

THE BIRTH OF THE *AUTEUR*:  
THE COUNTERCULTURE, INDIVIDUALISM, AND HOLLYWOOD CINEMA,  
1967-1975

By

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To my parents, Gary and Kathy, and their grandson, Owen

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION: THE BIRTH OF THE <i>AUTEUR</i> .....	1
II. ETHOS OF DISAFFILIATION: DEFECTION AS <i>AUTEURISM</i> .....	28
III. TECHNOLOGICAL TOTALITIES: MACHINES AS FOES IN THE DISASTER CYCLE.....	83
IV. ETHOS OF INCORPORATION: CORPORATE PERSONHOOD AS <i>AUTEURISM</i> .....	124
V. FROM COWBOY TO VIETNAM VETERAN: THE LIFESPAN OF AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUALISM.....	174
FILMOGRAPHY.....	221
WORKS CITED.....	223

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE BIRTH OF THE *AUTEUR*

As conventional history has it, Andrew Sarris adapted François Truffaut's European formulation ("la politique des auteurs") as the stateside "*auteur* theory" and the status of film appreciation changed forever, in the U.S. at least. Film had always carried cultural importance in France, with the high-art imprimatur of the likes of Jean Cocteau and André Malraux. But, as Kent Jones says, "To embrace American movies and moviemakers in Paris was one thing. To embrace those same movies and moviemakers in the country that had made and marginalized them in the first place was a far riskier proposition" ("Hail the Conquering Hero" 49). In order to grasp the sense in which these movies were "marginalized," when in fact they were the dominant form of entertainment, or the sense in which their "embrace" made for a risky "proposition," we should consider the rhetoric of the article that established the *auteur* theory, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962." Sarris writes that, "like most Americans who take film seriously," he has "always felt a cultural inferiority complex about Hollywood" (41). We hear, in this admission, the sense in which movies were "marginalized" is a sense in which one could draw no cultural capital from them, as one could from literature, and thus Sarris deploys *auteur* theory, trading as it does on the cultural capital of the literary author, as a technology for conferring European high-art tradition and respectability on what Jones refers to as the "culturally disreputable" Hollywood film.

Interpreted this way, Sarris's "theory" begins to sound like nothing more than the familiar project in a class society of policing the divide between high and mass culture,

only with the kitsch for the masses being revalued as the art of the elite. I use the word “kitsch” here with reference to Clement Greenberg’s “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” where Greenberg takes up a distinction between high and mass art as the fault line in a modernist project that has an Arnoldian provenance. In Greenberg’s words, kitsch is a “faked article” that might dupe “the naïve seeker of true light” (103), his “light” no doubt aligning with Arnold’s “sweetness and light.” Sarris, in turn, puts himself in this tradition by using similarly Arnoldian vocabulary in such a phrase as, “there is little point in wailing at the Philistines on this issue” (40-41). Sarris, by self-description, is a critic with the “audacity” to say “the cinema is an art” and the cultural goodwill to become the curator of this art’s canon.<sup>1</sup> The Arnoldian charge had, at its heart, the notion of “do[ing] away with classes” by making “the best that had been thought and known in the world current everywhere.”

The problem with Sarris’s critical declaration, for Pauline Kael and others in 1962, is that the relationship of the modernist project and the class project have changed, such that modernism no longer frustrates class domination but sustains it. Kael had discerned this historical shift in the status of filmgoing in her 1961 essay, “Fantasies of the Art-House Audience”: “For several decades,” she claims, “educated people have been condescending toward” “all those with ‘impoverished’ lives – the mass audience – who turned to movies for ‘ready-made’ dreams,” yet these same educated people have used “art” films only as a means of “cheap and easy congratulation on their sensitivities and their liberalism” (*Kiss Kiss* 31). Thus, on Kael’s view, Sarris only aped those liberals, descended straight from the Old Left, who once used high art as an instrument against the establishment but, having become the establishment themselves, could do nothing other

than render high art the establishment's instrument.<sup>2</sup> Wary of Sarris's part in this usurpation of the cinema, a proudly democratic art to Kael's mind, she wrote "Circles and Squares" as her 1963 rebuttal to Sarris's "Notes on the Auteur Theory." She there floats a cynical interpretation of the *auteur* theory in which Sarris only brings to bear high-art methodologies on a director such as Raoul Walsh because, "without some commitment to Walsh as an *auteur*, he probably wouldn't be spending time with these movies" (47).

"Circles and Squares" directs its anger ("I am angry," Kael writes, "but am I unjust?") at the class politics of *auteur* critics, the "ever-so-intellectual protestations" of critics who function as the elite guardians of "where the secrets are kept" (54), but the essay does not count as anti-*auteurist*. Within it, that is, Kael does not repudiate the practice of giving sole authorship of a film to its director; she only bristles at the rhetoric and methods whereby such critics make this practice so distinctively elitist. There are, however, those who seem undisturbed by *auteur* theory's class politics but are still troubled by its flawed descriptions. Thomas Schatz, for instance, takes exception to *auteur* theory as a historical description, noting that it "would not be worth bothering with if it hadn't been so influential, effectively stalling film history and criticism in a prolonged stage of adolescent romanticism" (*Genius of the System* 5). Schatz argues that the closer we analyze Hollywood as a historical situation, "the less sense it makes to assess filmmaking or film style in terms of the individual director – or any individual, for that matter" (5). Indeed, Pauline Kael did produce an anti-*auteurist* text, but it was "Raising Kane," not "Circles and Squares." Like Schatz, she decries the need to think of *Citizen Kane* as "the result of a single artistic intelligence" (131), arguing instead that Orson Welles, an icon of *auteur* criticism, was finally undone by trying to be "Orson

Welles” “a one-man show” when in fact “Orson Welles’ had stood for the activities of a group” (145).

While one may object that *auteur* theory fails because it misdescribes the group work of Hollywood production as the work of an individual, one may also say it succeeds in a different register of history writing for precisely this failing: as a post-war discourse (Truffaut’s “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema,” by many accounts the first salvo for *auteurism*, appeared in 1954), *auteur* theory doesn’t so much record a moment in the organization of the film industry as it indexes a response to the capitalist triumphalism promoted by World War II, the extension of its world system and the convergence of institutions in this increasingly deregulated environment. In this respect, *auteur* theory might describe an aporia in the ideology of liberalism *tout court*, in which it’s somehow suspected, on a rather broad scale, that the individual is no longer the basic unit of market or political agency. Thus, the discourses of various strata of Western societies began to reimagine the dynamic between the individual and institution, and whether the former is subsumed or wholly determined by the latter. Such an account of beleaguered individualism makes sense of why the *auteurist* discourse (one in which the individual is reinstated as autonomous of the system) was first very popular in the U.S., Britain, and France, but then quickly gave way to the cine-structuralist discourse (one in which the individual, the *auteur*, is nothing but an effect of the structure, a residue of its systems of signification).<sup>3</sup> The first discourse is compensatory, and the second alarmist; but both respond to the same set of social conditions.

While one might argue that *auteur* theory can shine a light on the crisis of individualism in post-war Western societies writ large, the focus of this study is more



narrowly the situation of U.S. film culture, and how the *auteur* theory, as it was instantiated in both film criticism and Hollywood production, was inflected by a set of questions about perceived changes in institutional life. We might consider exemplary studies such as C. Wright Mills's *White Collar* (1951) and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), as well as President Eisenhower's speech on the "unwarranted influence" of the "military-industrial complex" and the later deployment of this concept in Clark Kerr's lectures on the notion of the "multiversity";<sup>4</sup> we might single these out as data in a profile of the opaque and intractable character of institutional life in the post-war era. And, in this mood, we might return to Sarris's "Notes on the Auteur Theory" and note how it reads differently if narrowly construed as film criticism as opposed to being more generally construed as social criticism. Sarris's "third and ultimate premise" of *auteur* theory, the one that bestowed "ultimate glory" on "the cinema as an art" but confounded Kael, is that of an "interior meaning" "extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material" (43). Kael struggles to understand how "glory" might be found in "what has generally been considered the frustrations of a man working against the given material," but we might take "the given material" as metaphor for "the intractable institution" and swiftly hear in Sarris's *auteur* theory a chastened recourse to a metaphysic of personality, a fantasy amidst damaged life<sup>5</sup> in which one gathers personality up to himself as a proof of essence, a promise of autonomous subjectivity, without reference to the ruthless determinations of institutional life.

Indeed, if we take Sarris's *auteur* theory figuratively<sup>6</sup> rather than literally, as Kael did, then we can better understand his pertinacious resistance to Bazin's acknowledgment of Hollywood as a historical condition of an *auteur*'s status. "The cinema," as Bazin

writes, “is an art which is both popular and industrial” (251). We should note that Bazin has no problem calling cinema both “art” and “industrial” and, in fact, evaluates “these conditions” as “a group of positive and negative circumstances which have to be reckoned with” (251). Sarris, however, deems these “circumstances” universally negative, it would seem. In his 1968 *The American Cinema*, he describes the agonistic relationship between a director and his “circumstances” as the heroic context in which the director “almost miraculously” “extract[s]” “a sublimity of expression” “from his money-oriented environment” (37). The miracle, for Sarris, is that one could make art in accord with the profit imperative of industry. And thus the historical development of industry, and chiefly of that corporate capitalism of which classical Hollywood only marked the monopoly stage, must be repudiated by the example of the “strong director”: in preserving a remainder of personality amidst the impersonal transactions of industry, the “strong director” heroically refuses the determining power of history. We can hear this behind the concessionary rhetoric Sarris deploys against Bazin’s frequent mentions of “capitalism’s influence on the cinema”: “Without denying this influence,” Sarris says, “I still find it impossible to attribute X directors and Y films to any particular system or culture” (“Notes” 40). He concedes, in fact, that we can’t imagine “Griffith’s *October* or Eisenstein’s *Birth of a Nation*,” but insists on what sounds like the weak claim that “we are, nevertheless, compelled to recognize other differences in the personalities of these two pioneers beyond their respective cultural complexes” (40).

The ostensibly weak claim, however, elucidates the way in which this is a zero-sum debate: to concede that history determines at all, for Sarris, one must concede that history determines absolutely. As such he can’t celebrate “the genius of the system,” as

Schatz will, but must celebrate the differences between personalities described as “an *élan* of the soul,” now raised to a metaphysical principle. In discussing Sarris, Schatz recognizes that *auteur* theory discloses an attitude toward capitalist formations (“the dehumanizing, formulaic, profit-hungry machinery of Hollywood’s studio-factories,” as Schatz ventriloquizes Sarris’s outlook [5]), but he stops short of historicizing the theory as a discourse dovetailing with emergent counterculture grievances (the “dream factory” of Hollywood, at its most debased, shading into the “knowledge factory” of the university system). Schatz stops short, that is, of naming the *auteurist* disunity between the director and his “given material” a metaphor generated by the historical shift from a classical relationship between a culture and its institutions to a romantic relationship.<sup>7</sup>

*Auteur* theory registers anxieties about the closed and total nature of the institutions of a fully administered world, to echo the language of the Frankfurt School; Fredric Jameson characterizes this cultural *topos* of the 1960s as an anxiety of the “Institution itself as the radically transindividual,” whose “laws” are “not those of the individual human action or intention” (“Periodizing the 60s”). But *auteur* theory works in the mode of a reaction formation, with the closed and transindividual institution now being occasion for overstating and magnifying the role of the individual. Adorno discusses this as a kind of compensated subjectivity, when he reasons that “the more individuals are in effect degraded into functions within the societal totality as they are connected up to the system, the more the person, pure and simple, is consoled and exalted with the attributes of creative power, absolute rule, and spirit” (*Critical Models* 248).

I argue, then, that the *auteur* theory, though it inadequately describes the production and source of meaning in films, can serve, in spite of itself, as a hermeneutic

device that gives a historicist foothold on the meanings of a variety of post-war texts, both filmic and otherwise. In focusing on films produced roughly between 1967 and 1974, I use the *auteur* theory to highlight a set of interlocking concerns with the individual, the institution, and the techniques developed by the latter to better manage the former. On one hand, we might say that 1967-1974 comprises the *auteur* moment in Hollywood cinema, in that during these years there emerged a group of “strong directors” (Mike Nichols, Stanley Kubrick, Michael Cimino, and Steven Spielberg, to offer a short list) in whose name the Hollywood industry was ostensibly reorganized. On the other hand, we might call this span of years the moment of technocracy – the ascendancy of that regime of techniques that, by certain accounts, incited the total reduction of human autonomy to a set of technical and impersonal controls. In one such account, *The Making of a Counterculture* (1968), Theodore Roszak sounded the notorious claim that the counterculture of the 1960s was an explicit response to the conditions of technocracy.<sup>8</sup> In the fullest reckoning, what we find is that the relationship between the *auteur* and the Hollywood industry, perhaps on the same order as that between the counterculture and the technocracy, is less one of opposition than of symbiosis: the latter terms (Hollywood, the technocracy) give rise to the former terms (the *auteur*, the counterculture) in order to renovate their structural flaws.

I say the *auteur* theory works “in spite of itself” because, if we interrogate the motivations behind the theory, the theory can explain its own historical origins in a moment of ideological crisis, and, explaining this complex of intellectual and affective matters, it can illuminate much else. In short, the fallacy in the theory becomes its great asset, making it productive more in a world-historical key than in the more local film-

historical one to which it first aspired. On the face of it, *auteur* theory is an intervention in aesthetics, and the development of the branch of philosophy known as aesthetics has been the world-historical charge of the bourgeoisie. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton describes the incipience of aesthetic discourse in German idealism as the “cast into which conditions of social backwardness had forced the thinking of the late eighteenth-century German middle class,” which meant that the mind dreamt “a bold new social life as yet quite unachievable in reality” (19). The aesthetic, that is, was forged as the place where a contradiction between imaginative overdevelopment and material underdevelopment sought resolution. And thus the work of art came to model the kind of free subjectivity or exalted particularism that would become the *unum necessarium* for an operational political order; the work of art became the subject that citizens were not yet. This would-be bourgeois subject, which Eagleton calls “an entirely new kind of subject,” “only receives laws from itself,” as Rousseau remarked (19).<sup>9</sup> Because this political order turns on the appearance of self-issued laws of the individual, bourgeois ideology is always haunted by its need for a unitary subjectivity that it may fail to produce.

Understanding *auteur* theory as an aesthetic discourse, then, is license for understanding it as another kind of discourse, paradoxically enough. If we acknowledge the precedence by which the aesthetic realm offers another order on which to work out problems of social life, then we see plainly enough how the *auteur* theory proffers an aesthetic solution for what’s basically a social problem. In this respect, we might say the *auteur* theory, as Sarris advanced its thesis in 1962, is the aesthetic subset to the concerns raised in the Port Huron Statement that same year, the document whose goal it was to redescribe the citizen as fully participatory.<sup>10</sup> But it was important for Sarris, as noted,

that the aesthetic realm bear no strong relationship to the social. “If directors and other artists cannot be wrenched from their historical environments,” Sarris states, “aesthetics is reduced to a subordinate branch of ethnography” (40). Kael has no problem with this outcome, retorting, “what does he think it is – a sphere of its own, separate from the study of man and his environment” (79). As mentioned, Sarris urgently retains art’s autonomy because to compromise it by degree is to compromise it totally. Once compromised, art goes from being autonomous to functionalist; if it responds to and salves ideological crises, it gets reduced to an ideological instrument.

My interest, though, is not in contesting Sarris’s version of art’s autonomy, for I think the tradition of Marxist literary criticism has evolved nuances in historicism that avoid the traps of a vulgar determinism. Instead, my interest lies in showing the consistency between this position on art’s autonomy and an insistence on the autonomous and unitary character of the subject. Given that aesthetics first springs from a concern with the autonomous subject, and that the work of art models a solution to this problem, it follows that lost autonomy of art signifies lost autonomy of the subject. What this has tended to mean in the discourse of *auteurism*, though, is that for a film to be taken as a work of art it must be the work of a single author. We find in the early *auteurist* texts a chronic return to questions of “undivided authorship,” as V.F. Perkins puts it (“Direction and Authorship” 68). In modifying such a notion, Perkins engages the aesthetic demands of Ernest Lindgren, whose call for the “vision of a single man” (68) furnishes deep background for the debates of British *auteur* critics. While Perkins will reconfigure the notion of “undivided authorship” to interesting effect, which we’ll address shortly, his encounter with the very concept of a unitary *auteur* is marked by the aesthetic prehistory

that surfaces in Lindgren's decree to "Look to the operations of the mind which precede conscious creation" (68). We might deem fallacious Lindgren's reasoning that because a work of art appears unitary, a single personality must dwell behind it; but, however fallacious, we must see that his is a representative outlook, chiming as it does with Dwight Macdonald's belief that unity in art "will result only when a single brain and sensibility is in full command" ("Theory of Mass Culture").

Even as British critics began to turn away from the "conscious" "single brain" model, the provenance of the conception of unitary works and *auteurs* in bourgeois ideology still exerted its influence, no matter how attenuated, in remarks such as this from Robin Wood: "It seems probable that artistic value has always been dependent on the presence – somewhere, at some stage – of an individual artist" ("Ideology, Genre, Auteur" 87). Written in 1977, Wood likely hedges his claim as he does, suggesting only that it's a *probability* that an "individual artist" be involved at "some stage" in the production of artistic value, because the cine-structuralists have by now rewritten the early *auteurist* texts in accord with the posthumanist turn taken by Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and others. In "The Death of the Author," Barthes's claim that "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (97) instigated a reversal in *auteur* theory by which the *auteur* was no longer the agent for meaning in a film, but was now the name for the meaning constructed from a film. In the canonical declaration of this reversal, Peter Wollen explains that the "*auteur* is constructed *a posteriori*" ("The Auteur Theory" 566) but does not preexist the film. The critic, in this case, assembles the *auteur*, and this constructed personality "can then *post factum* be assigned to an individual, the director, on empirical grounds" (578). If there seems to be something

ungainly in the logic for how a constructed *auteur* happens to correspond, by luck, to an individual, we might suppose it to be symptomatic of a transition between the antinomial discourses of the early *auteur* critics and the cine-structuralists. The structuralist methodology had meant to displace the individual, but Wollen nonetheless retains the individual as a significant unit, rather than seek another organizing precept. One might think he does so because it consoles, as Adorno suggested it would, speaking of ideology as a whole.

### **A Theory Pressed into Service**

In *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell turns the same ground as does Wollen, but to a different end. Where Wollen decides that a textual construct (called “Hitchcock,” say) must be the singular vision for whom *auteurist* critics should seek an empirical individual as its “best available source” (“Michael Curtiz” 68), Bordwell simply argues that the cognition of a film is aided by imputing the unity and motivation behind its narration to a singular person outside the text: the director. The viewer benefits, in his analysis, from identifying “the narrational process” with a narrator – but this works for the “international art cinema,” with its “overt self-consciousness” (211), not Hollywood. Timothy Corrigan cites this passage from Bordwell in his book, *A Cinema without Walls*, in order to insist that this utility to *auteurism*, both cognitive and commercial,<sup>11</sup> might well have originated in the art cinema, but its uses soon extended from there into Hollywood. The “rise of the international art cinema,” as Corrigan contends, occurred during and was supported by “changes in production and distribution strategies” of Hollywood cinema, and as such it happened that Hollywood lifted



*auteurism* from the art cinema and deployed its prestige as “a kind of brand-name vision” to “distinguish” Hollywood product from “other, less-elevated forms of mass media (most notably, television)” and to “guarantee a relationship between audience and movie” (102). As Corrigan puts it, Hollywood cultivated the “commerce of auteurism.”

Because Francis Ford Coppola had a talent for blustery self-promotion, critics such as Corrigan, David Cook, and Jon Lewis refer to him in this context as a case study for the marketing trajectory of *auteurism*.<sup>12</sup> Yet if we look to *The Conversation* (1974), in many senses the most *auteurist* film involving Coppola,<sup>13</sup> we see that Coppola appropriated the concept of *auteurism* as the director’s means for fending off the rank of mere technician and becoming the proprietor of *the meaning* of his work. *The Conversation* depicts a crisis in the career of Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), a surveillance expert who both designs and deploys sound-recording technology. Caul finds himself in crisis when he refuses to cede ownership of a conversation he was commissioned to record. His refusal, predicated on not knowing how the content of his recording will be utilized, marks his ambivalent disposition toward his work: he goes between feeling that it’s his “business” to get “a nice, fat recording” and feeling that his “beautiful” recording is “a work of art.” In the former event he’s the executor of the form, but in the latter he bears ethical accountability for the content. Defining the meaning of one’s work, thus, becomes the privilege of the artist, whereas having one’s work defined by another is the lot of the technician. This tension characterizes Caul’s self-definition; an intensely private man, he tells his girlfriend that he’s “kind of a musician, a freelance musician.” Caul’s redescription of his surveillance work as an expressive art is meant in earnest, in that his development of technologies for extending the field of perception is, first and foremost,

the extension of *his* field of perception, which counts, fundamentally, as the work of the artist.

From the opening shot, *The Conversation* confuses the work of recording sound with that of producing music. As an aerial shot pans in on the activity of a city plaza, we hear the Dixieland jazz of a band evidently playing for the lunchtime crowd. Shortly, we hear electronic burbling, a distortion that interferes with the pick-up of the music. We learn quickly enough that the surveillance equipment, arranged by Caul and his team, is straining to gather all the sounds of the plaza. But the telling opposition is established between jazz, the iconic art of self-expression, and electronic burbling, a signal limit to be negotiated by the technician. As if to drive the point home, Harry Caul is himself a saxophonist who spends his private moments playing along to jazz records. Whether we are meant to construe Caul's expansion of the sound field through surveillance technology as the *same* endeavor as his production of meaningful sound with his saxophone, or whether we are meant to counterpose the one as technical work to the other's artistic work is less important, I would argue, than the fact that, within filmmaking, there had existed a contested hierarchy in which some were redeemed as artists while others were dismissed as technicians.

Gore Vidal sketched this hierarchy with polemical flourish in a *New York Review of Books* article, "Who Makes the Movies?," when he described directors as erstwhile "brothers-in-law" who had been transformed into "autonomous and original artists" (149). This rankled for Vidal not because directors had historically been "at best, bright technicians," but because the promotion of director to artist entailed the demotion of writer to the ranks of Hollywood anonymity. Being a writer, and a writer who worked in

Hollywood, Vidal intensely felt the unfairness of this shifting of credit. Vidal believed, quite traditionally, that a high level of technology encumbered the creation of art, and the writer, being so lightly dependent on technology, was therefore more fully immersed in experience. “Those who have spent too much time with cameras and machines,” Vidal sniped, “seldom have much apprehension of that living world without whose presence there is no art” (155). In moments, Harry Caul reproduces this sentiment, as though hewing to party line. “Listen, if there’s one surefire rule that I have learned in this business,” Caul says, “it’s that I don’t know anything about human nature, I don’t know anything about curiosity. That’s not part of what I do.”

*The Conversation*, though, is a story about reconfiguring the parts of what one does professionally in an effort to include “curiosity” about “human nature” in that purview. It is, finally, a story about extending the domain of one’s work to annex the affect that, otherwise left to the purveyors of the aesthetic, had allowed one’s expertise to be shunted to the status of the merely technical. Jameson observes that *The Conversation* (as well as the 1981 film *Blow Out*), being another version of *Blow-Up* (1966), problematizes its protagonist’s status as an artist simply by shifting his trade from a visual to an auditory one. As a photographer, the protagonist of *Blow-Up* still curated the visual dimension that, in Jameson’s phrasing, offers “some bewildering Bazinian field of Being for desperate inspection”; thus the photographer still secures “the philosopher’s art function,” even though he shoots fashion models, whereas the sound expert is forever a “technician for sale to the highest bidder” (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 20). I refer to Jameson’s insight, on one hand, because *The Conversation* does cling to the spatial logic of the visual even as it strives to transfer those concerns to the temporal logic of the

auditory. Harry Caul's obsession with privacy is visually figured in the four locks on his apartment door. Though he works in auditory surveillance, we nonetheless understand matters of privacy principally in the spatial terms of an inside and outside. On the other hand, I refer to Jameson's insight because *The Conversation* seems to be invested in the project of relocating affect, the precise outcome of which is to unsettle where the "art function" now falls.

In the film's terms, relocating affect does not betoken a new or heightened concern with affect, but rather a concern with who gets to manage it. Harry Caul tells his landlady, after all, that he has four locks on his door not because he has valuables within, but because his management of those locks is itself the value: "I don't have anything personal, nothing of value," he admits, "except my keys, you see, which I really would like to have the only copy of." Caul wants, in other words, to be in the position to name the content inside the form, so to speak, which is the affective dimension; he wants to do so, we might extrapolate, because he wants to control it. And this act, we should observe, is consistent with, or derived from, Caul's cathexis on church rituals, specifically his visits to the confessional. Linking Caul's organization of affect with church protocols puts *The Conversation* in line with Michel Foucault's analysis of "pastoral power," a mode of constituting subjects that structurally requires a person to have interior space, psychologically speaking.<sup>14</sup> But, most germane, reference to church rituals suggests that Caul, as the sole holder of the keys, occupies the hierarchical spot of the priest, which only returns us to the realm of aesthetics, whose charge had been holding down the hieratic function in the passage from feudal to bourgeois society.

I draw on *The Conversation* so extensively because it explains the origins of *auteurism* not as some instrument developed by the industry in an effort at self-renovation. The “brand-name vision” that *auteurism* supplied Hollywood was an effect, not a cause of *auteurism*. *The Conversation*, instead, explains the origins of *auteurism* in the impulse to disavow the status of technician and reclaim the meaning of one’s work, with the position of the Hollywood director simply being incidental or symptomatic of the more general condition of “the organization man.” But, importantly, the film accounts for autonomy as at once aesthetic and professional, and in fact makes a case for the interpenetration of what I’ll call the aesthetic or the affective and the managerial, a case made elsewhere in Douglas McGregor’s 1960 work on management theory, *The Human Side of Enterprise*. McGregor’s book struck a blow against the scientific management that supposed people, on average, “prefe[r] to be directed, wis[h] to avoid responsibility, [have] relatively little ambition”; it suggested instead the basic need of “self-fulfillment,” the need “for continued self-development, for being creative in the broadest sense of that term” (34, 39). Sanford Jacoby describes this “change in the postwar era” in terms of “the growing importance of psychology to personnel management,” a movement stemming from Elton Mayo’s ideas (“dubbed human relations by his followers”) that “managers should give more attention to the worker’s psyche” (208-209). In short, when Harry Caul becomes an artist rather than just a technician, by fusing a “curiosity” about “human nature” with his “business,” he at once becomes a new ideal for management.

In this light, we might regard *auteurism* as an episode in a managerial revolution that rolled back the bureaucratic dominion shaped through what C. Wright Mills termed the corporate restructuring of the United States “from a nation of small capitalists into a

nation of hired employees” (*White Collar* 34). We could perhaps say that the decisive contribution made in the corporate sphere by the *auteurism* of New Hollywood was the habit of describing creative or affective work as the province of the individual as opposed to the deadening and prescriptive work of the wards of an organization, which amounts to the substitution of the artistic function for the managerial one. When Martin Scorsese said that “Sarris and the ‘politique des auteurs’ was like some fresh air,” we might hear this not only as a remark on the local significance it had for film culture, but, in describing a condition of the individual’s ascendancy over organizational imperatives, we might hear it as a remark holding a general promise that self-expression, even beyond Hollywood, might become one’s work, that “hired employees” might think of themselves as artists in a business world, and that rather than toil as a function in a framework, one might think of the framework as issuing from one’s creative, unified self. That is, *auteurism* helped restore to the bourgeois ethos of individualism a “fresh” theoretical realism for how an individual mattered *vis-à-vis* the overwhelming scale of corporate structure: as a self-expressing artist, that is, rather than an organizational-replicant of the corporation.

One could argue that what *auteurism* expressed all along were the tendencies of a good manager. Indeed, if we return to Kael’s anti-*auteurist* tract, *Raising Kane*, we note that she means not to diminish Welles’s artistry, but only to say that his real achievement was of a managerial kind. Given that big-studio filmmaking tended to offer its crews “the limited opportunity” that McGregor claims characterize the “conditions of modern industrial life” (39), the “designers and technicians,” Kael reasons, “were hostile and bored.” “The worst aspect of the factory system,” she continued, “was that almost everyone worked beneath his capacity” (132). As a director given *carte blanche*, Welles

was shrewd and spirited enough to “liberate and utilize the talents of his co-workers,” who, languishing as they had in “studio-factory productions,” eagerly “came forth with ideas they’d been bottling up for years” (132). Welles’s already considerable talents were amplified in an environment, created by what we should call his managerial vivacity, in which everyone “seems to have had the time of his life because he was able to contribute something” (132). The resulting film was not only marked by its quality, but, as Kael observes, “the craftsmen were so ingenious about giving Welles the effect he wanted that even now many audiences aren’t aware of how cheaply made *Citizen Kane* was” (133).

Indeed, it now seems in behalf of managerial prerogative that V.F. Perkins, one of the *auteurist* critics at the British journal *Movie*, reconfigured the notion of “undivided authorship” in filmmaking. Perkins deemed it necessary to back off Lindgren’s strong claim for “one man’s vision,” because it so often proved counterfactual in filmmaking, and reasoned instead that, “[p]rovided that a film has its own unity, it seems unimportant whether the unity was evolved through cooperation and compromise within the production team or conceived by one man and imposed on his collaborators” (68). The director’s distinction, on Perkins’s argument, will derive from “his advisory function” and his capacity for “coordination,” seeing as film production “involves so many and such varied kinds of creative decision” (72). In order for a film to possess “even the most elementary form of unity,” then, a director must harmonize the work of “actors, designers, and technicians” “towards an agreed end” (72). Yet Perkins is flatly wrong, however, to assert that so long as the statements in a film are unified “it makes no difference to the spectator how they came, or were brought about, or to what extent their significance was intended” (68), as the history of *auteurist* debate attests. There is, after

all, a certain momentum in denying that a film is “group work” and insisting instead that, “if the film’s form embodies a viewpoint, explored in depth and with complexity, it is almost certain to be the director’s” (74). And we elect to call this figure an artist, with all its unitary implications, because he alone “has possession of the means through which all other contributions acquire meaning *within* the film” (74 emphasis original).

The genius of *auteurism*, we might say, lies not in its mechanisms for figuring the unity of a film as a kind of individual, but for the property of commutation it has for then explaining the unity of a group such as a corporation as a kind of individual, thus adding to the intelligibility of the long mystifying legal tradition of corporate personhood. Jerome Christensen’s scholarship has arrived as a late entry in the *auteurist* debate, arguing that *auteurism* has mistakenly scabbled for individual authors in its more oblique project for understanding the operations of the corporate author. In his argument, the studio *qua* corporate subject solves the problem of imputing intention, in an industrial situation, to one of two extremes: either to an “actual individual’s contribution” or to “some mode or means of production, some apparatus” (173). That unity that we dimly sense in the corporation can be figured, as he cites Phillip Selznick on organizations, by “prizing” “the device” of the corporation for “its own sake,” such that individuals can “become attached to an organization or a way of doing things as persons rather than as technicians” (174). Thus, in Christensen’s argument, the unity that presupposes persons licenses a “process that involves a change of perspective among technicians who become persons by treating the device of the corporation as if it were a person and not just a mechanism for making products, profit, and persons” (175). While *auteurism* models this process, the corporation benefits from it.



The corporation benefits because, as a person, it can shed the encumbrance of law in the name of friendship, artistic passion. This explains another, production-side use of *auteurism*, as explicated in Derek Nystrom's work. The Hollywood *auteurs*, such as Coppola, Robert Altman, and Brian DePalma, felt entitled to slip many of the union regulations in Hollywood in the name of their communal and artistic enterprises. In naming themselves artists rather than business people, they bypassed a history of labor laws. In *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men*, Nystrom claims that "the auteurist industrial strategies of the New Hollywood legitimized a PMC reclamation of workplace autonomy and control that, ultimately, was purchased against both capital and labor" (82).<sup>15</sup> For instance, DePalma avoided hiring union crews on *Hi, Mom!* (1970) because he would "probably have very little in common with them" and he needed to establish a fraternal or communal spirit on set in which "everybody's committed, politically, because they like the material, in all ways" (Nystrom 78). Likewise, Deborah Fine, a former employee at Coppola's Zoetrope film company, says that Coppola didn't care if workers thought they were "getting paid enough or if [they] thought [their] working conditions [were] good enough" because "there's a million people out there that would kiss the ground to work for him for nothing" (Nystrom 78). In other words, if a corporation were run by or identified with an artist, it might invoke a private set of norms as opposed to the public laws that govern the world of brute commerce.

## ***Auteurism* as Hermeneutics**

In the ongoing contest for the substantial truth of *auteurism* – whether it best organizes film canons, predicts the rising and falling fortunes of directors, collates themes across films, serves as a marketing instrument or a production protocol – my project seeks not to fix the meaning of the term, but rather to use it to mark off a set of historical conditions and concerns. Those conditions and concerns can be broadly called the counterculture, the technocracy, and the consolidation of a corporate hegemony in postwar America, all of which were shot through with a transforming ideology of individualism and personhood, at times in decline and at times on the rise. *Auteurism* functioned as a response to these conditions, taking the form of a compensation as well as a prescription. Like Thomas Schatz, I take *auteurism* to be a poor historical description of Hollywood filmmaking; but I take its simplifications to bear powerful ideological messages. As with any ideological question, I take it to possess no substantial truth, only a differential metric: it gauges the friction between the material life and imaginary life of a culture, and issues figurations of the contestatory definitions of what that culture means and how it will carry on. This dissertation turns to films made between 1967 and 1974 to weigh these figurations against each other, with the category concerns of *auteurism* as a hermeneutic device for tracking negotiations of the individualist credo so vital to classic liberalism.

The second chapter documents what I will call the genre of “defection” films, a genre whose first iterations came with the 1967 release of *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde*. The defection film typically involves the narrative of a couple escaping from society, with the emphasis always falling on what they flee *from* rather than *toward*. I use

the term “genre” not to suggest that production units were formed to develop defection films, but on the same order that Stanley Cavell refers to comedies of remarriage as a genre. Cavell claims that a “genre emerges full-blown, in a particular instance first (or set of them if they are simultaneous)” (27-28). I take this to be the case with the defection film, that is was found “full-blown” in both *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, and then these two instances solicited “further instances” to work out “internal consequences” (28). In this sense, Cavell remarks, a genre “has no history, only a birth and a logic,” along with a “prehistory,” which would be the “setting up of the conditions it requires for its viability” (28). The importance of this genre is that it tells the story that we might presume so-called *auteurs* told themselves, that of the reduction of institutional dependence in favor of an augmented individual independence. As well, we can also consider this the story the counterculture tells itself in this moment.

Chapter 3 focuses on an ostensibly very different film cycle, that of the disaster film. Critics tend to characterize these films as politically conservative, whereas the defection film is regarded as politically radical, as consistent with the counterculture’s self-regard. My argument insists that the difference is only apparent: the defection film erased the technocratic institutions of postwar life, while the disaster film accentuated them only to imagine their collapse, but in each iteration the status of these institutions functions as a precondition for reinstating autonomous subjectivity. Chapter 4 counterposes a form of corporate individualism to the autonomous kind wished for in the film narratives of defection and disaster films. It considers a series of films about the intelligibility of corporations, suggesting that the corporation models subjectivity in its contemporary form. This form of subjectivity, however, produces paranoiac reactions

from the standpoint of an obsolescent autonomous subjectivity. But it offers, somewhat ingeniously, the appearance of autonomy, and I will take the occasion to spell out the reasons that this appearance could be called the offering of *auteurism*. Chapter 5 situates the ideological ferment of 1967-1974 in the larger historical context of postwar American culture, arguing that the autonomous individualism ideally figured in the cowboy hero was a product of the territorial logic of a bygone phase of the nation-state. We indeed see the passing of the cowboy hero into the figure of the Vietnam veteran after the 1960s, an index of the fading relevance of a certain form of individualism, I argue, under the capitalist logic of an emergent corporate state.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Sarris is an incessant list-maker, notoriously creating a “pantheon” for the great directors and generating lists of the best directors of the American cinema *in toto* as well as of the best cinematic output for each given year.

<sup>2</sup> We might take the Partisan Review crowd as shorthand for the cognoscenti of the liberal consensus, especially figures such as Greenberg, Dwight Macdonald, and Daniel Bell, who had a fraught relationship with the emergent figures of the New Left. In Chapter 2 I discuss a roundtable published in *The American Scholar* in which selected figures of the Old and New Left attempt to clarify their different politics.

<sup>3</sup> For the seminal texts of the *auteurist* discourse, one should see André Bazin’s “De la Politique des Auteurs” and Ian Cameron’s “Films, Directors, and Critics” along with the aforementioned essays by Truffaut and Sarris. For a sense of how *auteurism* was reconstituted within cine-structuralism, see Peter Wollen’s “The Auteur Theory” and Charles W. Eckert’s “The English Cine-Structuralists.” One can find essays on *auteurism* and authorship in collections such as Virginia Wright Wexman’s *Film and Authorship* and David Gerstner and Janet Staiger’s *Authorship and Film*, but Barry Keith Grant’s recent *Auteurs and Authorship* provides perhaps the most complete historical overview, and indeed anthologizes the essays cited above.

<sup>4</sup> For a selection of essays representing an oppositional student response to Kerr’s envisioned “multiversity” and its relationship to the military-industrial complex, see Carl Davidson’s *The New Radicals in the Multiversity and Other SDS Writings on Student Syndicalism*. Kerr’s original lecture, “The Idea of a Multiversity,” can be found in *The Uses of the University*.

<sup>5</sup> I take the phrase “damaged life” from the subtitle (“Reflections on a Damaged life”) of Theodor Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* because Adorno is so often the implicit reference point in my discussions of imperiled subjectivity. I discuss Adorno more fully in Chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup> Sarris himself suggests, somewhat abstrusely, that “the *auteur* theory is merely a figure of speech” (36). But he seems to consider it a “figure of speech” in a different way than I am here proposing; for Sarris, it’s a figure of speech in that it would seem, when weighing the relative merits of artists, to foreclose the reputation of a lesser artist in favor of a total critical absorption in the greater artist. In an odd turn, he argues that it’s a figure of speech and doesn’t literally work that way because, “If the man in the street could not invoke Shakespeare’s name as an identifiable cultural reference, he would probably have less contact with all things artistic.” The implication is that the *auteur* theory will have no effect on people who don’t know the *auteur* theory, who have no investment in the relative standings of artists. As such, the theory’s only an instrument for the scholar: “The Shakespearean scholar, by contrast, will always be driven to explore the surrounding terrain, with the result that all Elizabethan dramatists gain more rather than less recognition through the pre-eminence of one of their number” (36). This caveat, that the theory’s utility only be measured in the rarefied domain of scholars and critics, becomes incoherent when later he says that “to argue against the *auteur* theory in America is to assume that we have anyone of Bazin’s sensibility and dedication to provide an alternative” (39). I think Kael is right when she says this defense amounts to saying “that

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the *auteur* theory is necessary in the absence of a critic who wouldn't need it" ("Circles and Squares" 47). Thus, the *auteur* theory is less for the refined critic than it is for the man in the street. I admit, however, that I am less concerned with analyzing the coherence of the theory than in using it as a "figure of speech" against the grain of the argument.

<sup>7</sup> In *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*, Robin Wood utilizes the terms "classical" and "romantic" to describe artistic practice ("Classical, when the artist is at one with at least the finest values of his culture" [42]) during the transition from studio-system Hollywood to the more fragmented Hollywood of the 1960s.

<sup>8</sup> The "American young," Rozsak writes, "grasped most clearly the fact that, while such immediate emergencies as the Vietnam war, racial injustice, and hard-core poverty demand a deal of old-style politicking, the paramount struggle of our day is against a far more formidable, because far less obvious, opponent, to which I will give the name 'the technocracy'" (4).

<sup>9</sup> Eagleton cites this passage from Rousseau's *Émile*, explaining that the "liberated subject is the one who has appropriated the law as the very principle of its own autonomy, broken the forbidding tablets of stone on which that law was originally inscribed in order to rewrite it on the heart of flesh" (19). Thus it becomes the case that law for the bourgeoisie, being immanent, must be understood sensually and affectively; the work of art, as such, becomes the best model as well as an agent of instruction in this endeavor. "The ultimate binding force of the bourgeois social order," Eagleton explains, "will be habits, pieties, sentiments and affections" (20).

<sup>10</sup> The Port Huron Statement was the mission statement of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), composed chiefly by Tom Hayden. I refer to the document in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> We should note that Bordwell grants *auteurism* not only a cognitive function, but a commercial one as well. He argues that the "consistency of an authorial signature across an oeuvre constitutes an economically exploitable trademark" (211). When Corrigan characterizes Bordwell's as a "formalist and cognitive" critique (103), it's difficult to know if Corrigan is overlooking the commercial dimension of Bordwell's critique, or simply saying it's underdeveloped.

<sup>12</sup> Alongside Corrigan's *Cinema Without Walls*, one should consult David Cook's "Auteur Cinema and the 'Film Generation' in 1970s Hollywood" and Jon Lewis's *Whom God Wishes to Destroy* for discussions of Coppola's role in endowing the *auteur* with a commercial vocation.

<sup>13</sup> I call *The Conversation* "*auteurist*" in various registers: it was the film Coppola opted to make for the Director's Company, a "production unit" granting authority to three directors (Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich, William Friedkin) formed by Paramount executive Frank Yablans "on the heels of the commercial success of *The Godfather*" (*Whom God Wishes to Destroy* 15-16); Coppola received sole writer's and director's credit for it, as well as co-production credit for it; Coppola regularly cites it as his personal favorite, along with *Rumble Fish* (18); and its story reads so plainly as an allegory for *auteurism*.

<sup>14</sup> In an essay published in *Critical Inquiry*, "The Subject and Power," Foucault describes the evolution, since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, of a "new political form of power" of the state,

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which is “both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power.” “The modern Western state,” Foucault writes, “has integrated into a new political shape an old power technique which originated in Christian institutions,” and this form of power, which he terms “pastoral power,” “cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it.” With respect to state power in the era of the bourgeoisie, Foucault makes the case that this form of power “has spread and multiplied outside the ecclesiastical institution” (782-783).

<sup>15</sup> The acronym “PMC” refers to the professional-managerial class,” a term coined by Barbara and John Ehrenreich to describe as a class situated “between labor and capital” whose members “engineer, administer, and supervise the workplace,” the expertise of which often place them “at odds with the capitalist class, especially over issues of occupational autonomy and technocratic reform” (Nystrom “Hard Hats and Movie Brats” 19).

## CHAPTER II

### ETHOS OF DISAFFILIATION: DEFECTION AS *AUTEURISM*

In Thomas Elsaesser's 1975 *Monogram* article, "The Pathos of Failure: Hollywood Films in the 1970s," he describes what he calls the "unmotivated hero" of New Hollywood films as a challenge to Hollywood classicality, a critique of the "ideology of forms."<sup>1</sup> Citing such films as *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971), *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), and *The Last Detail* (1973), Elsaesser claims that the problem for these films is precisely a formal problem: "The contradiction – or tension – lies in the combination of the unmotivated hero and the motif of the journey"; where the latter supplies motivation "from outside," there exists no "corresponding motivation on the inside," no "inner drive or palpable conflict" in the protagonist (280).

