, he writes for an audience presumably familiar with or interested in his literary father. A more extensive catalogue of citations comparable with 'Boy Scoutz 'N The Hood' reveals a complicated and intricate apparatus of inclusions and exclusions. These are marked, not only by the citation and the politics of sex and violence inherent within the story, but by knowledge of the text and the ability to participate in the citation as a knowing subject.

Members of the organization 'American Whitewater' provide a conspicuous example of such citation practices when they name one of the rapids on Tallulah Gorge, 'Road To Ainty', which is the canoeists' final destination point in *Deliverance*. This is a rapid that comes after 'Gauntlet' and 'Tom's Brain Buster', but before 'Twisted Sister' and 'Damned Lake'.<sup>18</sup> If 'Road to Ainty' is meant to suggest any sense of menace, in the manner of the other rapids, it does so, not through invoking the whole of a harrowing narrative about the tribulations of white water canoeing, but through the evocation of the rape scene:

**Mountain Man:** "What the hell d'ya think you're doing?"  
**Ed:** "Headin' down river - little canoe trip. Headin' for Ainty."  
**Toothless Man:** "Ainty!?"

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<sup>17</sup> There are two additional references to *Deliverance* in other episodes of 'The Simpsons', one involving 'Duelling Banjos' as the music for a log ride at a children's amusement park, and another where the cartoon only Gay character plucks the notes of Duelling Banjos. I have not been able to view either of these examples.

<sup>18</sup> 'Tallulah, GA', *American Whitewater*, <<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/rivers/id/506>> [accessed 29, May 2003] (para 17 of 21).

**Bobby:** “Sure, this river only heads one way captain, haven’t you heard?”

**Mountain Man:** “You ain’t never gonna’ get down to Ainty.”

**Ed:** “Well, why not?”

**Mountain Man:** “Cuz’ this river don’t go to Ainty. You done taken the wrong turn. See, this here river don’t go nowhere near Ainty.”

While some rapids bust your brains, or at least Tom’s brains, and others take you to the waters of the damned, ‘Road to Ainty’ is a wrong turn into the hands of hillbilly rapists. Unlike the rock climbers who sign post their ‘squeal’ citation by naming the rock ‘Deliverance’, the white water enthusiasts provide no clue to the significance of ‘Ainty’. The ‘joke’ requires not only that we have seen *Deliverance*, but also that we have a relatively good recall of the film.

*Deliverance* and the scene in question are generally cited as a central contribution to some of the ugly class stereotypes of the people of Appalachia. Not too surprisingly, one can scroll down the page and find a secondary, detailed list of the same set of rapids that includes another, and notably less menacing name, for the same spot on the river, ‘The Big Slide’. Anyone from the area, or anyone who has developed any affection for the area, might refuse to participate in these kinds of references to the film.<sup>19</sup> Add to this those who do not get the joke, and those who simply fail to see the humour in rape, and the need for an alternate name becomes apparent.

### *Critical Engagements*

*Deliverance* has become a prominent text within the critical literature on gender representation and popular film. This is largely due to the place the film is

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<sup>19</sup> Geoff Pavere, ‘The Banjo Duel Heard ‘Round The World’, *The Toronto Star*, 7 December 2002, p. J12; ‘Disappearing The Hillbillies; Where *Deliverance* Ended’, *Appalachian Journal*, 25 January 1996. p. 20. (Thanks go to the anonymous person working in the W.E. Eury Appalachian Collection at Appalachian State University, N.C. for the voluntary transcription of the latter.)



rightly given within Carol Clover's essential analysis of the horror genre, *Men Women and Chainsaws: Gender and the Modern Horror Film*.<sup>20</sup> Within her book, Clover provides an excellent analysis of the city/country dualism that consistently presents itself within the genre. For Clover, *Deliverance* is 'the film that stands as the influential granddaddy' of such a tradition.<sup>21</sup> The genre consistently represents country people as poor,

if not utterly impoverished, at least considerably poorer than their city visitors. They drive old cars, wear old clothes, watch old televisions [...] eat badly, are uneducated, are either unemployed or work at menial service jobs or subsistence agriculture, and live in squalor [...] The city visitors by contrast, are well dressed (city youths inevitably wear college T-shirts, drive late model cars (often foreign), are laden with expensive gear (hunting, fishing, camping) and so on. One of the obvious things at stake in the city/country split of horror films, in short, is social class—the confrontation between haves and have-nots, or even more directly, between exploiters and their victims.<sup>22</sup>

*Deliverance* establishes that relationship from its opening scenes. The group of suburbanites is relatively well dressed and well kitted out, driving late model cars. They arrive at a ramshackle garage, which is surrounded by auto parts that Bobby calls 'junk'. He states that he thinks this is 'where everything finishes up'. When he sees the decaying body of a '51 Dodge, he pretends it is the same one he owned in his youth, joking, 'all my youth and passion spent in that back seat'. Until someone finally emerges from the tumble down shacks, Ed suspects that the place has already been evacuated on account of the dam. The man who does emerge is dressed in clothing reminiscent of the men on the employment lines and soup kitchens in

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender In The Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). See also: Sally Robinson, 'Damned If They Do and Damned If They Don't: *Deliverance* and the Hysterical Male Body', in *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 165-179; Linda Ruth Williams, 'Blood Brothers', *Sight & Sound*, 4 (1994), 16-19.

<sup>21</sup> Clover, p. 126.

<sup>22</sup> Clover, p. 126.

Dorothea Lange's Depression Era photography or characters from *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), only he is dirtier. Their poverty is not only signified by a collection of used and broken articles, but by their hoarding of an earlier generation's cast-offs. The backwoods seem to suffer from a generalized form of retarded development.

When the station attendant speaks, he asks Lewis if they are 'from the power company?'<sup>23</sup> For Clover, the significance of rape, that figures so prominently within the city/country trope, resides in its suggestion that 'it is the man who is deprived of the phallus who must live by the penis'.<sup>24</sup> She goes on to argue that 'imbricated in the economic confrontation in these films is another confrontation' which should be understood centrally, and this is the confrontation 'of the civilized with the primitive'. The 'almost Darwinian terms' of this confrontation consistently strip the city dwellers of their comforts and question their ability to survive, 'without recourse to the law, or to verbal argument, or to money payoffs, or to sophisticated weaponry'.<sup>25</sup>

Class issues are undoubtedly central within *Deliverance*, but I believe Clover's critical posing of the primitive against the civilized constitutes an oversimplification of the narrative. Clover's reading alludes to the historical construction of the civilized subject, at the same time as it opposes that subject to a lack that is too quickly defined in terms of what pre-exists such formations of subjectivation. The primitive mountain man comes to stand for a pre-civil state of nature that even suggests a kind of 'environmental sentiment' characteristic to the genre.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Clover, p. 128.

<sup>24</sup> Clover, p. 157.

<sup>25</sup> Clover, p. 131.

<sup>26</sup> Clover, p. 129.



Linda Ruth Williams is more explicit about this point when she argues that, in the middle of the river and the woods are the mountain men, who ‘are somehow too close to nature’. ‘Their identity’ is ‘marked and muddied by being “too natural” to be properly human’.<sup>27</sup> Williams’ sense of the mountain men’s exceedingly natural state, is, I think, a misreading of their profound *distance* from nature. A Freud-Darwinian template of primitivism has been imposed upon characters who are utterly modern in their failings. As I shall detail, the mountain men represent a complete violation of nature as it is bio-politically defined.

The film’s title sequence, which intersperses shots of dam construction with the cars of the suburbanites driving up the mountains, is accompanied by a sound track of their preliminary discussion about the trip itself. Clover and others have pointed to this discussion as that which frames a narrative of nature’s revenge. Lewis, the one with survivalist or primitivist pretensions, complains about the dam building project:

“You push a little more power into Atlanta, a little more air conditioners for your smug little suburb and you know what’s going to happen? We’re gonna rape this whole goddamn landscape. We’re gonna rape it!”<sup>28</sup>

The air-conditioned life of the modern urban or suburban middle classes colonizes and disposes of the ‘wild’ and ‘untamed’ outerlands. In this way, the film would appear to value the natural world and suggest it needs protection from those forms of exploitation, which represent a kind of denaturing. Moreover, the idea that they are going to rape the whole landscape would apparently suggest a kind of inherent revenge for Bobby’s rape when it does occur. In what immediately follows, the film instantiates a more remarkable distinction between the mountain men and

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Clover, p. 128.

the natural world than such arguments allow. The men who commit that rape are the products of a failed civilizing project.

Lewis' discourse on the rape of the environment, for example, does not suggest that backwoodsmen can be the emissaries of the landscape's revenge. Lewis is wholly identified with the 'strenuous life' and the challenge of the frontier, discussed in the third chapter. He never demonstrates any affinity for, nor romanticism towards, the 'nine fingered people'. Instead, his attitude towards them is essentially one of contempt. In the discussion at the beginning of the film Lewis is apoplectic about the 'the vanishing wilderness'; 'they're gonna flood a whole valley', 'they're drowning the river', so 'there ain't gonna be no more river'. For Lewis, 'that ain't progress, that's shit!' When Bobby asks if 'there any hillbillies up there, anymore?' Lewis responds with the simple and dispassionate observation, as if the enquiry was disruptive or off topic. He says that there are some people who have never seen a town before, 'those woods are real deep'. While Lewis does see modern civilization as the villain, and seeks to preserve or find something in the river which he believes urban civilization has lost, there is no indication that this something is in the possession of the locals. Instead, a tripartite structure of suburbanite, wilderness and degenerate locals presents itself.

When they arrive at the backwoods gas station, the scene of their initial contact with the hillbillies, Bobby makes contemptuous and pointed remarks about garbage and genetic deficiency. When Drew cautions him that 'we don't want to offend these people', Bobby questions the use of the term by restating, 'People?' On one level his question alludes to the fact that no one seems to be around, but it also suggests incredulity at Lewis' use of the term to describe the hillbillies.

Ed looks on, seemingly unsure, even confused, by the scene before him. The garbage that Bobby kicks around the lot is the remains of the early model cars that



the locals drive. In varying states of decay these litter the landscape and signify an exit from cultural progress shortly after the 1930's or 40's, the era of the massive Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) public works project and its notoriously troubled attempts to develop the southern Appalachia.<sup>29</sup> In the Depression Era United States, the TVA tied dam building to the very idea of progress in the American imaginary. The damming of the fictional 'Cahulawasee' river, and the removal of the locals suggests the return of the TVA's interest in the area, but not in the people. Lewis's own concerns about the question of progress are similarly fixed on the future of the river.

The same detritus of early model car parts also composes a boundary between the hillbillies and the natural wilderness of the river. The stripped and rusting frames are strewn across the landscape, piling up on the sides of the road and prominently blocking access to the banks. Strewn around as they are, the cars suggest the locals' unqualified and unpoliced possession of the land, at the same time as they mark the limits of their domain. Lewis handles the negotiations with the locals and assumes a role that is more than simply tough, but plainly managerial. When he asks the station attendant for help getting the cars down river to Ainty, the man walks away, saying, 'Hell, you're crazy'. Further up the road they ask another man who asks, 'What the hell you wanna fuck around in that river for?' Lewis responds: 'Because it's there'. The reply comes, 'It's there alright. You get in there and can't get out, you gonna wish it wasn't.' The local's dread and disassociation from the river is unmistakably

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<sup>29</sup> Brian Black, 'Authority in the Valley: TVA in Wild River and the Popular Media, 1930-1940', *Journal of American Culture*, 18 (1995), 1-12; Howard Segal, 'Down in the Valley: David Lillienthal's TVA: *Democracy on the March*', *The American Scholar*, 64 (1995), 423-427; Melissa Walker, 'African Americans and the TVA Reservoir Property Removal: Race In A New Deal Program', *Agricultural History*, 72 (1998), 417-429. The head of the TVA entitled his documentary account of the project *March To Democracy*, which interestingly implied that democracy was not yet achieved despite the fact that the Tennessee Valley is firmly located within the US.

utilized to build the tension which finally gets to Ed. He recommends to Lewis that they should return to town and play golf.

When they finally set out on the water, banjo boy himself stares on in fascination from a pedestrian bridge, which consists of rusting cables and decaying planks, as the suburbanites pass underneath. Drew's gesturing efforts to get the boy to play his banjo do not even register, indicating a figurative barrier between them. Those who venture on the river are alien curiosities to the locals. The bridge and the child further confirm the disassociation of the mountain men and the river itself. This is also borne out in the rape scene, as the two assailants demand that Ed and Bobby get off the riverbank and up into the mountains before they begin their assault. Their distrust of, if not their fear of, the 'last wild, untamed, unpolluted, unfucked-up, river in the south' is palpable.

It would be impossible to argue that the associations analysed by Clover, Williams and others were anything other than the intention of the writer and the director. As discussed in the chapter on Freud and *Caligari*, this narrative of a primal subject prior to the civilizing process is itself an ideological template that serves to conceal the violence mediating contemporary subjectivity. Boorman's own memoir is telling in this regard as he recounts his excitement at reading the novel: 'Its themes coincided with my own: man's relationship to nature, the attempt to recover a lost harmony, the earth's anger at the despoiling human race'. He also identifies the rape at 'the centre' of the text, stating that it was 'a metaphor for the rape of America'. He also continues with a very brief and inconclusive aside: 'Levi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques* asks why Europeans who nurtured their land for centuries became rapacious when they came to America'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Boorman, p. 181.



The rapaciousness of imperial conquest, signified for most people in the progressive annihilation of Native-Americans, is subsumed within a generalized discourse of the natural world. The native becomes part of the landscape. For Clover the rape is a link in the chain which also begins with the urban exploitation of the environment. The problem is that the mountain men are neither natives nor sympathetic. They are clearly the villains of the narrative. Clover argues that the film aligns spectator sympathies with city people, thus 'inviting us to participate in their arrogance, but also in their palpable nervousness at having to face directly those they recognize, at some level of consciousness, as the rural victims of their own city comfort'.<sup>31</sup>

These readings are interested in a cleaner opposition of forces than the narrative actually allows. In the case of Boorman, it would appear that the subjective struggle to mediate bio-political sovereignty and subjection intrudes upon his narrative. While the film may play on environmental sentiments the wilderness itself represents a space of lawlessness. The very definition of wilderness depends on its lack of incorporation within the mechanics of the modern State. In *Deliverance* the only unincorporated space is the 'unpolluted and unfucked-up river', which is about to be dammed and thus incorporated.

Lewis' despair has everything to do with the fact that there is no 'nature', no unpolluted space left. His derision of the smug suburbs is carried within the description of an industrial process where smugness and smog are symbolically conflated. It is unclear whether the air-conditioners that will be powered by the damn produce the pollutant smugness at issue or whether they serve to clean the air thus concealing the pollution that infects suburban life. Either way, suburban spaces

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<sup>31</sup> Clover, p. 129.

are polluted with a form of subjective complacency for which the flight from domesticity, the strenuous life, holds out the potential for a cure.

For Lewis, the pollution of the suburbs and the end of the wilderness threaten the breakdown of civilization. He insists that the '[m]achines are gonna fail, and the system is gonna fail'. Despite Boorman's sense that the film is about nature's revenge, in his memoir he recounts his interaction with the studio head who spearheaded the film's production.

Because he thought I had contacts with the IRA he asked me if I could get him a rocket launcher for his yacht. He thought the collapse of civilization was imminent; he intended to take to the high seas and he would need to defend himself. Later he dropped out and lived in seclusion on an island off the coast of Maine, preparing for the apocalypse. He eventually got tired of waiting and went back to run Sony Pictures.<sup>32</sup>

The hillbillies are not representatives of nature's revenge, but warning signs that civilization is a project requiring particular forms of agency, namely that of the rugged individualist. The degeneration of the hillbillies is the very source of their menace. That degeneration manifests in the sexual impropriety of incest, implicit in the physical or mental disabilities of their children, as well as the violent sexuality and comparative idiocy of the rapists. It also finds expression in Ed Gentry's sexual ambiguity and effeminized subjectivity.

Dickey's book is curiously explicit in this regard, as a number of passages told in Ed's first person narration linger admiringly on Lewis' body, with its 'huge pumped-up' biceps.<sup>33</sup> During an argument between Drew and Lewis about the nature of the law, Ed discusses his reaction to Lewis:

I moved without being completely aware of movement, nearer to him, I would have like nothing better than to touch that big relaxed forearm as he stood there, one hip raised

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<sup>32</sup> Boorman, p. 181.

<sup>33</sup> Dickey, *Deliverance*, p. 55.



until the leg made longer by the position bent gracefully at the knee. I would have followed him anywhere, and I realized that I was going to have to do just that.

The film is only slightly subtler as the lingering gazes on Lewis' body are taken up by the camera. At the gas station scene, one shot features Lewis' bare, muscular arms centre screen as Lewis takes off his jacket. This is followed by the scene in which Lewis drives aggressively and recklessly down to the river. After first taking a wrong turn, they start out a second time. Sitting in the passenger seat, Ed initially demurs, timidly asking Lewis to slow down and to be careful. Lewis ignores Ed's sheepish requests and drives ever more recklessly.