By the terms of classical Hollywood, as outlined in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson's study *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, this indeed constitutes a violation of classical norms. The motivation cannot come *from outside*, such that external forces are altogether determining, because classical form specifies, by dint of repetition, that narrative causality places the outside systems of space and time in contest with a character's inner drives, with the latter ultimately subordinating the former (6). This narrative causality, in classical Hollywood, is construed as the "psychological causality" of the protagonist (13). The components of the journey, space and time, cannot then be the prime agents of narrative; that's the province of the character, whose goals must make the journey. Of course, as Elsaesser notes, classical form had an ideological



dimension that its critics identified as “a fundamentally affirmative attitude to the world it depicts, a kind of a-priori optimism located in the very structure of the narrative” (281). A Hollywood with formal discontinuities or inversions – in which characters didn’t make their own journeys but their journeys, reluctantly inherited, made them – would be an ideologically upended Hollywood.

Critics have generally averred that New Hollywood cinema finds us on the terrain of ideology critique.<sup>2</sup> But, while Elsaesser is perspicacious to note how this critique is formally waged and even to detect something like a genre of films involved in such critique, I believe he has mistakenly elaborated it under the name of the “unmotivated hero.” It’s not that “hero” counts as too strong a word, but that “unmotivated” misses the point. Some of these films, *Five Easy Pieces* most notably, psychologize their protagonists so roundly as to seem more like character studies than narratives, with the interrogation of character motivation eclipsing the importance of plotted events. Often poignantly, these protagonists tend to have motivations that, owing to prevailing ideologies, are not recognizable as such.

If we turn to *Five Easy Pieces*, we hear this dispute over the eligibility of motivations, over what counts as a story, plainly spoken. Outwardly, *Five Easy Pieces* concerns the son in a family of classical musicians, Robert Dupea (Jack Nicholson), who rejects his family’s lifestyle in favor of a working-class experience. In the film’s culminating scene, Robert pushes his father’s wheelchair to a remote clearing on their property. Robert and his father, mute due to his recent strokes, hold “half a conversation,” in order to “reach an understanding”: the father-son relation, as Robert’s sister Partita believes, is the one broken filial connection. Robert says to his father, “I don’t know if

you'd be particularly interested in hearing anything about me. My life, most of it doesn't add up to much that I could relay as a way of life that you'd approve of." The sense that the events of Robert's life don't "add up" to an approved "way of life" to his father is the sense that the values that sustain a calculus for adding up lives are fundamentally different for father and son. The son, that is, has no motivation to reach the goal set for him by his father, and thus, judged by the logic of the father, he appears "unmotivated." Robert continues, "I move around a lot, not because I'm looking for anything really, but because I'm getting away from things that get bad if I stay."

The challenge is not to hear Robert's words as a confession of "unmotivated" shiftlessness, but to recover in them the other order of motivation characteristic of "the sixties." Theodore Roszak, in his popular 1969 book *The Making of a Counter Culture*, explains that the youth of the "affluent society"<sup>3</sup> felt that, if they were to contribute to "epochal transformation," they would need to resist the incentives of the technocracy, that the goals of this "high-consumption, leisure-wealthy society" (30) were not of their devising. In short, theirs was "much more a flight *from* than *toward*" (34 emphasis original); or, as Clyde Barrow says in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), "At this point, we ain't heading to nowhere, we just running from." The popular slogans of the period – Nicola Chiaromonte's "total rejection" and Herbert Marcuse's "Great Refusal" – trade on this notion that a set of ethical goals, amidst the positivity and superabundance of affluent society, could only be negatively articulated. Assessed in the key of film narrative, then, we can say that a formal disjunction between psychological causality and external effects does obtain, as Elsaesser observes, but the disjunction stems from the inadmissibility of the protagonist's motivations, the basic mismatch between the goals of youth and the

society of elders. The mutation in narrative is not one of lost motivations, but of vanishing *telos*.

With this in mind, I wish to propose a redefinition of Elsaesser's insight. A genre does emerge in the late 1960s, one that I will name the "defection film." As Elsaesser remarks, "Over all the movies that take to the road on quests that are escapes and escapes that are quests, there hangs like a haze the sweet poignancy of defeat" (286). The stress should fall on "escapes," in that the "quests that are *escapes*" denote social goals with no society to nurture them, and the genre that seeks to formulate this negative impulse as a narrative has a "pathos of failure" as its coefficient. The "pathos of failure" accompanies hopes of a new society that, increasingly, can't be imagined. We can sense the stirrings of this genre early in the decade, in *David and Lisa* (1962) or *Mickey One* (1965), but in what Paul Monaco calls the "watershed year" of 1967 (182), a succession of films penetrated the popular imagination: *Cool Hand Luke*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *The Graduate*. The genre elaborated its features across *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *Easy Rider* (1969), *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), the Bud Cort sequence of *Brewster McCloud* (1970) and *Harold and Maude* (1971), *The Panic in Needle Park* (1971), *Straw Dogs* (1971), *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971), *Wanda* (1971), *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972), *Badlands* (1973), *The Last Detail* (1973), *Scarecrow* (1973), *Cockfighter* (1974), *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (1974), and *The Sugarland Express* (1974).<sup>4</sup>

Of all elaborated features, the most significant is the almost metanarrative concern with endings, the missing *telos* and lapsed closure. We find this in the form of abrupt deaths, such as those of *Easy Rider* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, that amount to a narrative solution to Bonnie Parker's quandary over where flights from society lead. "When we

started out, I thought we was really going somewhere,” Bonnie tells Clyde, “But this is it – we just going.” By 1971, we find this narrative recourse to death thematized in *Harold and Maude* by Harold (Bud Cort) staging his suicide every few minutes, to his mother’s unconcern. We also find the theme of lost *telos* expressed otherwise, not as the tragic conclusion of death but as an inversion of the comic closure of marriage and the implied reproduction of society: we encounter a prevalence of nonreproductive couples, whether because two men form the couple, as Laura Mulvey observes of this era in her classic 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,”<sup>5</sup> or another obstacle causes nonreproductivity, such as the enormous age disparity of *Harold and Maude*. Of course, the tragic and inverted comic conclusions coexist in several films, including *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Harold and Maude*.

The theme of defection feeds on diffuse anxieties about the value and potency of the individual subject within U.S. institutions.<sup>6</sup> Such fears took on discursive life when members of the Old Left, frustrated by the end-of-ideology rhetoric of consensus liberalism, began warning of the subsumption of the individual into institutional life, seen in David Riesman’s concern with “groupism” and C. Wright Mills’s description of white-collar conformism to technocratic imperatives.<sup>7</sup> By 1962, such concerns were amplified by the nascent New Left in the Port Huron Statement, wherein they voiced restored faith in “man” over against “dominant conceptions” that “he is a thing to be manipulated,” their opposition being directed against the “depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things” (Miller 332). In 1965, as Sean McCann and Michael Szalay argue,<sup>8</sup> Paul Potter, then-president of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), converted this network of power relations, “in one stroke,” into “the system,” a system that proved

capable of producing people as its objects.<sup>9</sup> The political task concerned, as Potter says, how “to control it, make it bend itself to their wills rather than bending them to its.” This problematic of the subject’s agency vis-à-vis the institution’s emerges saliently in crises in the institutions of the ruling class, most obviously, at both Tom Hayden and C. Wright Mills’s behest, in the university.

But it also plays out, as formal disruptions in defection films show, in the institution of Hollywood. Filmmakers expressed anxieties about institutions, and about Hollywood as a scaled model of the institution writ large, under the name of *auteurism*, a movement that repressed the institutional apparatus in order to celebrate the individuality of the director. *Auteurism*, simply put, described the individual’s relation to the institution, and whether accurate *in fact* it certainly had influence *in discourse*. Considered discursively, *auteurism* involved the staging of dramatic proof of the imprint the individual had on the institution, and in extreme cases it figured as the individual’s annulment of the institution. As a mode of criticism, *auteurism* is embattled; it has required renovation<sup>10</sup> so that it doesn’t simply lapse, as Thomas Schatz has hoped, into film studies’s “stage of adolescent romanticism.” In part, *auteurism* fails a cost-benefit analysis because we sacrifice the work of, say, Vilmos Zsigmond in order to carve out an integral body of work we call Robert Altman. When we perform the critical gerrymandering that produces the construct “Robert Altman,” we have to wonder how criticism benefits from subsuming Altman’s collaborators under his name. In contrast, if we take *auteurism* as a story filmmakers and cinephiles told about the dynamic between the subject and “the system,” we see that it’s of a piece with spreading discourses about

institutional life and but another iteration of the defection film. Indeed, the defection film, we might say, is the story so-called *auteurs* told themselves.

### ***The Graduate, Berkeley, and the Radicalized Affluent***

Not all defection films take affluence as their setting, though we might say affluence is the deep background for the genre. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, for instance, affluence is negated by the displacement operations of the period piece: youth audiences related to the film's portrait of disaffection and lawless flight as *their* issues, even though contemporary affluence had been swapped out for Depression-era scarcity. *The Graduate*, however, directly addresses affluence as a condition, even a stimulus, for defection. Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) finds himself flush with material wealth – an Alfa Romeo for his graduation, an absurd wetsuit for his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday – yet he is confounded by the opportunity, by what consent to this system of rewards would actually mean. Graduation itself begins to seem like a baleful form of consent. “Intellect has become an instrument of national purpose, a component part of the ‘military-industrial complex’,” as the University of California president, Clark Kerr, explained.<sup>11</sup> The confusion, for Benjamin, originates in the fact that none of this is of his choosing, that he's merely been shuttled through this “approved track” that, while guaranteeing him a share of blandishments, will lock him in as a “component part” of a morally questionable economy (Gitlin 20). “It's like I've been playing some kind of game, but the rules don't make any sense to me,” Benjamin confesses to Elaine (Katharine Ross). “They're being made up by all the wrong people. No, I mean no one makes them up, they seem to have made themselves up.” We can count this as the film's most verbal articulation of the

objective appearance of the system, or its “immediacy” as Marcuse calls it, the lack of intervening agency on the subject’s part: the subject no longer has a free “inner dimension,” Marcuse argues, to adjudicate the acceptability of the “outer,” deciding whether inner or outer adjustments need to be made; the subject, now, is merely mimetic of the object world, and thus it is that objects appear, bewilderingly, to exercise agency over subjects.<sup>12</sup>

But *The Graduate* is otherwise verbally inarticulate, for thematic reasons. Thus cinematography makes many of its statements. Mike Nichols encouraged Robert Surtees, the cinematographer, to devise photography that would endow the film with a “subjective look” (Monaco 77). Surtees generated a language of isolation and confusion by designing, say, a long tracking shot of Benjamin alone on the airport’s moving walkway, using depth of field to compose scenes of barren domestic spaces where subjects could be nearly identical with their acquisitions, and employing a wide-angle lens to render Mrs. Robinson at an abyssal distance from Benjamin in what, in truth, is only a short hallway. The film’s most resonant joke – the single yet cryptically suggestive word, “plastics” – is set up when mobile, tight-framed camerawork produces the sense that full disorientation would be required, a well-nigh ethical unmooring needed, before the laconic advice of “plastics” could be recognized as *good* advice.

At the beginning of the “plastics” sequence, Benjamin’s parents usher him down their stairs and, as the three leave the frame, the camera rests on a ghoulish black-and-white painting of a sad clown, an emblem of the funhouse into which he descends. The mobile camera then captures Benjamin and his parents in tight close-up as they descend the stairs and are stopped by friends, who ask a series of perfunctory questions, all

delivered too rapidly for the disoriented Benjamin. He excuses himself on the pretense that he needs to check his car, and, still held in a tight close-up tracking shot, he reaches the door, just as a man brusquely enters, an old family friend that greets him, “Hey, here’s the track star. How are you, track star?” Benjamin doubles back to re-ascend the stairs, but his effort is arrested by a hand that reaches into the frame and seizes his shoulder. He turns around to the greeting of two middle-aged women, one of whom caresses his face while the other intones a refrain of “proud, proud, proud.” A clap on the back turns Benjamin around, and Mr. McGuire stands on the step above him. He says, authoritatively, “Come with me for a minute, I want to talk to you.” We cut to the two men, Benjamin and Mr. McGuire, as they emerge from the house. We follow them in a medium-length tracking shot, and, perceptibly, the rhythm of the shots has slowed so that we might at last settle into a more placid conversation. We now feel the absence of prior establishing shots because, with the illuminated swimming pool behind the pair of men, we at last have our bearings, a relationship to the setting. Mr. McGuire begins, “I just want to say one word to you, just one word.” Benjamin prompts him, “Yes, sir,” and Mr. McGuire lets slip, “Plastics.” The scene has a mystifying effect: Having been lead through a labyrinth, deposited at its center with a self-styled oracle, Benjamin receives a key that would seem to unlock nothing.

The question stands: Why did this one-word advice, said knowingly, in the clubby overtones of one who cares about the future of his own class, resound with the film’s audiences (who were, by one survey, 95% under age 30)? How, that is, did the word “plastics” so perfectly account for the difference between the old and young generation? Read metaphorically, we could say that “plastics” bespeaks the artificiality of the



suburban happiness forged by the old generation, that generation that recalled the Depression-era scarcity but relished the postwar plenty. Read literally, as advice to a graduate mulling his future options, we can take it as a sound tip on a growth industry. *Prima facie*, history confirms Mr. McGuire's intuition that "there's a great future in plastics." But, for a young generation politicized in the universities, the great past of plastics served as the exact measure of what they perceived to be the ethical failure of those over thirty. Plastics, for them, functioned as the lynchpin in the military-industrial complex.

In his recent book, *Nylon and Bombs*, Pap A. Ndiaye documents the two faces of DuPont, that of the producer of women's nylons – one of the most iconic stills of *The Graduate* shows Mrs. Robinson's unrolling her nylons before Benjamin – and that of the producer of plutonium for the Manhattan Project.<sup>13</sup> A company like DuPont, known as a pioneering corporation in the union of the private sphere of mass consumption and the public sphere of politics, became an emblem of the past generation's surrender of politics for comfort. As Ndiaye remarks, such corporations came to symbolize a menace for the "powerful political protest" of the 1960s, awakening early-century Progressive critiques of the corporation's threat to democracy: the threat, now, took the form of a "technical neutrality" that had the force "to make politics disappear as a public space of liberty" (225). To a youth audience in 1968, "plastics" would be code for the underside of the affluent society's consumption habits, calling to mind such corporations as DuPont and the "shadow" the "the Bomb" cast "over all human endeavor" (Gitlin 23). "Plastics" meant, in a word, the production of comforts without the acknowledgment of their political entailments.

In this light, we can see the choice of Berkeley for Elaine Robinson's university as not at all innocent. Berkeley became known not only as a locus of radicals, both student and non-student, and a theater for protest; it also became known as the university which first became self-conscious of its own role in the production, as Roszak then phrased it, of the "brains the technocracy needs" (29). As noted above, Clark Kerr explained without embarrassment the university's triangulated spot between industry and the state in the military-industrial complex. The students resented this, considering themselves, as Mario Savio fulminated, nothing more than "raw material."<sup>14</sup> The Free Speech Movement (FSM) made its clamorous presence known during the Berkeley protests of 1964-1965, roughly three years before *The Graduate* hit theaters. Savio, as the movement's charismatic orator, outlined the university's several problems, suggesting that university problems were a synecdoche of America's problems. "We have come up against what may emerge as the greatest problem of our nation," Savio said, "depersonalized, unresponsive bureaucracy" (75). This problem was a familiar one, the old chestnut of a critique of what the Frankfurt School called the "administered society." In fact, Mike Nichols had riffed on it with his comic partner Elaine May in their popular sketch "Telephone," the problem being that no one, in a world of bureaucratic corporations, can actually speak for the corporation.

But the problem, in its second order of energy, was that the university should not, or so Savio believed, be run like a corporation, that it should "be in the world but not of the world" (77). The university, nonetheless, evinced the same problems of any "unresponsive bureaucracy." A corollary problem to the one of a "total lack of response on the part of the policy makers," then, took on the form of a problem with language

itself: If the university bureaucracy sought to “suppress the students’ political expression,” what kind of language, beyond the “speech [that] has no consequences,” would the students need to invent to speak with institutions (75-77)? Savio and his fellow protesters opted for the “sit-in,” the nonviolent tactic of the Civil Rights movement, and they first deployed it by sitting “around a police car and ke[eping] it immobilized for over thirty-two hours” (76); in essence, to speak with the immovable object of the institution, Savio reasoned, one must make oneself over as an immovable object.

Savio’s speech makes sense of Benjamin’s sluggishness and inarticulacy, and, with the Berkeley campus as a reference point, Benjamin’s inert state – raw material that remains raw material – can be taken for incipient resistance. In fact, Benjamin produces echoes of Savio’s “An End to History”: his concern that the rules were “made up by all the wrong people,” or worse, “made themselves up,” assumes the perspective on post-campus life that Savio described, of one “looking toward a very bleak existence... in a game in which all of the rules have been made up” (78). Thus, when Benjamin visits Berkeley, purportedly to marry Elaine, he dimly senses his place in a community. Savio’s observation that “many students here at the university, many people in society, are wandering aimlessly about” (77) frames Benjamin’s way of life as a recognizable one – recognizable enough that the landlord at his boarding house needs assurance that he’s “not one of those agitators, one of those outside agitators.” In the sequence of his arrival on campus, a crane-shot follows him through foliage until, at last, Benjamin sits at the lip of a fountain in the middle of campus. He is alone one moment; after a dissolve he is instantly accompanied by a throng of students. We can read this dissolve, most obviously, as Benjamin, a non-student, suddenly being surrounded by students once class lets out.

We can, more figuratively, see Benjamin's solitary confusion growing into something like a movement, a movement grown on college campuses.

Of course, Benjamin expresses no political credo; he only resembles those who would become political. Mike Nichols has said that, while Benjamin's a "worthy kid drowning among objects and things," "he doesn't have the moral or intellectual resources to do what a large percentage of other kids like him do – to rebel, to march, to demonstrate, to turn on" (Gelmis 284). Indeed, the community of parents, which appears so teeming in scenes at the Braddock house, compulsively oedipalizes Benjamin not because he acts to overthrow their values and lifestyles, but because he does not act to reproduce their values and lifestyles: he has not been properly initiated into the social. *The Graduate* crystallizes the problematic that comes to define the defection film, that of a protopolitical negation of the social order waged without the program for a new social order in mind. The films exhibit, that is, an absent *telos*. In Berkeley, Elaine chides Benjamin, "I don't want you to go anywhere... until you have a definite plan." We might assess the famous final scene of Benjamin and Elaine escaping the world of institutions – of marriage, family, and the church – in terms of absent *telos* and unformulated plans. If the defection film generically extends itself by rendering its protagonist couples nonreproductive, we might posit the Mona Lisa ambiguity of Benjamin and Elaine's expressions as a contemplative rest, a kind of glyph in this new narrative language of a politics of the present in lieu of the future. It's a moment, in other words, that requires a genre to answer the questions: Will they have children? Will they found and reproduce a society to replace the one they abandon?

### ***Bonnie and Clyde*, the New Left vs. the Old**

*The Graduate*, as noted, explicitly addresses contemporaneity, in the topic of the generation gap and failed middle-class reproduction. It developed, we might say, a language for objecthood, one that registered Savio's fatalistic plea that his generation would "die rather than be standardized, replaceable, and irrelevant" (78). But, as its self-contemplative ending suggests, it did not produce a language for new subjectivity. By turning its focus on the past, *Bonnie and Clyde* seemed to dramatize, somewhat ironically, the schisms in contemporary politics.<sup>15</sup> The sensational quality of the film, its vivid and nonchalant violence,<sup>16</sup> was matched by the sensational quality of its reviews. *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther was incensed by "the upsurge of passionate expressions of admiration and defense" for the way in which this "buffoonized picture" was purported to achieve "some sort of meaningful statement for the times in which we live" (Sept. 1967 52); Pauline Kael, as the film's ardent champion, explained that a movie so "contemporary in feeling" is bound to "divide[] audiences" because it "brings into the almost frighteningly public world of movies things that people have been feeling and saying and writing about" (*Kiss Kiss* 47). When *Newsweek* critic Joseph Morgenstern made what *Variety* called "the virtually unprecedented step of retracting a negative review" (Aug. 1967 1), he signaled that the choice to fall on one side or other of Kael's "divide" was one of generational identification. And this, it went without saying, was a politically pregnant choice.

While *The Graduate* limns a political difference between a radicalized youth and their satisfied parents, *Bonnie and Clyde* describes a political difference between two generations of the politically left. Crowther's bristling concession that young audiences

respond to the fact that the film makes an antagonist of “society,” the “Establishment” (52), was echoed by Jerry Rubin’s proclamation that Bonnie and Clyde were “leaders of the New Youth” (*Imagine Nation* 298) and Todd Gitlin’s like claim that the pair were “children of the sixties set three decades back” (*Whole World Is Watching* 197). If certain members of the New Left hoped to reclaim Bonnie and Clyde as *their* icons, this perhaps underlines the fact that the film’s setting in the 1930s invokes the politics of that decade, which we might describe as historically favorable for oppositional agency, at the same time as it neutralizes the political content of Bonnie and Clyde’s story by rendering them, via the media apparatus, a strictly cultural image.

Crowther’s attitude toward *Bonnie and Clyde*’s supporters, in fact, maps neatly enough onto the Old Left’s appraisal of the New Left. The Old Left, by one criterion or another, included intellectuals such as Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, and Lionel Trilling, the once Trotskyist thinkers who were now counted, by the New Left’s leading lights, among the political neuters of the liberal consensus. As documented by Joseph Dorman’s *Arguing the World* (1997), these former Marxists, who were themselves radicalized as students at places like City College, were now siding against the student protests of the FSM and Columbia University. Even a Leftist such as Irving Howe, whose journal *Dissent* maintained socialist convictions while his fellow New York intellectuals became more conservative, alienated a New Left that he found too obstreperous, embodied best in what he called Tom Hayden’s “authoritarian personality.” The New Left returned the insult when they carped that Irving Howe “doesn’t listen to us, he’s always telling us what to think.”<sup>17</sup> *Bonnie and Clyde*, then, spoke to a young audience, in part, because it spoke in a language, desperate because historically bedeviled, that the New Left favored

but the Old Left belittled. While invested in the state of politics in 1967, however, the film's approach to questions of difference between the Old and New Left is obscure enough that it only gains clarity when situated in these debates.

In a March 1967 forum between spokespersons of the two Lefts, Ivanhoe Donaldson complained that the "attitude of the Old Left to the New is paternalistic" (580). Donaldson was no doubt provoked to this declaration by Dwight Macdonald's remark: "I've been wondering why I feel rather disappointed in [the New Left]. I think because I assumed these groups would have the same intellectual and moral style, as you might say, that my own generation had" (575). Macdonald's disappointment, paternal in tone, derived from his interpretation of "their principled refusal to learn from the past, from history, because you have to go to a library, probably, and look up all those big dull books" (575). Along these lines, the moderator, Daniel Aaron, closes the forum with the regret that it "is hard, I think, to have a very close communion when there seems to be a certain ahistorical attitude on the part of some of the New Left people" (588). Richard Rovere, though, refrains from paternal assessments of the New Left, limiting himself instead to a characterization of the two generations of radical Leftists that could also double as a description of the defection film. "The most important difference between the two is to be found in differing degrees of alienation," Rovere notes, adding that "there is on the New Left a spirit of indiscriminating rejection of society" (574).

Rovere's remark underscores a sense, expressed by both Tom Hayden and Donaldson, that the New Left lacked faith in the "forces of social change," as Donaldson phrases it, that had subtended the political activity of the Old Left. The Old Left, Rovere observes, had "a kind of selective hostility toward political institutions," but not in

institutions *per se*; they in fact used the “health in particular institutions” as a vehicle for change on behalf of dispossessed groups (574). Hayden contends that his generation of the Left has no access to the established institutions, that their assessment of government might not be paranoiac at all, but might “turn out to be so true that there won’t be any operating room for any Left, New or Old” (569). But Hayden’s reasoning for this institutional apostasy is generation-specific: he believes that dissent is in the process of being bought off and managed as a merely cultural project, with its political impulse being purged. “The New Left is in danger,” he argues, “of being swallowed up as a cultural artifact.” The government “does not want the changes [they] propose, but it wants the image of being tolerant and friendly toward protest” (570). “The mass media,” in charge of such “images,” has converted the New Left into “a piece of fiction or cut-out caricature” (571). And the “only space for people who want to change the system seems to be in theaters like this, or in magazines, but not in the world where power is accumulated” (571).

*Bonnie and Clyde* makes a likeminded critique, though certain ambiguities result from the fact that it seems to address the politics of the 1930s and 1960s at once. The film begins not with moving images, but with a slideshow of sepia-toned photographs of poverty, in the style of Walker Evans. We view a series of hard-luck pictures of farmers, portraits of toil that will prepare us for protagonists who will fight against institutions because those institutions, *mutatis mutandis*, signify the institutionalization of class exploitation: on one hand we have farmers who add value to the land, on the other we have the banks that foreclose on farmers, stealing their value with institutional sanction. Clyde Barrow (Warren Beatty) enters already a criminal, if only of the two-bit kind –



Bonnie chides him for trying to steal an “old lady’s car,” her mother’s. Yet Clyde, when he later claims his gang is “just folks,” can pass off his crimes in *the name* of the struggling poor. He can, that is, attack institutions and claim legal high ground because, in this historical moment, institutions have an alleged role in immiserating the poor.

As such, when Bonnie and Clyde hide out in an abandoned house for a night, and its dispossessed owners visit the next day, Clyde can align himself with the former owner because they share an adversary. The old farmer says, “The bank took it.” And Clyde replies, “We rob banks,” as if the farmer’s situation will now warrant the Barrow gang’s crime spree. The farmer, in turn, accepts Clyde’s offer to shoot holes through the bank’s “foreclosed” sign. For the farmer, this gunplay serves as catharsis; for Clyde, though, it functions as authorization of his own campaign against institutions. The force of the film’s critique is to suggest that the actual politics of the situation, understood as a difference in access to resources, becomes a matter of culture insofar as the attention shifts onto the one who *represents* the political dimension, the one who acts *on behalf of* the oppressed. Such a perceived conversion of politics into cultural capital explains a common New Left frustration, seen, for instance, in Ivanhoe Donaldson’s exasperation with Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* and with Dwight Macdonald, whose satisfaction with writing political books will mark the difference between the Old Left and New.<sup>18</sup>

And, of course, *Bonnie and Clyde* does tell the story of the poverty class’s vague respect for the Barrow gang and the image they project. When the media begins to more fully document their bank robberies, a farmer, whom Clyde allowed to hold onto his deposit, tells the newspapers: “All’s I can say is, they did right by me, and I’m bringin’

me a mess of flowers to their funeral.” Yet the story the film tells more damningly is that of Bonnie and Clyde’s campaign to reproduce themselves by way of image culture. The film operates, at one level, as an allegory of Clyde as the director to Bonnie’s movie star. When Clyde first meets Bonnie, he flatters her by asking, “I bet you’re a movie star.” Throughout the film, Clyde styles Bonnie’s image. In a café scene, he criticizes a curlieue in her hair and demands, “Change that, I don’t like it.” All the while, the film is larded with reference to movie culture, from C.W. Moss’s wondering if Myrna Loy is in the latest *Screenland Magazine* to the quotation of *Battleship Potemkin* when Clyde shoots his first victim, a bank teller, through the lens of his eyeglasses.

In smaller degree, text accompanies their circulating images, in an effort to narrate their meaning. When the Barrow gang gives two lovers a joyride, Clyde smugly asks, “I suspect you’ve been reading about us?” Aside from the story elaborated by the media, Bonnie produces their story in text through the poems she composes. She begins to write poems, it seems, as a lark, a distraction from their fate. But, by the end of the film, her poems have become an instrument for realizing their fate as cultural images. After all, her verse, “If you’re still in need of something to read, it’s death for Bonnie and Clyde,” translates the politics of their campaign into the pure stuff of narrative. *Bonnie and Clyde*, we might say, is not *Reds* (1981) because it expresses interest in the folk heroes, the media icons, instead of the categorically political events and actors. That *Partisan Review*, likewise, was not *New Masses* gets at the ambiguity at the core of *Bonnie and Clyde*: Does the film blame the Old Left for transforming Left politics into a “cultural artifact,” given the notorious habit the Old Left had for starting journals as its chief response to political ills, or does the film attack the media *tout court*, a media grown

omnivorous by the 1960s, as the agent in glamorizing political subjects so that they become all image and no reality?

As an early member in this genre of defection films, *Bonnie and Clyde* establishes the self-reflexivity of this genre, its narrative problem with ending a story about couples that defect from society. The film twice renders Bonnie and Clyde nonreproductive, by first making Clyde no “lover boy” and then having the couple place themselves under the sign of death. Bonnie knows too well the imminence of their deaths, which confers on her the authority to write their story: she knows how it will end, “death for Bonnie and Clyde.” When she does write their story, and Clyde recognizes it as such (“You know what you done there? You told my story. You made me somebody they can remember”), newspapers blow in the wind – their story, that is, spreads – and the couple is finally able to make love. Of course, on-screen couples often wait until the end of the story to consummate their love, but such a narrative technique has traditionally contributed to projecting their happiness beyond the end credits, a happiness that continues, an audience would suppose, by including a family. Bonnie and Clyde, however, only consummate their love when their death is assured, but they do so knowing that their reproduction, obstructed biologically, will be carried out culturally.

Now, the act of positing an outlaw couple that can be culturally incorporated, in spite of or because of it itself, might set the minimum condition for the genre. The twin solutions of death and nonreproductivity register the problem that there is, in prevailing cultural analyses, no longer an outside to “the system.” The analyses themselves, though, were undertaken as cultural solutions at a remove from political problems, but the apolitical mood induced by their grim forecasts sequestered them, as acts, from “the

world where power is accumulated,” as Hayden says. This describes the sort of Möbius strip political act that results from a certain acculturation of the sphere of politics. As McCann and Szalay argue, Paul Potter’s claim that, regarding “the system,” we “must name it, describe it, analyze it, understand it and change it” (212) is a redescription of revolutionary activity as the historic charge of the intellectual, i.e. a culture worker. If “analysis” were the fulcrum of politics, “the intellectual” would become the “agent of social change,” as he put it (211). C. Wright Mills had advanced similar claims in his “Letter to the New Left.”<sup>19</sup> Mills stressed that “the seeming collapse of our historic agencies of change ought to be taken as a problem, an issue, a trouble – in fact, as *the* political problem which *we* must turn into issue and trouble” (20). When Mills refers to the “collapse of our historic agencies of change,” he refers to the collapse of the Left’s most effective political agency in the 1930s: the working class and political parties “acting in its name, ‘representing its interests’” (19). In the 1960s, Mills called for the renovation of political agency by turning to “the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals, as a possible, immediate, radical agency of change” (21). In other words, Mills, and Potter after him, call for the transfer of agency from those represented to the one who represents.

The problem, as *Bonnie and Clyde* begins to formulate it in 1967, and perhaps we could deem it a problem unforeseeable in Mills’s historical moment, is that the “cultural apparatus” was precisely the nemesis of the Left. Culture, as it functioned in bourgeois society, possessed the capacity to fold opposition back into itself. In an early essay, Marcuse describes this sinister function of culture as a pivot by which participatory politics can be rendered totalitarian politics. He argues that culture alone “assume[s]

concern for the individual's claim to happiness," but cautions that this merely compensatory realm "exalts the individual without freeing him from his factual debasement," thus solving ideally what it cannot materially.<sup>20</sup> For instance, it was surely a case of *épater le bourgeois* when Mills strode the halls of Columbia University in "working-class clothes" and rode a motorcycle to class, but *Happy Days*'s Fonzie would one day model this style to the approval of middle-class audiences. Like the beats, as Gitlin remarks, the politics of the disaffiliated was "at the mercy of the mass media," which had "chewed the beats' reputation to pulp" and made of their subversive traits so many marketable affectations, such as "black turtlenecks, tights, and jeans" (52). In short, culture was capable of turning the erstwhile political into so many lifestyle choices and fashion options. As Fredric Jameson has said of the process, "the as yet unregistered and unexpressed experiences which the beats were able to discover on the margins of the system have themselves – along with the very figure and role of the beat writer as such – become part of the culture and its stereotypes" (*Signatures* 93).

The two defection films of 1967, *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, establish the poles of the genre, with the former floating "total rejection" as the only ethical response to affluent society, and the latter suggesting that even the politics basic to this "ethos of disaffiliation" could be culturally recontained. These representational limits registered the sense that "operating room" was fast closing, as Hayden worried, and the subject clung to vanishing autonomy as "the system" came to appear ubiquitous and fully objectifying. Phrased thusly, Theodor Adorno might be the specter haunting late 1960s discourse, as his diagnosis of a "total system" and his lapsed Marxist faith in a revolutionary subject, what Susan Buck-Morss calls "Marxism minus the proletariat,"

suggest his pessimism lagged just behind Marcuse's political commitment. However, in that decade "known in retrospect as the sixties," Jameson observes, "Adorno's sense of Apocalypse seemed very retrogressive indeed, focused as it was on the moment of Auschwitz, and obsessed with the doom and baleful enchantment of a 'total system' that few enough – in a 'pre-revolutionary' moment defined notoriously by the sense that '*tout est possible!*' – sensed impending in our own future" (*Late Marxism* 5). I will discuss Adorno in relation to films of technological disaster in Chapter 3, but in this context, Marcuse's influence makes sense of the protopolitical valence of defection. It is worth suggesting, though, that the pessimism we associate with Adorno, namely that the protopolitical will be cut off at the knees, may well subtend this genre in its waxing phase of 1967-1974.

### ***Five Easy Pieces* and the Making of a Genre**

When Bob Rafelson directed *Five Easy Pieces* in 1970, a genre of defection had already spelled out its problematic; as well, the genre had crafted a set of semantic features. Such a semantic feature, as noted, was the couple at the heart of the narrative, whether Benjamin and Elaine or Bonnie and Clyde, whether Wyatt and Billy in *Easy Rider* (1969) or Joe Buck and Ratso Rizzo in *Midnight Cowboy* (1969). And the syntax for these semantemes, to deploy Rick Altman's terms, was conventionalized within a few repetitions and variations. For instance, the open-ended question concluding *The Graduate* – whether Benjamin and Elaine's expressions, turned abruptly from glee to grimness, mean we have seen comedy turn to tragedy, the destruction of the future rather than its regeneration – gets revisited by *Midnight Cowboy* just two years later. In the last

scenes of *Midnight Cowboy*, we see Dustin Hoffman in the back row of a bus with his partner, once again, as a kind of nod of fellowship to *The Graduate*. *Midnight Cowboy* reinterprets Benjamin's sullen look so that the stillness, the lack of expression, become the death of Hoffman's new character, Ratso Rizzo. While Joe Buck (Jon Voight) imagines aloud their future in Miami, and talks about a new job because being a hustler is no line for him, Ratso dies at his arm. This scene, in turn, is reprised in the final scenes of *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, when the fugitive Lightfoot (Jeff Bridges) dies next to Thunderbolt (Clint Eastwood) in their fleeing car, very much a self-conscious tribute to *Midnight Cowboy*. Repetitions such as these knit together the genre, in the process consolidating the fatalistic outcome as the only outcome of defection.

While *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde* tapped problems that resonated with a young audience, problems that the United Artists film *Midnight Cowboy* recognized as good material to rework, the Hollywood industry did not immediately detect in their success anything like a fledgling genre, one whose replication could be assigned to production units, as in the studio days. Not until *Easy Rider* scored similarly phenomenal success, that is, did Hollywood see bankable results in this style of film. The genre, however, was not being assessed along the lines of content – young couples defecting from affluence, say – but rather along the lines of an audience demographic and a scale of production, or, more precisely, size of investment to size of return (*Easy Rider* cost \$375,000 but earned \$19.3 million). The genre, then, was termed the “youth-cult” and the budgets were slight (*Lost Illusions* 162). On the strength of *Easy Rider*, Columbia contracted the film's producers, Bob Rafelson and Bob Schneider, to make another six films, *carte blanche*, so long as they came in under \$1 million.

In retrospect, we can see plainly that the film industry left much of the nuance of *Easy Rider* unread, as it were, in favor of a broad attention to its formula for success: hippies, drug use, and rock-n-roll. Overlooking the nuance perhaps led to the poor receipts of *Getting Straight* (1970) and *The Strawberry Statement* (1970), movies that bore superficial counterculture signifiers but failed to access the philosophical insights that excited the youth audience (Lev 17). Recent studies, indeed, continue to mistake the historical specificity of the contribution *Easy Rider* made to genre. Lee Hill measures the film's "full impact" in terms of its launch of the youth-cult cycle, as well as the benefits accrued to director autonomy, in its name, to those directors known as the "movie brats." While these count as some of its true effects, they narrowly describe how *Easy Rider* was instrumentalized as a model for industrial reorganization. In a history of film form, however, Hill consigns *Easy Rider* to the "road movie" genre, indeed ordaining it as "the road movie" (58-72). In this capacity, *Easy Rider* has a diachronic function in the development of the road movie that stretches from *It Happened One Night* (1934) to *Thelma and Louise* (1991), but it will have no essentially synchronic function for the 1960s, discussions of *auteurism*, or the counterculture. While its historic role can cut both ways, diachronic and synchronic, I want to insist that *Easy Rider* becomes more generically vivid if placed in sequence with *The Graduate*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and, significantly, *Five Easy Pieces*. Further, the suasion of my account for its genre function turns on close attention to how the film locks into place the ineluctable outcome of defection from society, chiefly the necessarily political reverberations of this act.

In considering *Easy Rider*, we need to place it in context of *Midnight Cowboy's* reinterpretation of *The Graduate's* final scene. Benjamin's uncertainty about the future



becomes the decedent Ratso's certainty about there being no future in 1969. The death, that is, of one or both members of the couple henceforth constitutes the meaning of the genre. For instance, Ratso's death releases the meaning of *Midnight Cowboy* in that it strips Joe Buck of his lone reserve for imagining a future, throwing him back on society as no more than one of its average and atomized parts. Likewise, we should predicate a reading of *Easy Rider* on its multiple deaths. The film's protagonist couple dies for the generic reason that they flee *toward* nothing, a condition that can only be narratively characterized by death. Wyatt had once used a Florida retirement as a flimsy pretext for their journey, but when he discredits this *telos*, we find only the exhausted motivation of the something *from* which they flee.

The death that imbues the film with meaning, however, is George Hanson's (Jack Nicholson). Wyatt and Billy encounter George in a Texas jail cell, and he at first represents "square" society to the pugnacious Billy. But they soon learn he's an ACLU attorney and, holding sway in the community as the scion of an important family, can get them safely out of jail. His presence, as a figure of law generally and civil rights law particularly, explains in part why *Easy Rider* is a Western in reverse, that is, why Wyatt and Billy, bearing the names of great Western heroes, travel from the terminus of the Western frontier, California, back into the Deep South. It's not simply for the symbolic reason that the law is being rolled back as they travel into the South; it's rather for the recent historical reason that the counterculture grows out of the civil rights movement, as SDS and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) did, and the journey that many leaders of this movement made, such as Tom Hayden, Paul Potter, and Mario Savio, was from the west into southern states such as Mississippi and Alabama. George's

death, then, refers to the movement's passage from formal politics into a "politics of consciousness" (51).<sup>21</sup> In other words, in 1969 the once ritualistic encounter with forms of law began to look less interesting to the counterculture than the exploration of forms of consciousness: George Hanson trying marijuana with Billy and Wyatt and discoursing on the "Venutians" is narrative shorthand for this shift.

Irwin and Debi Unger argue in their book *Turning Point: 1968* that the titular year was the breakpoint for a liberal consensus that had long demanded reform, but, under a welter of crises, had traded its stake in politics for one in culture (a revolutionary culture in the case of the Black Panthers and Weather Underground).<sup>22</sup> Most obviously, 1968 was marked by the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the ongoing ghetto riots, and the Tet Offensive. Hence, the dead body of George Hanson becomes a screen proxy for a gruesome number of dead bodies that impacted the country's political imagination, the liberal imagination most traumatically. Making *Easy Rider* a Western in reverse, or an "Eastern" as Peter Fonda quips, underscores the sense that there are no political open spaces left, or that perhaps the political openings closed because they went unrecognized: Wyatt and Billy leave behind the self-sufficient farmer, the commune, they bury the ACLU lawyer, in favor of their spree of individualism. We likely hew closer to the point if we call *Easy Rider* a "Southern," not after its writer Terry Southern but in recognition of the political defeat handed to the loud individualism of the Left by the "silent majority" of the emerging Right, engineered through Kevin Phillips's "southern strategy."

Notwithstanding its generic *mélange* (road movie, neo-western, southern), *Easy Rider* makes one statement with clear genre implications: "We blew it." Wyatt's famous

confession of failure lights up the defection genre, in a way that permanently suffuses the idea of defecting from society *as a political act* with the “sweet poignancy of defeat,” a pathos that Elsaesser had attached categorically to unmotivated beings. This pathos more powerfully attends these films after *Easy Rider* because the protagonists of that film, following the death of George Hanson, come to self-consciousness regarding their lack of a social program. As an effect of the popularity of *Easy Rider*, Wyatt’s confession rings profoundly, as though before a public tribunal, as the confession of the counterculture *tout court*. In its wake, *Five Easy Pieces* is the film that registers these failures and gathers up the dead bodies into a statement of generic purpose. *Five Easy Pieces*, in fact, conjures the public appearance of this genre by cementing the image of its emergent star, Jack Nicholson, as a counterculture hero and as a new type of star for this new type of film; by self-consciously placing itself in this burgeoning film tradition; and by literalizing the trope of defection as the act of emigrating from one’s country because it had foreclosed social alternatives.

*Five Easy Pieces* produces continuity between itself and *Easy Rider*, at the most basic level, by using the same personnel. The Raybert production team of Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider, reformed now with Steve Blauner as BBS Productions, had a hand in direction and production, with Rafelson in the former capacity and Schneider in the latter. Laszlo Kovacs again photographed the film, and Karen Black and Toni Basil again appear as actors. Most conspicuously, Jack Nicholson goes from being the unacknowledged center of *Easy Rider* to the acknowledged center of *Five Easy Pieces*. While this personnel carryover might suggest a budding movement within the industry –

the production-side analogue to the youth-cycle films that became known as the “New Hollywood” – it hardly accounts for the extension of the genre.

Rather, *Five Easy Pieces* extends the genre because the social questions that form the internal disorder of the other films are sedimented in it. Questions that motivated *The Graduate*, such as whether, once deprived of subjectivity, there exists any political speech proper to objecthood, and, if agency can hence be newly imagined, can this objecthood reproduce itself; questions back of *Bonnie and Clyde*, such as whether the Old Left had not converted political questions into cultural ones, and, with that conversion realized, did matters of culture now function to mask the operations of class *ressentiment*; questions examined in *Easy Rider*, such as whether the New Left itself had not cashed in politics based in legal forms for the politics of consciousness and lifestyle. *Five Easy Pieces* has the virtue of structuring all these questions into a framework for the action, or perhaps inaction, of its protagonist, Bobby Dupea. Any determinations as to the motivations of Bobby Dupea, I suggest, must be rendered within a framework thatched together from the thematic parts of these prior films.

Before treating the film’s generic continuities, though, I would like to address strategic decisions made in the production of *Five Easy Pieces* that had the purpose of suppressing certain unwanted continuities, with both recent Hollywood and European cinema. We should first note that the deaths of other films in this genre, those of *Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider* that anchor the film’s meaning, are purged from *Five Easy Pieces*. Though no one dies in the film, that was not the intent specified in its original script by Carole Eastman (credited as Adrien Joyce). Instead of ending the story as the film does, by having Bobby hitchhike into a cold oblivion, suggested to be Canada,

Eastman ended it with Bobby and Rayette Dipesto (Karen Black) driving off a bridge, with Rayette surviving and Bobby dying. This, along with Eastman's wish to cast Jeanne Moreau as Catherine, would make strong reference to François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1962), in which Moreau plays a Catherine who drives off a bridge and kills both herself and sometime lover Jim. But Eastman and Rafelson changed it to a deathless ending; it became instead an ending of pure escape, with Bobby leaving Rayette at a filling station, his destination undisclosed. Additionally, the original script described Catherine as an older woman, which would make the affair between her and Bobby, in the mode of *The Graduate*, one of compulsive oedipalizing. Of course, Catherine ends up being Bobby's age in the shooting script. In another suppressed continuity, Jack Nicholson wanted Janis Joplin to be cast as Palm Apodaca, the caricatured figure of the counterculture played by Helena Kallianiotis: Casting Joplin would have established the kind of overt connection with the counterculture that *Easy Rider* had forged.