**Ed:** "Lewis, you son of a bitch, why do we have to go so damned fast?"

**Lewis:** "You're gonna like it, Ed. When you see the river you're gonna like it?"

**Ed:** "Jesus Christ!"

**Lewis:** "It's alright."

After his initial resistance Ed starts to give in to the enjoyment and they both begin to laugh.

**Ed:** "Lewis, you're gonna kill us both before we ever see any water. Slow it down Lewis, come on. Come on. No fooling around."

Though still tense, Ed smiles through these lines, enjoying himself despite his protestations. He is also clearly melting, as his enamoured gaze lingers on his driver. The message is clear enough; Ed worships Lewis in an adolescent, boyish manner. However, the scene also rather plainly mimes a somewhat cliché narrative of a sexual encounter between an aggressive adolescent boy and a conflicted adolescent girl, complete with the euphemistic vocabulary of 'fooling around' and going "too fast".

Lewis finally stops the truck and tells Ed to, 'Listen to that! Listen', while the river flows audibly in the distance. Ed appears spent and breathes deeply. Lewis similarly exhales, smiles at Ed, rather lovingly, jumps out of the car and dashes up

the bank to view the river. Ed remains in the truck for a few brief moments, staring out the window at Lewis. When he finally gets out of the truck and makes his way toward Lewis on the bank, Lewis turns, looks down to Ed, and with the utmost sincerity and profundity utters one of the worst lines in movie history: 'Sometimes you have to lose yourself before you can find anything'. We cut to Ed up on the bank with Lewis, and while the trees obstruct their view, Lewis pushes apart their branches and the river flows before them. 'This is the one. There she is.' says Ed.

The erotic aspect of their relationship is unmistakable, but while Ed reluctantly enjoys the automotive eroticism, Lewis is in love with a river that is also a woman. Lewis' love affair with the wilderness is not only heterosexual, but also apparently monogamous. This superficially absurd possibility recalls the opening voice-over in the film, where Lewis convinces the group to come along on the basis that he can have them back in time for the football game, simultaneously dismissing their interest through reference to the 'pom pom girls', 'because I know that's all you care about'. It is clear that Lewis has no interest in the game, nor the polygamous fantasy life implied by the rest of the group's appreciation of cheerleaders.

Later, on the river, while the others get drunk around the campfire, it is established that Lewis does not drink, thus extending the terms of his moral purity. The diegesis asks us to recognize the eroticism that transpires within the truck, at the same time that it places the burden of that eroticization on Ed alone. Ed is already feminized, as he assumes a façade of girlish reluctance over his active erotic participation. He has mistaken the exchange, unconsciously imputing a desire to Lewis that he would need to resist, when Lewis holds no such desire, indicating a comical negotiation of homosexual desire as well. Ed is not only a failed heterosexual but any properly aligned masculinity that might be found within his homosexuality is similarly lacking. Ed is not positively straight, gay, or even



bisexual, or definably masculine or feminine, but lost in the sexual discourse of subjective composition, a fact that is only confirmed in the moment that the rapists, without any apparent thought, restrain Ed so that they can attack Bobby.

Lewis only confirms our suspicions of Ed a few scenes later. After some initial rapids, Ed and Lewis are together in a canoe while Lewis attempts to shoot fish with bow and arrow. Lewis stands in the canoe facing Ed, his vest exposing his arms and the zipper undone to his mid-section, exposing his chest. Ed reclines on his back at the other end of the canoe, facing Lewis, legs open. He holds a beer in one hand and manages the oar in the other, while Lewis proselytizes about the machines failing and the system failing while missing his shot:

**Ed:** “Well the system’s done alright by me.”

**Lewis:** “Oh yeah, you got a nice job, got a nice house, a nice wife, nice kid.”

**Ed:** “You make that sound rather shitty, Lewis.”

**Lewis:** “Why do you go on these trips with me, Ed?”

**Ed:** “I like my life Lewis.”

**Lewis** (arching his bow but looking at Ed): “Yeah, but why do you go on these trips with me?”

**Ed:** “You know sometimes I wonder about that.”

(Lewis shoots and pierces the fish with his arrow.)

**Ed:** “Here’s to you Lewis.”

Lewis’s question specifies Ed’s pathology in terms of his indecision. As this scene follows the scene at the gas station, it confirms a general portrait of Ed as the suburban neurasthenic.

In the scene at the gas station, Ed is hesitant and fearful, as when he expresses his wish to return to town and play golf. He walks with a seemingly crippled gait and smokes a pipe, a behaviour which is out of generation, out of time and out of place in the wilderness. Contrary to Bobby’s active derision of the locals, Drew’s enthusiasm for them, or Lewis’ managerial distance from them and their relative shortcomings, these same attributes render Ed insensate and nearly immobile. As he peers through a

window of one of the cottages and sees a severely disabled young girl, he can only stare absently as she struggles to gesture in acknowledgment.

When Lewis asks Ed why he comes on these trips, Ed either recognizes, or imputes to Lewis, suspicion of his own subjectivity. Lewis' repetition of the question after Ed's attempt to deflect it, only retains the ambiguity between recognition and imputation. His failure to answer directly the second time confirms Ed's irresolution. Ed is lost, atrophied or in the midst of premature degeneration; he is a subject without agency or a subject losing whatever remains of agency. While all of this signifies through laughably overwrought mythologies of American frontier masculinity, Ed's decomposition does not signify through simple inversions of valorized forms of masculine embodiment. The text seems to go out of its way to deflect the terms of a simple feminization. He is not the bad subject of masculinity, but a non-subject. The indeterminacy of health, age and sexuality, embodied by Ed, straddle and defy the same taxonomies of normal and pathological gender deployed in the rape scene.

### *Rape As The Suspension of Gender*

For Clover, the rape revenge genre suggests a symbolic that harks back to the one sex model explored by Thomas Laqueur, in which early modern medical science suggested that man and woman were simply 'inside versus outside versions of single genital system'.<sup>34</sup> The use of rape within these films, the fact that rape is used to subjugate men, men and women, and women in different films, presents us with a city/country split. This is a split in which the 'the body in question is experienced as neither strictly male or strictly female but as a common body with a penetrable "sheath" figurable variously as anus and vagina"'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Clover, p. 158.



Clover argues that 'rape revenge films' like *Deliverance*, 'operate on the basis of a one sex body, the maleness or femaleness of which is performatively determined by the social gendering of the acts it undergoes or undertakes'. Furthermore, the advantage of understanding things in this manner is that it 'obviates the question of which body, male or female is *really* at stake' in the spectator's visual pleasure. She proposes 'that the position of rape victim *in general* knows no sex', and that the viewer will identify with the subjugated.<sup>35</sup>

Clover does not dismiss the fact that the gendering of the subject will obtrude, comparing the level of dishonour accorded to Bobby's rape in *Deliverance* with the level of danger accorded to female victims in similar films. Clover argues that 'the rape revenge film is a similar case' to slasher films, which 'represent the traditionally male hero as an anatomical female', with the result 'that at least one traditionally heroic act, triumphant self rescue, is no longer strictly gendered masculine'.<sup>36</sup> The problem with this framework, aside from the massive a-historical leap to Laqueur's one sex model, is the exceptional status of *Deliverance*. While *Deliverance* is the 'influential granddaddy' of the rape revenge genre and Clover confesses that:

it is commonly taken less as horror than as a "literary" rumination on urban masculinity the genre categorization only results from the debts of the film's more clearly identified offspring such as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Hunter's Blood*, and *I Spit On Your Grave*.<sup>37</sup>

This retrospective genre categorization is complicated further by near sub-genre of films involving people who navigate the harrowing white water while trying to save themselves from male predators. More than one of these examples comes complete with intellectually lacklustre assailants or criminals, who threaten mothers

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<sup>35</sup> Clover, p. 159.

<sup>36</sup> Clover, p. 159.

<sup>37</sup> Clover, p. 126.

or pubescent daughters with sexual assault.<sup>38</sup> It is, oddly, the line that Clover places in parenthesis which gives us more of a sense of what is at stake in the representation of rape: ‘Paradoxically, it is the experience of being brutally raped that makes a “man” of a woman’.<sup>39</sup> Specifically, it is surviving and avenging the rape that signifies heroic self-rescue. In such terms, we can also understand that rape can also make a man out of a man.

After the rape, and the killing of one of the rapists, Lewis’ perspective on the people of the backcountry becomes more detailed. The picture of rampant incest and the impossibility of justice that Lewis paints, rest on the interplay between violence and sexual excess signified by rape. His analysis convinces the others to take the risk of concealing the body, and the homicide, rather than the risks of a jury trial.