In short, *Five Easy Pieces* avows its relationship to its fellow films as eagerly as it disavows it. Its minimalism, disquietude, and obliquity stem from its narrative logic, a kind of inner recognition of its story, that everyone is born into a system of avowals – whether those of class, culture, or nation – and no disaffiliation from them, no matter how adamant, can efface the avowals made on one's behalf. Bobby Dupea, for instance, disavows a family identity propounded by his father, because the identity, that of classical musician, finds itself on hidden avowals of its position within a class structure. The film draws out the class issues ensconced in culture issues. Yet as Derek Nystrom observes, in an incisive essay, the film, as a product of New Hollywood's *auteurist* cinema, cannot help but express a conflicted relationship to its own provenance. Nystrom

claims that *Five Easy Pieces* is “shot through with antinomial impulses regarding cultural capital and class identity” (35). On one hand, the film exposes the protocols of high culture as a means of policing class borders; on the other, it makes its case “via the use of the culturally privileged filmmaking strategies that would come to signify the New Hollywood” (34). Its critique, then, concerns the aporia of making meaningful self-critique without relying on, and finding solace in, the language that distinguishes the self. How, after all, can the critic renounce the training that enables the enterprise of criticism?

In this respect, *Five Easy Pieces* stands as the Ur-text of the *auteurist* movement in Hollywood, in that the film shares the tissue of contradictions that mark *auteurism*. The film posits the aesthetic experience as a preserve of “inner feeling” only to deconstruct the very autonomy of the aesthetic by disclosing its intersections with class politics. And, by various accounts, *auteurism* carried itself forward on such a contradiction: it was a means of isolating the figure of the artist amid relations of production, with the effect that the aesthetics of this isolated artist conspicuously resemble the politics of privilege of the workplace boss. The film’s opening scene, a montage of Bobby and his friend Elton working on an oil rig, replete with the obvious class indicators of hard hats, denim jackets, and hulking machinery, frames a story that will, we expect, deal with blue-collar realities. The film’s reversal, it turns out, will be to deploy such class markers early in order to frame a story of the artist’s seclusion – on an island whose insularity will intensify absorption in cultural stuff, on the order of Bergman’s films – for the purpose of showing how deeply implicated in class relations is the secluded artist.

When Bobby leaves the oil fields and returns to his family's secluded island off the coast of Washington state, in order to visit his stroke-victim father, he does so as a strong critic of his family's masked class commitments. His sister Partita (Lois Smith) and brother Carl (Ralph Waite) still live on the island with their father, who has been rendered mute, but not deaf, by two strokes. Carl's fiancée Catherine (Susan Anspach) chooses to be on the island, training as a musician under Carl, and in turn chooses to avow the lifestyle into which Bobby was born. Catherine, in effect, wants to believe that the sanctuary of high art, to which the Dupea's island existence is living tribute, can protect the emotional interiority of the subject. Bobby, in contrast, doesn't believe that his family's insulation makes them any less "ants" than the blue-collar workers stuck in traffic for "the most beautiful part of the day." This comes to a head when, during a cocktail party of Carl and Catherine's friends, a woman sermonizing about civilization and rationality calls attention to the brutish language of Bobby's working-class girlfriend, Rayette, and, seemingly, how easily managed she is by the mass-cultural appeal of television. Robert fiercely rebukes her, asking what grants her the authority to "tell anybody anything about class or who the hell's got it or what she typifies." The partygoers all appear stunned by his outburst, and in part the script, it seems, would have us understand their discomfiture as turning on the double session of the word "class": the artists and savants likely do not consider themselves united *as a class* by shared economic interests, but rather as confederates in high-mindedness, and it would be this latter trait that allows them to arrogate for themselves the *class*, understood as elegant taste, that they would deny Rayette.

This swift conversion of political content into cultural mastery recalls Dwight Macdonald's reference to all those "big dull books." In fact, we can either regard as one of *Five Easy Pieces*'s subtle jokes the fact that one of these partygoers, one of the more avid auditors in this very conversation, strongly resembles Dwight Macdonald, or we can regard as one of the unwitting jokes of Leftist culture the fact that most Trotskyist intellectuals look like Dwight Macdonald: dark goatee and black horn-rimmed glasses. But Dwight Macdonald, whatever the status of the joke, remains an important figure in this conversation, insofar as he can account for a suppressed connection in this juxtaposition of mass culture (television, country music) and high culture (classical music, big dull books): the cinema. In "A Theory of Mass Culture," Macdonald trades on the sense of avant-garde art practices that Clement Greenberg elaborated in his *Partisan Review* essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." The avant-garde "made a desperate attempt to fence off some area where the serious artist could still function," Macdonald explains, "It created a new compartmentation of culture, on the basis of an intellectual rather than a social *élite*" (63) The distinction between this "intellectual" and "social *élite*" would seem spurious, at least from Bobby's perspective. But Macdonald attributes to it "almost everything that is living in the art of the last fifty or so years" (63).

Macdonald does not attribute much that "is living in [] art" to the cinema, on precisely the lines of the *auteurist* problematic: "The only great films to come out of Hollywood," he claims, "were made before industrial elephantiasis had reduced the director to one of a number of technicians all operating at about the same level of authority" (65). He calls Griffith and Stroheim "our two greatest directors" because they "were artists, not specialists; they did everything themselves, dominated everything



personally” (65). To be an artist, on Macdonald’s account, one must have autonomy, because the unity “essential in art” “will result only when a single brain and sensibility is in full command.” Macdonald’s essay, published in the journal *Diogenes* in 1953, echoes in Andrew Sarris’s “criterion of value” as the discernible singular “personality of the director” in his essay, “Notes on the *Auteur* Theory in 1962.”

The problem, as the film conceives it, concerns how effectively the avant-garde artist could install himself in an area “fence[d] off” from the “social *élite*.” The problem is not simply that this figure of the artist provides an illusory outside to class relations and the kinds of subjects they must produce; the greater problem may lie in the viability of the concept of subjectivity. The fact that Bobby trained in childhood as a musician only to renounce serious performance in favor of odd work as a pianist in a Las Vegas musical revue confounds Catherine, who herself aspires to the very status he renounced. She dismisses the musical revue, sneering, “You don’t call that music.” Bobby objects, “Oh yes, I do, it’s music.” His refusal to draw a bright line between high-art music and that of mass culture imperils the safe place that modernist art, as its *raison d’être*, had preserved for the subject, the coordinates at which the subject produced “art for art’s sake,” not for commodity’s sake.

Yet when Bobby, at Catherine’s request, does play a piece of serious music for her, she becomes the dupe of a commodity use from which she had exempted serious music. Bobby’s performance makes her sense feeling where there is none; she mistakes its utility as a means for its integrity as an end. Her admission that she was “very moved” by his playing elicits his mockery: he picked the easiest piece he could remember, one that he played as an eight-year-old and played “better then.” “Can’t you understand,”

Catherine urges, “it was the feeling I was moved by?” But Bobby’s insistence that he “didn’t have any,” that the piece was executed without “inner feeling,” leads her to assent that she “must have been supplying it.” The notion that she could have supplied the “feeling” means, most fundamentally, that a subject could fail to recognize the difference between a subject and an object, and could indeed ascribe subjectivity to an object.

The erosion of the clear boundary between subject and object comes, on the view of many commentators, from mass culture, or the “culture industry” as Adorno and Horkheimer called it. As Macdonald claims, folk art had formerly been the self-expression of the “common people,” it “grew from below”; mass culture, on the other hand, is imposed from above, “becoming an instrument of political domination” (60). The “scientific and artistic technicians,” as Macdonald then remarks, degrade “the public by treating it as an object, to be handled with the lack of ceremony and objectivity of medical students dissecting a corpse” (70). High culture, however, no longer gives quarter for the subject in the age of mass culture because, “in a country like ours,” as Greenberg says, mass culture lays traps “even in those areas” “that are the preserves of genuine culture” (103). With the phrase “in a country like ours,” Greenberg means to signal the condition of affluence, by which society can “hold in solution the contradictions between its classes” (106). When this occurs, “the axioms of the few are shared by the many; the latter believe superstitiously what the former believe soberly” (106). At this point, kitsch appears as the “faked article,” threatening because it can sometimes be “high enough” to deceive “the naïve seeker of true light” (103). In sum, the effect of mass culture is to appropriate the findings of high culture and academicize them, leaving kitsch behind. This results, as Macdonald and Greenberg maintain, in a merger of

high and mass culture; it also results in a sort of shell game where one merely guesses whether a product of culture emits actual self-expression or whether it effects degraded self-manipulation, whether, that is, we can identify with a subject or object.

*Five Easy Pieces*, in this respect, returns us to *The Graduate*. Both films contend with the efficacy of the subject, on the premise that the category of “expression” – seemingly the province of the subject – has been cast irredeemably into doubt. Given the avowals made on one’s behalf, whether Benjamin’s or Bobby’s, one is reduced to an object that expresses the values of a class. To arrest this process, one can only express resistance through disavowals and disaffiliation. In *Five Easy Pieces*, Bobby disaffiliates from his family and the privileges of their class not, as I remarked earlier it might *outwardly* seem, in favor of a working-class lifestyle. Indeed, Bobby chafes at the limitations of the working class as much as at those of the artist class. He disaffiliates in some sense *absolutely*, like Macdonald’s avant-garde artist who would “fence off some area where the serious artist could still function.”

To this end, the movie concludes with Bobby first leaving his family’s estate, and then leaving Rayette at a gas station with his car, his wallet and all it contains: money, identification, whatever documents might authorize him as an American citizen. The film doesn’t give his destination, not explicitly at least. But we do receive indication from the film as to the order on which we should understand his defection. When Bobby first visits Partita at a Bakersfield recording studio, she tells him about their father’s strokes and his poor chances for recovery. Bobby promises to visit the father, saying that he plans to “drive up” and adding, somewhat mysteriously, “maybe I’ll go into Canada after.” The choice of Canada, like the locale of Berkeley in *The Graduate*, is not innocent, but

invokes the historic specificity of defection *to* Canada as one *from* the Vietnam war. The film more obliquely indicates Bobby's destination when he climbs into the cab of a truck and the driver cautions him, "Where we're going, it's colder than hell." As Peter Lev interprets this, "Bobby may, in fact, be heading for death at the end of the film" (21). Death, as noted, serves as only another trope for the total negation of an existing social order without the program for a new one in mind. Canada and death, in the cultural imaginary, operate as equivalents, in that neither one offers *telos* to a narrative of social dislocation.

With Vietnam as a backdrop, *Five Easy Pieces* perhaps suggests that anxieties about objecthood amount to personal concerns with being deployed as an object in a war. *The Graduate*, as argued, posits recognition of objecthood as the first term of a new politics, in that students can be most politically arranged *as objects* in sit-ins; Benjamin can be most threatening as an object that won't take shape as a subject of his class; and a cross can function, against its prescribed use, as an object for locking people behind church doors. *Five Easy Pieces* promotes a similar philosophy, still only protopolitical, in that it seems to articulate a language of objecthood that at once superannuates self-expression and compensates one for a lost subjectivity. We can observe this not only in Bobby's efforts to live a life of the body, one in which the body *qua* object indulges in sheer sensuality, given over to "proletarian physicality," as Nystrom remarks of Bobby's fits of violence (32), but could as easily refer to Bobby's sexual promiscuity.

We can also see Bobby's father, immobilized and stricken mute by his strokes, as an object of his class, "sitting there like a stone," as Bobby remonstrates, ready to join the busts of the composers and the gravid photographs that dignify the Dupea house as one of

museum pieces telling the grand story of music history. The father, Nicholas, functions very much as Bobby's counterpart, the other member of the pair in defection films, in that he "has ways of communicating," as Partita says, but these are no longer the ways of language, that medium traditionally according the status of *thinking subject*. Both men are limited to speaking with their bodies, but Nicholas's is sedentary and statuesque, monumentalizing the social order of the old generation, while Bobby's is mobile and, once free of its documents, untrackable, subject to no class or state. They form a couple, though, in the generically strange way that Nicholas was reproductive, but his offspring, Bobby, is the member of the couple left to repudiate reproduction (biologically, in turning his back on a pregnant Rayette, and socially, in renouncing his family origins) such that, as a couple, they demonstrate the diachronic unmasking of the social and political mechanics of the subject, a circuit that runs from unwitting complicity to undeceived defection: from subject to subject no more.

### **On Periodicity: *Brewster McCloud* and Genre's Self-Knowledge**

It is one sort of enterprise to catalogue the features of a genre such as the defection film, which amounts to reading for commonality across a set of films, but another enterprise altogether to explain why the genre came to life in its historical moment. Given how short-lived was the defection film (1967-1974), interest in such an explanation sharpens because it must account for peculiarity, for that which does not span cultural history but appears in its interstices. The genre's brief lifespan, in short, suggests a historical shift. The year of 1967 marks, in some tellings, the moment in which "the sixties" takes shape in the cultural imagination, with the summer of love and the

Monterey Pop Festival offering images of the counterculture to the culture at large. On Fredric Jameson's telling, however, 1967 does not show itself as the waxing of this era but as one of two "breaks" (the second occurring in 1973) that signal the end of the era. As Carl Dengler remarks in his 1968 study, *Affluence and Anxiety*, "the period from 1961 until 1967 constituted the longest period of uninterrupted prosperity in the history of the nation" (169). Yet 1967, as Jameson explains, sees the flickering of prosperity and the onset of a recession that, aggravated by the oil crisis of 1973, will culminate in a "worldwide economic crisis" ("Periodizing the 60s" 205). In other words, the period in which the defection film emerges, 1967-1974, is the twilight of the "age of affluence."

Of course, those experiencing it had different readings of the twilight of the age of affluence. Michael Harrington, for example, took it to be the twilight of capitalism. As well, members of the Weather Underground understood the decolonization and liberation movements in the Third World to be the first salvos in a worldwide overthrow of capitalism. With hindsight, however, we might say these symptoms were not those of a dying capitalism, but one in the midst of retrenchment. If something were dying, as David Harvey observes, it was a regime of capital accumulation known as Fordism. And the death of this regime might only have been a growth pang in the expansion and interconnection of capitalism around the globe, which made for greater domestic consumption of exports from the revamped economies of Europe and Japan. These patterns of production and circulation called for a flexibility that could only counterpose itself to the highly rationalized structures of Fordism, best characterized as "rigid." We might consider in this context *Five Easy Piece's* pairing of Nicholas and Bobby Dupea as a kind of cross-generational articulation of capital regimes, the father being fixed in his

station (socially, geographically) and the son mobile (on the same counts). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri will call this difference between father and son the reconfiguration of the labor force, one precipitated by the cultural movements peopled by “youth who refused the deadening repetition of the factory-society” and thus “invented new forms of mobility and flexibility, new styles of living” (274). The large corporation, now articulated on a transnational scale, was the manifestation of capital that was able to adapt to and recontain the energies of these youth movements.

The corporation, in Mills’s analysis, is responsible for displacing the small entrepreneur, forcing a passage from economic individualism to socialized capital. The effect we then encounter is that of the death of the subject, a passing much heralded in poststructuralist theory; the subject dies, that is, because the death of an economic regime means the death of a certain “regime” for “the production of subjectivity” (Hardt and Negri 275). The defection film, we might say, narrates the act of the pressing against this moribund regime’s limits. The narrative imagination of this genre, though, concerns itself with the subject attempting to flee this collapsing regime, but the imagination falls short of picturing an outside to this regime to the very extent that it will not relinquish the form of subjectivity produced within this regime. Protest against the old regime, in these narratives, takes expression as the opting for intransigent objecthood as an alternative to the subjectivity on offer.

While this subset of Hollywood films gives us a glimpse of these refracted concerns, we might look at other discourses to see how the concerns play out in different registers. Some critics have called 1967 a watershed year because Michael Fried published “Art and Objecthood” in that year, and Fried’s essay represents, in the

discourse of art history, a fraught acceptance of the loss of a subjectivity that itself was deemed, under the terms of modernism, to be coterminous with art itself.<sup>23</sup> Modernism's Promethean struggle was again and again to wrest away from reified life a small space in which the subject could be free unto itself, buffered against the determinations of a viral exchange system that was, inexorably, rendering everything an object susceptible to its laws. Modernism, as Fried puts it, took for its "imperative that it defeat or suspend its own objecthood," whereas the art he calls "literalism" (elsewhere called "minimalism") aims "to discover and project objecthood as such" (120). The implications are great, for Fried, in that, while subjectivity may separate us off from other subjects, it at best predisposes us to grant others their subjectivity and, when seeking community, inquire into the depths of other subjectivity. Objecthood, because it bears a much bleaker hope for community, seems politically retrograde, in Fried's account, beside the goals of modernism. Being a beholder of "literalist" objects, as Fried suggests, is not "entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another *person*" (128 italics original). In short, objects and people being alike, they are both things that get in one's way.

The resistance implicit in objecthood is, of course, the very protopolitical language *The Graduate* seeks to evolve. When Mario Savio insisted that you must "put your body upon the gears" in order to stop the "operation of the machine," he was insisting that the body be used to obstruct the discharge of institutional power. I would like to consider the defection film as a genre that develops the political efficacy of such a philosophy – a philosophy, that is, intent on choosing objecthood over subjectivity – and I would like the occasion for such a consideration to be a reading of *Brewster McCLOUD*, a



film at once in the stream of and against the current of the defection film. If *Five Easy Pieces* counts as the Ur-text of the defection film, its most mature formulation, then *Brewster McCloud* must count as its deconstruction.

*Brewster McCloud* begins on a note of arch self-consciousness when the MGM lion, instead of roaring, confesses, “I forgot the opening line.” While this move evinces the obvious deconstructionist impulse to bare the conventions of filmmaking as arbitrary, though by now thoroughly naturalized, it also proffers a different sort of commentary: that on the conditioning of nature and, a corollary dear in this era, the prospect of *deconditioning*. That a lion made to shill for corporate interests might forget how to do so held out the hope, general in defection films, that a subject could forget its training and return to a natural state. At its heart, *Brewster McCloud* concerns this tension, whether one should claim one’s nature or transcend it. When, following the MGM card, Rene Auberjonois walks into a classroom as a lecturer and makes his address to the camera, *Brewster McCloud* tells us outright that it will not resolve this tension, only explore it. “Flight of birds, the flight of man, man’s similarity to birds, bird’s similarity to man,” the lecturer begins, “these are the subjects at hand, we will deal with them for the next hour or so and hope that we draw no conclusions, otherwise the subject shall cease to fascinate us and alas another dream will be lost.” In one respect, *Brewster McCloud* cannot hope to answer this question, but only unfold the meaning of its terms. It is, after all, a critique of the impulse of the defection film, a film genre that, not coincidentally, finds its full expression (*Five Easy Pieces*) in the same year *Brewster McCloud* offers its critique. The critique, in a Hegelian sense, could only be initiated when the terms of the discourse were fully evolved, fully known, and we might say that in 1970 – after Herbert Marcuse,

Norman O. Brown, and Susan Sontag; after the Summer of Love, Woodstock, and Altamont – the terms of the discourse had taken on a public life.

Insofar as the terms of this discourse were the narrative bed of *Brewster McCloud*, as well as the defection film generally, I will show how the local telling of the former film self-consciously reflect on the general terms of the latter genre. *Brewster McCloud* has for its two prime movers the defecting couple of Brewster (Bud Court) and Louise (Sally Kellerman), whose defection takes the curious form of their fellowship in winged escape. Louise, whose back shows scars where wings had been, watches over Brewster as he constructs a mechanical set of wings, with which he will one day fly away from it all. In line with other films of the genre, the defection has no destination, and thus the narrative no *telos*. When Brewster's admirer, Hope (Jennifer Salt), asks why he's building wings, he tells her he's "flying away." When she further inquires, "Where you flying to," Brewster corrects her preposition by stressing "away." We hear, then, echoes of Clyde Barrow's clarification that "we ain't heading to nowhere, we just running from." *Brewster McCloud*, however, assures the nonreproductivity of its protagonist couple – which in other defection films is a tacit fact of the narrative – by way of an explicit interdiction on sex by one of its members. Louise warns Brewster about Hope's passion, fearing that "she could involve" him in "sex." The suggestive verb "involve" implies that, against Louise's goal of defection, sex would be a lure for Brewster's complicity, his entanglement with the verboten society, one chained, in Louise's logic, to the status quo. "People like Hope accept what's been told to them," Louise says, "they don't even believe they can be free" but that "their sex is the closest they have to..." and there Louise trails off. Brewster finishes her sentence, "Flying." Louise then continues that

such people “only at first” want to fly but, “as they grow,” “they turn more and more toward earth – when they experience sex they simply settle for it, and procreate more of their own kind.” “Their own kind,” of course, should be understood as the caged, the unfree.

If *Brewster McCloud* is unusual within the genre for explicitly naming and explaining the interdiction on procreation, we might say that it cuts even more sharply against the generic grain when it gives figuration to the otherwise abstract system of the technocracy. The Houston Astrodome, Brewster’s domicile, serves as a nearly science-fiction figure for the kind of hyper-rationalistic proposal to improve upon nature that might be advanced by a technologically inclined elite of specialists. Of course, the structure, owing to its scale and blandness, seems indifferent to human wishes. The Astrodome renders visible the sense of enclosure that remains an absent cause in the other defection films, which more often than not invoke the bucolic landscapes of the American romance: landscapes that, in each case, conceal the machine in the garden, as it were, whose “fresh, green breast” belies the inescapability of a seemingly totalizing contemporary society. Making explicit the contemporary nature of his enclosure, Brewster lives in the fallout shelter in the dome, as a sort of hidden child of the nuclear age.

Brewster’s choices, then, are to believe in freedom and transcend this system, which in this parable means learning to fly, or to take solace in the pleasures of the body. The body, in the form of the “proletarian physicality” Bobby Dupea seeks, may seem like an abashed compensation for lost transcendence; but, in this historical moment, the body presents itself as a forgotten “battlefield,” as Theodore Roszak puts it, around which such

theorists as Marcuse and Brown began to establish new ideologies, new reality principles. Discussing Brown in an essay in *Against Interpretation*, Sontag explains that “the core of human neurosis is man’s incapacity to live in the body” (259). For Sontag, in fact, Brown’s claim that “we are nothing but body” fits as the cornerstone in a philosophy of objecthood that finds its fullest expression in her famous essay “Against Interpretation.” Her essay calls for a “flight from interpretation” because ascribing meaning beyond the surface fact, taking the thing as something other than “brute object,” usually entails placing it in service of a larger system (10, 11).<sup>24</sup> Hers is an iteration of a fashionable poststructuralist claim that subjectivity comes as the effect of a larger structure. Thus she demands that we return to the sensual, to surfaces, and to the body *qua* object, an alterity that “a fatigued rationality” might seek “in the impersonal energies of sexual ecstasy or drugs” (“The Anthropologist as Hero” 69); she demands that we install “an erotics of art” “in place of a hermeneutics” (14). Her call is of a piece with “the new sensibility,” a “new attitude toward pleasure” for which intensified “sensations” take priority over “what furniture of ideas we have stocked in our heads” (“One Culture and the New Sensibility” 302, 300).

What we might describe as her radical reduction to the body is precisely what Fried fears in the celebration of objecthood. He fears, in short, that advocacy of an “absence of anything beyond itself” is advocacy of a status quo. And this, as we have noted, informs Louise’s interdiction on sexuality for Brewster: the pleasure that Hope seeks is no more than a mark of her reconciliation to the status quo, suggesting that the “new sensibility” of which Hope is a stereotyped representative (she works in a health food store selling organic food) has been recuperated in advance by the larger system. In

this respect, *Brewster McCloud* critiques the turn toward objecthood found in the defection film. The turn toward objecthood might also help explain the waning of the genre in roughly 1974: objecthood, particularly in Marcuse's account, is enabled by affluent society, in that the industrial society that first "turned the human organism into an every more sensitive, differentiated, exchangeable instrument" has also "created a social wealth sufficiently great to transform this instrument into an end in itself" (93); thus the oil crisis of 1973 could raise the specter of scarcity over the culture of affluence and, as such, quickly leave the philosophy of objecthood an exhausted politics.

Yet the defection film had begun to enunciate a language for objecthood only as a means of practicing oppositional politics *within* the system, and that because it rejected the form of subjectivity offered *by* the system. It had another, perhaps more quixotic goal: to annul the current social order and create a new one. The goal of annulling the social order produced fantasies of two kinds. On one hand, it was imagined that a series of violent acts against existing institutions, performed in concert with anti-capitalist movements across the globe, might actually spell the end of these institutions. The Weather Underground, for example, premised its violence on this conviction. On the other hand, a certain fantasy about autonomous individuality reemerged, one in which the strong individual had the power to blot out or transcend institutional life; this fantasy, as suggested, was the engine for *auteurism*. *Brewster McCloud* plays these fantasies off the objecthood Louise has criticized for turning "more and more toward earth."

The story of *Brewster McCloud* is indeed saturated with the fantasy of annulling the social order through acts of violence. As noted, the main plot tracks Brewster's construction of wings and physical preparation for flight. But a subplot involves the serial

killings of assorted Houston personages, most of them of some distinction and in possession of some wealth. We learn, gradually, that the team of Louise and Brewster are responsible for these murders, with Louise being the likely killer. Seemingly, Louise performs these murders as part of her charge in guarding Brewster, who is being threatened in some form by each of the victims. However, as we probe these killings, the explanation of Louise as guardian gives way to an explanation of her as avenging angel, visiting retribution on those who carry out injustice. Moreover, we begin to see, in the pattern of murders, that the specific form of injustice being avenged is racial injustice.

For instance, the first victim – Margaret Hamilton partially reprising her role of the wicked witch as a disagreeable socialite named Daphne Heap – shares space with Brewster in the Astrodome. She sings the National Anthem before ballgames in the dome, and Brewster has to listen to her off-key, screeching vocal performances as he works. But her true offense is the condescending manner in which she treats her supporting musicians, an all-black marching band. Though she herself caterwauls off-key, she browbeats the band, “You’re in the wrong key ... I want everything just exactly the way it should be, that’s why you’re in these uniforms!” Then she adds, “That’s why I bought you these uniforms!” And of course this clarifies, for the viewer, the logic of an arrangement in which Daphne Heap, a woman of no discernible musical talent, can place the considerable talents of the band in service of her own musical distinction: this is the logic of capital. The band, though, bucks this logic when they ignore her and launch into a version of James Weldon Johnson’s Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing”; by displacing the supposed hymn of democracy and freedom, the univocal “Star-Spangled Banner,” with “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” they expose the racist hierarchy

inherent in American individualism and exult instead the more democratic dictum to “lift every voice” rather than let the orchestral voices sustain the soloist.

Her racism is later made emphatic when, feeding birds in her backyard, she calls the raven a “nigger bird,” and then is promptly killed for it. The same happens to Abraham Wright (Stacy Keach), a rapacious capitalist who squeezes payments from the seniors in his nursing homes and rants against a “Black Panther conspiracy,” and the same happens to Douglas Breen (Bert Remsen), a venal police officer who denigrates a variety of ethnic groups in only a few lines. Obviously, the murders are designed to purge the ranks of institutional life of their bigots and profiteers. In some sense, these murders are a necessary adjunct to Brewster’s project of liberation. Yet it seems that *Brewster McCloud* still withholds its endorsement of these means of realigning social relations, given that such social relations are embedded in the social order, and Brewster’s greater objective is to transcend the social order altogether. In a *Film Comment* review in 1971, Roberta Rubenstein identified the ambivalence of *Brewster McCloud’s* critique when she wrote that, while some racial injustice may have been redressed by the murders of Heap and Wright, both of whom “survived by usurping the freedom of others” (46), the problem remains that “to destroy those who build cages does not insure that we ourselves can fly” (48-49).

While we might say that *Brewster McCloud* critiques the history of SDS and its mutation into the Weather Underground – a critique that deems its redress of race relations as drawing on the right intentions but, as time passed, on the wrong means – we might nonetheless observe that it saves its fiercest critique for the reemergence of an ideology of autonomous individualism, which, it must be stressed, *auteurism*

emblemizes. License for such a claim is found in the final scenes, in which Brewster, attempting to flee the authorities, uses his wings to fly frantically around the Astrodome, never able to penetrate the enclosure of the dome. He falls to the ground and lies dead in a mangle of broken wings. Lying in this heap, he seems to represent the ruins of the dream of autonomous individuality. There is pathos, no doubt, in his failed efforts to escape the enclosure society had built for itself. The pathos, as Marcuse remarks, derives from the fact that “everyone, even at the very top, appears to be powerless before the movements and laws of the apparatus itself” (*Eros* 98). But the loss of agency, *Brewster McCloud* suggests, is not corrected by again producing the mirage of autonomous individuality, that “frozen manifestation of the general repression of mankind,” in Marcuse’s phrase, but by acknowledging the group relations that underpin the deeds and distinction of the individual. Thus Brewster’s need for self-distinction reproduces Daphne Heap’s on another level: she had wanted to extract the talent from her band and still claim credit for it. Brewster’s *McCloud* project of flying, which is in fact nothing more than the movie *Brewster McCloud* itself, is not reducible to the work of a lone person, an *auteur* figure, but is spread across a company of workers. Signifying this, Brewster’s crashed flight is celebrated by a circus (“The Greatest Show on Earth”) in which the cast of the film parade out and, in place of credits, is introduced by a ringmaster – conspicuously not Robert Altman, but a random player.

The circus imagery, of course, recalls the conclusion of Fellini’s *8 ½*, the great behind-the-scenes testimonial to the director’s work. But *Brewster McCloud* minimizes the roles of those most insistent on self-distinction: while the marching band moves as part of the parade, Margaret Hamilton is conspicuously hidden behind a flag. And



Brewster, the figure of the *auteur*, lies in a heap on the turf. The critique, though it comprehends so many issues of the 1960s, seems to always have been directed at Hollywood cinema, as disclosed in this final circus-cum-parade: Jennifer Salt appears dressed as Dorothy, Shelley Duvall as the Scarecrow, and Margaret Hamilton, while obscured, is the wicked witch. And the critique, once seen to be operating within the domain of Hollywood, is understood to take for its main target the defection film, the pet genre of *auteurs*.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Elsaesser's essay, "The Pathos of Failure: American Films in the 1970s," first appeared in 1975 in *Monogram* but was reprinted in *The Last Great American Picture Show*.

<sup>2</sup> While I don't wish to portray the criticism of New Hollywood as monolithic, I would say that most of the nuance in the criticism is articulated within a consensus that New Hollywood films represented a unique moment in Hollywood history in which ideologies were interrogated rather than enforced. The recent anthology *The Last Great American Picture Show* is representative of this consensus. In one of the several introductions to the volume, Alexander Horwath remarks that if one came of age "as a cinema-goer during the heyday of New Hollywood cinema," one likely experiences the "main brands of post-1970s American cinema" as "less political, as retrograde" (9). "Towards the end of the Seventies," Horwath explains, "the increasingly complex narrative negotiation of (both fictional and very real) contradictions and conflicts started to recede behind the phantasms of a neoconservative discourse of re-mythologisation, re-evangelisation, and re-militarisation" (9). The essays in this collection mainly hew to this line. In Peter Lev's study of the period, *American Films of the 70s*, he acknowledges that it was a heterogeneous period for Hollywood film and that "no binary opposition completely describes the range of films" but he nevertheless endorses Bordwell's schema of "New Hollywood" and "Hollywood Continues"; Lev considers New Hollywood synonymous with ideology critique, such that a phrase like "a New Hollywood, socially critical movie" is routine (xvii, xx). Jack C. Ellis, in *A History of Film*, focalizes the critical spirit of New Hollywood by selecting Arthur Penn, Sam Peckinpah, Francis Ford Coppola, Robert Altman, and Martin Scorsese as filmmakers through whom to discuss the period. He says this group "maintained a strong interest in critically examining certain aspects of American culture" (383). As well, one might refer to a mainstay in New Hollywood criticism, Robert Kolker's *A Cinema of Loneliness*; to the chapter "Landmark Movies of the 1960s and the Cinema of Sensation" in Paul Monaco's *The Sixties*, in which he characterized the appeal of these movies as rooted in an audience "shared sense of alienation from middle-class American society, the values of America's older generations, and the nation's economic, social, and political 'establishment'" (182); and to popular critical works such as Peter Biskind's *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* and Mark Harris's *Pictures at a Revolution*. Even a critic such as David James, who saw the real undertaking of ideology critique occurring outside the aegis of Hollywood in underground film, still sees the impulse drawn within Hollywood film in the "brief dalliance with the counterculture" which inaugurated the New Hollywood (*Imagine Nation* 300).

<sup>3</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith popularized the term in his 1958 *The Affluent Society*.

<sup>4</sup> While each film might count as a genre member for slightly different reasons, or rather might force us to understand the genre in slightly different ways, the films selected here each makes a straightforward case for genre membership. In fact, it might be more instructive to assess in detail a borderline case, a film bearing resemblance to other genre members that, nonetheless, repudiates an aspect that seems crucial in defining the genre. The film *The Getaway* (1972) holds out just such an opportunity, in that a fugitive couple mortgages their future in order to chase their freedom. Yet the narrative ends in a way that secures closure. Though branded lifelong criminals by dint of their crime spree, the

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couple creates a future for itself by escaping U.S. jurisdiction and fleeing into Mexico, which, in the film's imaginary, stands as an order free of positive law. Once they cross into Mexico, their driver – an aging man, representing the other side of the generation gap – conspicuously counsels them on their reproductive status. “You know, if I was you kids what I'd do,” he offers, “I'd quit this running around the country, you know, get a little bit of money together, and buy a place and settle down and raise a family.” The respect and gratitude the couple expresses to their driver leaves the audience to believe they might repay him by acting out his advice, in other words, by producing a society that's consonant with his understanding of social life. One might argue, of course, that *The Getaway* belongs to the genre because, while it denies the generic requirement of nonreproductivity, it wages this denial by way of canceling out the U.S. juridical order and replacing it with a suggested return to an order of natural law. Indeed, I refer to Stanley Cavell's conception of genre because I consider genre to be a problematic that seems to emerge “full-blown” and “then works out its internal consequences (*Pursuits of Happiness* 28); *The Getaway* might simply work out those “internal consequences” in a nostalgic or mythological manner.

<sup>5</sup> Mulvey notes that a “recent tendency in narrative film has been to dispense with this problem [that of the woman] altogether; hence the development of what Molly Haskell has called the ‘buddy movie’, in which the active homosexual eroticism of the central male figures can carry the story without distraction” (203). I agree with Mulvey's assertion that the “buddy movie” developed in response to a problem, but not with the allied assertion that this development helps “carry the story.”

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this work I will use the terms “subjectivity” and “individualism” in a fashion that might suggest their equivalency, but that is only the effect of granting subjectivity priority in an ideology of individualism. I recognize, of course, that one can affirm subjectivity without endorsing individualism. For an illustrative debate on this topic, one might refer to Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut's *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, a book that was very much received as an effort to roll back the philosophical work of poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Althusser. As Ferry and Renaut charge, “at least one thing is clear: French philosophy of the '68 period resolutely chose the antihumanist position” (xxiii). Renaut's *The Era of Individualism* in some ways continues the attack on “antihumanism” as well as defends and clarifies the earlier position staked out by himself and Ferry. In deploying these charged terms, I do not mean to take a strong philosophical position in the debate, but only to acknowledge how interpenetrating were the philosophical and political projects. The postsubjective philosophies were marked, as Ferry and Renaut demonstrate, by the politics of May '68. Questions of subjectivity aside, I agree with Renaut's claim that “To speak of individualism is to speak in a *political* key” (*Era of Individualism* 29). The May '68 student protest, sharing a dynamic with the American student movements, seemed indeed to be haunted by the political implications of individualism, which at least one of its spokespersons, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, took to be bound up with questions of technocratic management (Roszak 293). As Ferry and Renaut explain, “one of the leitmotifs of May” is a “defense of the person against the ‘system’” (xxi). They quote Cohn-Bendit's “insistence that the ‘gears of the system’ be uncovered so as to accuse the

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system of transforming individuals into ‘cogs in the wheels that guarantee society’s functioning’” (xxi).

<sup>7</sup> See David Riesman’s essay “Individualism Reconsidered” and C. Wright Mills’s *White Collar*.

<sup>8</sup> Sean McCann and Michael Szalay say this in “Introduction: Paul Potter and the Cultural Turn,” their introduction to a special issue of *The Yale Journal of Criticism*.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that, in this one locutionary stroke, Paul Potter reintroduced the Marxist terminology of the Old Left, which had dropped out of leftist politics considerably after dustups between *New Masses* and *Partisan Review* regarding the Moscow Trials; after the evident bureaucratic industrialism of the Soviet Union rendered the best-known instance of Marxism indistinguishable from the technocratic organization of American politics; and after postwar consumer plenty had gelded the political force of the working class. Potter’s reference to the political problem as “the system” can only seem to connote that capitalism itself was, yet again, the enemy. One explanation for why the political language had again become faintly Marxist is offered by John Kenneth Galbraith in *The New Industrial State*, where he suggests that the example of Cuba had rescued the figure of the Marxist from the status of industrial bureaucrat (xv). Potter insisted, however, that the vagueness of “the system” differentiated it from the Marxist language of the Old Left (McCann 210).

<sup>10</sup> While I have suggested in my introduction that Barry Keith Grant’s *Auteurs and Authorship* is perhaps the most valued comprehensive collection, I would single out David A. Gerstner and Janet Staiger’s *Authorship and Film* and Virginia Wright Wexman’s *Film and Authorship* as essays collected in an explicit attempt to reassess and renovate this mode of criticism. The compelling reason for both Gerstner and Staiger to reassess authorship is for the ways in which hitherto marginalized groups newly inflect the category. “For those cultural producers at the margins,” Gerstner explains, “the issue of authorship as a productive force rests not so much on reifying the privileged status or Being of author” as it functions to challenge “the authorities that have decidedly announced, *once and for all*, the parameters and limitations of the body’s involvement in the process of cultural production” (17). Or, as Staiger more bluntly puts it, “the attempted death of the author comes at a time particularly nonadvantageous for some individuals – feminists, gays and lesbian activists, and antiracists. Depriving us of our voices just as we are speaking more loudly seems a plot” (29).

<sup>11</sup> Todd Gitlin cites this quotation from the Godkin lectures that Clark Kerr delivered at Harvard University in 1963, published as *The Uses of the University*, in *The Sixties* (20-21).

<sup>12</sup> In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse claims that a novel form of “introjection” occurs in advanced industrial societies. “But the term ‘introjection’ perhaps no longer describes the way in which the individual by himself reproduces and perpetuates the external controls exercised by his society. . . . Today this private space has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality. Mass production and mass distribution claim the *entire* individual, and industrial psychology has long since ceased to be confined to the factory. The manifold processes of introjection seem to be ossified in almost mechanical reactions. The result is, not adjustment but *mimesis*: an immediate identification of the individual with *his* society and, through it, with the society as a whole” (10).

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<sup>13</sup> In his insider memoir of the Manhattan Project, *Atomic Quest*, Arthur Holly Compton discusses asking and contracting DuPont for the plutonium project. See pages 132-134 and 162-167.

<sup>14</sup> Mario Savio refers to students as “raw material” in both his address on Sproul Hall during the December 1964 protests as well as in his transcribed speech at Sproul Hall, published in *Humanity* as “An End to History.” “An End to History” is reprinted in the collection *The Times Were A Changin’: The Sixties Reader*, edited by Irwin and Debi Unger. I will refer to the transcribed speech by the page numbers of this volume.

<sup>15</sup> In a *Los Angeles Times* preview of the film during its production, Robert Joseph wrote that while the contemporary trend has been for films to “make fun of the inanities of Prohibition and bathtub gin” and other events of the “Throbbing Thirties,” *Bonnie and Clyde* had captured the decade in the syntax of the 1960s: “The gun was their needle, splattering bullets their LSD, and excitement of the chase and escape their ‘kicks’,” Joseph wrote, drawing parallels where he could between 1930s criminal life and 1960s hip life. “To them,” Joseph continues, “citizens were the 1934 equivalent of squares” (Nov. 1966 13).

<sup>16</sup> “Arthur Penn, the aggressive director,” Bosley Crowther wrote, “has evidently gone out of his way to splash the comedy holdups with smears of vivid blood,” a “blending of farce with brutal killings ... as pointless as it is lacking in taste”

<sup>17</sup> Quoting William Phillips in a forum published in an Autumn 1967 *The American Scholar*, “Confrontation: The Old Left and the New,” which pitted members of the Old Left, Dwight Macdonald and Richard Rovere, against members of the New, Tom Hayden and Ivanhoe Donaldson.

<sup>18</sup> Donaldson inveighs against the idea that Harrington’s book makes poverty a legitimate cause. “My point,” says Donaldson, “is that people can legitimize themselves. You don’t take an established source to give you legitimacy. White people do not have the right to give legitimacy to black people” (583). In a swift locution, Donaldson shifts the critique from the “war on poverty” to matters of representation in civil rights, which shows but one way in which we might begin to transfer the critique set forth by *Bonnie and Clyde* into the context of the 1960s.

<sup>19</sup> C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” *New Left Review*, September-October 1960, 18-23.

<sup>20</sup> Marcuse’s 1937 essay, “On the Affirmative Character of Culture,” no doubt responded to the advent of German fascism, but it was of a piece with his evolving concerns with the function of culture in Western democracies. The essay appears in the collection *Negations*.

<sup>21</sup> In the chapter “An Invasion of Centaurs,” Roszak discusses a shift in the counterculture from an early interest in C. Wright Mills to a later one in “the apocalyptic body mysticism of Norman Brown, the Zen-based psychotherapy of Alan Watts, and finally Timothy Leary’s impenetrably occult narcissism, wherein the world and its woes shrink at last to the size of a mote in one’s private psychedelic void. As we move along the continuum, we find sociology giving way steadily to psychology, political collectivities to the person, conscious and articulate behavior falling away before the forces of the non-intellective deep” (64).

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<sup>22</sup> Irwin and Debi Unger claim that the “personal became the political” that year. “Groups of vocal Americans would organize to demand that ‘square’ and ‘straight’ society let them love and live as they wished” (371).

<sup>23</sup> In *The Shape of the Signifier*, Walter Benn Michaels uses this day as the beginning of a period, referring to Craig Owens’s characterization of Fried’s essay as the knell for “the death of modernism.”

<sup>24</sup> Many of Sontag’s notions of subjectivity as a kind of thralldom seem to issue from Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*, a book she champions along with Brown’s *Life Against Death* for its insistence that “Freud’s psychological categories” be seen “as political categories” (“Psychoanalysis and Norman O. Brown’s *Life Against Death*” 258). In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse says that under the “function of *reason*” a person “becomes a conscious, thinking *subject*, geared to a rationality which is imposed upon him from outside”; a person’s relationship to reality, then, is “organized” by “his society” (14). In turn, Marcuse describes a new politics in which such a *subject*, organized within “a logic of domination,” is dissolved into a kind of objecthood by way of “the will to gratification” (124). However, the line of thought is by no means a strictly “sixties” one for Marcuse, given that he enunciated it as early as 1937 in “The Affirmative Character of Culture”: “When the body has completely become an object, a beautiful thing, it can foreshadow a new happiness. In suffering the most extreme reification man triumphs over reification” (116).