**Lewis:** “Let’s get our heads together, come on now let’s not do anything foolish. Does anyone know anything about the law?”

**Drew:** “Look I...I was on jury duty once [...] it wasn’t a murder trial.”

**Lewis:** “Murder trial? I don’t know the technical word for it Drew but I know this; we take this man down out of the mountains and turn him over to the sheriff and there’s going to be a trial alright. Trial by jury.”

**Drew:** “So what?”

**Lewis:** “We killed a man Drew. Shot him in the back. A mountain man. A cracker! Gives us something to consider.”

**Drew:** “Alright, consider it. We’re listening.”

**Lewis:** “Shit all these people are related. I’ll be goddamned if I want to come up here and stand trial with this man’s aunt and his uncle, maybe his mom and his daddy, sittin’ in the jury box [...]”

...The arguing continues...

**Drew:** “How do you know that other guy hasn’t already gone for the police?”

**Lewis:** “What in the hell is he gonna tell him Drew? What he did to Bobby?”

...and continues...

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<sup>38</sup> See n.5.

<sup>39</sup> Clover, p. 159.



**Drew:** “Well I’m telling you Lewis, I don’t want any part of it.”

**Lewis:** “Well you are a part of it!”

**Drew (yelling):** “It’s a matter of the law!”

**Lewis:** “The law? Hah. The law. What law? (yelling) Where’s the law Drew? Huh?--You believe in democracy don’t you?”

**Drew:** “Yes I do.”

**Lewis:** “Well then we’ll take a vote [...] and I’ll stand by it, and so will you.”

Lewis’ suggestion to hide the body and never speak of the murder is debated and contested by Drew and the others, yet his representation of a mountain community in extreme excess of incest taboos is left unchallenged. This excess and its accompanying degenerations render the locals irretrievably other. These other people, this other state, is not a state of nature, but a state of perversion that can only offer a ridiculous parody of proper sexual and legal alignments. Sexual excess has over-ridden social restraint and so has naturally subsumed a premier apparatus of such restraint within democratic society, namely a legal system based on trial by jury. The imaginary jury evoked by Lewis is a scene of absurdity passing into the horrific. It is a material apparatus of social regulation, occupied and practiced by the subjects whose emergence it was always intended to prevent. While Lewis romanticizes the landscape, the people are marked by their abandonment of, and thus failed relationship to, functioning regimes of democratic subjectivation. The soon to be dammed area is not an uncharted land but a scene of modern democracy’s failed colonization.

The depth of the woods and the difficulty of the river represent real and symbolic impediments to the proper installation of a diverse but interconnected matrix of subjectivation. In his argument against the possible jury trial, Lewis confesses to the necessity of the civilizing regimes that a hero of the primitive would presumably decry. Drew’s refusal of Lewis’ desire to bury the body offers no challenge to Lewis’ view and simply insists that the concealment of the body can

only suggest illegitimate reasons for the homicide making the murder charge inescapable. Accordingly, Drew's argument falls into predictable ineffectuality, as it rests on vain hopes for the rational judgment of a culture with no rational capacity. In turn Lewis' invocation of 'democracy' plays on Drew's faith in civil structures; they are both democrats and they are now pitted against the excesses and deficiencies in this particular zone of democracy's failure.

In lawless lands they are the only possible hope of the law. Their survival depends on becoming superior in violence, and thus assuming the role of the Sovereign exception. Just what is needed is in part demonstrated by Bobby, who must twice be restrained from his attempts to attack the corpse of his assailant. Bobby's attempt to recover his sense of self demands that he re-establish himself as an agent of violence. Lewis' rescue paradoxically denies Bobby the chance to recover his own subjectivity. His futile attempt to attack the corpse indicates that his subjectivity cannot be restored by someone else's violence, only his own.

When Lewis recommends that the body should be hidden 'everywhere', the camera cuts to Bobby. It is he who shows the first signs of being re-engaged. One wonders if it is the potential dismemberment of the rapist implicit in distributing the body 'everywhere' that seems to bring him around. The scene is also set so that Drew, arguing the case for going to the police, is distanced from Bobby in a way that begins to seem callous. It is Ed who helps Bobby up from the ground, and helps him get his clothes back on. Lewis looks to each member of the group while he argues his point, but Drew is only focused on Lewis. The crosscutting suggests that Drew may even be ignoring Bobby's plight.

The vote is a vote to bury the evidence of subjection. Thus, they propose to reorder the spatial exclusion that suspends their subjectivation. As Lewis argues, 'did you ever look out over a lake, and think about somethin' buried underneath it?



Buried underneath it! Man, that's about as buried as you can get!' Lewis, the river's advocate, is now firmly lined up with the interests of the power company and the destruction of the wilderness, in his desire to prevent 'this thing' from 'hanging over' them 'for the rest of their lives'. The law on which their lives depend is not just any law, but the law of advanced industrial democracy. When Lewis calls for the vote he first turns to Bobby as Bobby's vote is a forgone conclusion: 'Let's bury him. I don't want this gettin' around'. Bobby is actually talking tough in this moment. The collective act of voting returns his subjectivity and the burial of his subjection allows him to half believe in his posturing.

The 'what would you do?' factor that some critics suggest makes *Deliverance* the film that it is, does not simply rest on a question of 'how would you deal with rape', but asks how one would respond to a situation where one is at the periphery of civil society. When they first set down in the river, Lewis reminds the group that the first explorers saw this land by canoe and Drew responds thoughtfully that he could imagine how they felt. The scene evokes the frontier and its conquest, positing a relationship, and an imaginative psychic distance, between the moderns and the first Europeans in the Americas. The wilderness of the river is no longer a frontier, but it is the last regional space that is free, for the moment, of the obstructions, pollution and technological interference that allow for and characterize suburban life.

The triangulation that begins to surface in the film structures the relation between wild spaces, a civilized subject and his potential for degeneration. Suburban comforts sit opposite the wilds, but a degenerative subjectivity threatens from the spaces of regulatory absence. The problem is that the degeneration, which results from the absence of functioning regulatory regimes, has a complement in the regulatory excesses of suburban life. The central dialectic supplied by the narrative is not progress or technology against the primitive and the wild, but human subjects,

positioned between the failed periphery of civilizing regimes and the stultification of the suburban interior.

*The Joke In Deliverance*

The extensive popular citation of *Deliverance* challenges those practices of narrative analysis which would seek to explain the relationships of identification and/or visual pleasure within the narrative, without considering what the audience actually does with the material. Unlike so many films, the particular reception of *Deliverance* and its cultural manifestations, provide the critic with obvious keys for a reading as to how the film operates and where its pleasures reside. This is not to suggest that there is a single valid reading of the film, nor to say that the film can only do one thing. It is to suggest that audiences of the film perform a spectacular reduction of the text, one which deserves attention in its own right.

That reduction also serves to stage future readings of the text limiting its interpretations. For example, the popular substitution of signs, ‘Duelling Banjos’ for the threat of sexual violence instantiates an associative link between the mental disability of the Banjo player and Bobby’s rapist. Due to the recognition level of this substitution, it seems fair to suggest that the naïve spectator’s understanding of the narrative is, to some degree, encouraged, or even required to reconcile that relationship. Some discursive link is needed as far as one would like to get the joke, or be in on the joke, and thus properly deploy such an amusing signifier of potential violence in future contexts.

In the final section of this chapter, then, I am interested in examining the form and social function of “the joke” in *Deliverance*, since it appears to tie together discourses of gender, masculinity, sexuality and violence, in ways I have been concerned with throughout this thesis. In particular, I am intrigued how it is that the joke of male rape figures so prominently in popular cultural constructions of



appropriate heterosexual masculinity. My suspicion is that it is the tension between “over-civilized” and “peripheral” subjects, delineated above, which structures both *Deliverance* and its culturally reiterated “joke”. This tension, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, is one managed by the absorption and denial of violence.

The more than gay friendly Canadian comedy team, ‘Kids In the Hall’, made a joke out of the fetishization of *Deliverance*’s rape scene in 1994 and began to surface its only partially submerged mechanics. In what ‘Kids In the Hall’ fans, at least, have come to refer to as the ‘Butt Freak, Film Buff’ sketch, a woman played by Mark McKinney, seeks to question her male partner’s (Dave Foley) apparent need to watch an unnamed film over and over again. Kevin McDonald and Scott Thompson perform the dialogue that originates from the television.

**Dave:** Oh, it's just that it's my favorite movie. Oh wait, this is my favorite scene coming up. Hold on, I'm just going to turn it up a bit.