### CHAPTER III

#### TECHNOLOGICAL TOTALITIES: MACHINES AS FOES IN THE DISASTER CYCLE

The switching point in *Five Easy Pieces*, when Bobby Dupea turns away from blue-collar life and revisits his high-culture origins, occurs only thirty minutes into the film. As Bobby and Elton eat lunch on an oilrig, Elton confides that Bobby's partner, Rayette, is pregnant; the news follows a scene in Elton's cramped trailer home, where Bobby plainly disdains the disruption of Elton's son and the vacant mothering of Elton's wife, Stoney, who sits in thrall to the television. Delivering the news on the oilrig, Elton counsels, "Somewhere along the line, you even get to likin' the whole idea." Bobby now crassly invokes the class difference that had hitherto been suppressed: "It's ridiculous, I'm sitting here listening to some cracker asshole who lives in a trailer park compare his life to mine." Following his outburst, Bobby stomps off and tells the foreman he's quitting his job. The sequence of events suggests that the grudging responsibility that Elton sees as "the whole idea" is servitude for Bobby, with the lures of a certain form of class life becoming snares. When Bobby quits, Feds come to arrest Elton, as if to confirm that Bobby's perspective on his as a carceral life is the film's perspective. A fistfight ensues, and though Bobby takes up for Elton, the scene ends with Elton escorted in handcuffs by the lawmen. In the final shot of this sequence, Bobby walks away from the oil fields in silhouette, depicted in a long shot that renders him roughly the same size as the drill rigs behind him.

While the shot records Bobby's battle-weary gait as a triumphant one, it has the effect of translating the conflict between Bobby and Elton, or even Elton and the law, into a conflict with machines. Bobby emerges from a field of machines a free man; Elton, less fortunate, has been captured among machines. We might dwell on this irruption of technological life in *Five Easy Pieces* simply because defection films are, in the main, conspicuously free of technological menace;<sup>1</sup> or, to make the point through chiasmus, they minimize technology so their characters can be conspicuously free. *Five Easy Pieces* otherwise follows the generic trend of representing the American landscape as sprawling and open, a bucolic space for rambling, with the state of technology only incidental in the quests of its characters.

But the very fact that the switching point from one class milieu to another is studded by technological operations suggests that the state of technology, repressed but now bubbling to surface, sets the conditions, in the genre's imagination, for one's enfranchisement to and power to defect from society. In *Five Easy Pieces*, not only does the fight among the oilrigs rely on a technological mise-en-scene, nor just the preceding one of Stoney narcotized by the television. As well, and as instructively, the subsequent scene of Bobby visiting his sister Partita at a Bakersfield recording studio insists on the conjunction of a technological setting and her self-expression as a classical pianist. Although Partita angers the recording engineers by incorrigibly humming along with her piano, alluding to Glenn Gould's polemical stance on the technological reproduction of a music once prescribed for concert performance, the fact is that Partita is enfranchised to this new technological order by way of class privilege. This manifestly technological passage suggests that *Five Easy Pieces* has acknowledged this mediation of self by



technologies as an entailment of a technocratic regime. Defecting from this regime, though, requires that we minimize the appearance of technological dependency. Thus, when hitchhiker Palm Apodaca rants against the “crap” created by “mass production” that has left little “room for man,” saying she herself means to escape to a much “cleaner” Alaska, she explains for the viewer Bobby’s drive from the California oil fields to his idyllic island home: feeling the squeeze of technocracy, he means to return to an appearance of pastoralism, where brother Carl rides his bicycle to “the post office in the village.” His return is temporary because bought, as he knows, with class privilege.

This seems, in one respect, to be an iteration of the “undefiled, green republic” that Leo Marx describes as an ideological deflection from the “intricately organized, urban, industrial, nuclear-armed society” (6, 4) the U.S. appeared to be in the 1960s. And while the defection film surely counts as a version of the American romance, its relationship to this tradition poorly explains its vexed theme of subjectivity vis-à-vis the *scale of technology*. In *Five Easy Pieces*, for instance, we can make more synchronic than diachronic sense of the perspective that renders Bobby roughly the same size as the drill rigs in the moment he departs the oil field.<sup>2</sup> In other words, this moment plays as a repudiation of technocracy when contrasted with a divergent peer, such as *Airport* (1970), in a way it cannot when compared with a kindred predecessor, such as *Walden* (1854). In fact, I choose *Airport* tactically, not only because its broad popularity contrasts with *Five Easy Pieces*’s niche popularity, but because we might consider the cycle of disaster films that *Airport* inaugurates to be the opposite number of the defection film, ideologically and otherwise. The disaster film imagines technology on a monstrous scale, as the virtually inescapable arena for social action; the defection film, as the scene from *Five*

*Easy Pieces* evinces, imagines technology on a personal scale, as a “match,” as Leo Marx puts it, “for the power of intellect” (146).<sup>3</sup>

In calling these genres opposite numbers, I mean to insist that they be understood jointly, as counterparts in a historical “structure of feeling.” The disaster and defection cycles are coeval (*Five Easy Pieces* as the fullest articulation of the latter appearing in the same year as *Airport*, the first articulation of the former) because they respond to the same problem, that of technology as the reification of technocracy and, its corollary, the usurpation of individual agency within technocracy. They propose different figurations for what is, per the ideological terms of individualism, a battle. Defection films displace the technological into the personal, such that people often look like mere instruments of some transpersonal cause, inert objects that once were subjects. Thus, Bobby can ridicule his brother Carl, whose sprained neck causes him to walk in stiff, mechanical fashion, as an ideological tool. Carl is, on Bobby’s account, a technology (in the shape of a person) of class perpetuation, a drone who teaches his fiancée how to succeed as a cultured drone. As such, Carl is like a drill rig to Bobby, or like a vehicle (“Crashes into a jeep and totals his neck,” Bobby remarks). Disaster films, in contrast, condense transpersonal agency into the hulking figures of technology, making foes of airplanes, skyscrapers, and cruise ships. Given that neither genre devises representational means for transpersonal agency, it’s hard to say that the genres differ politically, as has been generally said;<sup>4</sup> the genres chiefly differ symbolically.

However, if disaster films speak to the issue of technology by metastasizing it rather than repressing it, as do defection films, we have a chance to see, through one kind of distortion that clarifies another, what Hollywood considers the stakes of technology.

*Auteurism*, as a kind of formal statement issued by Hollywood extratextually but instantiated textually in the films of the defection genre, expresses suspicion of technology. This suspicion looks like a paradox, given that the *auteur* has chosen to practice what is likely the most technologized art form, unless we grant that status to architecture. But, then, the technologized arts have tended to experience identity crises as arts. Robert Fishman, remarking on how such a crisis played out for one of the twentieth century's more ambitious architects and planners, Le Corbusier, notes the tension between the roles of technocrat and artist: "Le Corbusier's concept of the planner combines two distinct images. One is the planner as scientist, surgeon, 'technician' – the man of reason, a disinterested lover of humanity who studies the problems of the city, formulates clear solutions, and carries them out with unswerving will. The second is the planner as artist, the isolated man of vision whose insights are the most profound record of his nation's spiritual life" (210). We can characterize the *auteur* as experiencing this split as a conflict, strenuously disavowing the status of technician in order to more fully claim the status of artist.<sup>5</sup> This conflict, I posit, evokes not simply the timeless relationship between technology and the arts; it rather signals a historic watershed in which the double movement of technical progress – as at once giganticized in the space station minuets of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and miniaturized in the motherboard circuitry of *Juggernaut* (1974) – makes the human body the wrong vehicle, so to speak, for subjectivity.

Thus, when *Five Easy Pieces* imagines technology on a human scale, it deploys a different strategy for narrating a world in which a certain traditional subjectivity, both personal and autonomous, retains significance. In contrast, when a disaster film such as

*The Towering Inferno* (1974) imagines technology on a monstrous scale, it does so in order to narrate the catastrophic collapse of that technology as the condition for the reemergence of that traditional subjectivity, which had been rendered obsolete within the still-hale technocracy. I will discuss the films of the disaster cycle in terms of their development of an imaginary that is adjacent, and sometimes antagonistic, to the *auteurist* imaginary. I say “antagonistic” because, as they attack the monuments of modernity such as skyscrapers and ocean liners, the disaster films occasionally make the complicity of Hollywood with this technological regime an implicit object of their dreams of annihilation.

I will begin, however, by looking at how the proto-disaster films of the 1960s (*Dr. Strangelove* [1964], *Fail-Safe* [1964], and *Billion Dollar Brain* [1967]) imagine not the scene of disaster, but the scene of decision-making that leads to disaster; here a set of technocratic imperatives banishes humans along with “human error” from all decisions, meaning that while persons may identify with each other across ideological systems, such identification no longer matters because the work discharged by ideological systems has been entrusted to non-human subjectivities. *2001: A Space Odyssey*, then, bridges the proto- and disaster film proper, in that it charts an evolution of human subjectivity in which, by its inception in the self-objectifying operations of technology, it necessarily displaces itself into the object, which accounts for a situation in which, “because we read our subjectivity off the things outside,” as Jameson has remarked, “the cinema is the truly decentered subject, perhaps indeed the only one” (*The Seeds of Time* 9, 10).<sup>6</sup> With these terms in place, I will turn to *Airport* as indeed a technophobic film, but one whose hidden phobia seems to be of the cinematic apparatus and not, as we’d expect, of airplanes.

Finally, after elaborating compensations of the individual in *The Poseidon Adventure* (1971) and *The Towering Inferno*, I will conclude my argument with a claim for *Jaws* (1975) as the last word of the disaster cycle because, shrinking the scale of technology to a more personal man-versus-nature battle, it merges the deflection and disaster imaginaries, which amounts to a cinema of *auteurist* special effects.

### ***Dr. Strangelove, Rational Planning, and the Technocrat's Brain***

*Strangelove* is, by most lights, the story of the technocracy produced by the confluence of the age of affluence and consensus liberalism.<sup>7</sup> The story involves a stalwart liberal belief in reason, that “[l]eaders were to embody reason,” as Todd Gitlin says (58), a belief, knitting together the Kennedy cabinet, that “sheer intelligence and rationality could answer and solve anything” (Halberstam 44). Of course, *Strangelove* crystallizes a fear that the installation of instrumental reason known as technocracy would end in total unconcern for human life, echoed in Buck Turgidson’s (George C. Scott) reassurance that “ten to twenty million” deaths would be “modest and acceptable civilian casualties.” This unconcern, expressed statistically on the order of Adorno and Horkheimer’s canon of numbers, marks the difference between *Strangelove* and *Fail-Safe*, the latter of which tells the very same story as the former but somehow fails to be the story of technocracy. *Fail-Safe* chronicles a situation in which automated decision-making enables an accidental, but irrevocable, nuclear war. Yet *Fail-Safe* confers a tragic tone on the miscalculated apocalypse by having the U.S. president (Henry Fonda) put his wife at the site of the falling warhead, thus personalizing the procedural war, whereas *Strangelove* conveys the personal feelings of all involved in the black-comic tones of

President Muffley's (Peter Sellers) petty squabble with Premiere Kisseff over who is more sorry about the imminent nuclear holocaust. The point of *Strangelove* is that the event has been lifted from the personal into the statistical, where Stalin's quote that "The death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions a statistic" presides; personal feelings don't factor into decisions of such magnitude.

As such, the character of Dr. Strangelove himself (Peter Sellers, again) is the avatar of technocracy, the character without feeling but with the capacity for shrewdest planning. As the Director of Weapons Research and Development, he plays as a caricature of the highly specialized military authority C. Wright Mills described in alarming terms in 1959's *The Power Elite*.<sup>8</sup> Faced with the event of doomsday, Strangelove shows a certain relish in sketching a scenario in which a "nucleus of human specimens" could be preserved, with even his language about humanity saturated with the terms of nuclear physics. Planning is his pleasure,<sup>9</sup> as shown, in one of the film's finer jokes, when he consults his decoder ring for the radioactive half-life of Cobalt Thorium G – a childish trinket for a monstrous calculation. His plan for preserving human specimens involves a eugenicist fantasy of selecting out desired traits: "youth, health, sexual fertility, intelligence, and a cross-section of necessary skills." To President Muffley's concern that he "would hate to have to decide who stays up and who goes down," Strangelove placidly instructs that such scruples "would not be necessary" because "it could easily be accomplished with a computer." President Muffley is only a compassionate figurehead, a mere accessory to the working technocracy.

If Strangelove in this moment displaces subjectivity into the computer, and refines his pleasure in its graceful programs, his foil character is Buck Turgidson. Turgidson too

easily slips out of planning an experience into living it. When describing the B-52s chances for reaching its target below radar, he begins to act out the adroit flight of a B-52, laughing animatedly, recreating its “vroom,” and thrilling at its “jet exhaust frying chickens in the barnyard.” Turgidson is *too much body* to Strangelove’s *too much brain*. The plan to rehabilitate humanity in a mineshaft, first skewing the population in a ratio of ten women with “highly stimulating” “sexual characteristics” to each man, obviously titillates Turgidson, who seems eager enough to abandon the “so-called monogamous sexual relationship.” But Strangelove, on the contrary, has been deliberately characterized as one for whom pleasures of body and brain are disconnected. His arm, for instance, disobeys him and salutes “Mein Führer,” then tries to strangle him; his wheelchair signifies his strict dependence on his mind. The abstraction of Strangelove from his body makes the blandishments of the mineshaft – the male-female ratio so attractive to Turgidson – of less importance to him and, in fact, suggests that his subjective self-indulgence can only be imaginatively embodied: “Mein Führer,” he proclaims, “I can walk,” as though his mind, at its most invigorated, can activate the object world, which had long claimed his immobile body.

Indeed, if we were to do away with the film’s multiple viewpoint characters, such as President Muffley and Buck Turgidson, and narrate the story from Strangelove’s perspective only, we would approach the narrative of a nonhuman subject, that of the sheer object of the brain that will, pushed to its logical end, shade into computer life. This might recall Kennedy’s cabinet of intellectuals, MacGeorge Bundy foremost; it might also recall Roland Barthes description of Einstein’s “reified” brain (*Mythologies* 68). As Barthes explicates, “the supermen of science-fiction always have something reified about

them,” and in Einstein’s case, that of the begrudging hero of the technocracy, it’s the brain as a purely technological object, “the most up-to-date machine” (68); this is why, Barthes continues, “two hospitals are still fighting” for its possession, so they might “dismantle” it and discover its inner workings (68). Of course, the notion of narrating the brain *tout court* (that is, telling the story from Strangelove’s perspective alone) presents a set of challenges, not the least of which is the loss of affect it entails.

The kind of narrative that emerges from this problematic is represented by *Billion Dollar Brain*, an espionage story involving Harry Palmer (Michael Caine), the spy from Len Deighton’s novels. Spy stories generate a very specific topos – that of a crisis for ideology – which it turns out is shared by the story of the “up-to-date machine” of the brain, i.e. the computer. The problem with spies, succinctly, is that they must possess unassailable affection for one nation-state in order to dissimulate as the compatriot of another. Allegiance to one ideology rather than another, that is, hinges on affective or libidinal investment. In *Billion Dollar Brain*, the question of the agency of the spy merges with the question of the agency of technology. The specialized skill-set of Harry Palmer counts as chief in its arsenal a capacity for affective neutrality, an unsusceptibility to enemy seductions; yet his skill-set is deployed by Midwinter (Ed Begley Sr.) on behalf of the fervid affect of anti-communism. *Billion Dollar Brain*, though, juxtaposes the construction of a spy with the construction of a computer, the billion-dollar brain of the title: the reliability of each remains an open question, in that without the additive of affect in their operations, they appear to be free of intrinsic loyalties. They appear, we might say, to be beyond ideology.



## **2001, the Cinematic Brain, and the Ideology of the Subject**

*2001* is neither a proto-disaster film nor a disaster film proper, and that, it turns out, produces its narrative impasse. In *2001*, the technological order functions too well, as Robert Kolker maintains, such that “perfect order and perfect function decrease the need for human inquisitiveness and control” and humans, no longer needed for control, are “integrated into corporate technology, part of the circuitry” (*A Cinema of Loneliness* 135). Of course, if humans are seamlessly “integrated” into the technology and are themselves “components” (Kolker 135) then the drama of the proto-disaster film – the “human inquisitiveness and control,” the zeal for planning, the contest between the rational and physical faculties – drops out. And barring a full collapse of the technological order, the drama of the disaster film proper is yet to occur: with the technological whole intact, none of the component parts can reemerge as subjects. While courting a kind of plotlessness, *2001* produces drama and overcomes its narrative impasse by displacing the subjectivity of the debased humans into the computer, HAL 9000.

It has been often remarked that HAL is the sympathetic center of *2001*,<sup>10</sup> but the way this happens, through the transference of a human narrative-teleology onto the object, importantly figures into the implications of this “agon,” as Kolker refers to it, between human and computer. It’s important, that is, not that HAL may or may not have feelings, which, after all, Dr. Dave Bowman (Keir Dullea) explains is part of his human design, but rather that he’s afraid of his death (“I’m afraid, Dave,” HAL says when being disconnected), that narrative considerations have been written into his program. More pointedly, it’s important that his feelings issue from his self-narration. Describing his

phased disconnection in terms of senescence, HAL says, “My mind’s going,” followed by the doleful, “I can feel it,” as if to insist that cognizance of one’s lifespan is the precondition for feeling. Dave had already expressed concern that, with no record of a 9000 computer ever having been disconnected, they can’t predict what HAL will “think about” his disconnection. HAL’s tenacious will to live, in contrast with the more proper “disconnection” of the hibernating astronauts, constitutes the center of *2001*’s schema for the commutation of human subjectivity to its object other.

The narration of a technology as a means of establishing it as a *cogito* seems, at first, to depend on the end of that technology, taken as *a kind of death*, but the force of *2001*’s philosophical intervention derives from its investigation into the origin of a technology and where we can locate its birth. In postwar America, the multiplication of nuclear and space-age technologies exacerbated the question of origins because, as Carroll Pursell explains, such technologies “seemed particularly magical in the sense that though [they] appeared to work, most people could not explain how, and certainly most people would never own their own reactor or atomic bomb” (65). One might have felt dominated in the age of machines or the age of factories, but one felt mystified in what Newton Minow alternated in calling “the jet age, the atomic age, the space age” (Rhodes 229).<sup>11</sup> *2001* trades on that “magical” moment, positing the monolith as the mystification of the birth of technology. The monolith, however, has turned out to be the film’s most inscrutable move, setting in motion a hermeneutics with no conclusion, a feat that, for Hollywood narrative film, counts as the “rarest of all things,” Kolker says, “a film that poses a multitude of problems with no easy answers” (*Stanley Kubrick’s 2001* 8).

I don't wish to make an argument for what the monolith means, only for how it dramatizes the obfuscation of meaning. In Arthur Clarke's production diary, he discusses the "famous monolith," tracking its development from a transparent idea (first a tetrahedron, then a transparent cube) to an opaque one (a black, rectangular slab). Were the monolith a tetrahedron, it would be the monumental form of a shape from nature that, as Clarke notes, "inspired all sorts of philosophical and scientific speculations" such as "Kepler's cosmography, the carbon atom, Buckminster Fuller's geodesic structures" (Schwam 62). We would, in this case, recognize the direction in which technology flows, with natural structures serving as prototypes for human designs; there would be no need to describe it as an "alien artifact" (62), as Clarke does, but rather as "imaginary markers" (Kolker *A Cinema of Loneliness* 136) of the progress of the human brain, which is after all profoundly historical. But the fact that they took the form, finally, of black slabs renders this a story of the obfuscation of the *historical* character of those operations, suggesting instead a *metaphysical* explanation, with the corollary adoption of that much different operation in which we make "alien" that which has fundamentally human origins.

With this operation in mind, I want to draw on Marcia Landy's reading of *2001*. Her essay, "The Cinematographic Brain in *2001: A Space Odyssey*," considers the film an "allegory of the evolution of human intelligence" that culminates in a "conception of the 'cinematographic' brain," a shift effected by the "conjunction" of space-age technology and the "cinematic apparatus" (87). The evolution of the brain is punctuated by episodes of pure body, as seen in hominid behavior prior to the monolith visitation, and those of pure brain, as seen in Dr. Floyd's (William Sylvester) portrait, as Landy

argues, of “the brain of the scientist as consecrated to state power” (93). With Dr. Floyd, “the human brain has become specialized, capable of purposeful thinking in terms of means and ends,” but “detached” from “bodily, sensory-motor connections to the world” (93). Landy urges us to associate the shifting attributes of subjectivity from body to brain with that shift from “the actual to the virtual” that characterizes the “cinematographic brain” (93); herein the “real” that we find secured in immediacy collapses into a “virtual” made remote by mediation, as displayed in “the information on the video monitors, the telephone-video image, and the surveillance technology” in the film (94). It’s the “cinematographic brain,” Landy proposes, with its “potential to generate incorporeal images” (89), that best models the commutation of subjectivity from human body to its object other that we find modeled onscreen in HAL.

Landy’s reading, in short, suggests that among the panoply of technological regimes (the nuclear age, the space age, the digital age) we range the *media age* as having at least equal power to organize subjectivities. We should recall, here, that when Newton Minow alternated in calling the period “the jet age, the atomic age, the space age,” he did so preliminary to calling it “the television age” (229). Leaguings media technology with those other technologies requires that we radicalize how we think of scale: we should no longer think of scale, in other words, in *visual* terms, as something we can measure with the eye. In a visual economy, of course, the spectacle of the mushroom clouds ending *Dr. Strangelove* and the deep-space movements in waltz-time from *2001* occur on a greater scale, in the shadow of which the human subject plainly gets lost (of which Frank Poole’s silent death in *2001* is representative). Against this scale, the onset of television viewing hardly seems like a catastrophe in kind to the *Weltanschauung* of the age, but when we

consider that the experience of scale must be anchored in *immediacy*, the pervasive *mediation* secured through the proliferation of television screens figures scale in a whole new phenomenological dimension, not that of being dwarfed in the presence of enormity but that of feeling estranged from the phenomena of size and scope because *presence* is a lost condition.

The screens on which everything flashes, Jean Baudrillard will later argue, have the effect of undoing the “oppositions subject/object” (126); the mediated subject will, in his account, be tossed into a new configuration with the object world in which the subject’s old interface, the human body itself, will be replaced by a screen interface, granting the very structure of mediation the status of subject and making the humans it places in relation its effects. This scale, which we can call the “media scale” after Paul Virilio,<sup>12</sup> makes *2001*’s seven-minute delay during the interview between astronauts and earth as great, because it reorganizes perception per se, as the scale on which the atom could “destroy the world” – as Minow puts it, denoting that “world” substitutes well enough for “human population,” seeing as the perceptual standpoint of the latter is what produces the former in this discourse (229). The disaster, on this scale, arises from an ideology of the subject in which subjectivity is bound to the immediacy of experience and is, therefore, diminished if not liquidated by mediated experience. Minow’s point, then, in describing the universal screens of cinema and television as an epochal fact is to stress that their effects be construed on the order of jet, atomic, and space technology, and thus to campaign for regulation every bit as vigilant.

### ***Airport*, The Museum of Accidents, and Apparatus Theory**

The universal screens of cinema and television, Virilio reminds us, have allowed us to witness “catastrophes of all kinds” and preemptively imagine the disasters of the future (*Virilio Reader* 259). On Virilio’s account, each technology bears within it its own novel accident. And audiovisual technology, he claims, has been applied more to the exposure of that accident than to the technology itself, such that the media have “always been more interested in derailed trains than the ones that run on time” (259). To the extent that cinema and television function in “exposing or exhibiting the accident as the major enigma of modern Progress” (256), one could count audiovisual technology as a corrective to, a means of examining, hidden fates of the other technologies. Audiovisual technology, that is, could abet the construction of Virilio’s “museum of accidents,” a museum in which we could imagine and, in imagining, ward off the baleful consequences of progress. In this sense, the cinema, say, has always “broadly anticipated disaster movies” (259). But I prefer to ask, given a reading of *2001* as attuned to general mediation as a kind of disaster for the subject, if the cinema is capable of imagining its own disaster?

*Airport* is known as the first film of the disaster cycle and is, as I read it, a story of the disaster of the cinema, with cinema standing in for televisual media *tout court*, and not at all a disaster involving airplanes. Its Boeing jet, in fact, lands safely, despite the work of a saboteur, Dom Guererro (Van Heflin), and the film ends with a hearty endorsement of the reliable Boeing Corporation (one pilot quips to another, “Remind me to send a thank-you note to Mr. Boeing”). In this respect, *Airport* stands apart from the subsequent films in the cycle, such as *The Poseidon Adventure* or *The Towering Inferno*,

films that imagine one technology or another on a grand scale only to imagine its collapse, or a film such as *Earthquake* (1974), which imagines a complex of technologies in a highly-developed phase (hydroelectric dams, skyscrapers) only to imagine their demolition at nature's hands. *Airport*, outwardly, tells the story of disaster averted and, for this reason, has been seen as an affirmation of technocracy.

But *Airport* affirms technocracy only in the sense that it hopes to restore faith in the narrative of progress that subtends technology and the hiving of society into technical specialization. It shores up this faith, however, not in the figure of the technocrat, but in the figure of the common man, Joe Patroni (George Kennedy). Patroni counts as the film's integral man, a singularity rather than a function ("They don't call them emergencies any more," he tells his wife, "They call them 'Patronis'."). Patroni is not an engineer, nor is he in Research and Development; he is a mechanic whose grit solves more problems than do the calculations of the "stiffs up in the front office." His foil, Mel Bakersfeld (Burt Lancaster), performs his front-office duties well to the extent that he trusts Patroni, and the men on the ground, and not those above in the offices – a set of relations, we might remark, that forms a near homology to *Strangelove's* General Ripper's (Sterling Hayden) preference for a hierarchy in which war is entrusted to the generals and not the politicians. Bakersfeld succeeds as a manager, that is, because he returns power to the common man, a power that had been unevenly accruing to what Eisenhower called the "scientific-technological elite." It's important to note, of course, that the symbolic economy on whose behalf Patroni appears as an integral man is a traditional, patriarchal one. When not working, which Patroni seems to be doing overtime, he stays home and loves his wife. His integrity, then, derives from the fact that

his authority over his household remains intact and, issuing from there, his authority spreads over the various units of the whole, keeping the rationalized parts coherent rather than compartmentalized. “Maintenance, it’s like a circus,” he instructs Bakersfeld, “One of us gets in trouble, he yells, ‘Hey, Rube’, they all come running.”

We are meant to juxtapose Patroni’s triumph with Captain Vernon Demerest’s (Dean Martin) redemption. Patroni’s capacity for controlling disorder at the airport, we might infer, bears a direct relationship to his capacity for ordering his own family life, while Captain Demerest’s louche habits leave him a challenged patriarch, both domestically (“Someday he’ll come home,” his wife hopes, “for some other reason than to just change his clothes”) and professionally (“When I’m setting down over 200,000 pounds of 707,” Demerest says, “I want something under my wheels that’s plenty long and mighty dry,” referring to the runway that, in emergency weather conditions, can only be cleared by Patroni). When Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan treat the disaster cycle, they claim that the “threat to social authority and male paternalist power” is generally brought on by “the movements of the sixties,” but by “feminism particularly” (*Camera Politica* 51). We might say, indeed, that feminism is the hidden accomplice in Demerest’s running together of his domestic and professional life, in that his promiscuity now finds its answer in liberated female coworkers. But Gwen Meighen (Jacqueline Bisset), the stewardess whose dalliance with Demerest leads to her pregnancy, is not overtly a feminist in the sense that we now think of second-wave feminism;<sup>13</sup> she is, though, in being sexually liberated (“I know you’ve got a wife, I know you’re married,” she tells Demerest, “I knew it in the beginning”), supported by a technological infrastructure associated with the feminist movement, namely the birth-control pill instigated by



Margaret Sanger and Katherine McCormick and the abortion procedure soon to be legalized by *Roe v. Wade*.

In one sense, *Airport* fears feminism as a sub-movement within modernity, and Patroni functions as its guardian of patriarchy, but in a more thoroughgoing sense the film fears the movement of modernity *tout court*. This is why, as I suggest, we are meant to juxtapose Patroni and Captain Demerest. Not only does reproductive technology keep Demerest from starting a family other than the one his marriage legally sanctions, but the film's more central technology, the airplane, keeps him from converting his legal marriage into a proper family. We can say that the conversion of marriage to family is stalled because the airplane has vaporized the space of home, considered as a *stable space*, making it the case that Demerest won't likely "come home for some other reason than to just change his clothes" so long as his occupation has him, upon leaving a snowed-under Chicago, "checking the Rome weather" where "it's not too cold and sunny." The airplane, in the film's logic, appears as the most obvious icon of modernity's collapse of time and space, and because of its force for deracination, it makes sense that its pilot, Demerest, has an attenuated relationship with his wife. He can make no home for his wife, not in Patroni's traditional sense, because his home has no fixed spatial coordinates. *Airport* sets up a dichotomy between Demerest and Patroni, rendering the former hyper-modern and the latter pre-modern, in order to celebrate the latter, the can-do potency of Patroni (who will clear the plane from the runway if he has to pull it with his teeth, he growls to his wife, who will wait for him at home).

*Airport*, however, does not celebrate the pre-modern at the expense of the modern; it does not, that is, profess *anti*-modernity. Rather, it calls on the pre-modern to

redeem the modern. Demerest, in the final scenes, stands by his pregnant lover, Gwen Meighen, the suggestion being that he'll redeem himself by caring for this new family. And it is courtesy of Patroni that Demerest is able to bring his damaged aircraft, and thus his injured lover, to the ground; the aircraft, earning its credit, was built strong enough to protect the lover throughout the descent. As noted, the film tends to affirm the modern, technocratic spirit, but it selectively does so. When Bakersfeld, the airport manager, confers with one of the airport's commissioners, he urges "a modern, expanded airport, big and efficient enough to take anything the designers throw at us." Bakersfeld, who had the managerial sense to defer to Patroni, proposes the refinement of modernity as a solution to problems wrought by modernity. It's important, here, to discern the schema by which the film selectively endorses technological modernity: it shows, at each turn, a preference for rationalized spaces, those in which functions are plainly articulated, such as the "big and efficient" airport and the hierarchized Patroni household, but it shows contempt for attenuated spaces, the loss of territory in which brute force sustains its dominance and the loss of immediacy that endows a kind of brute self-presentation with its force.

If the airplane is vindicated, particularly in its quiescent state as a *landed object*, the television media are not. As the hobbled plane lands, Mrs. Demerest rushes to the gate. She tells Bakersfeld, "I was home watching television and ...." Bakersfeld replies, "I know, a news agency picked up the mayday call and flashed it all over," his voice filled with scorn for how the media slips out of a hierarchy he works hard to fortify. This last remark depends, for its full impact, on the symmetrical renunciation Bakersfeld earlier made of the media, when discussing the protests with the airport commissioner.

“They’ll break it up soon and go home,” he says, “after the TV cameras get a few shots.” When the commissioner shows his alarm, “TV?,” Bakersfeld notes that the lawyers hired by the group “had arranged for news coverage.” What Bakersfeld deplors in the media is precisely its ability to distort the scale of the event, to make, in the case of the protesters, one aspect appear in wrong proportion to the whole picture. His problem with the media, in short, lies in its first fact, that mediation in all events implies a person with the power to control the medium, and in that *prima facie* power reposes the concealed power to control the perception of the event mediated.

This tension at the heart of *Airport* – that modernity’s rearranged perceptual field is the “accident” of its progress – makes itself known chiefly in formal terms. *Airport* rejects classical Hollywood editing grammar, avoiding the logic of shot-reverse shot to such a degree that it raises its avoidance to the level of philosophical principle. We need to consider the means by which it avoids such conventionalized editing before we can assess the philosophical stakes. One means by which *Airport* avoids shot-reverse shot is by placing characters in conversation in two-shot, an arrangement made easy by the setting of an airplane, in which it’s most logical to frontally shoot cockpit and passenger conversations. The film also accommodates its need to obviate cuts by shooting the ground scenes in Bakersfeld’s capacious office<sup>14</sup> or in his car. It goes without saying, though, that two-shots only work when characters speak to each other in the same space. In the airplane, the cockpit will need communication technologies to tether it *across space* to ground control,<sup>15</sup> and within the airport, the spaces outside Bakersfeld’s office require intercoms and mobile phones to be put in communication. In these communication scenarios, the film invariably eschews cuts between spaces, opting

instead for the unconventional use of inset images or split screens.<sup>16</sup> I will discuss a series of representative examples, with the declared purpose of interpreting its strategic avoidance of editing language as the film's inward efforts at disaster management.

We find the most typical use of the inset images in scenes of communication between the cockpit and ground control, with the person on the ground, because his voice has joined the cockpit crew, being pictured in an iris bubble between Demerest and his co-pilot. This method for depicting the two locations seems to purge two possibilities: first, that we would hear ground control as a disembodied voice in the cockpit, and second, that we would alternate, via editing, between two disparate spaces. Elsewhere *Airport* utilizes split-screens, usually to show the two halves of a telephone conversation. When Bakersfeld calls home, we first see him speak to his daughter in split-screen, then as his other daughter picks up another receiver, we see the screen divide into multiple frames, and then as his wife picks up yet another receiver, the screen breaks into still another frame. This multiple-frame imagery ensures that we view the entire family onscreen at once. In a last instance, we see the capacious airport fractured into its various coordinates when the intercom announces a coded alert; the screen, depicting the security guards at their different stations, suddenly fractures into a map of the airport, its space otherwise too vast to be recorded in one shot.

David Bordwell remarks that split-screen imagery grants us “a godlike omniscience as we watch two or more actions at exactly the same moment” (*Film Art* 215). It may turn out that the subject position of “godlike conscience,” a subject position known in another lexicon as the “transcendental subject,” is an inheritance from classical Hollywood narrative forms that strangely vexes *Airport*. In certain formal decisions, the

film seems committed to expelling the self-anchoring of cogitation, to turning the inward subject outward. When Demerest, for instance, in the backseat of cab, begins to recall his recent tryst with Gwen Meighen, he does so not by becoming glassy-eyed and looking inward, so to speak, but by turning his gaze to the split-screen to his left, where his memory seems to have material contours, as though it has been externalized and is seated next to him in the cab. In a sense, because he looks *at the* split-screen rather than fall into a daze and stare ahead, we can, as viewers, be jarred into realizing that he is actually looking at a technique of the cinema.

We need to think, here, of Demerest's lapsing into thought as a form of self-mediation in order to understand *Airport's* peculiar anxiety. Were the film to cut from Demerest to his memory, his present-tense body would be offscreen and only implicit in his reverie, in a manner similar to Jean Mitry's assertion that "in the cinema I am simultaneously in this action and *outside* it," which grants the subject the "ubiquity" of being "everywhere and nowhere" (Baudry 297). To the extent that Demerest's memory is a medium of his experience – and that *remembered experience* serves as a fit description of the medium of cinema, given the proviso that the cinema is not *our own* remembered experience – we can understand why Demerest's memory must be present to him in material form, why he must externalize what had been internal. For his redemption, he must shift from self-contemplation to self-activation, from having his pilot's imagined coordinates to having Patroni's brute, physical coordinates. In looking at the split-screen, Demerest does not look at the cinematic apparatus, as film theory would soon advise, but his look nonetheless bears an ideology in which the subject only subsists in immediacy, in which the subject, taken as pure thought or cogito, must posit itself as object on the

premise that being trumps non-being.<sup>17</sup> In other words, this is *Airport's* Hamlet moment: caught between thought and action, between being and non-being, as Adorno describes it, “the subject, thrown back upon itself, divided from its Other by an abyss, is supposedly incapable of action” (*Critical Models* 260).

We might say it's less important that *Airport* imagines the cinema's culpability in mediating the subject's experience, leading to a scene of pure thought and no action, and more important that it imputes an ideological function to the camera. In this regard, *Airport* turns out to be an unlikely bedfellow of the contemporaneous French discourse known as “apparatus theory.” Apparatus theory, given its canonical formulation in Jean-Louis Baudry's 1970 essay “The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus,” holds that cinema completes its ideological work, which is the reproduction of the dominant ideology, not at the level of film content, but at the level of cinematic form; the apparatus, Baudry believes, is an “ideological machine” (293). It does this, in Baudry's analysis, by constituting the camera as the transcendental subject of idealism, “the eye” “no longer fettered by a body,” casting the actual bodies in the theater in a somewhat inferior relationship to the apparatus: “Everything happens as if, the subject himself being unable – and for a reason – to account for his own situation, it was necessary to substitute secondary organs, grafted on to replace his own defective ones” (295). The viewers of cinema, then, gain the effect of subjectivity, by way of the transcendental subjectivity of the camera, but this mediated subjectivity can only be had “if the instrumentation” is “hidden or repressed” (295).

Whether or not we can say *Airport* wants to unmask the operations of the camera, we can at least say that it endeavors to avoid the kind of editing practices that preserve

continuity and keep the camera “hidden.” The stakes for *Airport*, that is, may prove quite different from those of apparatus theory: for the latter, the “revealing of the mechanism” would induce a desired “identity collapse” (296), and would seemingly generate critique on a higher order; the former, in contrast, abhors the reflective ego to the point of anti-intellectualism (“The good thing about the 707,” Patroni boasts, “it can do everything but read”) and instead endorses what Adorno calls “contemporary actionism” (262). The point, for *Airport*, is to win back the immediacy of experience, and thus it takes the cinema for its target in the same way apparatus theory does. Broadly, the disaster film requires, for its drama, that technological domination be undone, but none of the films subsequent to *Airport* will take the cinema as the locus for such domination.<sup>18</sup> *Airport* plays a unique role in the cycle, then, by floating a background suggestion that audiovisual technology could be every bit as nefarious as the massive technologies (skyscrapers, cruise ships) whose disasters were easier, in some sense, to imagine.

### ***The Poseidon Adventure*, the Total System, and Old-Fashioned Transcendence**

While the singularity of *Airport* is its choice to seize on Hollywood cinema, its codes and techniques, as a metonym for the greater technological armature, the commonality *Airport* has with other disaster films – chiefly, for present purposes, *The Towering Inferno* and *The Poseidon Adventure* – is the use of this metonymic operation which prefers to extract a feature from the armature of techno-corporate modernity and treat it as a proxy for the whole system, yet in the form of a reified model, we might say, which exhibits hateful traces of the system not as structural but as sequestered from the structure and, as such, ready for purging. This allows for Adorno’s “contemporary

actionism” in that one can act forcefully on a part without having a theory of the whole. Praxis and theory had special historical reasons for parting ways in the 1960s, as Jameson has remarked, because theory would first have to retool itself to comprehend hypertrophied institutional life, in order to allow for a praxis based on “laws,” “which are not those of the individual human action or intention” (“Periodizing the 60s”). Thus, in the name of efficacious praxis, in the 1960s, theory and what Adorno calls “abstract subjectivity” (260) are often eschewed in favor of the reemergence of individual action and experience. The trope of strong leadership, then – even when it comes as the strong leadership of a theoretician, as was the case with Herbert Marcuse, who objected to his status as leader with the quip that the New Left didn’t need “daddies”<sup>19</sup> – unites the films of the disaster cycle (*Airport*, *The Poseidon Adventure*, *The Towering Inferno*) more so than the objects against which a struggle is led.

Of course, the object of the struggle is important, not only for the value of its technological signifiers, but for the fact that it stands in for a theory of the whole. How one should act on behalf of social change in a complex society – whether in the mode of the Civil Rights movement or the Black Panther movement, whether by the methods of Michael Harrington or Ivanhoe Donaldson – is substituted with the question of how one should act to escape a collapsing total system. And the answer, predictably, is easier to come by. As such, we can say that the luxury liner of *The Poseidon Adventure* and the skyscraper of *The Towering Inferno* both count as figurations of a social totality which otherwise eludes representation. Crucial to their being a totality, they appear as closed systems, whose totalizing functions include the people within them. In this light, we can call on Adorno, who, as indicated in Chapter 2, helps to explain the interrelation of the



defection and disaster films in the sense that, where the former represses the system, the latter responds to Paul Potter's summons to name "the system." The disaster film, accordingly, names the system a machine, and in calling it a machine endows it with the look of being, like HAL 9000, now under its own control rather than of its supposed human subjects. On this model, we can refer to Adorno and Horkheimer's excursus on the alienating effects of technology, which is able, in order for reason to lapse back into unreason, to pass "mention" "of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is the greatest" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 121).

Before considering how *The Poseidon Adventure* and *The Towering Inferno* convert machines into the visible foes, we should recall the means by which Adorno and Horkheimer see the total system closing, that of their notorious machine, the culture industry. They indeed describe the culture industry in machinic terms; it "impresses" its "stamp" on all, and by its "mass production" is bent on "classifying, organizing, and labeling consumers" such that "none may escape" (120, 121, 123). However, as Jameson notes in his study on Adorno, they do not exactly discuss "culture" in its recognizable guise as a space "still offered for the exercise of a non-alienated subjectivity that was neither business nor science"; but rather in their analysis it is "the tremendous expansion of the cultural sphere and the acculturation of daily life since the 1960s" that serves as a Trojan horse for *industry* or "business as such" (*Late Marxism* 107, 108). In other words, the culture industry, as "the commercialization of life" (Jameson 144), describes the means for the "penetration of 'enlightenment'" – understood here as a conversion into ruthless equivalencies – "into the mind itself" and the "reduction and subsumption" of

“individual subjectivity” into its machinery for exchange (107). It is this closed circuit that Adorno and Horkheimer allude to when they claim that “Kant foretold what Hollywood consciously put into practice,” in that culture works out “the conceptual apparatus” that then “determines the senses,” or, in its Hollywood iteration, that “in the very process of production, images are pre-censored according to the norm of the understanding which will later govern their apprehension” (84).

This sense of enclosure, of sealed-off totality and determined subjectivity, grants us a perspective on the figures of technology in *The Poseidon Adventure* and *The Towering Inferno* that resonates with Clark Kerr’s delineation of the university’s merger with the military-industrial complex: in all cases, what looks like the subject’s development or fulfillment turns out to be the manufacture of an object on behalf of some total system. In both *The Poseidon Adventure* and *The Towering Inferno*, the people celebrate – at a New Year’s Eve party in the former, a gala opening in the latter – while behind-the-scenes interests precipitate the collapse of the totality enclosing them. It’s important, in culture-industry terms, that the people are entertained while the true interests remain behind the scenes. In *The Towering Inferno*, the builder James Duncan (William Holden), accused of having an “edifice complex,” is most invested in the gala party as a demonstration of the opulence of his tower, but his son-in-law, Roger Simmons (Richard Chamberlain), was subcontracted for the electrical work and acts as a node in the corporate venality (“Payoffs and kickbacks”) sustaining the construction of such buildings. Yet the users of the building don’t see its operational side, only its decorative side. The corporate rapaciousness, that is, is known only to its beneficiaries, and is otherwise submerged in the design, for which architect Doug Roberts (Paul Newman) is

feted. Likewise, the U.S.S. Poseidon is capsized by a tidal wave, after the representative of corporate interests, Mr. Linarcos (Fred Sadoff), orders the ship's captain (Leslie Nielsen) "full ahead" because his consortium loses "thousands of dollars" for every day they fall behind schedule. The point in the appearance of these characters is not the identification of a scapegoat, but rather the suggestion of a trans-individual agency for which they can only be stand-ins, and thus, owing to their insufficiency as causes, they make the transference of villainy to the figure of technology a logical narrative step. In short, because the corporate person cannot *individually* bear the weight of trans-individual agency, the figure of technology must.