[turns up the volume on the tv]

**Kevin:** We're going to make you squeal like a pig, ain't we boy? We're going to make you squeal like a pig!

**Scott:** SQUUUEEEAAAAL like a pig!

**Dave:** Yeah, let me rewind that bit. We'll just watch that part again.

[TV]

**Kevin:** We're going to make you squeal like a pig, ain't we boy? We're going to make you squeal like a pig!

**Scott:** SQUUUEEEAAAAL like a pig!

**Dave:** You don't want to see it again?

**Mark:** Are you trying to tell me something?

**Dave:** What are you talking about? We're just watching a movie.

**Mark:** No, no. We're not just watching a movie, we're watching one movie over and over. No, in fact, we're watching one scene over and over. And I'm not sure if you're trying to tell me something.

Further on:

**Mark:** What is it that you like about that scene?

**Dave:** I like that it's well written. I mean, ah, it's a very famous scene and it's famous because of it's writing.

**Mark:** Just out of curiosity, are there any other scenes from any other movies that you consider to be exceptionally well written?



**Dave:** The Butter scene from *Last Tango in Paris*. The writing in that is just extraordinary.<sup>40</sup>

It follows that the woman, in a panic, repeatedly accuses the man of being a ‘Butt freak!’ while he defensively responds ‘Film buff!’ There is no need to explain the joke, but there is a need to point out how the joke disavows exactly what it proposes to surface. While the effectiveness of the skit recognizes the widespread, and notably male, appreciation of this particular rape scene, the contradictions of such an appreciation are recuperated by the nameable text *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), with its similarly notable heterosexual, consensual, anal sex scene. This deflects the possibility that the film buff is actually a ‘rape freak’ and transfers his desire, if somewhat insecurely, to a more general anal sexuality. At the same time, the repeated viewings with a heterosexual partner, and the heterosexuality of *Last Tango in Paris*, similarly transfer the irrefutable homo-sexuality of the rape to an unsecured, but effectively heterosexual, fetishization.

By the end of the skit, the “fan” is still essentially ignorant about the visual pleasure and imputed desire at work in his intimate relationship to *Deliverance*. The skit requires and confirms our sense that something suspicious is at work in the appreciation of the film, but it is unable to sustain an engagement with the subtleties of that identification. His partner flees the room in a panic and he asks himself, ‘Why is it so hard to find a woman who appreciates good film?’ The once knowing woman, who represented the objectification and critical recognition of what is at work in the cultural appreciation and citation of *Deliverance*, has been transposed into a prudish figure with an overstated repulsion for anal sex.

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Butt Freak Film Buff’, *KITHFan.org*, <<http://www.kithfan.org/work/transcripts/five/filmbuff.html>> [accessed 4 June 2003]. This an ‘unofficial’ transcription by fans of the show; the errors are in the original. The sketch itself ran in the fifth and final season of the show. ‘Kids In The Hall’, writ. & dir. David Foley, Bruce McCulloch, Scott Thompson, Mark McKinney, Kevin McDonald and others. Canadian Broadcasting Corporations/Home Box Office Productions, 1994.



By the end of the skit, the joke has moved from playing on her knowledge and his ignorance, to playing on his resistance to a now specifically heterosexual desire for anal sex and her horror at the turn. Retrospectively, one might suggest that her previous “knowledge” must have been of his non-heterosexual desire for homo-violence. Suspicion of the ‘film buff’s’ homo-violent fantasy life is raised, only to be safely subjugated to the implicit transgression of traditional notions of reproductive sexuality, and its attendant fictions of intimacy, structured around vaginal coitus. Heterosexuality serves to re-inscribe violence within manageable terms that echo the discursive relations explored in the chapters on *The Sheik* and *Once Upon A Time In The West*.

The humour of the ‘Kids In the Hall’ sketch thus rests upon widespread recognition of the *Deliverance* rape scene, but it would also suggest a degree of cultural unease about the appreciation of the film that is ripe for the picking. While the question of male rape is displaced, the interpretative turns of *Deliverance* indicate specifically gendered ways of negotiating the joke.

The subjective relations governing the appreciation of the film and its citation are helpfully delimited by a recent and controversial appearance of the joke. In a 2002 commercial for the Saturn Vue, a “sports utility vehicle” produced by General Motors, the film similarly remains unnamed and its narrative unelaborated. The citation is simple and uncomplicated, without any apparent reflexivity or comment on the time worn reference. *Adweek*, one of the advertising industry’s top trade publications, provides an instructive description of Saturn’s ad, entitled ‘Camping Trip’:

Four guys journey to the great outdoors, their new SUV leading the way. VO: “A Saturn Vue comes standard with four-wheel independent suspension (better for the bumpy ride in the woods), folding rear seats for more cargo space (better for holding a tent, sleeping bags and camping supplies) and electric power steering (better for a fast getaway after hearing ‘Duelling



Banjos' off in the distance).” Tagline: "The Saturn Vue. Get in. Get away.”<sup>41</sup>

Inside the parentheses are *Adweek*'s attempts to describe the implicit messages of the commercial's visuals and audio. Neither the television commercial nor the *Adweek* article apparently feel any need to name the film or explain the reference, thus indicating a significant level of confidence in 'Duelling Banjos' as a signifier for the threat of sexual violence, as well as one that works with a certain comedic effect.

That confidence sits uneasily with the mixed reception of the ad produced by its critics, many of whom feel the need to spell out the meanings of the citation to an apparently ignorant audience. While *Adweek* identifies 'Camping Trip' as a winner in the list of the best advertisements of 2002, in other locations, the ad is condemned as one of the 'worst' of the year's offerings. Michael Miller, whose 2002 'Turkey Awards' circulated within a range of smaller American publications, vehemently disagrees with *Adweek*'s appreciative evaluation:

Prestone and Saturn promote their products with the "Duelling Banjos" theme from the 1972 film "Deliverance," in which three men are killed and one is sexually assaulted by a male hillbilly. Saturn plays upon this semi-obscure reference in a new commercial for its VUE sport utility vehicle. A group of men drive out into the woods and set up camp. As they prepare for an evening of male bonding, the banjo notes from "Deliverance" are heard in the background. Within seconds, the campers' eyes grow large and they throw everything into the SUV, then speed out of the woods as if the devil were on their collective tail.<sup>42</sup>

Miller then quotes from another writer's condemnation of the same ad:

Without proper context, that commercial probably doesn't make much sense. And with proper context, the commercial becomes outright disturbing. In other words, the TV commercial's tag

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<sup>41</sup> 'Best Spots: Saturn Vue: Camping Trip' , *Adweek*. 14 October 2002. <[http://www.adweek.com/aw/creative/best\\_spots\\_02/021014\\_15.jsp](http://www.adweek.com/aw/creative/best_spots_02/021014_15.jsp)> [accessed 30 May 2003].

<sup>42</sup> Outside this reference I could not find any detail of the Prestone ad that is discussed.



line could easily be: The Saturn VUE: protection from rape by psychotic hillbillies.<sup>43</sup>

The critics explain to their readers the origin of ‘Duelling Banjos’, describing the reference as ‘semi-obscure’, and suggest that the commercial may well make no sense to some members of its potential audience. Therefore, the detail that the critics provide for us has a dual function: first, it would propose to clue in the uninitiated and then it would apparently seek to remind the readership that rape is not the laughing matter proposed by the commercial.

The problem with this dual function is that it is complicated by the ad’s apparent success. Saturn approved it for broadcast, and *Adweek* came to think of it as one of the year’s best. The critics of the ad curiously seek to place us as innocents before what is obviously a widely recognized discursive deployment. I am not suggesting that *everyone* is familiar with the textual inclusions and exclusions of *Deliverance*, but questioning the way in which the cultural and critical discourse of *Deliverance* posits an untenable distinction between majority and minority audiences. The critics’ supply of information conspicuously overlooks, or bypasses, the possibility of *majority* recognition of the joke’s referent, in order to neutralize what is at work in the citation. The supply of information positions the critic as the translator/interpreter between camps, and performs an implicit minoritization not only of those who would like the joke, but of anyone who would even recognize the reference.

Their indignation suggests that once we are aware of the dubious code utilized by other people, our own indignation will be raised as the event benchmarks another step in the decline of Western civilization: “*My god! People are making jokes about male rape?! What next?!*” Such a strategy feigns ignorance of the extent

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<sup>43</sup> Michael S. Miller, ‘Pop and Circumstance: 2002 Turkey Awards’, *Lighting The Fuse*, 23 December 2002, <[http://www.lightingthefuse.com/artman/publish/article\\_34.shtml](http://www.lightingthefuse.com/artman/publish/article_34.shtml)> [accessed 30 May 2003] (para 13 of 13).

and tradition of jokes about male rape, a discourse so pervasive that the US organization, Stop Prisoner Rape, has a link on their website where you can provide a 'Rape Joke Report'. It also ignores the high profile that *Deliverance* has developed within such a discourse and the shorthand that its citation provides.<sup>44</sup>

Following Freud's model in *Jokes And Their Relation to the Unconscious*, the use of allusions such as 'Squeal like a pig', or the opening nine notes of 'Duelling Banjos', is what allows 'smut' the opportunity to 'venture to climb into good society'.<sup>45</sup> 'The greater the discrepancy between what is given directly in the form of smut and what it necessarily calls up in the hearer, the more refined the joke', and so the higher it can climb in the company that would refuse the naked presentation of jokes about rape.<sup>46</sup> Such an understanding would complicate the minoritization enacted by the critic. The need for metonymy like 'Duelling Banjos' already assumes the rejection of the joke in its undisguised form by the members of polite society. As the joke's composition is founded on its ability to function as a recognizable code, the critical explanation of the joke enacts a curious disavowal of the joke's very purpose.

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<sup>44</sup> 'Stop Prisoner Rape', <http://www.spr.org/> [accessed 30 May 2003]. On the website one can also read about the organization's patchy success in trying to stop the endless stream of commercials featuring jokes about prisoner rape. Virgin Mobile featured an ad in 2003 where Wycliffe Jean is on the run in the deep south; he is eventually put in prison where two large white men with skinheads ask him to 'pass the soap'. About the same time Yahoo had an ad in which a particularly heterosexual vision of a camp queen (uncoordinated clothing and absurd accessories, please!), eyes up a straight man who is naked and tied to a tree. This is accompanied by a rather surprising voice-over allusion to the queer classic, *A Streetcar Named Desire*: 'You can't trust the kindness of strangers'. The British Advertising Standards Authority upheld complaints and Yahoo modified the add. The Virgin ad continued to run for some time.

<sup>45</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation To The Unconscious*, trans. by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1960), p. 118.

<sup>46</sup> Freud, *Jokes*, p. 119.



We can strip Freud's analysis down to the basic power structure imputed to the deployment of smut and its more refined allusions so as to gain some more insight:

Generally speaking, a tendentious joke calls for three people: in addition to the person who makes the joke there must be a second who is taken as the object of the hostile or sexual aggressiveness, and a third in whom the joke's aim of producing pleasure is fulfilled.<sup>47</sup>

Within the Freudian model, the discursive function of jokes is to satisfy a drive for Sovereignty, formerly expressed through unmitigated social violence. Only later, and in passing, does Freud subjugate this violent will-to-Sovereignty to the more simple accomplishment of libidinal drives.<sup>48</sup>

Freud's argument helps to provide an explanation for the curious exclusion of the possibility that the reader would recognize the joke. When the critic casts himself as an interpreter/translator who relays the ad, at the same time as he explains the meaning of the ad, he implies that the second party, who is the target of the allusion's aggression, is absent from the scene. He simultaneously implies that as the third party he does not appreciate the attempt. The problem is that the citation of 'Duelling Banjos' does not enact aggression, but names the threat that comes from outside the group. Like the example from 'The Simpsons', the threat is disembodied and originates in the distance. It envelops the group that hears it, precipitating them

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<sup>47</sup> Freud, *Jokes*, p. 118.

<sup>48</sup> As this thesis has sought to correct or amend a number of Freudian understandings, a caveat is necessary to point the manner in which sexuality, aggression and hostility maintain a significant balance of force in Freud's work on jokes. In that analysis the distinction of such forces is preserved at the same time that they underwrite each other's function. For Freud, jokes such as these are the advanced technology of our primal forms of violence. 'Brutal hostility' has been displaced by 'a new technique of invective' where we can 'make our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him—to which the third person, who has made no efforts, bears witness by his laughter'. Freud, *Jokes*, p. 122.

into a common plight. The citation thus serves, in good society, to suggest a perceived threat to that society.

Thus, Miller's attempt to exclude the possibility of a recognition is both a refusal of the threat and, importantly, reproduces its logic. His analysis doubles back on the creators of the ad, and those who participate in its humour, to suggest that they alone perceive the threat in question, they alone are in danger of some form of violent subjection. Miller and his readers, on the other hand, are secure in good society.

Another commentary on the Saturn commercial is more instructive. Michael Wilke writes for the web magazine, 'The Commercial Closet', which is devoted to collecting and analyzing LGBT themed advertising.<sup>49</sup> 'The Commercial Closet' selected 'Camping Trip' as one of the ads in the category of 'Worst Taste' for 2002,

a year that gays and lesbians were presented frequently as sexual predators in prisons and parks. A year that Enrique Iglesias loves a man holding potato chips, a friendly giraffe is comfortable with his feminine side, and MTV continues to set the standard for everyone.<sup>50</sup>

The article goes on to describe the Saturn Vue commercial in terms essentially identical to the above example. We are told that *Deliverance* is 'about guys on a camping trip raped at gunpoint by hillbillies', and that when the film's 'Duelling Banjos' song plays in the advertisement, the four men 'can't scramble fast enough back into their mini-SUV and peel out to escape'.<sup>51</sup> A more detailed profile of the ad,

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Wilke's commercial media analyses are regularly printed in a range of American Gay and Lesbian magazines and newspapers.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Wilke, 'The Report: Gay Ads in 2002 Lack Taste', *The Commercial Closet*, 17 January 2003, <<http://www.commercialcloset.org/cgi-bin/iowa/?page=column&record=70>> [accessed 30 May 2003] (para 3 of 19).

<sup>51</sup> Michael Wilke, 'Ad Overview: Camping Trip', *The Commercial Closet*, <<http://www2.commercialcloset.org/cgi-bin/iowa/portrayals.html?record=1039>> [accessed 30 May 2003] (para 2 of 8)



linked to the above commentary, responds to the persuasive argument, by a presumably queer readership, that references to male rape are not references to homosexuality, by insisting, that aggressive homosexual predation of heterosexual men 'remains a persistent stereotype' and that:

it is difficult to imagine how rape of any sort evokes humour. Further, the decision to pick a song about male rape is a more homophobic choice than another that could also have worked, such as any horror movie reference.<sup>52</sup>

While understanding that the ad operates through homophobia, in full or in part, he struggles and stumbles into tautology to instantiate the claim via the representational content of the ad. He is undoubtedly between a rock and a hard place, as any insistence that anxieties about male rape are expressions of psychological homophobia, rather than simply a justifiable fear of violence are difficult to defend against demands for empirical instantiation.

The rape scene in *Deliverance* provides a few indicators for reading the rapists as 'homosexual'. 'Mountain-man' brushes Bobby's cheek lightly with his hand early in the scene, and the two rapists admiration of Ed's 'pretty mouth' arguably gender their desire. But these moment are subsequently undercut when Mountain-man responds to Bobby's fearful and rather feeble escape attempts by suggesting that they haven't got a 'boar' but a 'sow'. While this could be read as a simple effeminization, the brushing of Bobby's cheek is only the first indication of what is likely to take place next. Bobby's transposition from a boar into a sow diegetically marks the inevitability of the rape and therefore reconstitutes the sexual ambiguity of the rapists in terms of gender, but more distinctly in terms of the implicit bestiality.

There is much to defend an insistence that the disproportionate, and ultimately fictive, concern with the threat of male rape found in prison shower jokes

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<sup>52</sup> Wilke, 'Ad Overview', (para 7 of 7).



and *Deliverance* citations is little more than homosexual panic. At the same time, the violence signified by such citation allows for a functional disavowal of the imputation of homophobia. A reading of “homosexual panic”, the conflation of homosexuality with violence, fails to explain that homophobic stereotyping relies so heavily on the figure of the effeminate male, presumed to be incapable of any effective violence.

The same article provides us with the official perspective of Saturn which takes us closer to understanding the actual threat involved:

“We were looking for a pop culture tie-in that's timeless and humorous,” explains Cindy Kamerad, a Saturn spokeswoman. “College kids know about that movie.” Kamerad notes that the ad has gotten positive reviews on an unofficial Saturn web site, [SaturnFans.com](http://SaturnFans.com), and that sales have doubled for the new vehicle now that advertising has kicked in.<sup>53</sup>

Setting aside the impossibility of reconciling the temporality of ‘college kids’ with the ‘timeless’ of the above quote, the semiotic messages of the ad are fairly direct. The Saturn Vue is a relatively diminutive SUV, vying for space within a market in which the symbolic parameters are, to some degree, determined by the size and extremity of the ‘Hummer’, an SUV originally produced for military purposes, but which GM made available to the consumer public after the commercial success of the first Gulf War. The absurd proportions and equally ridiculous price of the ‘Hummer’ coalesce in its advertising campaigns, which hardly refuse the discourse of hard and soft masculinities.<sup>54</sup> A print advertisement for the same model carries the text: ‘In a world where SUV’s have come to look like their owners, complete with love handles and mushy seats, the H2 proves that there is still one out there that can

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<sup>53</sup> Wilke, ‘Ad Overview’ , (para 3 of 7).