*The Poseidon Adventure* and *The Towering Inferno*, in this move and others, look enough like each other that a discussion of one can cover the other. Catastrophe strikes during a party; people are then trapped in an architectural enclosure; rescue of the survivors depends on the pairing of a civil servant and what we might call a purveyor of culture, in the former a priest and the latter an architect. Pausing to assess the difference in these pairings, however, will instruct us as to differences that line the boundaries of the defection and disaster genres, insofar as the latter, unlike the former, takes the ruins of the social order as an occasion to propound a reconstituted authority. *The Towering Inferno* shades toward *Airport*, in that authority comes in the pairing of architect Doug Roberts and Fire Chief O'Hallorhan (Steve McQueen), with the film privileging the "common man" of the pair, O'Hallorhan, over the technocrat closer to capital, Roberts.

O'Hallorhan, it should be said, is less a brute than *Airport's* Patroni, and more a practical man. The pairing in *The Poseidon Adventure*, in contrast, privileges the man of spiritual vision, Revered Scott, over its practical man, Lieutenant Rogo. That practical means

should defer to spiritual means during a state of emergency is only, it turns out, a technique for grounding a familiar form of authority.

The familiar form of authority – sacerdotal authority – means, however, to present itself in the idiom of the social movements and in the style of youth culture. Reverend Scott, conspicuously free of his collar, describes himself as the “best kind” of minister, “angry, rebellious, critical – a renegade.” And his work, he implies, is the uplift and agitation of an inner city parish (which might recall New Left forays into impoverished urban neighborhoods, such as Tom Hayden’s work in Newark). While Reverend Scott claims to relish being “stripped of most of his so-called clerical powers” because it grants him a renegade status, liberated from “all the rules and all the trappings” of the church, he still preaches sermons underwritten by the church’s authority; he gains credibility as a leader through his institutional affiliation. Indeed, his sermon returns what look like the secular appeals of reason to their earlier form of transcendental appeals: “Pray to that part of God within yourself,” the Reverend urges those on board. In effect, Reverend Scott’s outward rebellion requires the structure of authority rooted in the church. Like *auteurism*, we might say, it’s a form of renegadism that needs an institution as its silent partner. The film’s rhetorical program, again like *auteurism*, needs the dissatisfaction of the youth culture in order to reorganize existing institutions, as it suggests when its hippie rock band replaces the Strauss waltz. These are the energies Reverend Scott courts on the church’s behalf. The old-fashioned transcendence that is so plainly the film’s allegorical surface – with the inverted ship forcing its debauched passengers to strive upwards to salvation, following Reverend Scott’s lead – has for its effect, and likely its design, the

recontainment of those impulses behind defection: the individual gains the appearance of transcending the institution, with the institution's permission.

### ***Jaws*, the End of Disaster, and the Institution of Defection**

If *Jaws* is the last word for the disaster cycle, as I have claimed, this is so not solely because the disaster movie's model for box-office success wanes at the very moment that *Jaws* marks the waxing of a high-concept model that will issue in the blockbuster.<sup>20</sup> It is so because Steven Spielberg, in suffusing disaster narrative material with *auteurist* prerogative, stitched together the appeals of the defection and disaster imaginaries; in effect, Spielberg is responsible for an industrial shift from the courtship of the youth market to the induction of that market into what his contemporary Martin Scorsese calls "the spectacular entertainment" (Ebert 42). Indeed, in making first a defection film, *The Sugarland Express*, and then a disaster film, *Jaws*, and notably making inner modifications of each genre, Spielberg proposes a means by which subjective autonomy (*auteurist* prerogative in his own account) can be rescued from the outlaw status granted it in the philosophical impasse of the defection film and reinstalled within the framework of the law, the very rhetorical work that disaster films undertook.

It is crucial that, before understanding *Jaws*, we understand the way in which *The Sugarland Express* rewrites the basic principles of the defection film. What makes *Bonnie and Clyde* one term in the proposal for a genre lodging a somewhat novel impulse in Hollywood film – distinct from earlier films about fugitive couples, such as *You Only Live Once* (1937) and *They Live by Night* (1948) – is that the pair leaves no offspring. They defect from dehumanizing institutions but neither find nor found any new

institutions to mollify their social discontentment; their failure to reproduce functions as their failure to envision better social forms that could be reproducible as institutions. In *The Sugarland Express*, the couple defects in order to reclaim their baby. Clovis (William Atherton) and Lou Jean (Goldie Hawn) are reproductive before anything else, and their *telos* is simply to be again in control of what they reproduce. And this will only occur when they defer to the wisdom and sobriety of their law enforcement chaperones, which appear in the film as the retinue of police cars, the eminently patient police captain (Ben Johnson), and the patrolman they kidnap and befriend (Michael Sacks). The film goes to lengths to depict the couple as benighted and the police as enlightened.

Indeed, existing institutional life plays the hero in *The Sugarland Express*. Spielberg attests to as much when he claims that “the heroes of the picture are really the police,” but recognizes that “nobody else sees it that way” (Friedman *Interviews* 6). Perhaps the police were illegible as heroes because everyone was reading them in the context of these other films Spielberg describes as “thematically similar,” specifically fellow films of 1974 *Badlands* and *Thieves Like Us*. Spielberg is right to assert that his is an “essentially different” film (7). Because he appropriates the form of the folk ballad, which is to say its iconic markers,<sup>21</sup> but rearticulates it so the heroic stress falls not on *the people* but on *the institutions*, Spielberg makes a defection film that misses its essence. His film, then, failed commercially, even if it succeeded critically, owing to its incoherence as a populist statement that implores greater obedience from the populace. This “condescending” tone to “middle America” (7) registers an anxious coexistence of youth culture and legal institutions, one in which Spielberg has yet to symbolically rework “middle America” into a heroic subject rather than the ignorantly subjected.

*Jaws*, as a disaster film of sorts, is the alembic by which “middle America” becomes a heroic subject. This is another way of saying that the defection film, being the story of individuation, is the wrong form for the celebration of mass society, whereas the disaster film, with its plotlines interlocking an ensemble cast, depends on an articulation of group life. Yet Spielberg, as he did with the defection film, modifies the disaster genre.<sup>22</sup> Instead of deploying an ensemble cast in *Jaws*, Spielberg “credit[ed] himself with streamlining the story,” as Hoberman notes, purging it of its subplots of Mafia connections and adultery (212). The plot is distilled into the single threat of the shark, which calls on individual leadership from a triumvirate of nominees: Brody (Roy Scheider), the town sheriff; Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss), the young ichthyologist; and Quint (Robert Shaw), the rugged fisherman-cum-shark hunter. Jameson offers a canny observation on the “ultimate partnership” between Brody and Hooper, which is arrived at when Quint is killed by the shark. Theirs is “an alliance between the forces of law-and-order and the new technocracy of the multinational corporations,” a “fraternity in which the viewer rejoices without understanding that he or she is excluded from it” (“Reification and Utopia” 29). The point of this modification on the disaster film, we might say, is first that the large-group relations for which the ensemble cast was a screen representation has been substituted with the individual heroics of a strong leader; mass society, in Brody’s final confrontation, is shunted off-screen and he acts in its behalf. And, second, the symbiosis between law-and-order and technocracy now responsible for the stability of the social order appears, in the moment of triumph, as the lone figure of Brody, the deputy for the entire people, rather than in the techno-corporate figure of Hooper, the delegate of an enclave of people.

This reworking of the raw materials of the disaster genre would be interesting enough in itself, but the real work of *Jaws* occurs when, in replacing the figures of technological totality such as the skyscraper or a cruise liner with a figure of nature, the shark, the film redescribes the technological state of the social order as a natural state. In *Jaws*, we might say, there are no disasters, only mythic encounters. Yet the status of the shark as a *natural object* is curiously belied by the insistent descriptions of it as a machine in both the film and Peter Benchley's novel. In the film, Hooper instructs Mayor Vaughn (Murray Hamilton), "What we are dealing with here is a perfect engine, an eating machine." We could say that Hooper's words to Vaughn extend the rhetoric used in the novel, notably a similar conversation in which Hooper explains his fascination with sharks to Ellen Brody, the chief's wife. "They're like an impossibly perfect piece of machinery," he says admiringly (117).

But this tendency to describe the shark as a machine, looked at from another angle, has a very specific meaning in the film, and indeed in the film industry more broadly. The shark used in the film, referred to on-set as "Bruce," was indeed a machine, though it was far from perfect. And Spielberg was charged with the task, which he interpreted as an *auteurist* task, of rendering the machine as a natural object. Indeed, in *The Jaws Log*, Gottlieb refers to the director's work as traditionally one of managing the machinery of the film. The film's producers, Richard Zanuck and David Brown, "first considered getting a director who was a great engineer, one of the old-timers whose principal virtues are their ability to move the ponderous machinery of film-making around" (30). Spielberg entered as a different kind of director, a "movie brat" fresh from a defection film produced by Zanuck and Brown. But his distinction would be to supplant



the “old-timers” and stamp the production of *Jaws* with his name, that of the individual capable of coaxing from the machine a series of natural movements. His distinction, as Gottlieb remarks, would be to make the shark the star of the picture, which in effect would be to make the “machinery of film-making” once again the star. The disaster film had been seeking to rescue this machinery by stacking films with celebrities across Hollywood eras, but *Jaws* would transform this machinery by the director’s agency.

We should recall, for Spielberg’s understanding of his relation to this machinery, his own account of Quint’s introduction in the film. He had wanted, he recounts, to introduce Quint in a theater watching John Huston’s 1956 version of *Moby Dick*. Quint would have been “laughing all the way through it,” in the screenplay Spielberg wrote. “It’s so silly, the mechanical white whale,” as Spielberg explains, “this little mechanical figure still sticking the little mechanical harpoon in the whale.” We might construe this as what comes to be Spielberg’s particular inflection of *auteurism*. Part of what characterized *auteurism* was its claim that, as André Bazin phrased it, while “the cinema is an art which is both popular and industrial,” such conditions do not, of themselves, hinder a filmmaker’s *personal* vision (“On the *politique des auteurs*” 251); *auteurism*, indeed, is the impress of that personality. Spielberg posits a version of personal filmmaking that is distinct from, say, Martin Scorsese’s version, in that, as Spielberg says, Scorsese makes films about “who he is and his old neighborhood,” whereas Spielberg thinks of his identity not as a member of a community with a story to tell, but as a member of that community being told stories. As he puts it, “I’ve often taken the approach from my filmmaking that I am the audience” (Ebert 39). For Quint to laugh at the representation of Ahab’s personal quest, in other words, is for Quint to be alienated

from representations of the natural by a knowledge that they are technological. Spielberg, we might say, retains the *auteurist* impulse on display in the defection film, that of needing to blot out the techno-corporate order, the administered society; but rather than blot it out, he inhabits it and restructures its technological mise-en-scène to appear as a natural setting for personal quests.

In this respect, *Jaws* is simply a new rendition of the Western, with the ideology of strong individualism retooled for an age of technocratic expertise. Brody comes to Amity as the new sheriff in this small seaside town, and finds himself caught between the venalities of government, represented in the person of Mayor Vaughn (Larry Hamilton), and the specialized knowledge of the expert class, represented by Hooper. In cleaning up the town, which is the act of reinstating the law of strong individualism over against the state and in the name of the people, he must make that law look like it issues from a mythic rite rather than technological imperatives. This tension, then, plays out when Quint, accusing Hooper of being “some kind of half-assed astronaut” (with reference to the space program, which would be the true technological frontier of 1974, in contrast to the mythic frontier of *Jaws*), tells the young expert, “Maybe you’re a big yahoo in the lab, but out here you’re just supercargo.” After Hooper disappears in his shark cage, Brody is able to kill the shark in the name of the sacrificial Quint, a proxy for the people offscreen, both the townspeople absent in the film’s third act and the audience who would view Quint’s death, unlike *Moby Dick*, as more natural than mechanical, more involving than alienating. Brody’s individualism is sealed in the event’s believability. The believability, of course, is Spielberg’s personal claim as an audience member.

It is in this sense that Robert Kolker asserts that Spielberg's films "are not simply ideological bellwethers" charged with "responding or giving shape to ideology," but his films "instead become ideology" (*Loneliness* 257). His representations are natural enough that the *imagined* seems more believable than the *actual*. When asked by an interviewer whether he "believe[s] in poltergeists," Spielberg answered, "Yes, I do, I absolutely do. In every movie I've ever made I've essentially believed in what the films were about." But he curiously appended this by saying, "If I ever make a film about a fifty-foot woman, I'll believe that too" (94). As a story about the reemergence of individual heroics, it's perhaps less important that Brody bests the shark, without Hooper's "real fine, expensive gear," than it is that Spielberg manages the "perfect machinery" of the industry such that his success seems to be a product of his own chutzpah rather than an effect of the techno-corporate structure of Hollywood. The story of Spielberg's fusion of the deflection and disaster film, in other words, is an iteration of *auteurism*'s half-answer to administered society, namely that the subject stakes out its autonomy only by repressing its origins in a techno-corporate order.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I say the genre minimizes technological incursion “in the main” because we find exceptions in *Brewster McCloud*, a film that technologically envelops its characters, and *Two-Lane Blacktop*, a film about two gearheads who fix cars as competently as they race them. *Two-Lane Blacktop* seems, indeed, to rewrite *Easy Rider*, seizing on the relationship between the protagonists and their vehicles as constitutive of their vision of freedom. The subcultures punctuating Wyatt and Billy’s motorcycle journey, such as the eco-experiment of the hippie commune, become the subculture of mechanics and gearheads in *Two-Lane Blacktop*. *Two-Lane Blacktop* counts as a defection film, interestingly, because the very vehicle that symbolizes mobility, escape, and freedom has been reincorporated as accessory to a subculture under the umbrella of consumer society, a certain niche demographic now studied for its habits and needs. Technology, then, is only a cathexis for the impulses of certain defector personalities, and in this respect we can compare *Two-Lane Blacktop* to its counterpart, *Cockfighter*, a film in which the subculture isn’t gathered around the technological spectacle of auto-racing at all, but rather its agrarian analogue, cockfighting.

<sup>2</sup> In part, I say this because, on Leo Marx’s analysis, the pastoral tradition tends to treat technology’s incursion as a fixed meaning. The tone it possesses, “characteristic of Virgilian pastoral, is a way of saying that the episode [Hawthorne’s experience of the train whistle amidst seclusion at Sleepy Hollow] belongs to a timeless, recurrent pattern of human affairs. It falls easily into a conventional design because it has occurred often before” (31). In a specifically historicist study such as my own, I see little benefit in assimilating the entwined themes of defection and technocracy to a “timeless” “pattern of human affairs”; I prefer, then, to explain the defection film in relation to the contemporaneous disaster film rather than in relation to the pastoral tradition.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx recalls Boswell’s witness to Boulton’s production of a steam engine, upon which he wishes “that Johnson had been with us: for it was a scene which I should have been glad to contemplate by his light. The vastness and the contrivance of some of the machinery would have ‘matched’ his mighty mind” (145).

<sup>4</sup> For critics who consider those films I call defection films, and *auteurist* cinema more broadly, as personal, even revolutionary, see David Thomson’s “The Decade When Movies Mattered” and Ryan Gilbey’s *It Don’t Worry Me*; for critics who consider the disaster films conservative, see Peter Lev’s *American Films of the 1970s* and Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan’s *Camera Politica*.

<sup>5</sup> In some respect, I take this to be the reason neither Walter Murch nor Gordon Willis has ever become the household name or marketing tag that Francis Ford Coppola became. Film technicians had to be absorbed by film artists if film were to be considered as something outside of and uncontaminated by modernity’s armature of advancing technology. On this problematic, see my reading of *The Conversation* in the Introduction.

<sup>6</sup> Jameson makes these comments with reference to Paul Virilio’s *War and Cinema*.

<sup>7</sup> Ray Pratt makes this claim most plainly in *Projecting Paranoia* when he says that “no single cultural artifact better represents the disintegration of the American consensus in the early and mid-1060s” than *Strangelove*. Versions of this claim show up often enough, from David Halberstam’s *The Best and the Brightest* (427) to Robert Kolker’s *A Cinema of Loneliness*.

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<sup>8</sup> Mills describes this specialized strata of military men as “the professional soldier at the top of a large and permanent military establishment” who must “earn the respect of his men by logistical planning in the Pentagon” rather than “by better shooting, harder riding, faster improvisation when in trouble (179, 180); this kind of professional military man is sustained, Mills asserts, by “a certain kind of social hierarchy” (172).

<sup>9</sup> The analogous character in *Fail-Safe* is Professor Groeteschele (Walter Matthau), a political scientist who, after discussing the aftermath of nuclear war, says, “It’s all hypothesis, of course, but fun to play around with.”

<sup>10</sup> Barry Keith Grant says “the computer HAL seems a more complex character with greater emotional depth than any of the people in the film” (*Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey* 69) and Kolker says that the “digital construction” of HAL “wins the viewer’s sympathies” (*A Cinema of Loneliness* 136).

<sup>11</sup> Newton Minow served as the chairman of the FCC during the Kennedy administration. This quotation is taken from his 1961 address of the National Association of Broadcasters.

<sup>12</sup> In “The Museum of Accidents,” Virilio describes the “media scale” as being “so vast” that it requires “the amplitude of the perceptual field” as “the first stage of a new understanding” (*Virilio Reader* 260).

<sup>13</sup> By the same token, the protesters in the film are not the kind familiar to audiences in 1970, their protest being against noise pollution rather than war; nor is the disaffected soldier back from Vietnam, but likely from Korea or World War II, if he is a veteran at all. *Airport* works hard, we might say, to displace its social conflicts into historical moments other than the contemporary one.

<sup>14</sup> His office, I should note, is ostentatiously large, recalling Kellner and Ryan’s observation that “the marks” of the “environment” in these films “are usually luxury and modernity” (52). An airport manager, as befitting a high-ranking technocrat, would bask in a large, modern, and well-appointed office, and the camera would need to depict this space in a long shot rather than close-up. In this respect, generic content (modernity makes spaces luxurious) issues a generic form (modernity’s spaces, being thusly luxurious, should properly be rendered in deep-space compositions).

<sup>15</sup> See Paul Young’s essay “Media on Display” for an account of how early cinema deployed communication technologies as a means of smoothing its crosscutting between spaces. “The plots of films like *The Lonedale Operator* would have been difficult for contemporary audiences to disentangle,” Young argues, “had the telegraph not provided justification for Griffith’s crosscutting between one place and another” (229).

<sup>16</sup> David Bordwell remarks that “split-screen phone scenes,” used from the early cinema onward, “were revived for phone conversations in *Bye Bye Birdie* and other 1960s widescreen comedies” (*Film Art* 215). Bordwell’s language is misleading because while the device of split-screen was used for phone conversations in early cinema, one can observe the phasing out of this device in Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s, the moment of classicality. Some critics have suggested that it was the innovation of Cinemascope itself that provoked the revival of split-screen editing. In *Cinema Dreams Its Rivals*, Paul Young claims that, in the contest between the media of cinema and television, cinema used widescreen as a means of marking “film’s superiority” (180). Widescreen accentuated a capacity peculiarly its own, Young observes, by

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“construct[ing] versions of ‘presence’ and ‘liveness’” that recalled early cinema’s “mode of attractions” and what John Belton calls “legitimate theater” (181). Widescreen comedies, then, reproduce the liveness of theater – in which phone calls between two people would necessarily be staged as a phone call between people in the same space – by using split-screen, as in *Bye Bye Birdie*, to make it seem like the phone conversants share a space. *Bye Bye Birdie* brings this point home by choreographing one of its dance numbers out of phone conversations, bringing all of the people first connected through the figure of split-screen into the same literal space, now dancing while retaining their phone receivers as props. Indeed, what’s telling about this scene is that phones, in Cinemascope’s split-screens, were props all along. Constructing the immediacy of liveness, in short, only emphasized the artificiality of cinema’s first fact, mediation. Paul Hirsch, an editor who collaborated with Brian DePalma, remarks that DePalma’s fondness for split-screen shots ruined the illusions of cinema. “Basically it takes the audience out of the movie,” Hirsch says, “The technique works on an intellectual basis ... But you don’t *feel* anything. Engaging your intellect takes away from feeling what’s happening” (*First Cut* 189).

<sup>17</sup> I would like to here acknowledge that Vivian Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye* makes important contributions along these lines with respect to spectatorship, though I would add that her method shows more dialectical subtlety than does *Airport*’s. “The existential act of seeing-in-the world grounds the existential act of seeing the world with one’s own eyes,” Sobchack writes. “The former is an *anonymous* mode of being situated that discovers the world as the experience of consciousness, whereas the latter is a *situated* mode of being that discovers the *self* in the world and recognizes the act of seeing as *mediated*, as the consciousness of experience” (51).

<sup>18</sup> I should note, however, that Pauline Kael remarked that *Earthquake*’s destruction of Los Angeles was undertaken with such “pleasure” as to seem like a “death wish for film art.”

<sup>19</sup> At a talk in December 1968, Marcuse responds to the *New York Times* christening him a leader of the New Left by saying, “And there is one thing the Left does not need, and that’s another father image, another daddy” (*The New Left and the 1960s* 122).

<sup>20</sup> Disaster films sat at the top of box-office charts in 1970, ’72, and ’74, with *Airport* grossing second most in the first year’s box-office figures, *The Poseidon Adventure* grossing second most in the second year’s figures, and *The Towering Inferno* grossing the most, *Earthquake* the third most, and *Airport 1975* the eight most in the last year. If we want to chart the disaster cycle’s diminishing financial returns across the 1970s, however, it’s most instructive to look at figures for the *Airport* franchise: *Airport* had rentals of \$45.2 million; *Airport 1975* had rentals of \$25.3 million; and *Airport ’77* had rentals of \$15.1. The year following the last year of the disaster cycle, in which the top ten rentals was stacked with three disaster films, *Jaws* outperformed every movie by at least one hundred percent. This was the beginning of the high-concept model, which was solidified two years later by the monster performance of *Star Wars* (1977). Figures from David A. Cook’s *Lost Illusions*.

<sup>21</sup> In *Film/Genre*, Rick Altman designates this side of genre the semantic.

<sup>22</sup> In his essay “*Nashville* Contra *Jaws*, or ‘The Imagination of Disaster’ Revisited,” J. Hoberman calls *Nashville* and *Jaws* “each in its way a brilliant modification on the

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current cycle of ‘disaster’ films” (195). *Jaws*, however, has been more generally leagued with the disaster cycle than has *Nashville*, for which, as far as I know, Hoberman is the only critic to argue its “disaster” status. Peter Lev, on the other hand, treats *Jaws* as a disaster film, and Carl Gottlieb generally discusses it as a member of this genre in *The Jaws Log*, though he distinguishes its script from the more hackneyed ones of *Poseidon Adventure* or *Airport*, which tended to have “cardboard characters doing plastic things” (57).

## CHAPTER IV

### ETHOS OF INCORPORATION: CORPORATE PERSONHOOD AS *AUTEURISM*

In the opening shot of *The King of Marvin Gardens* (1972), we see only the illuminated face of David Staebler (Jack Nicholson) in total blackness. The face is first in profile, as he stares off-screen left, and then it turns deliberately toward the camera. Stopping the pivot, David starts to speak *sotto voce*. David is not addressing the camera, but rather a microphone: he is a DJ, we soon deduce, and the darkness is that of the radio booth. The close-up image of the face, however, reminds us that this is Jack Nicholson, star of *Five Easy Pieces*. As his face rotates toward us, we might interpret it as a source of light, that it is luminous rather than illuminated. Indeed, it might put us in mind of Bobby Dupea, his character from *Five Easy Pieces*, the wattage of whose ego had the effect of dimming the film's other characters and events; and, in this mindset, we might guess that this is another tale of individualism. We might, just as well, see this as the scene of the confessional, David's hushed voice meant only for a priest who, in the analysis of Michel Foucault, exercises the "pastoral power" that, in probing and knowing one's mind, produces one's subjectivity.

But *Marvin Gardens*, Rafelson's first directorial effort following the success of *Five Easy Pieces*, desists from the unbridled individualism of the earlier film. Indeed, if *Five Easy Pieces* is the Ur-example of the defection film, a story that *auteurs* told themselves about the encumbrance institutions placed on individuality, *Marvin Gardens*



is the story of incorporation that seldom gets told, a story in which the version of individualism bearing the name of *auteurism* depends on the powers of a specific institution, that of the corporation. Put archly, *Marvin Gardens* knows that the corporation authorizes the *auteur*.

As *Marvin Gardens* begins, the character of David Staebler perhaps enjoys the luminosity conferred on him by Nicholson's rising star, but in David's monologue, he plainly understands that he himself is no sufficient power source, no lone hero. His claim to authority is not made as an individual but in partnership. His monologue explains partnership as the irreducible source of power in the form of an originary myth about why he doesn't eat fish: it chronicles a childhood ritual of Friday fish dinners, enforced by his crotchety grandfather, who David and his brother Jason (Bruce Dern), in alliance, leave to choke on fish bones. The story recalls *Five Easy Pieces* in that claiming authority of one's own requires toppling a patriarch. We can gauge how much the dynamic has changed, though, by noting that the passage of authority from Nicholas to Bobby Dupea is sealed by an individualist credo, one that entails the besting of Bobby's brother, Carl. In contrast, *Marvin Gardens* insists that authority, in its contemporary form, can only be gained and exercised cooperatively: "At that moment, my brother and I became accomplices forever," David says. And, in a later scene, he pronounces the obsolescence of individual authority as a historical fact: "The form of the tragic autobiography is dead, or will be soon, along with most of its authors."

This message of "dead authors" comes, of course, as an unlikely one from Rafelson, one of the rising *auteurs* in 1972. But it comes as an unlikely message only if, following the impulse of the defection film, we repress the structure of the institution in

telling the story of the individual. Rafelson had no need to repress that structure, in that the corporate structure was one he knew well. Rafelson had formed Raybert Productions with partner Bert Schneider, a colleague at Columbia's television arm Screen Gems, and the two experienced huge success with their sitcom creation, *The Monkees*. Following the success of *Easy Rider*, the pair formed BBS Productions along with friend Steve Blauner. BBS, then, became the patron corporation for *auteurist* cinema, backing the work of Peter Bogdanovich, Henry Jaglom, and even a Jack Nicholson who hadn't yet decided his destiny was in acting, not directing (*Drive, He Said* [1971]). In the moment of *Marvin Gardens*, we might as easily say that Nicholson's place was within the corporation, as a part of BBS, more than it was that of the extolled actor. His place *within* the organization characterized the corporate sense of *auteurism* patented by BBS.

*Marvin Gardens* clarifies the corporatism BBS favored over individualism, by elucidating their ethic of corporate behavior as a source of meaning more vigorous for its plurality. As a repudiation of Dwight Macdonald's dated maxim that meaning is the "result" of a "single brain and sensibility" "in full command," *Marvin Gardens* regards *auteurism* as the necessary means for fixing corporate meaning as singularly authorized, in order to dispel the ambiguity attending meanings whose authorization spreads more or less evenly across an organization. Throughout *Marvin Gardens*, we see such confusion figured in the question of which brother, David or Jason, is the artist and which the businessman of their partnership. David, considered an "artist" by Jessica (Julia Ann Robinson) and a "philosopher-king" by brother Jason, is needed by business because "image is everything in business today" and he can, with his craft, present merchandise "with style." But Jason, the obvious businessman who "love[s] all the hustle around

here,” is distrusted by his boss, Lewis (Benjamin “Scatman” Crothers), because he’s “no businessman” but “an artist.” *Marvin Gardens*, in other words, depicts the changing business environment of which *auteurism* was a representative trend, a time in which the opposition between creative freedom and conformist hierarchy, the individual and the “organization man,” was being undone.

I want to suggest that *Marvin Gardens* is, in effect, the canonical statement on *auteurism*, insofar as it offers the fullest, most dialectical account of *auteurism* as the talismanic discourse that reconciles individualism and corporatism. This reconciliation, adumbrated across the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the polemic of “corporate personhood,”<sup>1</sup> marks a set of changes within the operations of capitalism that will elsewhere be described as the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation.<sup>2</sup> What I hope to demonstrate, finally, is that BBS Productions was no maverick enterprise, no aberration, with what Rafelson called its “fuck-all” attitude, but was rather a bellwether for the radicalized business practices that would shape the future of capitalism. Before supporting such claims with a detailed reading of *Marvin Gardens*, I want to make a divagation through a cycle of films on the corporation, a cycle roughly coeval (1967-1976) with the genre of the defection film. This cycle of films includes *Point Blank* (1967), *Klute* (1971), *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971), *The Parallax View* (1974), and *All the President’s Men* (1976). Unlike *Marvin Gardens*, these films express a philosophical wariness of the corporation, which, in their narratives, amounts to a well-nigh epistemological problem. Because the corporation cannot be *known* as a person can, this creates, in these films, a new foe that can never be bested because it can never be fully present for a contest.

### ***The Parallax View: Paranoid Style and the Corporation***

Alan Pakula's so-called "paranoia trilogy" affords good traction on the problem of the corporation, as it can be taken as three plots striving to come to terms with corporate structure. Only one film in the trilogy, *The Parallax View*, explicitly concerns the corporation; all three films, nonetheless, can be deemed efforts at grasping forms of social organization that are prompted by the primordial inscrutability of the corporation. *Klute*, for instance, first seems to be a story actuated by the mystery of city life, but it soon becomes clear that city life is no more mysterious than suburban life: the mystery, it turns out, attaches to the corporate figure that knits together the divided city and suburbs. *The Parallax View*, as the middle term in the trilogy, is a narrative of the sheer inscrutability of the corporation that leads to the sheer impotence of the individual. But *All the President's Men* offers an imaginary solution to the problem of the corporation by converting it into the political party, for which a kind of ultimate accountability is incarnated in the president. Woodward and Bernstein, that is, can trace a network of wrongdoing back to H.R. Haldeman and then, once in the White House, to Nixon himself: all plots end in the authority of the president. I call this "imaginary" because the idea of individual causation embodied by the president is every bit as ideological as, say, that of the *auteur*. But the ideological work carried out by the figure of the president has an efficacy that the corporation has historically lacked, which may be another way of saying that stories about American politics can end, whereas stories about the corporation cannot.

If we want to treat the trilogy as a kind of equation that yields Nixon as a sovereign agent, we need to begin with *Klute*'s story of the breakdown of agency. *Klute*

begins with a MacGuffin: Holly Gruneman (Betty Murray) reports to the police that her husband Tom (Robert Milli) is missing. In searching Tom's desk, they find correspondence with New York call girl Bree Daniels (Jane Fonda). The letters found suggest Tom's sexual deviance, his predatorial attraction to Bree. After the police work on the case for half a year, Tom's colleague, Peter Cable (Charles Cioffi), decides to finance a personal investigation of the disappearance, conducted by Tom's best friend, John Klute (Donald Sutherland). Tom's disappearance, it turns out, does little more than motivate the plot; the film soon forgets Tom as an interest, in favor of Bree. But, interestingly, his disappearance motivates an essentially film noir plot about the effort to descry intelligibility in urban space, that of New York City, undertaken *from* the remote space of Pennsylvania suburbs.

Film noir customarily concerned itself with the unintelligible city, with its individual lives disconnected by the forces of modernity into atomized units rather than aggregated unities. As Fredric Jameson remarks on the crime fiction of Raymond Chandler, "Since there is no longer any privileged experience in which the whole of the social structure can be grasped, a figure must be invented who can be superimposed on the society as a whole, whose routine and life pattern serve somehow to tie its separate and isolated parts together" ("On Raymond Chandler" 127). This detective figure functioned well for grasping the social structure in totalized form in the interwar years, when a Philip Marlowe or Sam Spade lived and worked among the city denizens. But in the postwar United States, the G.I. Bill of 1944 and the explosion of Levittowns caused a division in which many people now worked in the city but lived in the suburbs. The

mystery of the city, for this suburbanizing middle-class, now held less interest in some sense than that of the division between urban and suburban life.<sup>3</sup>

This change in social organization, then, induces a mutation in film noir form. The mystery of the city supplies little compelling mystery *in itself*, but the mysterious city, a shopworn concept by now, is being deployed on behalf of something or someone else, and that something or someone else accounts for the real mystery.<sup>4</sup> *Klute* gestures to this new source of mystery when Bree asks John, “Tell me, Klute, did we get you a little, huh, just a little bit? Us city folk – the sin, the glitter, the wickedness?” John’s brusque response – “Ah, that’s pathetic” – suggests that Bree is “pathetic” for operating under this old understanding, this trite notion that the secret of the city seduces the ingenuous suburbanite. *Klute* resembles a fellow noir of this period, *Chinatown* (1974), in that the clichéd urban mystery serves as a convenient mystification for a set of social relations and actions that are perfectly known to their beneficiaries, the Noah Crosses. In other words, the invocation “Forget it, Jake, it’s Chinatown” doesn’t imply that, owing to the neighborhood’s inaccessible logic, crime can’t be fought in Chinatown, but rather that crime can’t be concealed *without Chinatown*, without the logic of its protocol to do “as little as possible.”

When John Klute criticizes Bree’s bluster as “pathetic,” he means that her attempt to impress him as a tough woman, proudly lawless and amoral, has fallen comically short. But he also means his adjective more literally, that pathos attends her mistaken sense that city life is where her kind, the self-identified lawless, are agents. He sees Bree as vulnerable rather than in control. And *Klute*, indeed, floats a version of Bree’s liberation (which from one angle looks like an instantiation of second-wave feminism) as

a form of absolute vulnerability, that of a *mere body* in a sensual domain. In fact, the split domains of city and suburb translate into the sensual and the spiritual, respectively, such that a commitment to the city tends to render one a mere body. And a commitment to the suburbs, by corollary, renders one a mere spirit.<sup>5</sup> This works in *Klute* by the trope of the tape recorder, a device used by the killer to preserve the voices of prostitutes whom he will murder, unless thwarted (as in the case of Bree); the film's first image is a tape recorder playing back the voices of John Klute, Peter Cable, Holly Gruneman, and her missing husband, Tom, with the spectral quality of their voices conjuring the remembered scene of a dinner party in the Gruneman suburban home. Bree's clients, then, visit her when on business in the city, escaping from spectral suburban life into the corporeal life of the city, the erotic promise of which, vouched by Bree, is a permission to use their bodies in whichever imaginable way. The difference, hence, between the life of mere body in the city and mere spirit in the suburbs makes it "not unique," as the police inspector tells Mrs. Gruneman, that "a man will lead a double life, a Jekyll-and-Hyde existence."

But even if Tom's double life makes him "not unique," it does make him distinct from Bree. When police inspectors ask Klute if he knew the "subject Thomas Gruneman," they mean that Tom is the "subject" of investigation. The play on the word, though, is apt, in that Tom can claim to be a *subject* because he coordinates the two domains of sensuality and spirituality, body and soul, where Bree cannot rise above *object* status, which is why she both works and lives in the city, the domain of sensual bodies. Bree is the cynosure of the film because she exhibits a breakdown in agency, illustrated by the fact that Bree fails as an actress but succeeds as a prostitute; in short, as

an actress she can't convincingly operate herself as an object, which means that as a prostitute she attracts clients who wish to operate her. The real practice of agency, though, amounts to the hidden interest of the film, and Tom fills the place of that practice but cannot claim it as proper to him. He is "not unique," in this respect, because a certain kind of organization authorizes his place of agency, an agency that could never be reducible to him.

As a placeholder, so interchangeable is Tom that, though first suspected of stalking Bree, it turns out to be his colleague from the Tole American Corporation, Peter Cable, who has perpetrated the crimes threatening Bree. The strange plot mechanism, then, of Peter Cable financing an investigation that would, if successful, lead to his own exposure – in effect financing an investigation of himself – seems to mark his confidence that his anonymity is so great as to render him unidentifiable. In legal terms, Cable has shielded his person with the juristic person of the corporation; his liability has been taken over as the corporation's. When Bree tells her analyst, "What I would really like to do is be faceless and bodiless," she is describing the condition of personhood the corporation enjoys. Her stalker, it seems, only reminds her that she is too much body, and that the only way to be invulnerable is to possess the immaterial body of the corporation. She has been stalked, in this sense, by a corporation; thus Bree's wish to be "faceless and bodiless" counts as recognition that the only way to fight back, to make the contest winnable, is to convert herself into a commensurate being.

At the end of *Klute*, Peter Cable has been identified by Klute and eliminates himself, yet Bree still decides that she "can't stay in the city." Cable's elimination, then, provides an incomplete resolution for Bree. Knowing Cable's identity hardly vaporizes



the threat because she still can't believe the threat was reducible to him, but rather, senses it be some additive to Cable's body. If Cable's body cannot finally be said to itself constitute the threat, then neither can the city, the domain of bodies. On leaving the city, Bree confesses to her therapist, "Maybe I'll come back, you'll probably see me next week." For her therapist, she characterizes the problem as one of knowing: "I have no idea what's going to happen." The knowledge Bree needs, which is some kind of formula for becoming a subject within the network of this world-system, is not a knowledge occulted by the city. The sense, then, that *Klute* pondered a false object of knowledge (Bree could leave the city or return to it, both options being equal) leads to *Parallax View*, a story founded on the assumption that a threat reposes in corporate structure.

The city might atomize its residents, as it has Bree Daniels, but, in doing so, it does not grant agency to those lone individuals; the fact haunting those lone individuals, as the "paranoia trilogy" indicates, is that agency still exists somewhere, historical tides still turn. Not knowing how this happens occasions the "paranoid style" that makes *Klute*, *The Parallax View*, and *All the President's Men* a trilogy rather than a group of films made by similar production crews (Alan Pakula, Gordon Willis, George Jenkins). The "paranoid style," in Richard Hofstadter's notorious definition, alleges "the existence of a vast, insidious, preternaturally effective international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the most fiendish character" (14). Now, "conspiratorial" "acts of the most fiendish character" notwithstanding, we might assess this style as an effect of the diffusion of corporate structure, where "effective[ness]" often hinges on the "vast[ness]" of the "network"; the trade term for the measure of this effectiveness is *economy of scale*. The scale of agency, it turns out, is precisely what confounds understanding, and while

*Klute* might proffer the city itself as an explanatory model for agency on a large scale, the film does not finally believe that the city itself organizes such networks. If it did, leaving the city would be enough to escape the Peter Cables, but Bree's uncertainty in the closing scene registers the historical novelty of her problem: that locating accountability in the person obscures the problem, yet using the city as a higher-order explanation of how people fall into interconnection is now quaint, at best describing enclave life in the late-modern world.

*The Parallax View* reformulates the problem of whether Cable acted alone or within some larger framework in terms of the epidemic of political assassinations in the 1960s (JFK, Malcolm X, MLK, RFK, Fred Hampton), which, in paranoid style, gives a "fiendish" cast to the opposition between lone agents and corporate structure. In *The Parallax View*, agents are figured as gunmen and corporations coordinate the assassinations of leaders; it's given that gunmen can't do their work without corporate orchestration. If paranoid style, in Hofstadter's account, swells into "movements" only in "episodic waves" (39), *The Parallax View* bears the paranoid style, we might say, because the 1960s rippled with such episodes. As noted, the assassinations of the decade function as the "catastrophe" likely to "elicit" paranoid explanations. Joe Frady (Warren Beatty), the journalist at the center of the film's plot, explains that "people were crazy for any kind of explanation" because "every time you turned around some nut was knocking off one of the best men in the country." However, on the film's terms, paranoia is not generated by the assassinations only, but it finds Hofstadter's other catalyst – "a confrontation of opposed interests which are ... totally irreconcilable" (39) – in the irreconcilable interests of the individual and the corporation. In short, by dissipating the

culpability of assassins through a corporate network, the film enacts the repetition of assassinations paranoically not because the acts are heinous but because the full scale of the agency is unknown.

*The Parallax View* is the purest story of the paranoia trilogy because it assumes that the story of the corporation, if told right, will always produce a mood of paranoia. The film considers the corporation, in other words, the objective correlative for paranoia.<sup>6</sup> Its plot begins with the assassination of Senator Charles Carroll (Bill Joyce) and tracks Joe Frady, a crusader journalist, as he tries to uncover the “wider conspiracy” that insistently lurks behind Carroll’s death, despite a special committee’s announcement that “no evidence whatsoever” supports a conspiracy and that the assassin “acted entirely alone.” Frady first resists conspiracy theories and accepts the committee’s version of events, but when seven witnesses of the Carroll assassination turn up dead over the course of three years, he comes to suspect the lone-gunmen line is a flimsy cover-up. Upon following leads, he learns of the Parallax Corporation, a firm in the business of recruiting assassins. Posing as a would-be assassin, Frady attempts to infiltrate the corporation. A client of Parallax, the Manufacturer’s Intelligence Group, contracts Grady’s services but, on his first assignment, Parallax frames Frady rather than utilize him and then kills him. The film concludes with the findings of another special committee, which sound as rote echoes of the earlier committee’s reports: Frady acted alone, “no evidence” to the contrary. For a story focused on the corporation, we have seen very little of it – only a surface whose opacity renders an innocent of a stock figure for knowledge, the maverick journalist.<sup>7</sup>

When Frady visits Senator Carroll's former advisor in hiding, Austin Tucker (William Daniels), Tucker rebukes Frady for his hubristic ignorance. "Fellow, you don't know what this story means," Tucker warns. The condition of beholding the corporation, says Frady's experience, is the condition of *not knowing*. This cause one to wonder: Had the corporation become epistemologically more intractable in the 1960s than it had been earlier in the century? Had the story of the corporation once yielded meaning that it now withheld? The debate instigated by the creation of the legal subject of the corporation – in Machen's words that of "corporate personality" – had always tested the limits of thought. Walter Benn Michaels gave a formative account of this debate in the context of naturalism, that is, at a moment in industrialization when people had been reduced to things in the snare of natural and social forces. Referring to Machen, Michaels says that "his claim that corporations are 'entities' appears now as simply a version of the more fundamental naturalist claim that 'persons' too are really entities and hence that natural persons are as fictitious as corporate ones" (202). In this moment, the corporation provides a rehabilitated model of subjectivity in that "the transformation of thing into person involves, as it were, the addition of a certain immateriality" (204) and the corporation isn't reducible to its materiality; it "cannot be reduced to the thing it is made of," as Michaels puts it, "and still remain the thing it is" (21). Corporate personhood, then, recapitulates subjectivity on the order of the Cartesian doctrine of two substances, with the split between materiality and ideality needing a figural union.

We might say the split reemerges, as I suggest, when the country historically splits into cities and suburbs. At this point, the corporate figure, known for uniting these two geographies, reintroduces a kind of mystery because his anonymity, taken as a form

of subjectivity, is so unlike the rugged individualism of the recently favored agrarian form of subjectivity. The loss of ruggedness, of cowboy self-distinction, means the loss of identity, such that corporate figures look like automatons, rationalized managers. Concerning *The Parallax View*, we can take the shot of the special committee as the canonical image of this facelessness. The shot begins as a rectangle hovering in the middle of a dark widescreen frame, and within the rectangle the seven men of the committee sit behind a bench, all of them but the speaker as mute as figures in the Parthenon frieze. As the camera zooms in until the rectangle occupies the frame, the men's stony countenances, staring inexpressively at the viewer, look simply like variations on establishment men: all aging white males, conspicuously interchangeable. With the closing shot of the special committee, the men disappear upon stating their findings; the film thus sums up the anonymity of the establishment.

What we must bear in mind is that this anonymity, the stigmatized "organization man," is the residue of a form of corporate management that the 1960s is displacing. As Thomas Frank puts it, William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* was above all a critique of a style of management, "a sweeping study of American business and its problems" (21). As eminent business historian Alfred Chandler remarks, the 1960s saw changes in "basic institutional arrangements" of the corporation that mark "a new era of managerial capitalism" (606, 621). The firm itself begins to subdivide in ways that make for a more complicated structure of greater "scope," to use Chandler's word. And, while John Kenneth Galbraith claims that it "takes an effort of mind to grasp" the mechanics of "group decision-making" and how deeply they "extend[] into the business enterprise" (68), this effort of mind had to be redoubled in order to assess that "group decision-

making,” that plural agency, across the “new markets” firms could exploit in the absence of the historical trauma of depressions and world wars; across the “separation of top management in the corporate office from middle management in the operating divisions”; and amidst the “extensive and continuing divestiture of operating units” and the “buying and selling of corporations as a distinct business in its own right” (621). Attending this radical change in corporate structure is the radical change in management theory that Frank documents.

By 1974, then, we can say that not only is the story of the corporation more bewildering and, owing to its obscure historical agency, being told in a paranoid key; the story of managerial style is now told in the mode of caricature, with lone gunmen claiming agency vis-à-vis anonymous corporate cogs. *The Parallax View* simply imagines a scenario in which corporations authorize lone gunmen in order to offer a figure of accountability to a baffled public. Likewise, *All the President’s Men* posits Nixon as sovereign agent, a figure of final account. *Auteurism* must be understood as a mild rendition of the same scenario. Corporate Hollywood instrumentalized the *auteur*, that is, in the same fashion as *The Parallax View* sees corporations using lone gunmen.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Jon Lewis explains Paramount’s creation of the Director’s Company (Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich, William Friedkin) in the very terms of instrumentality, observing that while the company “seemed to perpetuate a growing acceptance of the *auteur* theory in Hollywood,” Paramount instead meant it as a “recontextualization of *auteurism* within the studio superstructure” (16 emphasis original).

### ***Point Blank*, Sensationalized Bodies, and Violent Panoramas**

In his study *Medium Cool*, when Ethan Mordden notes that a “cult of admirers regards [*Point Blank*] as one of the most typical of sixties films” and that Lee Marvin as Walker “is our sixties archetype,” he explains that the decade is thus signaled not by the fact that the film’s violence is raw, but by the fact that, as viewers, “we *have* to see, hear, and watch” its violence (70 emphasis original); that it must not be suggested, but must register on our sensorium. Paul Monaco similarly asserts that the essence of 1960s Hollywood is a shift from the “cinema of sentiment” (from the late 1920s through the 1950s) to a “cinema of sensation.” Formerly encouraged to feel with their emotions, viewers were now encouraged to feel with their bodies. Of course, it’s not only the viewer’s body undergoing a new experience in Hollywood cinema, but the bodies onscreen: from the textural quality of the excessive gun-down of Bonnie and Clyde, to the balletic massacre that closes *The Wild Bunch* (1969), to the gory tollbooth murder of Sonny Coreleone in *The Godfather* (1972).

While critics have proposed a variety of film-historical explanations for the rise of sensational violence, I want to suggest that this reduction to the body expresses a philosophical kinship with the torpid objecthood we see in *The Graduate*. In other words, subjects talk with language, while objects talk with violence. Mordden intimates that violence will be the expected option when facing an adversary like the corporation, whose scale outstrips conventional showdowns. “When you deal with ... ‘the organization’,” he says, “violence is like breathing: necessary” (69). It’s of course easy to see the logic of his assertion if we consider that subjects who once flexed power have been shorn of it under a new regime of subjectivity. The cowboys, lone heroes, and tough

guys of whom Lee Marvin counts as an *éminence grise*, called on violence only as a last resort; this was their code. Reduced to objects in films like *Point Blank*, violence becomes their default language because no other resorts exist.

*Point Blank*'s structure is homologous to *Klute*'s – a split between body and soul; the dual form that Walter Benn Michaels argues gives the corporation its curious status. In *Point Blank*, the split is acted out by Walker and Yost (Keenan Wynn), the former a brute body and the latter a guiding spirit. In an early scene, the two men talk on board a tour boat to Alcatraz. A voice on the P.A. system dins behind Walker and Yost's conversation, chronicling the failed escapes made by inmates throughout the history of Alcatraz. The scene had begun, of course, with footage of Walker escaping the island, a fact unknown in the prison's lore. Having been shot by his partner, Mal Reese (John Vernon), in a heist and left for dead in a prison cell, Walker is depicted making his way from the cell to the craggy shores, with hurt, animal purpose; the shot sequence is remarkable for the sometimes montage way in which it renders the prison's security measures – chain-link fencing, watch towers, thickets of barbed wire – as a landscape of sensations, all threats to the body. And in the last shot before we cut to the meeting between Walker and Yost, Walker trudges over the rocks to the rough waters of the bay, his movements so emphatically languorous yet inexorable that his body recalls the great movie monsters. We cut to the tour boat, then, with Walker, now in a gray suit, staring at bay waters that prompt memories of his escape, shown in the film form of intercut images of Walker now swimming against, now bobbing on the current. The next shot depicts Walker isolated at the boat's stern, then, following the intercut image of Walker swimming the bay, another shot depicts him alone but then, with an abrupt cut that is not



a jump cut but still startles, joined by Yost, who asks, “How did you make it, Walker?” Walker only stares mutely in response. We should interpret his mute response not as a man being conversationally aloof, but as a man listening to his own voice. The odd quality of dialogue between Walker and Yost, with Walker often turning his back to the speaking Yost, suggests that Yost’s voice and Walker’s body form a duality, their actual figures being the certain quotient of physicality or intellect shaken out from the whole. As such, within *Point Blank*’s revenge scenario, they have different desires: “You want Reese, and I want the organization,” Yost states.

The difference between wanting Reese and wanting the organization is a difference in thinking accounts can be settled on a person-to-person basis and thinking accounts have been socialized to an extent that persons are made anachronistic. The primacy of individual persons had not been recently made anachronistic, as studies such as William Roy’s show, in that corporate structure, as dominant site of agency, emerged from the “milestone” creation of the U.S. Steel Corporation as *the social structure*, and this occurred in the first year of the twentieth century (3-4). Why the “transformation from one way of life to another, from a society based on rural, agrarian, local, small-scale, individual relations to one based on urban, industrial, national, large-scale, and organizational relations” (3) should persistently surface as raw material for narratives in the 1960s, and not in the 1940s, can be understood on the principle of *longue durée* worked out in Fernand Braudel’s analysis.<sup>9</sup> In *Point Blank*, it matters little that statistical data might explain why the emergent situation looked different from the current dominant situation; it matters only that accounts can no longer be settled by the old code of honor governing the use of violence. Walker stands as “our sixties archetype,” then, because he

cannot redress wrongs honorably, and thus his turn to violence is archetypal of the changed stress in the passage from Civil Rights to Black Power, or SDS to the Weather Underground, the stress falling now on violent means rather political ones.

While the thinking half of the Walker-Yost duality asserts Reese as Walker's target, Walker's actions do not seem so decisively geared to any single object. After all, he kills Reed just over halfway through the film, and yet his assignment continues. In part, we can explain his need to continue as honoring his commitment to Yost, who wants the organization, not simply Reese. The mantra-like prescription for possessing the organization is the purging of "Carter, Brewster, Fairfax." But we should also remember that Walker's motives are described alternately as revenge and restitution. He claims to want his \$93,000, and Reese just happens to be the one who stole it. But even Carter (Carroll O'Connor), when confronted by Walker in one of the film's more frank scenes, doubts the money is Walker's real object. "You threaten a financial structure like this for \$93,000," Carter questions. "Now, Walker, I don't believe you. What do you really want?" Walker responds sheepishly that he, in fact, wants his money, but a certain conviction drains from his voice. The change in Walker's delivery, from assured to nonplussed, suggests his dawning understanding of the dimensions of his foe. When Reese said that he put the \$93,000 "all into the organization" and that "no one man" had it, Walker countered, "If you go high enough, there's always one man." Only as Brewster lectures Walker do we see that Walker's hunt has been motivated by the loss of that "one man" as an object for righteous anger. "Let me tell you something about corporations," Brewster begins, "This is a corporation and I'm an officer in it. We deal in millions; we never see cash. I've got about \$11 in my pocket." The unintelligibility of his foe, on this

account, derives from the fact that the larger whole does not even appear to be built of the same substance as the individual units; the individual men – Reese, Carter, Brewster, Fairfax – do not then make the corporation. Money in its material form, cash, does not make the financial structure as men in their material form, bodies, do not make the organization. When Walker, now befuddled, says that “somebody’s got to pay,” he registers his new ambivalence by straddling the line between revenge (against persons) and restitution (of money), as if to deconstruct the project of righteousness.

*Point Blank*’s final scene reveals that money was not the object of Walker’s quest. But the scene functions as a “reveal” in a more technical sense. Brewster, agreeing to help Walker get his money, returns with him to Alcatraz, the site of Walker’s first heist. There Brewster is killed by a gun hired by Fairfax, the last man in the triad. As Fairfax steps into the light, he is revealed to be Yost, the spirit guide to Walker. He tells Walker their deal is done, shouting “come and get your money then!” Walker disappears then, leaving the money to Fairfax/Yost as the trace of Walker’s disillusioned recognition that the corporation cannot be killed, only its officers. Walker finally understands that their duality was made of unequal parts, and he was only doing the bidding for a corporation of which he was the dupe. The corporation only needed *to look* like Walker; it had, in truth, deployed his image of tough lawlessness in order to reinstitute its own law.

Yet it would somehow miss the point to say *Point Blank* is a film about businessmen co-opting the maverick’s image, or that it’s about heroism in the absence of noble quests. *Point Blank* no doubt requires these social conditions to recognize itself, but we should note that these only amount to the conditions for the film’s artistic statement. *Point Blank* participates in a movement of films that take the desperate turn to violence as

a new subject, a new palette of imagery, for film art. Like *Bonnie and Clyde*, it arrived prior to the MPAA's institution of the new Code and Rating Administration in late 1968. It emerged in the gap, that is, between the Production Code and the ratings system. And this emergence of violence as an artistic subject attested to a recognition on Hollywood's part that renewed social relevance could come from converting a mood of desperation into something that looked like art, at least as foreign cinemas had conceived of film as art. John Boorman remarks that the example of the French New Wave, Antonioni, and Fellini led to an "explosiveness" in the Hollywood filmmaking of that period, one that particularly encouraged exploration of the medium. "To me," Boorman claims, "composition was terribly important." And the event of anamorphic widescreen gave filmmakers a new shape for composition. *Point Blank*, then, begins to paint the panorama of violence that finds its climactic expression, its stylized and sensationalized peak, in *The Wild Bunch*; it begins this project, crucially, by explicitly linking failed heroism's recourse to violence and the transpersonal structure of the corporation.

### ***McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, Naturalist History, and the Status of the Entrepreneur**

*McCabe & Mrs. Miller* is still another variation on the theme of the individual and the corporation, but it substitutes a style of naturalism for sensationalism because, we might suppose, the naturalistic tones better evoke a historical past than the stylized ones of *Point Blank*, suited best for the contemporary moment.<sup>10</sup> While *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* adopts its naturalistic look for the sake of historical inquiry, it is nonetheless saturated with contemporary themes. Its assimilation of sensational violence – seen, for example, when a gunshot leaves Pastor Eliot's hand dangling from its sinews – reflects the film's

tendency to signal the contemporary dimension of its historical story. Its historical moment, turn-of-the-century America, just supplies the matrix for a set of economic relations that the film seeks to critique in their present, developed form. As Robert Altman's *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970) so obviously resonated with concerns about Vietnam, the story of John McCabe (Warren Beatty), building a town with entrepreneurial gall and know-how just to have it usurped by a corporation with only money and muscle, functions as a prism for understanding both the Hollywood subordination of filmmaking skill to conglomerate might and the corporate restructuring of the American workforce writ large.

John McCabe arrives on horseback in the mining town of Presbyterian Church. Upon entering Patrick Sheehan's saloon, a dark and gloomy interior marking little improvement on the rainy exterior, McCabe immediately starts a card game. He brings his own blanket and, spreading it on a table, instantly converts the dank backroom into a more convivial casino. Shortly, McCabe enacts the same kind of conversion on the whole town, hiring men to construct a complex of casino, whorehouse, and bathhouse that serves as a leisure locus that transforms the town of miners into a fast community. The transformational logic of McCabe's rapidly developed entertainment complex stands, of course, in telling contrast to the town's perpetually under-construction church; by inference, the town, stitched together as a community in its secular pursuits, emerges from the darkness of its religious bondage. This is modernity's civilizing call, and it also functioned as the Hollywood ethos that suffused a nation with community feeling.<sup>11</sup>

It's appropriate, then, that *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* is a Western, for that was the genre to elaborate the myth of the American civilizing process. And the civilizing process

occurred under the auspices of a rugged individual, the cowboy figure whose nature was dual. As John Belton puts it, this figure “not only occup[ies] the frontier but also embod[ies] it” (210); the figure should express, that is, nature and culture, Eastern reason and Western vigor, body and spirit. In this respect, John McCabe very much recapitulates the split between Walker and Yost, with the strength of Walker as forerunner to the savvy of Yost. McCabe’s reputation as a gunfighter serves to legitimate him, in the minds of the townspeople, as a businessman. When Sheehan asks McCabe about his identity, “‘Pudgy’ McCabe,” he asks, “the gunfighter,” McCabe insists, “businessman, businessman.” But of course the establishment of the latter depends on the tacit authority of the former.

But if McCabe has the authority to start a business via his image as a gunfighter, he draws the content of his business from his life practices. In short, he knows the business of casinos and whorehouses because he himself has long gambled and visited whores; when McCabe identifies himself as a “businessman,” a fellow card player remarks of McCabe’s losing hand, “Business ain’t so good, is it?” His business is continuous with his life, and thus his experience is organic. And the woman of the title, Mrs. Miller (Julie Christie), filling the traditional part of the domestic additive in the civilizing operations,<sup>12</sup> knows how to run a whorehouse with “class girls, clean linen, and proper hygiene” because she herself is a whore. McCabe has Mrs. Miller at his side, as a partner and perhaps more, because his experience, skills, and business practices form a closed circuit. “It’s just my luck the only woman that’s ever been one to me ain’t nothing but a whore,” McCabe admits, “but what the hell, I never was a percentage man, I suppose a whore is the only kind of woman I’d know.”

The logic of this closed circuit means that one doesn't need to be "a percentage man" to know what kind of business McCabe will start: knowing his personality is identical to knowing his business. Indeed, McCabe and Mrs. Miller, by dint of their expertise, build "the fanciest warehouse in the whole territory." But once built, it attracts the attention of "big businessmen" Harrison-Shaughnessy Mining Company, who want to buy out McCabe as they have Patrick Sheehan. When McCabe consults a lawyer about legal protections from the corporation, the lawyer speechifies that "this free enterprise system of ours works" and "working within it we can protect the small businessmen and the big businessmen as well." Of course, the lawyer, the aspirant "next senator from the state of Washington," offers no legal mechanism by which McCabe can be protected from the corporation, only an ideological one. McCabe, he claims, doesn't "need the Marshal": when they "get this thing in the paper and in the courts" the corporation "can't afford to kill" McCabe because "they have stockholders" who they don't want "thinking [the] management isn't imbued with all the principles of fair play and justice, the very values that make this country what it is today." The lawyer's account of the public's ideological investment in the "small businessmen," the entrepreneurs that count as ostensibly national "values," provides an unconvincing defense for McCabe, not simply because McCabe is ultimately killed by the corporation, but because this naïve defense assumes that the public's ideological beliefs are consistent with their real practices. The company can very easily "afford" to kill McCabe because they profit from his death, as do their stockholders.

However much they profit in the near-term, though, the question of whether they can "afford" to kill McCabe may in the long-term be more a managerial question than an

ideological one. After all, McCabe knew how to profitably run the business; Harrison-Shaughnessy, being a mining company, likely does not. While their property acquisition raises the old specter of company towns, it also resembles the new specter of diversified corporations, specifically the conglomerates that had come to dominate Hollywood. In this sense, the one piece of legislation to which the lawyer alludes – anti-trust legislation (“Busting up these trusts and monopolies,” he tells McCabe, “is at the very root of the problem of creating a just society”) – is precisely irrelevant to the small enterprise. Indeed, the Paramount decree of 1948 ended the monopoly studios exercised over production, distribution, and exhibition, but it led to an era of even bigger enterprise, that of the conglomerates. What the takeover of Hollywood at the hands of the conglomerates generated, as it were, was a problem of management, in that corporations such as Gulf + Western “had no prior experience or financial interest in the movie industry” (Monaco 31). The problem, as Galbraith ventures as a thesis in *The New Industrial State*, is that a rift continues to spread in corporations between ownership and management; the two, once coupled, have been severed and express increasingly little relationship. Early in the century, as Galbraith says, “the corporation was the instrument of its owners and a projection of their personalities”; but “the men who now run the large corporations own no appreciable share of the enterprise” (2).

The problem, by Galbraith’s light, does not belong to Hollywood alone in the 1960s, but to the whole of American culture. C. Wright Mills had seized on the historical fact that ownership and control were no longer united in his 1951 study *White Collar*, advancing it as an explanation of failed politics and lost subjectivity. Mills thinks of political involvement as Jeffersonian, and considers the first integer of such involvement



to be made in the style that McCabe makes his way. In the chapter “The World of the Small Entrepreneur,” he describes the entrepreneur’s access to politics: “he owned the sphere of his own work, and because he owned it, he was independent” (9). This is consonant with the Jeffersonian tenets that “Who would govern himself must own his own soul. To own his own soul he must own property, the means of economic security” (9).<sup>13</sup> To the extent, then, that “working skills” were no longer “performed” “upon one’s property,” as increasingly became the case throughout the century, the “economic authority” that stood in as “political authority” was increasingly tendered to the large-scale ownership of property (9-10). To Mills, the “new middle class” is marked by this discontinuity between the work they perform and the property they own, such that the “transformation of property” (what William Roy would call its “socialization” through corporate ownership) means workers “cannot realize” themselves in their work, “for work is now a set of skills sold to another” (14). When the “white-collar man” displaces the rugged individual, he does so not triumphantly, but as a “victim”: he is the “small creature who is acted upon but who does not act” (xii). Thus Whyte’s “organization man” and Mills’s “white-collar man” – the living proof that “the centralization of property has shifted the basis of economic security from property ownership to job holding” and thus eroded the “political power” of individualism (58) – remember the McCabes all the more piquantly. As Mills describes postwar America, “the old independent entrepreneur lives on a small island in a big new world,” which requires that “as an ideological figment and a political force he has persisted as if he inhabited an entire continent” (34).

When McCabe is stalked by the corporation’s three bounty hunters, he is threatened by men that “don’t make deals” but work on behalf of Harrison-Shaughnessy

only “when they can’t make deals.” Their threat is impossible to defuse because it is a specialized function: they act as the muscle of the corporation, but have no connection to the brain. These men of course kill McCabe, but he kills them as well in the process. The deaths, though, can hardly be considered commensurate, as McCabe’s death counts as the death of a whole system of politics, that of economic individualism, whereas the bounty hunters die the death of strict replaceability. In the closing scenes, a dying McCabe struggles through a snowed-over landscape, eventually halting and freezing in place, like a monument for the townspeople, a “political force” preserved as an afterimage while the economic order of which he was a vital part decays.<sup>14</sup>

### **BBS Productions, Management Style, and Mavericks of Capital**

The films expressing suspicion of the corporation carry the emotional charge they do, at least partially, because they are told from the standpoint of those outside the corporation. Their protagonists are “the small creature[s] who [are] acted upon but who [do] not act” (Mills xii); in short, they are objects experiencing a relationship with the subject of the corporation. They are objects, to recall Mills in his Marxian mode, because they do not own the “sphere” of their “own work”; they simply sell their “work skills” to an owner, who increasingly cannot be identified as a person, not concretely at least. This describes the condition of reification, an epiphenomenon of a pervasive system of exchange values, for which Georg Lukács gave the classic account in his essay “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat.” The struggle waged by Lukács is one of theorizing the implacable reifying forces of commodity-structure, capable of reducing all to objecthood, while at the same time imagining means by which people *qua*

objects could “comprehend” and “rebel against” these forces and thereby return themselves to people *qua* subjects. The resulting “subject-object” was thought, in Marxist forecasts, to be the future claim of the proletariat.

Now, Lukács needed to give a certain cast to capitalism, I would argue, in order to say that only the proletariat could supply this revolutionary impetus. He needed, specifically, to characterize it as “irrational” in its totality but so compulsively rationalized in its parts that its functions are rigid, inflexible, and unaccommodating of integral humanity. Namely, Lukács needed Taylorism as the pure expression of labor under capitalism. Taylorism issued from that breakdown of the world in which “partial functions” were made “autonomous” from each other, in which they evolved their own perfectible inner logics; this should be the expected mode, as Adorno and Horkheimer note, when life is conducted by the canon of numbers.<sup>15</sup> On an order where “science” is unmoored from “its vision of the whole” (104), then, one can imagine management as “scientific management”; people’s movements can, by such science, be engineered as so many machine parts working together, if one represses a broader understanding of the brain that coordinates these movements. Of course, this style of management, known in revised form as “Theory X,”<sup>16</sup> is only deemed effective by a certain philosophical mindset, one that Lukács himself might have called the “vantage point” of “reified consciousness” (104).

I argue that in these films we view the corporation from the standpoint of “reified consciousness,” that the corporation becomes an epistemological problem precisely when, during the encounter between “reified consciousness” and corporate structure, the latter appears as “a formally closed system of partial laws” to the former (104).

Epistemological questions, in this interrogation, do not penetrate their “material substratum” and thus produce no “overall knowledge” (109). Given that “reified consciousness,” the very reconfiguration of subjectivity under commodity-structure, views the world as populated by a like kind – a world of *nature morte* as Adorno called it (“Looking Back on Surrealism” 89) – it is difficult to understand the corporation, a site of living agency, as something other than a system of dead objects, or army of automatons, the decision-making center of which lies always out of sight. If we take BBS Productions, in counterpoint, as the vantage from which to view the corporation, we gain an understanding of the corporation *from within*, as a kind of structure that begins to look ontologically distinct from that of the commodity.

When McCabe repudiates partnership in favor of “hav[ing] things [his] own way” – “Deals I don’t mind, it’s partners I don’t like,” he tells Sheehan – he cuts himself off from the historical drift of economic life. The story of BBS Productions (the movie version of which, I will claim, is *Marvin Gardens*) is one of enfranchising oneself with, perhaps even becoming a pioneer of, the economic life of the period. As mentioned, the company formed on what appeared, afterward, to be a kind of sage business insight on the part of its co-founder, Bert Schneider. This insight amounted to trusting that partner Bob Rafelson, and his friend Jack Nicholson, had the sense to ferret out worthwhile properties. Schneider, on no further calculation, wrote a personal check to Dennis Hopper for \$40,000 and Hopper’s band of friends went with cameras to shoot their drug odyssey at Mardi Gras. Schneider’s investment in their self-documented revelry became *Easy Rider*. Yet, even if this act can *look like capitalism* by being assimilated to the brazen of capitalist risk-taking, it will still be hard to recognize in the BBS office space at 933 La

Brea anything like Lukács's description of the "rigid and immobile face" that the "ceaselessly revolutionary techniques of modern production" turn "towards the individual producer" (97). Patrick McGilligan describes offices "decorated with European film posters, posters of the 1968 student riots in France, a Peter Max mural" (201). The building, as Peter Biskind says, "became a hangout for a rag-tag band of filmmakers and radicals of various stripes" (76). Timothy Leary, Abbey Hoffman, and Huey Newton were all known to drop by the offices. "A noted Jungian psychiatrist would regularly visit BBS," McGilligan writes, and "a dope courier would also make the rounds for those who needed a stash" (201). If reification in the monstrous guise of Taylorism should be taken as the norm for capitalist labor, of what kind of economic life did BBS imagine itself to be part?

One might object, on Lukács's behalf, that reification does not begin and end at the workplace, but that the workplace, being the site for labor power's exchange, is only a localized experience of the phenomenon. Lukács stipulates, after all, that "the problem of commodities" must be regarded as "the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects" (83). Even if one's labor power is seemingly allowed to comprise the integral person, as the atmosphere at BBS seemed to encourage, the sale of that labor still occurs on a market of commodities, all of them gutted of their integrity in order to take their place as exchange values. I will address this objection shortly. One might, as well, object that the work practices at BBS were strictly anomalous, that theirs were peculiar to the trendy progressivism of California culture in general and the movie business in particular; further, their work practices, one might argue, reflected the values of the evanescent spirit of the 1960s, and these values explicitly attached to a *counter*, not

*mainstream*, culture. The inner workings of BBS, thus, are hardly representative of the American corporation *from within*. I will address these objections forthwith, because they seem to be less substantial objections than the first.

BBS prided itself, of course, on unconventional methods, with Schneider offering points to most everyone involved in *Easy Rider* and flattening the hierarchy of the company so that its employees participated, as Henry Jaglom said, in “a sensibility that nobody was supposed to exploit anybody else, we were all supposed to be sharing, working collectively” (Biskind 77). The unconventional, however, was called upon by BBS with the rather conventional effect, in managerial terms, of making employees feel vested in their work, making their productivity a matter of inner conviction instead of outer compulsion.

Thomas Frank’s study of business culture in the 1960s, *The Conquest of Cool*, suggests that management style at the time was more susceptible to the lessons of the counterculture than suspicious of them. “American business,” Frank writes, “imagined the counterculture not as an enemy to be undermined or a threat to consumer culture, but as a hopeful sign, a symbolic ally in their own struggles against the mountains of dead-weight procedure and hierarchy that had accumulated over the years” (9). Ignoring standard accounts of a divide between counter and business culture, Frank turns to the industries of menswear and advertising to show how the former helped revitalize the latter. These industries, as management books of the era indicate, were only among the bellwether industries for radicalized corporate practices.

Douglas McGregor stands astride the management theory of the moment, being both the author of epochal book, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (1960), and a consultant

for very conventional firms that radicalized their practices at his behest.<sup>17</sup> McGregor's book divides all organization management into two schemes, Theory X ("the Taylorist 'traditional view', according to which workers must be 'coerced', supervised, and 'directed' by a hierarchy of power" [Frank 22]) and Theory Y ("a more sophisticated approach according to which workers' ingenuity is recognized, and they are motivated by progress toward an objective rather than fear of punishment" [ibid]). Recasting BBS in this light, we can say they simply modeled "Theory Y" management and, far from being out of step with business culture beyond Hollywood and California, participated in the "'permanent revolution' of capitalism itself" by replacing a rotting core of "hierarchy and efficiency" with "individualism and creativity" (Frank 88, 25).

Neither does this management style stand out as a historical curio of the 1960s. In his essay "Corporate Pleasures for a Corporate Planet," Christopher Newfield surveys the management literature on the "new economy" of the 1990s, so much of which merely extends those insights of the 1960s; as Frank, too, describes the "bloated corpus" of today's management theory as "one long tribute to McGregor's thought, an interminable string of corollaries to 'Theory Y'" (22). A "fundamental component" of "life on the corporate inside," Newfield declares, is a transformation of "work into pleasure" (31). Citing Tom Peters's *Liberation Management*, a book "announcing the market death of tyrannical bureaucracy," Newfield notes how insistently Peters offers the pursuit of "unending personal liberation and business fun" as the engine within this "new economic order" (33). It seems unlikely that Tom Peters's version of corporate capitalism would advocate support for its trenchant opponents, such as Huey Newton, but it seems quite likely that Peters would recognize the management style at BBS as belonging to his

economic life. The lineaments of recent corporate capitalism still resemble, then, in most important features, those of an innovated management of the 1960s, predicated on the axiom that capitalism takes health from the seizure of its other, its outside, the case of Huey Newton being only an extreme form of this.

Now, if the business style of BBS was not eccentric but rather an augur of corporate endeavor in a post-Fordist economy – in contrast, for example, to Coppola’s endeavor with *Hollywood General*,<sup>18</sup> an odd return to Fordism – we need to reconsider how reification operates, and if it indeed objectifies in a way that prepares a uniquely “proletarian truth,” as Jameson summarizes Lukács.<sup>19</sup> If the Lukácsian objection that reification does not somehow confine itself to the workplace but has penetrated every reach of capitalist society, because commodity-structure is in fact *general*, then it might mean that transforming work into pleasure, making the worker feel integral to his product, does nothing but mystify the ruthless equivalency of everything (even the content of a given worker’s singular life-experience) within that structure. If we grant this, however, and concede that the workplace can dissimulate as a pleasure space without dissolving the reified sheen of life, we are left to wonder why the proletariat alone could emerge as this “identical subject-object” (149)? Why not, for instance, the “new middle class” who, as Mills claims, no longer own the sphere of their work? By way of explanation, I wish to place Lukács’s voice within this epistemological discourse that resolutely evacuates all sites governed by commodity-structure of the prerogatives of knowledge and action. Lukács, accordingly, gives a tendentious account of the proletarian subject-object because only if this class achieves such status, on Marx’s reckoning, can capitalism be overcome. “Classical philosophy,” according to Lukács,



“finds itself historically in the paradoxical position that it was concerned to find a philosophy that would mean the end of bourgeois society” (148). To the degree that any epistemology leaves bourgeois society standing, one would have to judge it philosophically incomplete, leaving it a marker of thought’s limits.

I certainly don’t mean to suggest that the problem of the identical subject-object, looked at from within BBS, is materially resolved. But I do want to advance two associated claims. I want to claim that *auteurism* concerns a version of this debate and offers, in the context of corporate structure, an elegant, if sophisticated, answer to what might be called an internal limitation of capital, namely its structurally uneven distribution of agency. I want, then, to claim that the “class point of view”<sup>20</sup> to gain consciousness of reification’s pernicious effects turns out to be the “point of view” of the corporation, not a traditional class at all but a collectivized structure nonetheless; and its repurposing and redeployment of nonreified labor practices, at least as *appearances*, in the form of *auteurism*, and what Christopher Newfield will elsewhere call “Emersonian corporate individualism,” softens the transition from the egregious reification of Fordism to that of flexible accumulation.

Before looking at *Marvin Gardens* as both the story of BBS and a demystified account of *auteurism*, we should look at *Head* (1968), the first Raybert production and Rafelson and Schneider’s first effort in filmmaking. *Head* tells the story of the Monkees, the fictive band Rafelson and Schneider converted into a hit television show. Far from being a box-office cash-in on its television popularity, *Head* is a confession of participation in reified life. The film thoroughly deconstructs the Monkees, their fabricated nature, and, by plugging them into a sequence of genre films (war, Western,

boxing pictures), it strives to deconstruct the fabricated nature of the entertainment complex's representations *tout court*. A hare-tempo jingle denouncing the band, sung by the band itself, plays over five columns of television screens: "You say we're manufactured, to that we'll all agree," chirps Davey Jones, now joined by the others in chorus, "Hey, hey, we are the Monkees, we've said it all before, the money's in, we're made of tin, we're here to give you more." All the while, the television screens fill with images, the final one being the traumatic execution of a Viet Cong guerilla, made famous by the Eddie Adams photograph. This icon of war violence, then, overtakes every screen of the five columns, and is punctuated by a woman's scream; as this scream swallows the whole frame, we see a young female fan, screaming in the audience of a Monkees concert. Disavowing the "Prefab Four," a corporate image masquerading as a rock band, was a precondition for forming BBS Productions, a firm so maverick that, as their first commercial project, they undid the barriers that kept the commerce of pop culture uncontaminated by the politics of imperialism: they placed a critique of pop culture's complicity with the war, that is, on the market alongside all the other guileless commercial artifacts.

That the Monkees were produced as objects by certain corporate procedures is no more interesting than their reception as objects by certain contemplative procedures. We know the band is *manufactured* because the jingle's lyrics confess it, and this receives overt depiction in the scenes of the Monkees in a factory, guided by a plant manager who expounds the industrial sophistication of the factory in which, we later see, the Monkees were made by assembly-line methods. The sophisticated methods are geared, the plant manager says, to "a new world whose only preoccupation will be how to amuse itself."

The manager then steers them into a room and, upon forcefully shutting the door, the Monkees find themselves in a black box of a room. In this black box, they perform a silly part for an advertisement; Davy Jones is dropped into his individual black box to perform a dance routine. They execute amusements, in other words, in a space partitioned from the military executions of Viet Cong guerillas. The object lesson, here, is that the rationalized workplace contributes to reification in the same measure as does the habituation of reified consumption; in both the interconnection between corporate amusements and imperial maneuvers is suppressed. The black box is the image of reification. Lukács summons a matching image of reification from Fichte, who describes “the absolute projection of an object *the origin of which no account can be given* with the result that *the space between projection and thing projected is dark and void*” (119 emphasis original).

### ***The King of Marvin Gardens, Self-Posited Submission, and Corporate Friendship***

We can now revisit the darkened radio booth of *Marvin Gardens*, better attuned to what we are seeing. We see the reified image of Jack Nicholson, disconnected in “dark and void” from any setting, any other people, more or less a face caught in tight close-up. On a theater screen, his face would overwhelm an audience. *Marvin Gardens* invokes Nicholson’s status as a star only to invert it: this is a story, after all, of irrefragable partnership, where, we can infer, the individuality sealed in star power is exposed for all the relations concealed by the star’s singular body – the commercial power breathed into the isolated star, for instance, by its multitudinous fan base, the corporate power of distribution and marketing that props up the star. This story, in short, deconstructs

Nicholson's magnitude as another iteration of that of the Monkees. *Marvin Gardens* underscores this not only with its story of partnership, but by "letting Nicholson play against type" (53), as Jay Boyer notes, as the contemplative one, withdrawn in his mind, next to Bruce Dern's exuberant one, luxuriating in his body. But the film undercuts even his contemplative pose when the unedited close-up of Nicholson's face, lasting an unusually protracted six minutes, is now flashed with a red light, filling in the low-key light that had rendered him an object of absorption. While this appears to be public radio, and the interruption comes from his brother's phone call, what it recalls is the broadcasting medium supporting his self-absorbed monologues, and the interruption feels like that of an advertisement. This is the high artist's version, we might think, of the pop star manipulation of the Monkees – first isolated in a black box, they soon find themselves compelled to shill for shampoo.

If *Marvin Gardens* tells the story of partnership, why does it begin with individual portraiture? As it happens, this opening monologue is a staged instance of the corporation considering itself an individual, with the power to confess and the need for private moments. Such a move enacts and bares the mechanics of *auteurism*, a strategic splitting of the difference between an individualist and corporate ethos. Christopher Newfield outlines the philosophical mystifications of individualism in his essay "Emerson's Corporate Individualism" as having a "prehistory" in the antebellum U.S. that has not yet ended (680). Beginning with a recognition of American liberalism's "ongoing ideological and material defenses of its assumptions about individuality" "as the effect either of autonomy or of administered subjection," Newfield marshals Emerson's philosophical work as a self-contradictory elucidation of how self-positing autonomy is gained from

“obeying a massive (benevolent) administrative power which is private *and* out of one’s control” (657-658 emphasis mine). Newfield insists that loss of agency derives from the fact that collective life in America *is* private by virtue of the corporate charter that historically shifted from the common weal to the private. The lost individualism entailed in a shift from contract to corporate law (“legal agency” connected less to “ownership” than to “transactions” [673]) resurfaces in membership in the corporation, such that “the more a person is corporate, the more that person is individual” (663).

This “compromise individualism,” as Newfield explains, demanded rhetoric as elegant as Emerson’s, but this demand must be satisfied again and again. As “administered subjection” is felt to be redoubled in post-war America, the defection film emerges as one kind of proposition about individual autonomy: it becomes feasible only in the moment when community life is repressed, a moment that nullifies agency along with the body politic. If *auteurism* possessed an individualist appeal, then *Marvin Gardens* gives a frank account of its “compromise” because it presents a figure we associate with individual autonomy, the artist with vision, as enfranchised to corporate structure. But this structure assumes Newfield’s parenthetical *benevolence* because its members need not voluntarily pledge their obedience to it; rather they involuntarily love it because the structure is transfigured as that of the family. As we might construe *The Godfather* as a palliative version of competitive capitalism by way of its transformation into the personal business of family, *Marvin Gardens* agrees to claim agency under the terms of partnership so long as the partner is one’s brother.

The aid of rendering collective agency in filial relations does not simply explain how one generation’s paradigm can be retained, though modified, in that of the next; a

sort of détente, at a theoretical level, with the fact that authority is borrowed not created, what Newfield refers us to with “Herbert’s dependence on the law of the father mak[ing] him the explicitly oedipal son” (667). Rendering group submission in family terms has, as well, the practical efficacy of making the workplace appear as one of non-alienated labor. In this sense, *Marvin Gardens* tells the story of BBS. The film allegorizes the relationship of Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider as brothers David and Jason Staebler. In the military, Rafelson was a disc jockey on “all-night sessions” for which he “took to doing long, free-form monologues,” precisely like David Staebler (Boyer 1-2). And Schneider, like Jason Staebler, “had the charisma of a movie star,” “was possessed of extraordinary personal authority,” (Biskind 57) and clearly “love[d] all the hustle” of Hollywood deal-making. Converting their partnership into brotherhood, by film narrative, has the effect of making them “accomplices forever.” Indeed, Peter Biskind quotes a close friend of Schneider’s saying, “It was almost like you mingled your blood with Bert when you were his friend or business associate” (55).

Of course, converting business relations into family ones did not require the alchemy of film narrative, in Schneider’s case, given that his father Abe was the President of Columbia Pictures, his older brother Stanley ran the studios from New York, and his younger brother Harold was the unit producer for BBS. This filial backdrop, then, provided the ethos for the BBS labor environment, where everyone was taken care of as family; the flipside of which can be detected in Nicholson’s comments on his casting practices for *Drive*, *He Said*: “If I hire my friends, the people I work with will be willing to do anything for me” (McGilligan 204). In other words, turning work into family induces involuntary submission on the part of workers. The approach could be taken as a

fusion of styles of capitalism, as Alfred Chandler sees them modeled by the largest industrial economies. British “personal capitalism,” with its “family-controlled” managerial culture, “assembled smaller management teams” that characteristically were “located on or near the largest plant,” “having daily contact” with other tiers of management (241-242). Grafting the British-style relations onto the competitive structure of American capitalism, such that cozy human contact displaced the “detailed organization charts and manuals” (242) of outsize organizations, allowed BBS to operate as a unit of Columbia Pictures but functionally appear as a grass-roots, maverick company wherein friends nurtured the creativity of friends.

When David and Jason Staebler first demonstrate their radicalized business creed, however, it is not their family culture that marks its difference but their ostensibly noncompetitive practices. In a scene on the Atlantic City boardwalk, in a store apparently not their own, the brothers give away appliances and gadgets to a frenzied crowd of women waving dollars overhead, with David insisting, “We don’t want your money, ladies!” After the women disperse, the store proprietor questions the brothers, “What about my merchandise?” David returns, “Why be so short-sighted, why don’t you think of the goodwill that it bought you?” The insistence that the exchange could be termed a success without the “receipts” the proprietor needs to “balance [his] books” is elaborated in Jason’s “news flash” that “these grandmas are coming back with half the widows of South Jersey.” The curious redefinition of business success in terms other than monetary profit amounts to the burden of Peter Drucker’s thought. Perhaps the most important writer on management theory in the field’s history, Drucker sought to rehabilitate Western capitalism by the vehicle of the modern corporation, which, at its best, “might

stand athwart the atomizing, existentially harsh modernity” of “twentieth-century economic life” (Lichtenstein 11). Among Drucker’s innovations was “that a business cannot be defined or explained in terms of profit” (Drucker 35); the only valid purpose of a business is “*to create a customer*” (37 emphasis original).

Jason argues that “half the widows of South Jersey” could be counted as new customers “not because they got a handout for nothing, but because merchandise was presented to them with style.” The immediate exchange, that is, won’t secure a business, but rather the long-term capacity to exchange. What characterizes BBS, if we might step back from *Marvin Gardens*, is not simply the culture within its office walls but the culture that they tried to construct beyond their walls, a business purpose that, in Drucker’s word’s, “[lay] in society” (37). In this sense BBS would be noncompetitive with, say, other filmmakers of the New Hollywood because the urgent business in the 1960s was to restore a market of filmgoers. And, in keeping with this intent, BBS cooperated rather than compete. As Hal Ashby was preparing to film *Coming Home* (1978), he solicited television footage from a number of production companies, all of which footage entailed a fee. Bert Schneider sent a missive to Columbia on Ashby’s behalf, asking that the fee be waived, whether because he wished to save Ashby production costs or whether he simply deplored the deadening proceduralism of Ashby having to acquire permission for each seconds-long clip. Trafficking in a related film aesthetic and traveling in the same circuit of political causes, Schneider and Ashby alike cared about enlarging their audience more than their residuals.

Whether by revealing market segments in a hitherto monolithic market, such as the youth market, or by demolishing barriers to markets unpenetrated by decree of the



national security state, BBS sought to reimagine world markets as a network of friends. When Schneider accepted an Oscar for *Hearts and Minds* (1974) at the 1975 Academy Awards, he used the opportunity to read a letter from the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam conveying “greetings of friendship to all the America people” (*New York Times* May 4, 1975). Of course Schneider incited the anger of the Hollywood old guard, such as Bob Hope, for whom the USO likely represented the farthest reach of Hollywood’s market. Frank Sinatra, in turn, read his own message “on behalf of the Academy” decrying Schneider’s (Kinn 198). And just like that the Oscars telecast staged a spontaneous debate on whether the Hollywood market should be fractured by geopolitical alliances, a debate riven by generation (as jeers at Sinatra registered) and haunted, no doubt, by a McCarthyist past, which made high drama of Hollywood’s obligations to what Jerome Christensen calls “an old customer, the national security state” (“Time Warner” 596). Schneider may have breached industry orthodoxy but, in doing so, he likely grew rather than shrunk his scope of customers that night.

*Marvin Gardens* had construed the global dimensions of markets several years before that Oscar ceremony. When David and Jason meet Japanese businessmen who may invest in their proposed island resort, the point is that you don’t “settle every last detail over a lobster” but that lobster dinners do forge the friendships that mean new investment money and new audiences. By the mid-1970s, Schneider had acknowledged that part of business was widening this circle of “friendship,” denoting in this case *potential sources of financing*. He remarked that “the advent of civilian money into Hollywood” had changed the business atmosphere, that an “influx of Arab oil money is one example of the new funding sources” (“Finding the Cash”). In the narrative of

*Marvin Gardens* the geographical ecumenism of their investment initiatives lends support, on the face of it, to a corporate domain beyond geography; the domain created would be Staebleravia, the locus of which would be in the South Pacific but the ownership of which, in terms of shareholders, would be transnational.

But the modality of corporate friendship, as intimated already, though maverick vis-à-vis the insularity of Old Hollywood studio practices, is only revolutionary in the sense that the very core of capitalism is revolutionary, what Joseph Schumpeter calls its “creative destruction.” BBS is otherwise an outrider of an incipiently “flexible” “regime of accumulation” (Harvey 124). The flexibility, it turns out, allowed BBS and such production companies to obviate union rigidity, and the principle of friendship and work-as-pleasure here served as an alibi. Concurrent with the production of *Marvin Gardens*, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) filed an “unfair labor practice” charge against BBS, claiming that a new firm with a “fictitious” name had been set up to avoid “obligations under existing agreements” (*Variety* Sept. 27, 1972). BBS had set up N.B. Productions, alleged Gerald Smith of IATSE, “to avoid hiring” “an American citizen,” preferring instead to “import” “so-called artists” from Europe. BBS, Smith claimed, threatened the local “to take the pic to Canada” in order to work with the cameraman of their choice (*Variety*).