<sup>54</sup> One advertisement featuring a young woman driving her Hummer around town closes with the tagline, ‘Threaten Men In Whole New Way’. The line potentially affirms the female consumer, but one must wonder if it also holds the promise of a lucrative reaction formation on behalf of a male consumer, susceptible to the effects of an impugned masculinity and an accompanying faith in the recuperative capacity of an automotive prosthesis.



drop and give you 20'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, it is exactly Bobby's love handles, and mushy un-armoured body, that grounds his discursive transformation from a human into a boar. and finally into a sow.

The violent, homosexual rapist, otherwise a contradiction in terms, turns out to be heterosexual, to the extent that his object, the effeminate, over-civilized heterosexual city dweller, can be trans-sexed. In the clash between over-civilized and peripheral subjects, it is the raped, not the rapist, whose gender is in question,. Against this backdrop, the disassociation enacted by Saturn's citation of *Deliverance* becomes embarrassingly clear: men driving their little Saturn Vue out into the woods may not be as manly as some, but they are definitely not looking for butt sex! The automobile itself, perhaps in its denatured imitation of the real thing, suggests a potential vulnerability, a sexed and gendered indistinction that must be actively refused.

These themes of gendered and sexual ambiguity in the citation of *Deliverance* can also be traced in an article on road trips, written for *Maxim*, that enthusiastically misogynistic young men's magazine:

*Road Trip Number Three: The Quest For Uncle Jesse*

**Mission** He drove a great beat-up old pickup with a gun rack, took the Duke boys under his wing, and always saved the day. Sadly, Denver Pyle, the actor who so ably portrayed Uncle Jesse on *The Dukes of Hazzard*, died of lung cancer on Christmas afternoon, 1997. Gone, yes, but not forgotten; we've taken it upon ourselves to ensure that the legacy of a true American hero lives on. Thus we have our final road trip: the quest for Uncle Jesse [...] Moving south into the mountains of Georgia, you'll come upon the **Chattooga River**, where Ned Beatty taught the world how to squeal in *Deliverance*. Rafting is so good on the Chattooga that someone dies on its Class IV

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<sup>55</sup> 'H2', *Hummer.com*. <<http://www.hummer.com/hummerjsp/h2/index.jsp>> [accessed 30 May 2003]. My attention was called to this ad in a paper presented by Hazel Carby at the 'Future of Utopia?' conference at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina between April 27-30, 2003. The ad had run in US magazines earlier that year.



rapids every year. Just remember that “this river don’t go nowhere near Aintro.” Assuming you survive the raging torrents and amorous mountain men, your next stop is Athens, home of the world’s only surviving **double-barrelled cannon**, a failed Civil War experiment.<sup>56</sup>

As always, what exactly occurs on the river remains ambiguous, and so the article arguably participates in the normal mode of passing film references. More conspicuously, the rape scene becomes a “destination” for the young male readers of *Maxim*, while it is also the object of sarcastic reverie. The assertion is that in teaching the world to ‘squeal like a pig’, Ned Beatty has provided some kind of larger service. If it is simply that of providing a particularly terrifying moment in film history, then what do we make of the invitation to visit the river where that terror was shot?

While the Chattooga River is a tourist destination due to its ‘natural beauty’, *Maxim* only renders its majesty in terms of the fictional rape scene and the real life deaths of rafters. As Drew’s death and Lewis’ injury occur on the rapids, the *Maxim* text works to compound the river’s attraction through the narrative frame of *Deliverance*. Taken together, *Maxim* would apparently invite its readers to view the scene of the rape and the ensuing calamity, but to avoid first hand experience of the rapids. In other words, *Maxim* invites its readers to develop their intimate knowledge of *Deliverance*, the narrative object, rather than the river itself.

The fictional framework, within which one is supposed to achieve this knowledge, would suggestively consolidate the readers’ intimate relationship to the text, as they are asked to wryly enter the backcountry in an ironic search of another fictional character, ‘Uncle Jesse’, who was also a hillbilly. Just how close to the narrative are *Maxim*’s readers supposed to get? Perhaps a certain frisson of transgression is intended when the reader imagines participating in a kind of

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<sup>56</sup> Charles Coxe and Jason Kersten, ‘Rockin Maxim Road Trips’, *Maxim*, July 1999, <[http://www.maximonline.com/maximwear/articles/article\\_1396.html](http://www.maximonline.com/maximwear/articles/article_1396.html)> [accessed 29 May 2003] (para 24 of 31).

The web page is riddled with errors which I have kept in the text.



knowing arrogance, similar to that of the characters in *Deliverance* at the beginning of their own trip? The magazine seems to be clear that the real fun is not in the physical dangers of the river, but in the psychical dangers of risking one's subjectivity by effectively inviting homosexual rape at the hands of anonymous hillbillies, or even the friendly 'Uncle Jesse'. But where is the pleasure supposed to reside in knowing the detail of Bobby's rape well enough to unpack these allusions?

I do not think that the answer is to be found in a gesture towards psychoanalytic ideas of repressed desire or conflicted attractions to the disavowed object. Instead, the attraction to the scene of *Deliverance* proposed by the *Maxim* article is quite literally an expression of the will to knowledge. The *Maxim* citation sits alongside the earlier examples which condense the narrative into the key signifiers to suggest that those signifiers carry sections of, or the whole of, the narrative. Knowledge of those scenes, therefore, substitutes for knowledge of the textual relations of the narrative. The article invites its readers to get dangerously close to the site of de-subjectivation, at the same time as it asks them to achieve an unparalleled degree of knowledge about the cultural artefact used to disavow the potential for de-subjectivation. It seems unlikely that the writers of the article actually expect anyone to carry out the mission as they describe it, but the proposal itself takes *Maxim's* readership to the boundary of the very masculinity it otherwise serves to consolidate.

The contradiction suggests that the discursive limits of a properly aligned heterosexual masculinity turn on an axis of violence. The hyper-masculinity of the prison rapist exceeds the terms of heterosexuality into a rampant sexual violence that can forcefully interpellate the heterosexual as effeminate and homosexual. To be too violent is to be sexually perverse; to be without the powers of violence is to become sexually perverse. The suggestion is that these jokes, these citations, do some kind

of cultural work in on the discursive borders between too little and too much violence.

What I seek to move to is a suspicion that *Deliverance* functions symbolically to disavow the confusion found in the slippage of signs. Further, I suggest that the slippage in question, what seems to include the insecure binaries of, among others, minority/majority, homosexuality/heterosexuality, masculinity/femininity, male/female, dominance/submission, human/animal, sadism/masochism, consent and force, are not simply mediated by the symbolic relations of other contiguous signifiers, but the imagined relations of real violence, the threat of real violence carried by such signs.



## CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the first chapter of this thesis, I referenced Michel de Certeau's assertion that violence is 'not in the first place a matter for reflection nor is it an object that can be put before the eyes of an observer'. Instead, 'violence is inscribed in the place from which we speak of it. Violence defines that place.' He continues by arguing that 'what must be taken into account before any examination of the facts is that violence is branded on this "sick language" (J.L. Austen) that is objectively servile and utilized—no matter what he says--by the system it challenges'. That language is 'taken, carried off, "refashioned" by the commercial networks whose socio-economic function bears meaning heavier than all ideological content'.<sup>1</sup>

In this thesis, I have attempted to explain the inscription of violence in discourse and the ways in which it defines both the servility and agency of the subject. My argument is not that violence is *in* language, but that the relationship between language and materiality is mediated by violence. The two are given into

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Certeau, 'The Language of Violence', in *Culture in the Plural*, trans. by Tom Conley (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 29-36 (p. 29).

each other via the dispersal of violence techniques throughout those regimes which serve to consolidate the corporate structure. Discourse is the field in which the physical force of violence, and its linguistic or symbolic expression, can be discerned and defined. The modern democratic subject is the subject and the object of that material and symbolic unity.

We democrats exist on both sides of violence. Our authority rests upon it and our individual distinction is defined against it. Yet, our collective participation in, our performance of, our reiterations and our displacements of that relationship, make the axis of our subjective definition unstable and subject to change. In the discursive State, the terms of our constitution are consistently out of perceptual reach, making any certain self-definition unattainable.

It follows that we should turn to fantasies to provide us with a semblance of self-definition. Even better are those fantasies which help us imagine we have overcome the persistent discursive incursion of violence. At the same time, those fantasies and those narratives that intimate some lesson about our subjectivity and subjectivation remain attractive. In part, this is because knowledge itself implies power. In knowing the nature of subjectivity, we enact the intellectual discourses of our own subjectivation in an attempt to escape our potential subjection. In knowing something about how violence works we hope we can resist inadvertently becoming its object again. The more complicated part of the equation is our refusal of responsibility for the application of violence at a more general social level.

In this thesis, I have delineated what I take to be four complicated texts on violence. In distinctive ways, each offer an insight into the relationship between violence and discourse. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* asks us to recognize that violence constitutes the authority of science. The narrative insists on the significance of violence in the very discursive regimes which allow us to believe that we can



escape violence at all. As the film ends and Francis is rendered delusional, we are allowed a kind of respite from the implications of his story. In this way, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* offers a raw, simple example of the subject's dialectical oscillation. The narrative allows us a chance to understand the constitutive mechanics of discourse, at the same time as it provides an opportunity for deflection through the pleasure of fantasy. It speaks to our subjection, condemning the tyranny of institutions, and it speaks to our subjectivation, confirming our agency and knowledge that we are, though not only, an object of violence.

That *The Sheik* found the audience it did further attests our desire to understand and deflect knowledge of our subjectivation through violence. *The Sheik* inverts *Caligari's* condemnation of the displacement of violence by admiring totalitarian, male embodiment. Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan delivers Diana to her subjectivation; all subsequent "sheiks" of romance narratives deliver women in general to the same. The narrative shifts the value and the mode of violent expression represented in *Caligari* away from that of regimes, to concentrate power specifically within a heterosexual vector of subjectivation. The role of fantasy and desire is key to this shift. The totalitarian model is the object of desire as it dispenses with the incremental progress of democracy. The pain of female subjection, psychological and physical, which the democratic regime only reluctantly concedes, is reduced to a short sharp burst. The pathology of femininity, so endlessly discoursed upon by the scientific disciplines of the era, is reversed in the course of a few difficult nights, as the female body becomes invested with the authority of the new regime. At the same time, the representational Sheik's apparent control over violence displaces recognition of this transfer, allowing the spectator to imagine that her own subjectivation is innocent.

The first two films both observe and serve the processes of subjectivation in violence, whereas the latter two suggest discontent with the results. In *Once Upon A Time In The West*, we find confirmation of our suspicion that our faith in subjective autonomy is nostalgic and foolish. The text asks us to let go of these narrative props of Sovereignty; in appreciating the film we effectively confess that there is something about the Western's conception of subjectivity which is no longer tenable. Yet, unsatisfyingly, the film suggests that the world we are left with, or at least the world *men* are left with, is emptied of its romance. While the gamesmanship of pastiche and quotation offers the comforts of mastery in knowledge, against the backdrop of the political dissolution of Sovereignty, that comfort seems meagre and transparent, particularly when it is compared to the deflection offered by *Caligari* and *The Sheik*. It is for this reason that *Once Upon A Time In The West* destroyed, not so much the Western, but our ability to watch it *innocently*. The film is, thus, effectively a lament for a time of innocent participation in untenable fantasies. In this lament, audiences enact an appreciation of what never was and what could never have been. The lament becomes a site of longing that still suggests a refusal to acknowledge or embrace the contradictions and paradoxes determining modern subjectivity. No one, it seems, wants to get to grips with violence, however obvious and necessary it may be.

Citations of *Deliverance* sound the alarm that the subject's imaginary stability is under threat. The narrative's exploration of the subjection and subjectivation, couched within the language of femininity and masculinity, yet again takes us close to the heart of the issue, asserting that violence mediates the subject's dialectical oscillation. James Dickey's original novel plainly asserted the regenerative potential of violence, but Boorman's film closes with Ed Gentry's nightmare of the buried bodies' return from the depths of the lake. A single hand



reaches out, or perhaps accuses; it could be Drew or it could be the body of the rapist. When Ed awakes in his own bed and his own home, his wife's attempt to console him fails. This time heterosexuality offers no respite.

In a different essay, de Certeau makes the argument, that, if we follow Foucault's own logic, the critical elucidation of apparatuses of surveillance integrates them within our ideology. Made legible, they 'no longer fill that silent roll which is their definition'. De Certeau argues that we must ask 'what apparatus determines Foucault's discourse in turn, an underlying apparatus which by definition escapes an ideological elucidation'.<sup>2</sup> I think de Certeau is right about Foucault, to the extent that they both fail to account fully for the role of violence in discourse.

These four films, and undoubtedly many others, offer us fleeting recognition of our division. They continue to circulate in cultural discourse, with a slight aura of mystery surrounding their appeal. Representation allows us a chance to discern collectively the contemporary discourse of violence and then collectively enact a refusal to believe what we just saw. In so doing we allow ourselves to reside in ideology. Like the imaginary participants in *Maxim's* "road trip", we can take ourselves to the brink and the frisson of transgression derives, not from the obvious but imaginary physical danger, but from the exposure of the fantasy constituting our sense of subjective security and stability.

I close this thesis by pursuing some other applications of my analysis of violence. New violent texts are undoubtedly symptomatic of the dynamism of discursive regimes, while old favourites are symptomatic of some of the more intractable relations of the same regimes. Classics, like Elias Kazan's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), offer clear distinctions between an old regime and a new

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<sup>2</sup> Michel de Certeau, 'Micro Techniques and Panoptic Discourse: A Quid pro Quo'. in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 185-198 (p. 189).



regime; those lines are made legible by the violence enacted by an anti-hero against an anti-heroine. When I told people what this thesis was about, almost everyone assumed I must be writing on David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999). This is a narrative which revolves around a character who has two personalities, a violent one and a rational one; the rational one never knows what the violent one is doing. The assumption that I would write on that film suggests that the film is destined to achieve a status similar to the films examined in this thesis. The implication is that the film says something valuable or important about violence, but it was significant that no one was quite sure what it was. There was the palpable sense that the film was close to some kind of truth that just evaded the spectator's grasp. There was clearly something to be written, but what? In the end I believe that *Fight Club* represents some of the core issues outlined in the first chapter but, I suspect that it similarly repeats the tropes of a doomed, homosocial escape from effeminization, reminiscent of *The Sheik* and *Deliverance*, at the same time that it holds out the respite provided by heterosexual love.

Other didactic films about violence and culture like Sidney Lumet's *Network* (1976), or violence and politics like Antonioni's *Zabriski Point* (1970), appear without hope about the possibilities of transformation. This is itself a product of representation where the demands of the spectacle, as Guy Debord would have it, require that the regimes of violence are themselves violently overthrown.<sup>3</sup> If nothing else peace and pacifism provide lousy visuals. As argued throughout this thesis, this is so because they do not provide the satisfaction of an escape from the paradox of subjective oscillation. More importantly, the violent overthrow of violence predictably reintegrates the revolutionary subject within a new, albeit altered, regime of violent determinations. The axis of subjectivity is identified, but we do not

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<sup>3</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York, Zone Books, 1994).



relinquish our dependence on it. Hence, nihilism sets in, as the only imaginable future of is one of subjection.

My suspicion is that the democratic ideal of citizenship, ‘that form of subjectivity that would no longer be identical with subjection for anyone’, cannot be realized without an explicit recognition of, and an effort to, extricate the procedures and instances of violence from the institutional regimes of subjectivation.<sup>4</sup> I fear that as long as the concept of legitimate violence is entertained, subjects will require violent representation to help them mediate such a culture. Such questions take the arguments of this thesis into territory that I have not even begun to chart, yet representation offers us a flawed method of reconciling ourselves with violence. It allow us to rehearse a way of seeing and denying violence similar to the parent, whose corrective smack, however hard or soft, imagines that their violence is something other than violence. By exposing such procedures we can perhaps define a more profound relationship between violent representation and broader political considerations. I believe that there is deeper discursive political unity to be defined, which links everything from feminism (perhaps the only general movement to take otherwise ‘incidental’ acts of violence seriously), to anti-racism struggles, anti-gaybashing campaigns, gun control legislation, anti-bullying and anti-smacking campaigns, general action against child abuse, as well as prison reform movements, police monitoring, and anti-war struggles, to name only a few.

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<sup>4</sup> Etienne Balibar, ‘Subjection and Subjectivation’, in *Supposing the Subject*, ed. by Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 1-15 (p. 12).

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