Of course this occurred under the auspices of global friendship, not under the industrial labor laws generated by nation-states. Global friendship, in another lexicon, was known as “runaway production,” and Robert Altman had raised the hackles of organized labor by shooting *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* in British Columbia, thereby hiring nonunion crews and creating conditions where a crew member stands, in Altman’s words,

“up to his ass in mud and water building this bridge with some other, and I mean this is really hard work. Those people up there – and I know they’re not on dope, so they’re not just up there stoned – they really love what they’re doing” (Thomas 62). The pride of New Hollywood, to revisit Nicholson’s quote, is to break compliance with labor practices by turning work into a friendship in which workers are “willing to do anything.”

Fundamentally, the hegemony of corporate friendship recognizes that, as Jason Staebler reasons, you don’t “insul[t] the wrong people”; by corollary, you befriend the right people. Jason explains to his brother David that their island resort was refused a gambling license when Donald Dimbleby applied for it, because “Dimblewit” thought he could “do it without politicians.” But “you never can,” Jason lectures. Like *The Godfather*, *Marvin Gardens* inculcates a series of business maxims, none of which support the “efficiency theory” of business success. In Chandler’s influential account, “efficiency theory” explains business success in terms of rationalized management, a “visible hand,” replacing market forces as the coordinating force in modern enterprises. William Roy’s *Socializing Capital* refutes Chandler’s efficiency model, explaining that business success is rather determined by power arrangements – befriend the right people, on Jason’s philosophy. We might say that it is for this reason that *Marvin Gardens* renders business protocols in a criminal *milieu*. For that matter, all the above films (*Parallax View*, *Point Blank*, and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*) place business in a criminal *milieu*. The sense that capitalism is not a meritocracy but a distribution of power pervades all these films; thus honor among thieves necessarily displaces labor laws. *Marvin Gardens*, we might say, is the only film that seeks to redefine the grammar of the system rather than sound an agonized denunciation of it.

Indeed, *Marvin Gardens* makes a point of renaming the “hustle” so that it seems like something else. In the way that Drucker renames capitalism’s inveterate profit motive as the creation of customers, *Marvin Gardens* renames the “hustle” of the criminal *milieu* as the domain of the philosopher-king, the visionary artist. And explaining the naming of the domain as itself the business of the domain has an *a fortiori* power if, as David claims, “image is everything in business today.” If, in other words, businesses succeed by creating customers, they engage in what Thomas Frank calls “nothing other than the construction of consumer subjectivity” (24). And they do this by means of “image,” by presenting merchandise “with style.” Jason Staebler simply calls this the work of an artist. When the Staebler brothers purchase the island of Tiki, they will get to rename it; and David, as the artist, “can consider that [his] department.” The question, then, of which one is the artist and which one the businessman becomes redundant: if business success turns on the production of style, then the successful businessman will in all cases be an artist.

*Marvin Gardens*, we observed, begins with individual portraiture, that of David Staebler *qua* contemplative artist, only to open onto the relations of partnership, the mechanics of group behavior. And the film closes, likewise, on the image of David sealed in his radio booth, engrossed again in the pathos of monologue, as if to suggest that the collective personality expresses its integral unity in the form of a lone individual. Told from David’s standpoint, the story of business partnership – with its “middle-age kewpie dolls,” “Japanese businessmen in bibs,” and “Lilly’s dolphin” – can be construed as figments of the artist’s imagination, a world of interesting characters posited by the contemplative mind. BBS, by corollary, expressed its personality to the public in the

figure of Jack Nicholson, and their corporate structure concealed itself in his bravura individualism. If the corporation cannot be known as a person can, it cannot have friends as a person can; and *auteurism*, in this context, offered a concrete response to the abstractions of corporate personality, such that operations on a large-scale could be performed, after a kind of legerdemain, on the small-scale of friendship between individuals.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*, Walter Benn Michaels gives a substantial account of the corporate personhood debate, exploiting its often abstrusely theoretical character to help theorize the status of personhood in the fictions of American Naturalism. See his chapter “Corporate Fiction,” specifically pages 195-206. The *locus classicus* for this debate is Arthur Machen’s essay “Corporate Personality,” published in the *Harvard Law Review* in February, 1911. Machen’s essay first surveys the Continental debate on the subject, which he notes is much more involved than that of English law. He then engages “two basic propositions, (1) that a corporation is an entity distinct from the sum of the members that compose it, and (2) that this entity is a person” (258). See also John Dewey’s essay, “The Historic Background of Corporate Legal Personality,” published in the *Yale Law Journal* in April, 1926. Dewey refers to the decisive influence for “English readers” of Frederic William Maitland’s account of the corporation’s personhood as a “synonym” for its status as a “right-and-duty-bearing unit” (656). Dewey intercedes in the debate on behalf of the philosophical notion of “personality,” the conceptual instability of which, subtending the “jural person,” has “generated confusion and conflict” in the legal concept (658). The philosophical position, which is thoroughly intermixed in the legal position, refers back inexorably to modern German philosophical accounts of the “subject” and “subjectivity,” and for that, Dewey writes, one needs some knowledge of “Kant in particular” (660). I chiefly call on Machen’s and Dewey’s accounts because they are both formative in the larger debate and because they best evoke the philosophical dimension of the legal debate.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey, drawing on the models of the “regulation school,” describes this shift in terms of a problem basic to Fordism, its “rigidity of long-term and large-scale fixed capital investments in mass-production systems that precluded much flexibility of design” (142). When the Eurodollar market formed in response to a forsaken Bretton Woods agreement, the profit principle called for more flexible production models, which meant more flexible labor markets as well as more flexible government (i.e., the scaling down of the welfare state). This led to flexible accumulation, which “rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption” and “is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation” (147). Arguing for how this shift fed into the production of new subjectivities, Harvey says that “the extent of this kind of downsizing, and the spread of temporary contracts in the non-Fordist sector, have created some of the social conditions for the fluidity and insecurity of identities that typify what can be called postmodernity” (*Spaces of Capital* 14). I would here add, without recourse yet to notions of postmodernity, that identities are secured, in this new regime, by identifying with the corporation over against the state or organized labor.

<sup>3</sup> In *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, Edward Dimendberg contends that the city, as represented in film noir, was never truly a period snapshot of the totalized city, but rather manifested a “nonsynchronous character” that’s “best apprehended as a tension between a residual American culture and urbanism of the 1920s and 1930s and its liquidation by technological and social innovations accompanying World War II, as well

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as the simultaneous dissolution of this new social compact of the 1940s and 1950s by the society emerging in the 1960s, in which the simulacra and spectacles of contemporary postmodern culture are clearly visible in retrospect” (3).

<sup>4</sup> Dimendberg describes this retrospective postwar gaze on the past as one still exercising a “palpable fascination” for a vanishing “period in American society whose seemingly transparent social structure” was stitched together with “relative ease by a morally irreproachable detective figure” (4). The city still fascinates, in his account, but not for its mystery alone. “Eclipsed by the dispersal of space in the suburbs and the geographic ubiquity and impersonality of the large corporation and the more opaque social and economic relations developing in its wake,” Dimendberg claims, “the dark cities of film noir nonetheless retain a firm hold upon the contemporary imagination” (4). Dimendberg suggests, that is, that viewers, from a standpoint in “dispersed” and “centrifugal space,” return to old noirs for an “image of the city” (6, 7). I take Dimendberg’s reading of the genre to be canny, and would add to it that, when noirs were made after the main cycle (dated 1941-1958, give or take several years), they registered an interest in the city from a wholly different diegetic standpoint. Dimendberg notes how investigative agents once found “egress from the violent metropolis” in a “snowy wilderness” (7), as Robert Ryan did in *On Dangerous Ground* (1952); this occurred, we might say, because the agents lived in the metropolis. In a film like *Taxi Driver* (1976), those who would wish to investigate the city are Betsy’s parents in the suburbs, who take interest in her transition between suburb and city, *how* she got from one to the other, rather than in understanding the city itself. Once Betsy is saved from the city, one presumes, her parents likely lose interest in the melee it becomes.

<sup>5</sup> For a different reading, see Fredric Jameson’s chapter “Totality as Conspiracy” in his study *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*. Jameson remarks on this opposition, city and suburb, in terms of Lukács’s valence of the “political” in the historical novel, held in place, as it were, by an “opposition of public and private,” which was structurally necessary for any “distinct, specialized ‘political’ literature about public life” (48). In turn he suggests that the specificity of the “conspiratorial narrative,” because it’s predicated on the loss of the private, is to “stand as a symptom of the tendential end of ‘civil society’ in late capitalism” (48).

<sup>6</sup> Again, I acknowledge Jameson’s “Totality as Conspiracy” for its treatment of the films of the “paranoia trilogy” as well as other conspiracy films, such as *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) and *Videodrome* (1982). He explains conspiracy stories as the effort to cognitively map the world-system, and thus the inscription of transportation modes as well as communication technologies becomes a necessary textual feature for tracking the circulation of both people and information through this system. In discussing a scene from *Condor* in which Redford descends “into the interior of the telephone central” to tap the lines of the conspirators, Jameson claims that this scene is a *topos* of the genre and in fact the “promise of a deeper inside view is the hermeneutic content of the conspiracy thriller in general” (15). I understand the “deeper inside view” of these paranoid stories to give onto the corporation itself, its nerve center and seat of action, whereas Jameson tends to characterize the view more broadly as that of the world-system. These two views could be congruent, in that glimpsing the inner workings of the large-scale corporation might well be tantamount to glimpsing the inner workings of the world-system.

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<sup>7</sup> The film regularly infantilizes Joe Frady, showing him on a miniature train in a children's zoo, for example, or having him order milk in a bar where the rough patrons all drink liquor. A moment in the film's opening sequence best establishes this motif: Frady, trying to sneak onto the elevator in the Space Needle where Senator Carroll will be assassinated, is stopped by security and left to watch like a child as the authorized press ascend the Space Needle. The scene emblemizes Frady being debarred from knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> I would note that Jerome Christensen uses the same analogy with respect to Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991). In his essay "The Time Warner Conspiracy: *JFK*, *Batman*, and the Manager Theory of Hollywood Film," Christensen writes: "Although [Michael] Albert eagerly followed Stone in his rejection of the suspiciously simplistic lone gunman theory of the assassination, he strangely adhered to the equally simplistic lone crusader theory – if not Kennedy, struck down in his prime, or Garrison, stonewalled by government bureaucracy, then Stone himself, pilloried by a mainstream press unwilling to tolerate challenges to its prerogatives. Albert did not feel the pinch of the contradiction because he was a victim of theory – and not political theory but film theory. Despite his able critique of persons as causes, he embraced the explanatory model of the *auteur* theory, which proposes the director as agent of the distinctive vision of the motion picture" (592).

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 5 for an extensive discussion of Braudelian analysis, carried out by Giovanni Arrighi in his study *The Long Twentieth Century*. In particular, refer to the section "Economic Orders and Borders."

<sup>10</sup> Of course it's inaccurate to say that *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* is less stylized than *Point Blank*; it is the case, though, that the stylization is of a naturalistic kind, meant to recall antique photographs or a "The Potato Eaters"-era Van Gogh painting. Cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond "flashed" the film negative to give the film its worn look.

<sup>11</sup> As only one testimony on the ideologically cohesive effect of Hollywood classicality, Robert Ray cites William Manchester's remark that "even in the 1970s, middle-aged strangers could relate to one another and find a meeting ground by references to *The Philadelphia Story*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, or any other of a hundred films remembered and cherished, over thirty years later, by virtually an entire generation" (130).

<sup>12</sup> As Belton notes of Westerns, women "embody the values of family, community, education, domestication, and cultivation that inform the male hero's transformation of the wilderness into a garden" (214).

<sup>13</sup> Mills is here citing A. Whitney Griswold's interpretation of "Jefferson's doctrine."

<sup>14</sup> By comparison, we might recall a similar frozen death in a film at the start of the next decade, *The Shining* (1980). Unlike the comforting figure of McCabe, the frozen Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) is a monumental warning of the kind of megalomania that comes from a resistance to the present social realities in favor of a romanticized version of bygone social realities.

<sup>15</sup> In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer say that "number became the canon of the Enlightenment," and this abetted the functioning of a bourgeois society "ruled by equivalence": "It makes the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to abstract quantities" (7).



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<sup>16</sup> “Theory X” comes from Douglas McGregor’s schematic breakdown of organization management styles in his 1960 book, *The Human Side of Enterprise*.

<sup>17</sup> For an account of McGregor’s role in Proctor and Gamble’s radicalized practices, see Art Kleiner’s *The Age of Heretics*.

<sup>18</sup> In *Whom God Wishes to Destroy*, John Lewis tells the story of Coppola’s 1980 purchase of the studio facilities of Hollywood General, characterizing Coppola’s vision for the studio as a throwback to “the old days” of the studio system. With new facilities for his production company, Zoetrope, Coppola projected a “positively nostalgic production structure”: “a place where you could have writers and actors and designers and special effects people and photographers, all of whom agree to come to work under the highest possible standards with real discipline” (8).

<sup>19</sup> In *Marxism and Form*, Jameson turns the Lukácsian model around so that it applies less to the “ideals of scientific knowledge,” and still less to scientific management, and more to the “nineteenth-century novel” (189 emphasis original).

<sup>20</sup> Lukács claims that a way out of reification “can be seen only from the standpoint of the proletariat because the meaning of these tendencies is the abolition of capitalism and so for the bourgeoisie to become conscious of them would be tantamount to suicide” (181). My claim, then, that the corporation comes to form a class with such consciousness only means, on Lukács’s diagnosis, that the contradictions of capitalism “will remain unresolved and will be produced by the dialectical mechanics of history at a higher level, in an altered form and with increased intensity” (198).

## CHAPTER V

### FROM COWBOY TO VIETNAM VETERAN: THE LIFESPAN OF AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUALISM

We have seen how the disaster film's imagination of technology in ruins was little more than the obverse of the defection film's bucolic imagination, each joining a more general effort to reinstate the conditions of possibility for autonomous individualism. Both imaginations are retrogressive, I submit, when compared to the corporate individualism of *Marvin Gardens*. They wish to return to a lost frontier culture in which the spread of capitalist markets still allows one to think of an inside and an outside to the economic and juridical order. They wish, in other words, to confect their stories from outmoded materials.

The period of 1967-1974, though, is one in which new economic and juridical realities are triggered by the undoing of this inside-outside model in the name of the transnationalization of corporate capitalism, occurring in plain sight (from the Marshall Plan to Bretton Woods to the advent of Eurodollars and the boom of foreign exchange markets). Everything, in this new order, happened *within* these corporations that traversed national borders. We can thus say that, in a narrative register, Hollywood film records this shift when Bobby Dupea, at the end of *Five Easy Pieces*, divests himself of his money and identification – all the markers of national citizenship – and then the Staebler brothers, in the course of *Marvin Gardens*, invest themselves in the identity of Staebleravia – a new dream of corporate membership. The trouble in using these two films to measure this shift, and the ideological accommodations it compelled, is that,

having been made only two years apart, they foreshorten the historical process; they offer but a synchronic view on it.

To gain a proper long view on the ideological vicissitudes of individualism, which we might suppose is first and foremost economic individualism,<sup>1</sup> we should turn our gaze on the changing fortunes of the Western hero, the cowboy, a representation so evidently sensitized to economic and juridical realities. If we recognize *auteurism* as a means of recasting an individualism in disrepair, as I suggest we ought, then tracing the trajectory of the cowboy hero will help us see how individualism came to fail its ideological exigencies over the course of the postwar period. As a stock icon of individualism, the cowboy hero was given its classical expression in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), and then it was Ford, as well, who delivered its valediction in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962).<sup>2</sup> After *Liberty Valance* demystifies the "classic configuration of the individual, self-reliant Westerner," to use Thomas Schatz's words, as a mythic golden mean between "natural and cultural forces" (70), in effect eulogizing the figure, the cowboy hero does not simply become "a museum piece," as *The Shootist* (1976) says, because it has outlived its time. Instead, in 1970s Hollywood film the cowboy hero mutates into the Vietnam veteran, suggesting that the figure's location on the edge of the juridical order, once needed for that order's vitality, now introduces dissonance into that order.

The agent of disorder the cowboy hero has become by 1962 – best displayed by his confrontation with the reality principle in *Lonely Are the Brave* and his consecration as myth in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* – is so because his sense of self-reliance entails a refused internalization of the existing order, a refusal which passes for ethics as

such. The cowboy hero, that is, promises to negate the social order again and again, and this act would tally as ethical on the same rationale that structures the “ethos of disaffiliation” behind the defection film. At the dawn of the sixties, then, the cowboy hero shows the features of the defector, and therefore as a part of living history, rather than as a “museum piece,”<sup>3</sup> he connotes revolutionary politics rather than the Manifest Destiny underwriting the progress narrative of American imperialism. *Lonely Are the Brave*’s protagonist, Jack Burns (Kirk Douglas), hiding from law enforcement in the New Mexico mountains, has most in common with the *Foco*-school revolutionaries in the Sierra Maestras and the Viet Cong guerillas in jungle undergrowth. Burns is a repudiation of the technocrat’s version of modernity. That Burns should preview the characterology of the defector in 1962, the same year as *David and Lisa* exhibited early generic traits of the defection film and enjoyed sleeper popularity, marks the year as a kind of switching point for sensibility, after which the cowboy hero will either induce nostalgia, as an afterimage of former lifeways, or become the sign of radicalism.<sup>4</sup>

The burden of this chapter, then, is to connect the dots between *Lonely Are the Brave* and *David and Lisa* and their predecessors and successors, to clarify a relationship between the *auteurist* moment, which I designate roughly as 1967-1974, and the longer period of postwar American culture.<sup>5</sup> The postwar period forms an economic unity, one that Theodore Roszak, for instance, calls “the Age of Affluence” and claims stretches from 1942 to 1972. His bookend years mark the end of the Great Depression and the entrance into the war – a move that “rebuilt” the “entire industrial plant of the United States” into “the world’s only state-of-the-art technological establishment” (xii) – and

then the beginning of the oil shortages that pricked the exuberance of affluence by reintroducing the principle of scarcity.

What I wish to demonstrate, in turn, is that the period forms a cultural unity as well, in that storytelling practices, unwittingly pegged to economic practices, follow a trajectory that resolves in the moment known otherwise as the sixties. While I acknowledge that non-narrative culture might as fully disclose the era's dynamics of subjectivity, I seize on "storytelling practices" as an instance of cultural production chiefly because the institution of Hollywood is defined, classically, as a narrative cinema, and I wish to chart the rise and fall of certain narrative tendencies in Hollywood film. I recognize, however, that I could open this period in 1953, when Merce Cunningham's "Suite by Chance" (a product of Cunningham's "chance operation" collaborations with John Cage, dating back to the 1940s) underlines the way in which the organization of economic life informs the disposition of the expressive arts on questions of how the body is determined. In this alternate telling, I might select Elinor Langer's 1973 publication of "Notes for Next Time: A Memoir of the 1960s" as the twilight of this cultural moment, for its confession that defection from institutions had made the New Left "heroes and heroines of imaginary revolutionary," prepared not for "engagement but detachment" (76). Instead, I take the sounding of similar concerns in various domains of culture as a license to claim that a preoccupation with the form of the individualist credo did not simply denote a film-historical inward movement (i.e. Hollywood needed to tweak or render novel an old story). It indicated that the basics internal to the Western genre had a general purchase in U.S. cultural history.

Of course, claiming that the stuff of the Western genre also informed the dance ideas of Merce Cunningham might lead one to surmise, after the strong model in which base expresses itself as superstructure (denounced as vulgar Marxism), that the “stuff” in question is sheer economics. Rather than grant total determining power to economics, I prefer to regard this stuff as transactions between the economic and juridical, in which priority falls alternately on the economic system and the state apparatus. In support of such an analysis, I refer to Giovanni Arrighi’s *The Long Twentieth Century*, which builds on Fernand Braudel’s *longue durée* studies of capitalism as a world system broken into phases of capital development. The phases split into “material expansion” in which “money capital ‘sets in motion’ an increasing mass of commodities,” and next into “financial expansion” in which “an increasing mass of money capital ‘sets itself free’ from its commodity form” (6). Arrighi calls these two phases, taken together, a “full systemic cycle of accumulation” (6 emphasis original); these two phases will solicit, one expects, different regulatory environments.<sup>6</sup>

Arrighi’s schema is useful for the task of assessing the ideological curve of individualism because it frames the interplay of the economic and juridical, the jostling between economic and state imperatives captured, for instance, in what David Harvey describes as the yielding of the Fordist-Keynesian regime of accumulation to that of flexible accumulation. Harvey remarks of the transition that, while there had “always been a delicate balance between financial and state powers,” this had “evidently meant a shift towards the empowerment of finance capital vis-à-vis the nation state” (3). I will offer a scenario, accordingly, in which this provokes an individualism with new contours, leaving behind those of a material body bent on staking out its own territorial

sovereignty, and replacing them with those of an immaterial body, whose sovereignty derives from its independence from fixed territory, like the corporate prerogative of vanishing and reappearing wherever it is most propitious.

Beyond its frame for economic-judicial issues, Arrighi's schema can endow with a sense of deep history the postwar era *as a* period, insofar as it accentuates the "patterns of recurrence and evolution" that fit it into the longer life of a world system. Pinpointing the exact dates and punctual events that begin and end a period is admittedly a fool's game, because periods tend to phase in and out gradually rather than punctually. But given that only a fool's game can make a period intelligible as such, I will structure this chapter by considering two story cycles of the Western hero, the sequence of which constitutes a period. The first cycle runs from *Stagecoach* to *Liberty Valance* (1939-1962), and it exhibits, under the curatorial hand of John Ford, the waxing of the cowboy myth. I draw selectively on the films of this cycle to describe the balance sought between natural and positive law in the classical figure of the Western hero. The second cycle, then, runs from *Lonely Are the Brave* (1962) to *First Blood* (1982), and it tracks the waning of the cowboy myth. I compare the homologous structures of these films from 1962 and 1982 for the fact that, though they are strikingly alike, their telling difference is that the former film has a cowboy for its protagonist, and the latter film a Vietnam veteran. In the intervening years, moreover, two important films – *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *The Deer Hunter* (1978) – negotiate, in both concealed and overt ways, a merger of the Western hero and the Vietnam veteran, disclosing the philosophical coordinates used in constructing both figures and supplying them their ideological suasion. An explanation of

the waning value of the cowboy myth will, ultimately, make sense of the *auteur* as a preferable figure of ideology.

### **Economic and Juridical Orders and Borders**

I have made preliminary remarks on how Arrighi's long cycles of capital accumulation might give shape to the postwar period, but looking at the finer details of his framework will allow us to thusly ask broad questions: Does the fixity of commodity capital versus the flexibility of finance capital bear calculably on the style of individualism encouraged in such economies? Do these forms of capital result in territorialist or capitalist logics of state-making? And, as an important corollary, does one logic issue in, or stabilize, the state-form more naturally? And, last, if the state-form derives from one logic rather than the other, how will the individualism so implicit in liberalism accommodate itself to one logic or the other? Working out these questions sets the parameters in which the cowboy myth takes on its historicity; in setting these, we see like a series of chess moves the historical modifications needed to remake this figure into the Vietnam veteran, who can only menace the order the cowboy once vouchsafed.

Arrighi divides capital development into four systemic cycles of accumulation. He identifies the most recent of these as the U.S. cycle and claims that it begins in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and supersedes the British cycle in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The cycle, as noted, comprises a phase of material expansion and a phase of financial expansion. Arrighi takes these phases to be a "restatement" of Karl Marx's "general formula of capital" expressed as "MCM'," or money capital, commodity capital, and second-order money capital. This essentially means that capital prefers to remain liquid, but in order to



expand it must do so in the form of fixed production (the production of this or that commodity), only to return as “*expanded liquidity*” (5). In terms of the rise to prominence of the U.S. economy, the point to be made, with respect to a period of growing commodity capital, is that the expansion of the U.S. economy that led to its eclipse of British hegemony was sustained by “the comparative size and growth potential of the domestic market” (61). In that regard, the U.S. held a *territorial* advantage over an expanding economy such as Germany. Owing to the U.S.’s “continental dimension, its insularity, and its extremely favorable endowment of natural resources” (61), the size and kind of land within the U.S. state accommodated its capital development. Thus, its period of state expansion (Manifest Destiny) – which we’ll take to be its annexing of large markets then used for production *as well as* consumption – had the effect of looking the same as its capital expansion.

And this fact – that for Benjamin Franklin, as Arrighi says, the “territorialist spirit” was the same thing as the “capitalist spirit” (60) – powerfully shapes the style of individualism characteristic of the icon under consideration, the cowboy hero. We might, moreover, refer again to the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal touted by C. Wright Mills, an arrangement in which the individual “owned the sphere of his own work” (*White Collar* 9). We dimly sense, here, that the individualism once supposed “economic” could just as well be “territorial,” and that their conjunction might be strictly conditional. Indeed, the fact that no necessary overlap obtains between “territorialism” and “capitalism,” and that they could be deemed “opposite modes of rule or logics of power” (Arrighi 33), is a lesson made plain at the conclusion of the material expansion phase and the commencement of the financial expansion phase, the hunt for liquidity behind the

Marshall Plan. That the two logics could decouple and each support distinct “modes of rule” – long occluded by the circumstance that their blend supported *a single mode of rule* – became apparent when, in the postwar economic climate, “capitalist enterprises” became progressively more “enmeshed in dense trans-statal networks of production and exchange” causing “the segmentation of these networks into discrete political jurisdictions” to “have a detrimental bearing on the competitive positions of each and every capitalist enterprise” (32-33). This is an esoteric way of saying that, in different moments of accumulation, corporations could be impeded by states. At this juncture, were the corporation to unmoor itself from the segmented territories of states, and their juridical spaces, we would see a new style of individualism.

In sum, corporations could *seem* to hew to a “territorialist” logic just as much as a “capitalist” one<sup>7</sup> to the extent that the state had power over liquidity (the U.S., for example, held “a virtual monopoly of world liquidity” in 1947 when “its gold reserves were 70 per cent of the world’s total” [275]) and a sustaining share of “productive capacity and effective demand” (the U.S. national income was “more than twice that of” “the combined national incomes of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries” [275]). With these logics harmonized, during the U.S. phase of commodity capital, the capitalist logic of corporations seemed to support the territorial logic of the state. But, as the explosive growth of the foreign exchange market throughout the 1960s and 1970s led liquidity off the rails of monetary governance established at Bretton Woods in 1944, in tandem with the liberation of Third World countries from colonial rule (which system had been, in another lexicon, the territorial-extension of the dominant states) and the opening of these markets for certain input-output combinations for the

world economy, the corporation will now *seem* to cut against the territorial logic of a state system. As such, during the U.S. phase of finance capital, a corporate hegemony subordinates the territorial logic that had long underpinned state-making. And, within this hegemony, the terms of territorial logic no longer organize the style of individualism.

The labor done by the word “seem,” in the paragraph prior, is to suggest that the source of a juridical order could never, with much conviction, be assessed as precisely the function of the territorial logic of the state or the capitalist logic of the economic system. As Arrighi contends, if states impede business, “capitalist enterprises may well mobilize governments to reduce rather than increase or reproduce the political division of the world-economy” (33). In this scenario, the juridical order would not derive from those divided territories known as states, but a supraterritorial demiurge would wear the mask of state government as it fashions the laws of the land. This scenario spells the end of an outside to any given juridical order, because the source of laws could never be located inside anyway, not at least in authentically democratic means. If corporations could thus produce the appearance of state expressions, then what appears as the outside of the state could likely be called the inner space of the corporation. The principle of the corporation, in short, could always cast suspicion on the project of the state, on the juridical order it had meant to circumscribe.

This description, one might observe, echoes the argument of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*, which holds that Empire, the formation of a transcendent economic-juridical order, has supplanted the former imperial system of nation-states. This occurs, in part, through the elimination of an “outside” by means of the “formal” and “real” “subsumption” of the noncapitalist world, which describes bringing labor and value from

non-capitalist practices under capitalist “relations of production” (*Empire* 255). More generally, the loss of an outside counts as the work of modernization, which is always “the internalization of the outside, that is, the civilization of nature” (187). (In both respects, the Green Revolution would be understood as such a subsumption of the outside.) In all events, this loss of borders and of an outside marks a crisis in our icon of individuality, the cowboy hero, whose place it was to be on the border between civilization and nature, a locus privileged in modernity as a “border place,” as Hardt and Negri claim, “that serves as the standpoint for the critique of the system of power” (184). Henceforth, the figure constituted outside the juridical order, the representation of which will slide, I argue, from cowboy to Vietnam veteran, will be regarded as a highly suspicious figure, not one celebrated for its capacity to critique power and renew the system but one feared for its power to resist subsumption into that system.

### **The John Ford Cycle: An “Intuitive Understanding” of the Western**

In discussing the evolution of the Western genre, Schatz muses that it was perhaps John Ford’s “intuitive understanding of what made the Western genre work” that caused him to resolve *Stagecoach* with an “ambiguous ending” that would inspire “postwar productions” to reconsider the genre along the lines of Ford’s film. The “ambiguous ending” in question involves an expulsion from society of the film’s cowboy hero, Ringo Kid (John Wayne), that still allows him to begin a marriage. The ambiguity lies in the genre’s need for the cowboy hero to restore order in community life but never be incorporated into it. As Schatz remarks, “earlier silent Westerns and their later low-budget counterparts” accomplished this by sending the Western hero “into the sunset,”

“thereby sustaining the genre’s prosocial function while reaffirming the hero’s essential individuality” (52). *Stagecoach* seizes on this ambiguity as the core of the genre, and this might be the “intuitive understanding” Schatz attributes to Ford. What we find at the core of the genre, in other words, is something like a crisis. Ringo Kid is good for the community, because he can purge it of bad elements like the Plummer brothers (“There’d be a lot more peace in the territory if that Luke Plummer were so full of lead he couldn’t hold his liquor”); but the community is bad for Ringo Kid (“Well, they’re saved from the blessings of civilization,” Doc says as Ringo and Dallas depart).

Of course, while the ambiguity first seems to lie in the fact that the community needs but can’t incorporate Ringo Kid, it lies fundamentally in the fact that Ringo Kid is the character we most want to start a family because he stands as the one most likely to begin the desired community (the existing community, in other words, is flawed, and theirs is the ideal community on the horizon). *Stagecoach* resolves this by having Ringo Kid purge the community of the Plummers, thus establishing his bona fides in community protection, and then taking Dallas (Claire Trevor) across the border to his ranch, where they might start a family. We can understand the two poles of this ambiguity by noting that Luke Plummer is not the villain, but rather only the occasion for a proof of Ringo’s bona fides. The film takes the banker, Henry Gatewood (Berton Churchill), for its true villain, thus making its two poles, hero and villain, represent the logics of territorialism and capitalism. Ringo Kid will more likely start the desired community because he identifies with the land; his ranch is a “nice place” constituted from nature (“trees, grass, water”). Gatewood’s identification with capital, in contrast, is the very opposite of Ringo’s elemental stability, given that Gatewood absconds from the community of Tonto

with the payroll deposit for the employees of the mining company. Capital cannot be trusted, in short, to stabilize a community, because it seeks further profit, we might infer, and not necessarily the cultivation of land that will become the stable grounding of community.

As Peter Lehman says, “For Ford, the West is won by families who care not for money but for the land” (150). It should be said, however, that this forms a crisis for the genre not for the historically obvious reason that the U.S. is a capitalist country. Rather, it forms a crisis for the genre because, though its stories so often concern the courage to enforce law, it remains unclear what the source of this law will be. *Stagecoach* prefers Ringo’s moral code, the sort of natural law that emerges from his land stewardship, because the film disdains the notions of lawfulness that attend Gatewood, the self-righteous law propped up by the logic of capital. Gatewood professes admiration for the cavalry (“fine-looking bunch of soldier boys”) to the extent that they enforce the laws written by those with capital. He wishes, after all, that the country had a “businessman for President” because his “slogan” is that “government must not interfere with business.” Knowing him to be an embezzler, the audience hears his slogan to only mean that law should yield to and shapes itself around the movement of capital, no matter its prerogative. Once the “fine-looking bunch of soldiers” leaves the stagecoach vulnerable, Gatewood turns swiftly indignant at the “impertinence” of the lieutenant. We can hear in this banker’s rant against government “impertinence,” especially his antipathy to “bank examiners” (“as if we bankers didn’t know how to run our own banks”), the gap opened up between the prerogatives of the country and those of capital in the tightening regulatory environment of New Deal government.

In this respect, *Stagecoach* could be read as part of a populist reaction against big business, a reaction conditioned by the trauma of the bank failures during the Great Depression. But if we can specify the venal banker as a Depression-era caricature, we can assimilate the ladies of the Law and Order League to a much longer tradition, perhaps one with cinematic origins in D.W. Griffith's films, such as the women's reform group in *Intolerance* (1916) who, from their position of privilege, lord their values over the poor couple. And this longer tradition concerns itself precisely with the justice that derives from families who care for money, not for land. *Stagecoach's* ladies of the Law and Order League, for instance, don't care that Dallas, as a kid, lost her parents in "a massacre on Superstition Mountain," throwing her back on her own devices, which led to her livelihood as a prostitute. They don't care, in other words, that Dallas's parents were slain as part of the country's western territorial claims. They banish her from Tonto, rather, because she can't keep up genteel appearances – appearances permitted by not having to do certain forms of work. As such, it's no surprise that a prominent member in the Law and Order League is the wife of Gatewood: he, as the caricatured capitalist, underwrites her de facto legislating.

Not only is their version of positive law tainted by its proximity to amoral capital; it seems, too, to be haunted by an older aristocracy, the ghost being the Southern gentleman in disrepute, Hatfield (John Carradine). For Hatfield, respect for law is strictly a matter of appearances, the performance of good manners, being as his true habits – gambling and shooting people in the back – make him an outlaw of the craven kind. We can imagine these characters as having been hemorrhaged by the Eastern establishment, and its law books followed in their wake. We find confirmation for the family relation

between this positive law generated by capital and an old aristocratic order when Hatfield, with his dying words, requests, “If you see Judge Greenfield, tell him his son ...” Because he dies mid-request, we are left to wonder if the law can repress this relationship. The important point, though, must be that this form of law, which is no more than a performance that disguises its origins, is moribund. Hatfield will not contribute to the future of the West, his will not be its juridical precepts.

Ringo and Dallas are, of course, the future of the West. We know these two outcasts bear future hope by the recognition Ringo expresses on seeing Dallas hold a newborn. That Ringo and Dallas both lost their parents only means they aren’t chained to tradition, like Hatfield and Lucy; Ringo and Dallas are the robust characters, instead, whose capacity to nurture and protect ordains the pair, in the film’s scene, as being ready for a family. Still, it’s hard for Ringo to model a set of juridical precepts that could be formalized as positive law, under which society could grow, because so much of what he does is mere negation of what existing society does: he accepts the pariahs, Dallas and Doc, because he rejects the social norms under which they’ve gained a stigma; he eliminates the Plummer brothers because he abhors their random, unmotivated acts of violence. But without seeing what kind of community Ringo and Dallas might start, the concern lingers that, owing to a basis in non-normativity, law in such a community might not be able to take a positive form. Ringo may finally be *sui generis*, and his personal “style,” as Schatz calls it, might not withstand being conventionalized.

*Stagecoach* manages the slippage between natural law and positive law, and their ostensible sources in land and money, by having recourse to a border (a spatial beyond or horizon) as well as to a future instead of a past, such that a germinal tradition is projected



rather than an ossified tradition recollected (a temporal beyond or horizon). We see this same set of moves deployed in the subsequent Ford films *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and *The Searchers* (1956), but the moves evolve different meanings over the intervening years. In *Clementine*, Wyatt Earp kills the Clanton family in order to establish his bona fides a second time over: the first time in Dodge City, and this time in Tombstone. He kills the Clanton family because they represent a sort of vacuum of law subtended by the logic of capital, and he does this specifically in the name of his brother James, his emblem of the future. “Maybe when we leave this country, young kids like you will be able to live and grow up safe,” Earp says to the tombstone of his slain brother. *Clementine* ends in such a way as to suggest that the future will be secured for “young kids like you” through the twin establishments of school and church. But Earp must leave Clementine (Cathy Downs) in order for her charge as schoolmarm to officially begin, which is only another way of saying that his natural law must leave the scene in order for her to teach literacy in the community and thus inculcate positive law. We still see slippage in *Clementine* in that, while the law of capital is voided, it seems to be compensated by the law of the church, on which Earp puts his begrudging imprimatur (he goes to the church dance, it should be said, because his love interest Clementine goes).

But if Wyatt Earp, through the specific loss of his brother, understands himself vis-à-vis the general protections that would be codified for all families, Ethan Edwards of *The Searchers* can by no means transfer the rights of his private family to a generalized other and, as such, his condition of being “beyond the border,” of being debarred from the interior of society, is an absolute condition. Ethan best embodies Schatz’s observation that the moral code of the Western hero, “as the genre develops,” “emerges as an end in

itself,” with his former “role as promoter of civilization” becoming “almost coincidental” (51). When Schatz remarks that *The Searchers* “might be read as a procession of characters with whom Ethan is doubled” (72), he is observing a circumstance that could be no other way: every person Ethan encounters will be his opposite, in that they are all other than him. Ethan’s trenchant commitment to specificity makes something of an anthropologist of him: he knows the Comanche language, the Spanish language, and the customs and rituals of different groups. He knows, for example, the cultural differences between the homesteaders and the Comanche well enough to explain that shooting the eyes out of a dead Comanche will make no difference by what the homesteaders “preach,” but by what the Comanche believe, it will prevent him from entering the “spirit land.” But he brandishes cultural difference, which he believes rests on biological difference, as reason to refuse community *tout court*. Because community is so hard to keep pure (Debbie is “Comanche now,” Martin is one-eighth Cherokee), cultural difference will always exist in any community. And thus Ethan has to limit his family, finally, to only himself (in his will, he disavows Debbie as “blood kin”) as a means of radically limiting what he will claim as his culture.

By *Liberty Valance*, then, the reconciliation of natural and positive law has worked, if at all, by way of banishing sheer individualism from the communitarian setting or else deferring, as a task for future generations, the synthesis of the specific/individual with the general/communal. *Liberty Valance* is such a self-knowing account of this crisis that it has come off, in some appraisals, as “stylized,” a “world of formal artifice,” with a “sharpened consciousness of the thematic level” of the work.<sup>8</sup> It functions as a postmortem of the Western, filled with references to earlier moments in the genre: such

as Ransom Stoddard's (James Stewart) arrival in town on the Overland Stage, the same line that Buck Rickabaugh (Andy Devine) drove in *Stagecoach*; and Link Appleyard (Andy Devine) having married a Mexican woman named Julietta, as he said he would in *Stagecoach* in the role of Rickabaugh; and Tom Doniphon (John Wayne) is building a bedroom on his ranch, as though it were Ringo's "half-finished ranch" from *Stagecoach*, still under construction these many years later; and Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin) and his flunkies number three, as Luke Plummer and his brothers did; and "when Tom shoots Liberty from the shadows of an alley," as Parick McGee notes, "he uses a rifle just as Ringo did" (134). Indeed, McGee argues that we could take *Liberty Valance* as "an attempt to bring together and resolve the tensions" that issue from *Stagecoach* and *Destry Rides Again* (1939). While it must be true that *Liberty Valance* intends to draw together Ringo Kid and Thomas Jefferson Destry (James Stewart), it does so not because the two characters had distinct relationships to law and order. Though Ringo seems to endorse natural law to the extent that his rifle can enforce it, and Destry doesn't believe in "shootin' irons" but instead "law and order" "without guns," they both, ultimately, gain the authority to implement their versions of law by being dead-eye shooters. Destry, that is, can promote a positive law that grants rights to individuals, irrespective of the force of the individual, because Destry himself can display great individual force. *Liberty Valance*, we might say, puts both films together because their traditions both suppose that natural law and positive law are blended together, with the former being the teeth of the latter, and the effect of them being joined in a single figure has been to mystify the source of law altogether.

*Liberty Valance* disarticulates the figures of natural and positive law and suggests that their union in a single figure – in either Destry or Ransom Stoddard – was mere “legend.” Instead, *Liberty Valance* implies that these two figures of law compete with each other. Tom Doniphon antagonizes Stoddard, “I know those law books mean a lot to you, but not out here.” Doniphon explains how far natural law extends when he then admonishes Stoddard, “Out here a man settles his own problems” by “packing a handgun.” Such law emerges from the individual, and extends only as far as his might. Ethan Edwards has shown how problematic such law is, because he used his might to protect only the people who met his capricious standard of family. In fact, we might say that natural law, in this regard, results in a problem of nativism: those families who are *of the land* will be protected by such law. *Liberty Valance*, however, wants to explain this reference to natural law, that “a man settles his own problems,” as an axiom that best serves the logic of capital. After all, Liberty Valance is a hired gun for the cattle barons “north of the Picket Wire.” It’s a logic that survives on the other side of the border, where it can escape the jurisdiction of territorial logic; it needs, in other words, for there to be such a space as “north of the Picket Wire,” and thus it fights statehood with its hired guns. Stoddard, indeed, understands Doniphon’s words on just these lines, and declares that Doniphon doesn’t oppose Valance’s logic but reproduces it himself. “You know what you’re saying to me,” Stoddard questions Doniphon, “you’re saying just exactly what Liberty Valance said.”

At a philosophical distance from Doniphon, Stoddard is free to enunciate the territorial logic behind his version of law and order. Stoddard explains to his classroom, which is at once a literacy and a civics course, that “if the big ranchers north of the Picket

Wire River, if they win their fight to keep this Territory an open range, all your truck farms, your corn, the small shopkeepers and everything, the future of your kids – it'll all be over, all gone.” This sense of state law as a precondition for the right use of land (not open-range cattle farming, in Stoddard’s account, because this is the lot of the cattle barons, the avatars of capital) should count as an advance on *The Searchers*’ Jorgensen family’s future-tense sense of territorial logic: “Someday this country will be a fine, good place to be,” Mrs. Jorgensen says, “Maybe it needs our bones in the ground before that time can come.” Her sense in which the land could generate lawful life requires the sacrifice of her own life to “kill-crazy” natural law, as Ransom Stoddard describes it. In her outlook, her family prepares the land for future generations; they don’t have the chance, though, to employ its right use. In the last act of *Liberty Valance*, Dutton Peabody (Edmond O’Brien) explains for a delegate convention the successive phases of land stewardship and their attendant forms of law: passing through the “law of the tomahawk and the bow and arrow” and, next, the “law of the hired gun,” the Territory arrives at a new threshold in which “the people,” brought by the railroads, populate the land and use it, and this, as Peabody declares, is the preordained outcome of development. For these “steady, hard-working citizens,” among whom Peabody counts “the homesteader, the shopkeeper, the builder of cities,” they “need roads to join those cities, dams to store up the waters of the Picket Wire,” and, of course, “statehood to protect the rights of every man and woman, no matter how humble.”

Stoddard is, on Peabody’s account, the man to codify those protections for “every man and woman” because Stoddard, rather than “packing a gun,” came “carrying instead a bag of law books.” But given that Peabody himself admits that “you can’t shoot back

with a law book,” the question of how such protections will be instituted remains. The answer, in an idealized narrative that Stoddard is known to tell, is that because the U.S. is governed by the people (“The people are the boss,” the conspicuously Swedish-accented Nora declares, because “the United States is a republic”), education will inculcate the law of the land in them. Michael Bohnke, in a legal meditation, describes this source of law “as developing within society, being spontaneous and growing upwards, independent of any dominant will” (48). And thus, as Stoddard has written on his chalkboard, “Education is the basis of law and order.” So Stoddard, as he’s announced at the delegate convention, is necessarily both a lawyer *and* a teacher; his teaching functions, putatively, as the teeth of his law. Indeed, the moment in which Stoddard believes he has “got Liberty Valance just exactly where he wants him” is also a moment in which he discovers Hallie’s (Vera Miles) illiteracy. Hallie has never known which laws Liberty Valance could be charged with violating because she has never had the power to read a law book.

But, then, Stoddard has never really taken *literacy*, a facility with words, to possess power enough to legitimize the law. Enforcement of the law, that is, can’t come from within itself, but must draw its force from without. In this respect, Stoddard’s confession that “When force threatens, talk’s no good anymore” is only another version of Peabody’s mocking description of Stoddard’s power to scare Liberty Valance by being “the spectacle of law and order here rising up out of the gravy and mashed potatoes.” In short, the crisis of positive law, insofar as it prescribes the workings of domestic tranquility, is that its power to remain integral *cannot* come from within; it must have recourse, when threatened, to a brute force from without, to a reminder of the “law of

survival” that Peabody claims, in his oratory, to be a sedimentary layer of national history.

*Liberty Valance* poses a simple enough solution to this impasse: When the town of Shinbone needs to eliminate Liberty Valance, Doniphon kills him and passes it off as the work of Stoddard. This act confers legitimacy on the peaceful order Stoddard advocates by way of positing a chimerical originary moment, one in which law has its own teeth, “spontaneous and growing upwards.” The elegance of this solution lies in the fact that the social order can rid itself of the border, across which the righteous criminal fled (Doniphon doesn’t have to flee, only become a revenant of the juridical order), as well as of its reliance on future-tense resolution of incompatibilities within the law. Indeed, *Liberty Valance* inverts the Western’s formal tendency to look forward (to a time when the Jorgensen’s bones are in the ground, and the land is safe for the young James Earps) into a tendency to look backward (to a time when Tom Doniphon and Ransom Stoddard could seem, in a kind of mirage, to be the same person). In consequence, the territory need not have borders, in that its juridical order can extend forever. Still, for its legitimacy, positive law must at once retain its mythic roots in natural law, but banish from its interior the actual traces of an authority that was, *a fortiori*, above positive law: it must nostalgically recall Doniphon as it buries him.

### **Criminalizing the Cowboy: From *Lonely Are the Brave* to *First Blood***

Having solved the problem of the relationship between natural and positive law, whether sophisticatedly or otherwise, *Liberty Valance* pushes another problem more squarely into the foreground. We might say that the Ringo Kids and the Doniphons

deplored those who brought westward a positive law elaborated on behalf of capital, and therefore they turned to a natural law born from a communion with land, forging, in reaction, an individualist credo that might never detach from the individual and extend to community. In response to the fact that the individualism of natural law carried no moral charge – it could yield a Scar or an Ethan Edwards, a Liberty Valance or a Tom Doniphon – a new positive law had to be formulated on behalf of territorial concerns. This law of the Territory would cover all its people, converting the Territory into a state, and its people into citizens. The problem, then, emerges in the new form of how you delimit the citizenry? And the two solutions come in the form of Ethan Edwards's nativism or Ransom Stoddard's education, and neither solution is coherent. Walter Benn Michaels has convincingly argued the outcomes of nativism, all of which result in the extinction of the endogamous family, and the solution of education (a scenario in which anyone who learns and observes the law of the land is granted access to it and its rights) is flawed because it doesn't delimit but rather makes the possible citizenry infinite, whereas the land is obviously finite.

In response, a new kind of logic is floated, one better fitted to the transnational territoriality of corporate capitalism. We see that logic in *Five Easy Pieces's* renunciation of the markers of citizenship and then *Marvin Gardens's* displacement of that citizenship by something like corporate fraternity, or corporate friendship as I call it in Chapter 4. And an early film to float this new logic happens to be a Western, *Lonely Are the Brave*; indeed, the film might be described as a swan song to the cowboy hero.<sup>9</sup> The plot of the film involves Jack Burns, whose rugged individuality is signified by his cowboy dress and horse, and his visit to Duke City, New Mexico, where good friend, Paul Bondi



(Michael Kane), has been imprisoned. Burns comes to town with the purpose of breaking Bondi out of jail and, to that end, gets himself imprisoned, with a hacksaw blade stashed in his boots. Burns finds Bondi in the cell, but Bondi won't take part in Burns's prison-break because he has a wife and son and, for their sake, refuses to be a fugitive. So Burns breaks out alone, and then becomes the object of a manhunt. He outfoxes the police, however, and eludes their search party. A truck hits Burns, then, as he tries to cross an expressway on horseback, making the film's point obvious enough that the contest between people belonged to a heroic era, while the contest between people and their machinery is the true one in a fully modernized era.

For insight into the film's reconsidered logic of territory, though, we should compare the film with its source text, Edward Abbey's *The Brave Cowboy* (1956). Dalton Trumbo's adapted script remains quite close to the novel, but the change he does make, the reason for Bondi's imprisonment, italicizes the stakes to thinking in new ways about nation-states and territory. In Abbey's novel, Bondi goes to prison for "refusin to register for the draft" (24). It's important to note that he refuses to "register for the draft," not to fight in a war,<sup>10</sup> because we've already seen that Jack's refusal to register for the Selective Service is of a piece with a larger refusal to carry identification (no "draft card, social security, driver's license" [72]). Burns refuses draft registration, then, because he views it as the state's intrusion on his autonomy. "Don't need none," Burns says of I.D., "I already know who I am," indicating that his rights are constituted from self-knowledge, and are not conferred by the state's knowledge of him. It's clear enough that neither man is a pacifist; they direct their refusal, rather, at the state's efforts to regulate

them. Bondi tells his draft board, in fact, “it’s the law itself that I object to,” because the law of “compulsive military service” is “unconstitutional” (108).

Bondi’s philosophical position seems to show inconsistencies. He claims to be serving his prison sentence, rather than breaking jail as Burns would like, because he has “a great deal of respect for law and order,” yet he also labels himself a “no-account Jeffersonian anarchist” (100, 107). Any sense in which he’s truly Jeffersonian or respectful of law must be understood in terms of the opposition he constructs between individuals (“immediate concrete things”) and the state (“the giant abstractions”). If he is indeed lawful, it cannot be “Jeffersonian” in the sense that citizens would be “enlisted by all their interest” to the “moderate powers” of the state, as Jefferson himself wrote (*The Republic of Letters*); it must, rather, be that Bondi has subtracted the state from Jefferson’s individualism and then placed that individualism into a new bonding form. And that bonding form, expressed in his “pledge” to “choose my friend” if made to choose “between my country and my friend,” will fall outside the organizational bodies recognized by the nation-state (“Great nations may fall in ruin before I shall sell a friend,” says Bondi [109]). But notions of law and order under such organization will not have the character of Burns’s “romantic, outlandish, impossible, nineteenth-century notions,” the old-fashioned character that Bondi elsewhere says passed with “Thoreau, the frontier, the I.W.W.” (100, 113). He does little to articulate the contours of such an organizational body on a large scale, preferring instead to identify the bond in the domains of immediacy – “my wife and my son and you and myself” (109). But one can imagine that the corporation might be the full-blown organizational expression of the laws intrinsic in the natural formations of self, family, and friendship.

The corporation might not only give some consistency to Bondi's views on law and order once the state-form is eclipsed; it might also explain a hidden consistency in the change Trumbo makes to Abbey's novel. In *Lonely Are the Brave*, Bondi is not in jail for protesting the draft, but for helping illegal immigrants once they crossed the U.S.-Mexican border. If we can clear up Bondi's ostensible inconsistencies by understanding that he cares for law, but simply not for those laws rooted in the state, then it follows that he would show no respect for the state's boundaries. Bondi "helped" the immigrants, "hid them and fed them and gave them directions about where to find work," which is a "crime" that owes its special relevance to a territorial logic of law and order, one that subtends the kind of protectionism that made "igloos" of "nation-state economies," to again use Hobsbawm's language. In fact, it's a crime that offends not "nineteenth-century notions," but the twentieth-century ones of the labor movement, making sense of Bondi's inclusion of the "I.W.W." among his outmoded styles of lawfulness. The labor union movements depended on states, appealing to them to mediate the relationship between business concerns and labor. We might infer that the I.W.W. is outmoded, in Bondi's mind, because states are outmoded, and therefore he commits no ethical breach in helping illegal immigrants "find work" on the U.S. side of the border. He anticipates, rather, a new ethical order, a new juridical order, one in which friendship displaces citizenship as the guarantor of rights.

But I am less concerned with projecting the sort of juridical order in which Bondi's principles would eventuate than I am concerned with showing the fault line between the principles of Bondi and Burns. The novel and film present Bondi's individualism over against the individualism of Burns. Bondi will accept a term in prison

for his individualism; Burns won't. In both cases, they premise their individualism on a belief in natural law and a rejection of positive law; they both fell in love, as Burns says, with a girl called "Do what you want to do and the hell with everybody else." But though the film has Burns and Bondi refer to their shared belief in "natural man," it omits the philosophical dialogue that the novel uses to delineate the opposed logics that license their different brands of individualism. They both detest the positive law that has, through its institutionalization and expression in bureaucratic functions, become impersonal. As Bondi laments, "I see my own country overwhelmed by ugliness and mediocrity and overcrowding" (106), all of which ensues from the institutions of modernity. But, unlike Burns, he doubts that modernity is reversible – or escapable. Burns, in the tradition of the cowboy hero, still takes there to be some wilderness into which he can flee from civilization. He wishes to take Bondi and his family with him into this sanctuary, where they might teach Bondi's son how "to read and write, I suppose, and better things too – how to track deer, how to fish through ice, how to trap the silver fox, how to make things, useful things like bows, arrows, snowshoes, bullets" (101). In short, Burns still derives his individualism from a territorialist logic, which is, as seen, an earlier phase of law and order, on Dutton Peabody's account.

But Bondi eschews the territorialist logic, evident in his disregard for border laws. Bondi tells Burns, "I don't believe in your form of escape" (112-113). While he can't blame Burns "for wanting no part" in the political system, he's "not yet ready to withdraw," "even if withdrawal is possible, which," as he admits, "I doubt." Burns disputes him, "It is possible ... I know of places right here in the American West where white men have never been" (106-107). Burns represents, in this respect, the impulse

behind the defection film, but his failure lies not in his inability to imagine a new political system, but in his need to imagine a prepolitical way of life. Bondi, in contrast, imagines a world completely absorbed by political systems, and as such asserts a style of individualism, with its own attendant legal forms, from *within* the system. He carries this out as an educator, as he says, so that he might “make an honest living introducing a little philosophy into the heads of engineers, druggists, future politicians” (107). The difference between Bondi and Ransom Stoddard, though, is that Stoddard saw education as the means to inculcate positive law in the people of the territory, whereas Bondi views education as a potential virus in the body politic, and teaches so that his students might repudiate the positive law of a mediocre and overcrowded country. In short, Bondi derives his individualism from the seeming autonomy that education has gained from the state. He affiliates with an institution that can pursue its charter in antagonism with the state, even if the state had originally granted it its charter.<sup>11</sup> It is in this sense that we might think of Bondi’s individualism as one that would find its congenial organizational culture in the modern corporation.

The philosophical rift between Burns and Bondi crystallizes a bifurcated moment in the crisis of individualism, with one solution oriented to the future and another to the past (this is said, of course, from a future standpoint in which individualism, irrespective of its repercussions, is ideologically sound). In this respect, their dispute recalls the movement from *Five Easy Pieces* to *Marvin Gardens*, where first the character of Bobby Dupea relinquishes all personal identification, all proof of citizenship, and then wanders off into a political wilderness; and then the Staebler brothers decide to create their personalized polity, the domain of Staebleravia, not by renouncing the laws of their

society, but by considering those laws amenable to revision in the name of friendship. Burns represents the first moment, the absolute repudiation of the system, and Bondi represents the second moment, which we might refer to as accommodations within the system. Thus we can take the movement from *Five Easy Pieces* to *Marvin Gardens* to be roughly the same movement made, in a single plot, in *Lonely Are the Brave*.

*Lonely Are the Brave* chooses the past, as it were, proffering its cowboy hero as either a stay against history or an indictment of its ruthless march. The film does not, namely, dwell on Bondi's emergent form of individualism so much as it observes the passing of Burns's form of individualism. In fact, *Lonely Are the Brave* views the passage of the cowboy hero not as one from relevance to obsolescence, but as one from the status of ego-ideal to that of criminal. When Burns escapes prison, he provokes a manhunt that calls on the state's most advanced means, such as the helicopters lent to the sheriff's posse by the army. It's hard to imagine, however, that the state marshals its greatest powers because Burns himself poses so pernicious a threat; his crime, after all, was nothing more than fisticuffs. The state hunts him so aggressively because, if it is to show the reach of its surveillance technology, it must snuff out what Burns symbolizes: an outside, a place beyond the system. Burns must be rendered a criminal, then captured, because it reassures the state of its own omnipotence.

Of course, the irony of *Lonely Are the Brave* is not that the machinery of the state can apprehend Burns and, having done so, show its unlimited reach. The irony is that unlimited reach is attributed, instead, to economic development. Burns is struck down by a delivery truck with the logo "Acme" emblazoned on its side and a cargo of "privies" in its trailer. The truckload of toilets is much more than an undignified hand of death. More

broadly, it signals that the dams have stored up water, as Dutton Peabody requested, and that indoor plumbing is spreading throughout the West, perhaps as quickly as the construction of the interstate highway system permits. The ignominy of Burns's death, then, is that he is killed by the fixture that was once placed outside the domestic space, but is now being drawn indoors, a signifier of the completed internalization of wilderness.

Criminalizing the cowboy, it should be emphasized, marks the first moment in his transformation into the Vietnam veteran. His criminal status has to do, chiefly, with the fact that he has trained in surviving outside the juridical order. Edward Abbey, understanding that the capacity to exist alone in nature affronts regimes of law, developed first the character of Jack Burns, an outlaw cowboy, and then turned his interest to the character of George Washington Hayduke, the Vietnam veteran in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) who is the munitions expert in a band of eco-terrorists. In transferring the qualities of cowboy to Vietnam veteran, Abbey might be one of the first to note the homology in the inner formation of these icons, in terms of their representations.

Of course, Abbey based Hayduke on real-life friend Doug Peacock. Peacock, in turn, represented himself in the memoir, *Walking It Off: A Veteran's Chronicle of War and Wilderness*, and in some respects his self-representation both reproduces and fends off Abbey's representation. Peacock credits Abbey, on one hand, with noticing "my talents – my useful training and that great anger going to waste – and determined how it might best be used": to raise a "fist against the blind greed of technology" (27, 34). Peacock, on his own account, needed a representation of the source and value of his "own militancy" (27). And it was Abbey's representation that sorted out the philosophical

stakes to his character, “forged” in the “crucible” of Vietnam and now “identifying for me my real enemies and the real war, the one being waged against life on earth” (27). But, on the other hand, Peacock sees pathos in how the representation must be lived out in real-life. “The trouble,” Peacock writes, “was that, unlike Hayduke, the real man was not content to stay out in the cold; he wanted to cross back over into the human realm” (102). The “human realm,” for Peacock, debars what he sees himself as, a warrior, because “warriors, however necessary, are not fit company for society” (102). But rather than retain his language, which has a kind of mythic quality, pitting warriors against humans, we might hear his “warrior” and “human” as simply “noncitizen” and “citizen.” Vietnam, simply put, rendered Peacock unfit to be a citizen.

And, in this sense, we might think that the cultural value attached to the cowboy hero dissipates because, at some point during the spectacle of the Vietnam War, it became hard to imagine how special training in noncitizenship could help rather than harm society. We might look to media representations of Huey Newton or Katherine Boudin as episodes in the emergent cultural management of the figure of the militarized outlaw. Huey Newton’s murder trial caused consternation in main media outlets, seemingly reflecting or stimulating public response, likely both. Katherine Boudin’s involvement in the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion raised another kind of specter: that of a child of affluence being initiated into bomb construction and the skill set of the special forces. We might suppose that putting such heavy emphasis on how amateurish were these bomb-builders was one means of managing anxiety about the general spread of these specialized skills.



Furthermore, the medicalization of the Vietnam veteran's unfitness for society, seen in the growing diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), counts as the surfacing in another discourse of that peculiar relationship of which the cowboy is an icon – the relationship, that is, between law and lawlessness, and the marginal status relegated to those trained *outside* the norms of a society to protect the *inside* of a society. When Veterans Affairs pronounced Peacock's PTSD "100%" and "Total and Permanent," they officially avowed what Peacock himself hoped to disavow, that, because the war had shown "that all things are indeed permitted," it had been able to "disfigure the core of my being" and that "I was totally whacko and forever unsuited to operate within what they called civilization" (109, 112, 113). It is in this regard that "in Vietnam, the myth of the gunslinging Western hero swaggering into the frontier sunset had finally died an overdue death" (124).

### **The Trauma of the Cowboy: *The Deer Hunter* and *Taxi Driver***

While no film more explicitly rewrites *Lonely Are the Brave* than *First Blood*, and thus none more publicly declare the conversion of Western hero into Vietnam veteran, I wish to consider first a group of films that creates a psychological profile of the Vietnam veteran. Though this cycle may begin with *Hi, Mom!* and it may include *Tracks* (1976), *Coming Home* (1978), and others, I will only address *The Deer Hunter* and *Taxi Driver* for their expression of a certain philosophical sequence, one in which the lesson of the Vietnam War is that natural law had always been a cultural construction and, thus, the practitioners of natural law had always been inside society, along with a corollary procedure for reconstructing those subjectivities constituted outside the juridical order. In

analyzing these films, I mean to accentuate the ways in which they keep the Western hero as their reference point, either explicitly or implicitly, though they depict Vietnam veterans, and this end will be kept in view to show, finally, how the originary icon, the Western hero, is all but effaced by the time of *First Blood*.

Unlike *Liberty Valance*, *The Deer Hunter* opts for naturalist settings and details, relying on the unvarnished effect of location shooting rather than the kind of studio sets and broad characterizations that placed *Liberty Valance*'s nested tale, as Schatz remarks, in an allegorical realm. But *The Deer Hunter* is still laden with symbolism, and it will be through those means that the film elaborates a kind of philosophical crisis. Most immediately, symbolism inheres in the mise-en-scène. In the opening shot, a highway overpass frames a Pennsylvania hamlet, in a centered, square portrait. The town of Clairton looks sleepy from this distance, but not so much from want of activity as from the fact that it's morning, everything seems to be shut down, and a fog resting on the town makes it look as though seen through gauze. But a tanker truck speeding under the highway breaks the illusion that we are beholding a village tucked in green hills; this is a fully industrialized landscape, and the smoke given off by the truck only adds to that of the steel foundry's smokestacks, the source, it would seem, of the foggy portrait. The town seems sleepy merely because its activity is hidden within the steel foundry, where the men of the town labor in shifts throughout the day. We again encounter the *locus classicus* of the American romance, as outlined by Leo Marx, with the scene of nature (Pennsylvania hillside) interrupted by the signs of industry (steel foundry, fuel truck). *The Deer Hunter* takes its title, though, from the habit of its male characters to hunt in these hillsides when not working in the steel foundry. The film holds the experience of nature

as a bulwark against the figure of industry, the truck rushing headlong at the townspeople below, bearing something of the inexorable fate of the truck from *Lonely Are the Brave*.

Though mise-en-scène first suggests the film's symbolic economy, its characters quickly reinforce it in their dialogue. As they emerge from the foundry, Stevie (John Savage) points at the sky and exclaims, "What the hell is that?" Michael (Robert De Niro) looks up and says, "You know what that is? Those are sun dogs." And when the others react quizzically, he explains, "It means a blessing on the hunter send by the Great Wolf to his children." If we don't already gather that the opposition being laid out is the old one between Native American traditions and those of an encroaching European-style civilization, established in the Western genre, then Michael clarifies it, "It's an old Indian thing." The film deploys Michael, indeed, as the liminal character, in touch with both nature and civilization, squarely in the tradition of the Western hero. Yet we might associate Michael with a longer Western tradition, with roots in James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking tales; the film's title, of course, recalls Cooper's *The Deerslayer* (1841). In this respect, *The Deer Hunter* bypasses the codification of the Western hero through Ringo Kid and Tom Doniphon and Ethan Edwards, but still draws on the same set of philosophical concerns by going to a different font. Natty Bumppo, as it happens, gave early voice to the riddle of natural law and its basis for legitimacy. In argument with fellow hunter Hurry Harry, Bumppo remarks that, though they "live in the woods" and thus appear to be "beyond human laws," "there is a law" yet, "and a law maker, that rule across the whole continent" (18).

The fact that a "law maker" presides over "the whole continent" places people in some contract with the land and its creatures. Michael, in the same mode, feels

reverentially towards the animal he hunts, believing there to be a code for taking a deer's life. He shares his philosophy of "one shot" ("One shot is what it's all about," he says, "a deer has to be taken with one shot") with not only Natty Bumpo, who scorns Hurry Harry for taking an errant shot at a buck "when there is no occasion for the meat, or the skin" and describes the echo of his missed shot as "the voice of natur' calling out ag'in a wasteful and onthinking action" (45); this purposefulness of his hunting methods, as Bumpo self-proclaims, makes him "a slayer" but "no slaughterer" (45). Michael shares the principle, as well, with Ringo Kid, who asks the marshal for only three bullets to use against the three Plummer brothers (and his efficiency is contrasted with a Plummer brother, who takes a potshot at a cat and misses). We might say that back of this credo lies not only an interdiction on "wasteful and onthinking action," but a belief that an outcome is preordained. Reserving only "one shot" for one's mark presupposes an understanding of that prey, its habits and abilities, as much as it presupposes the rightness of hunting that prey in the first place. The hunter, that is, is permitted his prey by his knowledge of the larger design.

*The Deer Hunter* develops Michael's religious feeling for nature in order to explain the trauma of Vietnam. Robin Wood has delineated the structure of the film as one of an "alternation pattern" between "geographic locations," breaking into five "narrative blocks" the alternation between Clairton and Vietnam. Further, the principle for the alternation is "diminution," with each block being "significantly shorter than the one that precedes it" (*Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* 246). As Wood explains, this structure signals a passage "from plenitude to impoverishment" (247) – his main examples being the death of Nick (Christopher Walken), the amputated legs of Stevie,

and the lost leadership of Michael. *Pace* Wood, I would instead suggest that the form, because it suggests attenuation and gradual abrasion, is a bad fit for the trauma of their experience in Vietnam. The formal diminution, in fact, might be calculated to absorb, bit by bit, the shock that comes from the very sudden, very absolute epiphany that their experience of nature was a purely cultural one. Michael and Nick, and the others less poignantly, are forced to accept that they had never been experiencing nature without mediation, but had instead been bringing notions of civilization and culture into nature. They sharply realize, once in Vietnam, that nature imparts no law; Nick's early confession to Michael that "I don't think about one shot that much anymore" functions as a way of preparing the film, philosophically, for Vietnam.

Sylvia Shin Huey Chong offers a compelling way to understand the film's "alternation pattern," noting that the "Clairton sequences rely on a thickness of naturalistic detail," whereas the "Vietnam scenes draw on a thickness of corporeal experience" (92). But we might qualify that the film produces a "thickness of naturalistic detail" in service of documenting cultural practices. The scenes of the Russian Orthodox wedding and reception famously last twenty-five minutes. But we are given to understand that community functions, such as those of the church, are not the sole venue for the enactment of cultural values; even when hunting in the mountains, which has been depicted as an escape from civilized life, the characters are insulated by culture, as we learn from the choral music scored to Michael's tracking of the deer, the same musical cue from the wedding. This ritual of individual solitude, that is, has community sanction. Contrast with this the cut to scenes in Vietnam, which has only the chopping of helicopter blades for its soundtrack. In these scenes, Michael, Nick and Stevie are thrown into a

nature that has no logic, no mercy. This nature – perhaps suggested in the juxtaposition of excessive vegetation with the starkness of the trees that Nick loves so much in the mountains – is not efficient and purposeful. Indeed, the correlative for its wastefulness is the Vietcong torture practice of Russian Roulette, which is a figure for the body’s brute subjection to chance. The “thickness of corporeal experience,” as Chong calls it, is nothing more than the body’s response to a nature freed from mediations, a nature which gives rise to no law or fair play, whether individualist or communitarian.

If the trauma occurs, though, when the body loses the cultural integument it turned against nature, we might construe this trauma, in socio-historical terms, as that which occurred when Vietnam became nothing more than a vacant space onto which pure capitalism could be projected. *The Deer Hunter*, after all, is completely unconcerned with the politics of Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, it hews to the “tradition of the Western,” as Wood writes, in evacuating the politics of the Other and projecting “*uncontainable* energies” into that space (emphasis original 253). What had hitherto contained the energies of capitalism, we might say, was a territorialist logic. But the tension in which the latter logic held that of capital is now gone, and a totally unregulated environment begins to form itself before the imagination. *The Deer Hunter*, now freed from any naturalist commitments, imagines this phantasmagoria in which Vietnamese capitalists wave dollars around, speculating on the probabilities of human life itself, as the imputed torture technique of Russian Roulette is now recast as the very figure for the unbridled speculation of finance capital. When Michael chases his friend Nick as he leaves the gambling den, and then sees Nick throw dollar bills from his fleeing convertible, with the dollars scattering in the air for the excited villagers, we can imagine that *The Deer Hunter*

is not a meditation on the Vietnam War at all, but on the explosion of the foreign exchange market and the emergence of what has been called the “capitalist archipelago” of East and Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup> The film’s final scene, indeed, gathers its main characters in the industrial town of Clairton, Pennsylvania, to mourn at once the loss of their friend Nick and their territorial sovereignty: “God bless America,” they sing in chorus, “*land that I love.*”

Next to the *The Deer Hunter*, *Taxi Driver* is a much more truculent film. While both films pathologize the Vietnam veteran, *Taxi Driver* presents its protagonist, Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro), as a full-blown sociopath. We might begin to consider their different characterizations of the returned veteran by attending to similarities in the openings of the respective films. Both films begin with a shot of an automobile cutting through the vapor: in *The Deer Hunter*, we see the fuel truck barreling through a smoggy morning toward Clairton, while in *Taxi Driver* we see the taxi emerge from the vapors hovering just over the sewers and streets of New York City. But where Clairton retains something of a bucolic quality, albeit one punctured by industry, the New York City of *Taxi Driver* is cleft from nature for good. Thus, no feeling of opposition remains, as it does in *The Deer Hunter*, where we might think the truck represents an incursion on the town, that its mass of metal hurtles toward and endangers the people below. *Taxi Driver*, rather, presents the taxi as a kind of agency of its own, a character in the story. Though we alternate between a view on city life and the close-up eyes of Travis Bickle, underlined by a Bernard Herrmann score alternating between sinister percussion and lyrical saxophone passages, we do not have a sense that we are beholding the scene from the standpoint of human subjectivity. Instead, we see our surroundings from what feels

like the merged perspective of the taxi and Travis Bickle, a sense conjured by the electronic font of the opening credits that transitions into the digital smear the streets become through the rain-streaked windshields of the taxi.

Seeing the world from this perspective is, as Wood says, sharing the viewpoint of an “efficient killing-machine” (45). But the identity between Bickle and his taxi is meant to recall the relationship a cowboy had with his horse, such as Jack Burns and his horse, Whiskey. When Burns says he “fell in love with a no-good horse” (96), however, he invokes a relationship with nature that Bickle doesn’t have. In fact, Bickle’s relationship with nature has already passed through the phase of its technological transfiguration, evidenced in the fact that Bickle’s horse is his taxi. The distinction, then, between nature and civilization dims to the extent that Bickle, a self-styled sheriff riding into town to clean it up, notoriously confuses natural and human forces. “Someday a real rain will come,” he says, “and wash all this scum off the streets,” and, in saying a “real rain,” we are expected to hear a distinction from the rain he thanked God for, the natural rain that washed the “garbage and trash off the sidewalks.” The “real rain,” we come to understand, will be Bickle armed with an arsenal of weapons, affixed to his body as though he were a humanized tank. But the point, in some respects, is that Bickle doesn’t fully know if he’s waging war on nature or society. When Bickle meets the arms dealer, Easy Andy, and asks him about a .44 Magnum, Andy tells him that the gun will “stop a car at a hundred yards, put a round right through the engine block.” We sense that this might fit Bickle’s conception of his mission, it being a stark war between machines. Yet Bickle, though in command of high-tech weapons, sees his passage through the city as one through a jungle, noting, “All the animals come out at night.”



*Taxi Driver* attributes the fact that Bickle has been made into an “efficient killing-machine” to his tours in Vietnam. In his interview with the taxi company, he says that he was a Marine, “honorably discharged in May, 1973.” His military-issue jacket has a “King Kong Company” patch on its left shoulder, and he uses a kay-bar knife. Still, no mention of the war itself is ever made, no matter how plain the clues; we are meant to recognize him as a Vietnam veteran, rather, by the effect the war had on Bickle. But if *The Deer Hunter* seeks a film form that might approximate the psychological condition of PTSD, *Taxi Driver* simply uses the old form of the Western, specifically *The Searchers*, to show the ideological depletion of that form in the contemporary moment. In short, the cowboy was a hero under specific cultural conditions, but, correcting for cultural change, the cowboy is pathological and monstrous. Wood claims that the fact that the hero of a bygone ideology now appears monstrous accounts for the film’s inconsistent “attitude to its protagonist,” such that it is now a Western, now a horror film. I suggest instead that the film, far from being tonally incoherent, gains its coherence by recording the shift in the pathos of the cowboy hero from noble to horrific. The remarked irony of *Taxi Driver*’s ending, then, issues from the misrecognition behind media efforts (“The papers always blow these things up,” Bickle says) to recontain this horror by reconstructing Bickle’s outlaw persona in the name of Iris’s parents – representatives of a small-town culture as bygone as the cowboy ideology – rather than in the name of the corporate reorganization of American life.

**“Why One of Your Machines Blew a Gasket”: Ideological Recuperation in *First Blood***

While *Taxi Driver* presents Bickle’s appeal to natural law (“a real rain”) with reference to the cowboy hero (Ethan Edwards) in order to show the perversions natural law can easily undergo, *First Blood* will render horrific any appeals to a law other than the positive one, but, in doing so, will repress the source of legitimacy for natural law in the cowboy hero. In large part, this comes from the fact that Vietnam is identified with nature, as illustrated in the rhetoric of *The Deer Hunter*, and the guerrilla tactics and the reliance on the natural terrain that characterized that war made obsolete Hague and Geneva Convention-style warfare and thus threatened U.S. might. In other words, the deregulation of currencies that occurred from the 1960s on was mirrored by the contemporaneous deregulation of warfare, demonstrating the ramifications of the natural law put in play by capitalist expansion. Understood this way, *First Blood* distances itself from the cowboy hero, making John Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) look more like a Viet Cong soldier (wearing a headband, hunting wild boar with a wooden spear, setting booby traps in the verdant growth of the Northwest terrain). Still, *First Blood* reproduces the philosophical makeup of the cowboy hero, whose outsiderism creates tension with figures of positive law, such as seen between Ethan Edwards and Captain Clayton. We hear this echoed in Rambo’s assertion to Sheriff Teasle (Brian Dennehy), “In town you’re the law, out here it’s me,” a blunt declaration that nature is his dominion.

Given that *First Blood* needs to outflank the specter of the cowboy hero, it is worth dwelling on the fact that, *mutatis mutandis*, it is the same film as *Lonely Are the Brave*. In *Lonely Are the Brave*, Jack Burns rides into town to visit his old friend, Bondi, who sits in jail; Burns gets himself thrown in jail, only to escape that evening; after his

escape, he is the object of a manhunt for which law enforcement marshals all its technological might, (including, in the source text, a helicopter for bird's-eye surveillance of Burns's progress); relying on grit and his training in nature, Burns eludes his pursuers through mountainous terrain; once free of the law, Burns is struck down and killed by a commercial truck. In *First Blood*, John Rambo walks into town to visit his old friend, Delmar Barry, who has died recently of stomach cancer; Rambo gets thrown in jail, almost despite himself, only to escape during booking; after his escape, he is the object of a manhunt for which law enforcement marshals all its technological might, including a helicopter for bird's-eye surveillance; relying on grit and his training in nature, Rambo eludes his pursuers through mountainous terrain; once free of the state law, representatives of vaster law, namely Colonel Trautman (Richard Crenna), rein in Rambo, not in the name of the small-town law, but, as we understand in sequel films, for the purposes of the Pentagon.

The differences between the two films, however, tell the story of ideological change between 1962 and 1982. In 1962, when *Liberty Valance* famously professed, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend," it concerned precisely the *printing* of the legend that would give positive law (law, that is, in *printed* form) its mythic legitimacy; it did not, however, desire further instantiations of that legend. Recognizing the death of such heroic individualism, among mundane administered life, *Lonely Are the Brave* eulogized the passing of the cowboy. Twenty years hence, *First Blood* tells the same story but swaps out the cowboy hero with the Vietnam veteran. It, then, effaces its protagonist's origins in the cowboy hero and, in the spirit of recuperation, does not kill this figure but saves him for reassignment. Another crucial difference emerges in the

characterization of the small-town sheriff, with *Lonely Are the Brave*'s Sheriff Johnson showing grudging respect for the ideals of Jack Burns mutating into *First Blood*'s Sheriff Teasle's murderous abhorrence for the proficiency of John Rambo.

Kirk Douglas, for one, did not approve of the shift in the story, whether or not it were ideologically true. Douglas, who had incarnated Jack Burns for the first story, was first cast as Colonel Trautman in the second story. Douglas himself discusses this in his memoir, *The Ragman's Son*. He recalls accepting the role because he "liked the concept," on the condition that Trautman kills Rambo in the end. It is unsurprising that Douglas "liked the concept," given that it's the same concept as *Lonely Are the Brave* and that film had been his "favorite movie" (450, 337). It's perhaps equally unsurprising that Douglas wished to alter the script so that his character killed Rambo: this would, in effect, be the cowboy hero asserting itself across history. If the cowboy hero had bested the Vietnam veteran, after all, it would provide a stay against ideological change, and by extension historical change, and it would suggest that cowboy individualism were simply a transhistorical theme. Douglas hopes for such static themes when he says, "I love the theme that if you try to be an individual, society will crush you" (337).

What I want to suggest is that Douglas's theme indeed underwrites *First Blood*, but that the decision to interject Colonel Trautman as the force working on behalf of Rambo's survival is best understood as part of an enterprise in ideological recuperation. When Sheriff Teasle asks his staff, "What ever possessed God in heaven to make a man like Rambo," voicing another rendition of the concern that natural law could produce an Ethan Edwards, Colonel Trautman makes his entrance and states, "God didn't make Rambo, I made him." Trautman arrives like a *deus ex machina*, the great administrator

that modernity calls on to lift its ideologies onto its higher order of social development. In this respect, *First Blood's* rewriting of *Lonely Are the Brave* is a way of saying that the presence of a great administrator might have saved Jack Burns from the commercial truck, the *deus ex machina* of modernity. If we are to understand Sheriff Teasle's abhorrence of Rambo, as well as his resistance to Trautman, we need to understand that he abhors the effects of modernity, chiefly its tendency to organize power such that the law of the land, and local power as such, drop out of the larger structure. Once Teasle learns that Rambo is a Green Beret, he begins to understand him as the best-built machine of power in its highest order. Repulsed by the fact that such training could be turned indiscriminately against the civilian population, Sheriff Teasle says, "Colonel, you came out here to find out why one of your machines blew a gasket." He hates Rambo, in other words, because he can't effectively fight him face-to-face; for him, Rambo's face is just a portal into the transindividual institutions of corporate capitalism.

In order to connect the situation of Rambo up to that of *auteurism*, which stands at a nearer remove than we might first wish to think, we need to first consider that the Green Berets, being a highly-specialized and flexible unit of the Army, is nothing but the military expression of the organizational logic of the evolving corporate models of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Colonel Trautman, in such a model, doesn't need to be the face of this organization; he can, instead, condense all the powers of that institution into the face of Rambo, a recognizable maverick and anti-hero. The process should not be seen as much different than that of the vast conglomerates putting on the face of the maverick movie-brat, such that Columbia could be seen as the young radicals, Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson. But the problem with Rambo, of course, is that he recalls the militarized icons

of the 1960s and 1970s, those who made themselves domestic proxies for the military conflicts abroad. There was a need for his transfigured individualism, purged of its military impulse. There was a need, to take but one example, for Bernardine Dohrn to be a member of the law faculty at Northwestern University, not a bomb-builder in the Weather Underground. *Auteurism*, it might be said, made the corporate world safe for such maverick individualism.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I grant the economic aspect priority in the ideology of individualism to the extent that I assimilate the ideology to the tradition of classic liberalism. Indeed, outside the New Left individualist appeals, the other mid-century stimulus for debates on individualism came from the reassessment of liberalism carried out by those associated with the doctrines of “Austrian School” economics, such as Ludwig von Mises, F.A. Hayek, and Karl Popper. These theorists tended to formulate their positions on individualism over against collectivist economic models.

<sup>2</sup> It has become a critical truism to deem Ford’s Westerns the standard-bearers of the genre’s classicality. Ford himself helped strengthen the association of his name with the genre by declaring before the Director’s Guild, “My name’s John Ford. I make Westerns.” Because Thomas Schatz uses Ford’s films to describe the evolution of the Western in his study *Hollywood Genres*, I cite Schatz as a representative critical opinion on Ford.

<sup>3</sup> For the extent to which the cowboy hero still popularly functioned as a “museum piece,” refer to J. Hoberman’s discussion of Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater’s tendencies to don the costume of this hero and present themselves as this kind of rugged individual, suggesting that the icon now had the same venerability, in the political imaginary, as did the iconic founding fathers. See *Dream Life*, 102-112.

<sup>4</sup> Hoberman emphasizes the Leftist pedigree of the makers of “post-Westerns”: “*The Misfits* (1961), was directed by self-exiled John Huston from HUAC-harassed Arthur Miller’s screenplay; *Lonely Are the Brave* (1962) was produced by star Kirk Douglas and written by Dalton Trumbo; *Hud* (1963) was directed by the gray-listed Martin Ritt” (*Dream Life* 104).

<sup>5</sup> Though, as Theodore Roszak is intent on noting, “the upheaval of those years was more than an American phenomenon.”

<sup>6</sup> Keynesianism, for example, will count as the “mode of regulation” (Arrighi 2) for the Fordist period, as the F.A. Hayek *Road to Serfdom*-school will serve as theoretical dogma for the deregulation of economies following the centralization efforts of Bretton Woods.

<sup>7</sup> This holds true despite the fact that, as Arrighi quotes Stephen Hymer, “US corporations began to move to foreign countries almost as soon as they had completed their continent-wide integration” (241). It holds true because the U.S. was an “autocentric” rather than an “extroverted” economy, such that the U.S. mode of accumulation, in its early phase, could retreat from the British free-trade practices into those of protectionism, a lapse into the “igloos” of “nation-state economies” as Eric Hobsbawm puts it.

<sup>8</sup> Schatz describes it as a “world of formal artifice, a timeless theatrical realm in which the allegory is enacted” (77). Both he and Robin Wood describe it as “stylized.” Wood explains that its characters are “conceived more in terms of their functions than in terms of naturalistic characterization,” making of it a “morality play” and marking Ford’s “sharpened consciousness of the thematic level of his work” (“Shall We Gather at the River?” (24).

<sup>9</sup> In saying that Ford delivered the Western hero’s valediction in *Liberty Valance* and that *Lonely Are the Brave* is a swan song for that hero, I don’t mean to say that filmmakers stopped producing Westerns after 1962. I only mean to show how their ideological suasion changed. The philosophical discourse that was refined by postwar Westerns, once

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demystified by *Liberty Valance*, seems to have detached from the genre and, as I argue, attached to film representations of the Vietnam veteran. The Westerns produced after 1962, then, tended to either join a valedictory litany (*The Wild Bunch* [1969], *The Shootist*) or deconstruct the genre in various ways (*Little Big Man* [1970], *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*). One might refer to John Cawelti's essay "Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films" for observations on the philosophical mutations the genre underwent.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, Bondi claims, "But I love war," when asked by his draft board why he won't simply register as a conscientious objector. He tells them, "my father got rich off the last one canning dogfood for the infantry; all Bondi's love war" (108).

<sup>11</sup> In fact, *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* is very much a historical instance of an educational institution using a contract consecrated by the state as means of autonomy against that very state, and as such the case served as an important precedent in the development of corporate law that leads to the historical moment under discussion. But I thusly qualify my statement not to suggest that Bondi teaches at a state-chartered institution; his institution could well be private. I make the qualification, rather, because he could feel such autonomy *even if it were state-chartered*, owing to the evolution of corporate law.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps this explains why, as Robin Wood remarks, we scarcely can know if the character that Michael exterminates with a flamethrower is North or South Vietnamese soldier. "The problem is partly that one *doesn't* think about it – the direct impact of the scene discourages any analytical distance – but more importantly that the perpetrator, whether American-trained or not, is still an Asian" (emphasis original 242). In *The Deer Hunter*, in other words, the war is not a matter of borders and territorial sovereignty.

<sup>13</sup> Giovanni Arrighi cites this coinage of Bruce Cummings's (22).



## FILMOGRAPHY

*2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968)  
*Airport* (George Seaton, 1970)  
*All the President's Men* (Alan Pakula, 1976)  
*Arguing the World* (Joseph Dorman, 1997)  
*Badlands* (1973)  
*Billion Dollar Brain* (Ken Russell, 1967)  
*Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967)  
*Brewster McCloud* (Robert Altman, 1970)  
*Bye Bye Birdie* (George Sidney, 1963)  
*Cockfighter* (Monte Hellman, 1974)  
*Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1978)  
*Cool Hand Luke* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1967)  
*David and Lisa* (Frank Perry, 1962)  
*The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978)  
*Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964)  
*Drive, He Said* (Jack Nicholson, 1971)  
*Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969)  
*Fail-Safe* (Sidney Lumet, 1964)  
*First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982)  
*Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970)  
*The Getaway* (Sam Peckinpah, 1972)  
*The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972)  
*The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967)  
*Harold and Maude* (Hal Ashby, 1971)  
*Head* (Bob Rafelson, 1968)  
*The Heartbreak Kid* (Elaine May, 1972)  
*Hearts and Minds* (Peter Davis, 1974)  
*Hi, Mom!* (Brian DePalma, 1970)  
*Intolerance* (D.W. Griffith, 1916)  
*It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934)  
*Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975)  
*Juggernaut* (Richard Lester, 1974)  
*The King of Marvin Gardens* (Bob Rafelson, 1972)  
*Klute* (Alan Pakula, 1971)  
*The Last Detail* (Hal Ashby, 1973)  
*Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970)  
*Lonely Are the Brave* (David Miller, 1962)  
*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, 1962)  
*McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (Robert Altman, 1971)  
*Mickey One* (Arthur Penn, 1965)

*Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969)  
*My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1946)  
*The Panic in Needle Park* (Jerry Schatzberg, 1971)  
*The Parallax View* (Alan Pakula, 1974)  
*Point Blank* (John Boorman, 1967)  
*The Poseidon Adventure* (Ronald Neame, 1972)  
*Reds* (Warren Beatty, 1981)  
*Scarecrow* (Jerry Schatzberg, 1973)  
*The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956)  
*The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980)  
*The Shootist* (Don Siegel, 1976)  
*Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939)  
*Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971)  
*The Sugarland Express* (Steven Spielberg, 1974)  
*Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976)  
*Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991)  
*They Live by Night* (Nicholas Ray, 1948)  
*Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (Michael Cimino, 1974)  
*The Towering Inferno* (Irwin Allen, John Guillermin, 1974)  
*Tracks* (Henry Jaglom, 1976)  
*Two-Lane Blacktop* (Monte Hellman, 1971)  
*Wanda* (Barbara Loden, 1971)  
*The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969)  
*You Only Live Once* (Fritz Lang, 1937)

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