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# Narrative, spectatorship, and ideology :

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Narrative, Spectatorship, and Ideology:
Shadow Of A Doubt and Blue Velvet


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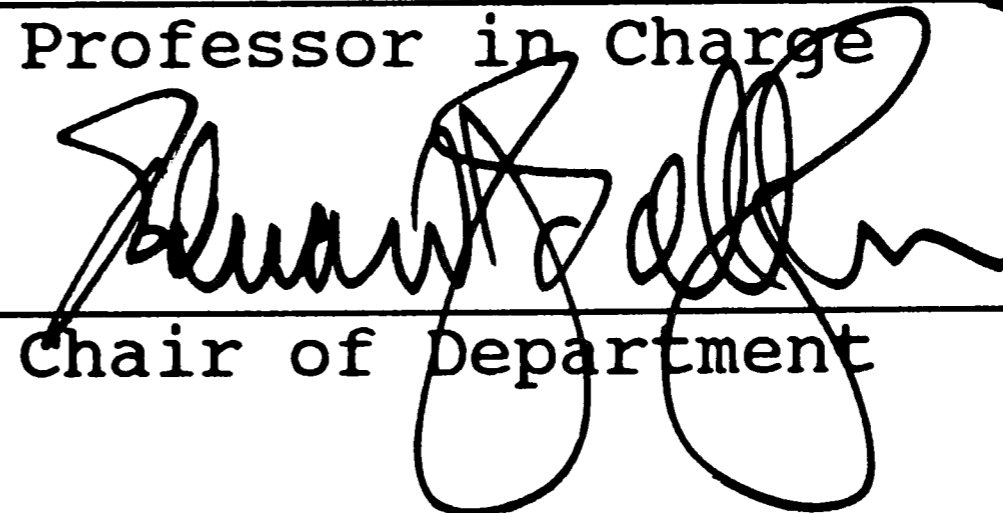of Arts.

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ii

# Table of Contents

# Abstract

"Subject-positioning" theories of narrative and spectatorship often assign the film viewer a passive role in the making of meaning, making her/him an object "placed" or "positioned" before the screen. Consequently, for these theories, the spectator easily becomes a victim of "ideologically complicit" films that do not try to radically change the spectator's relation to the screen. So-called "classical" and "postmodern" narratives have both frequently come under attack for maintaining their spectators in a reactionary and false relationship.

I think the "subject-positioning" theories of spectatorship and the condemnations of "classical" and "postmodern" narratives may result in a crippling conception of the film viewer's activity and a reinforcement of traditional, politically disenabling interpretations of certain "classical" and "postmodern" films.  Therefore, I have chosen to analyze two films in an attempt to "enable" the spectator with regard to a re-evaluation of the labels "classical and "postmodern:"

Hitchcock's <u>Shadow Of A Doubt</u> subverts the notion of a "classical text" that relies on an "invisible"

1

continuity style which transmits a logically coherent sequence of events. The film operates by means of a consistent address to the spectator through extra-diegetic cues, the most important of which is the repeated motif of the waltzing couples. This operation is not merely formal, since it allows the spectator to construct a reading of the film as a critique of patriarchal ideology.

David Lynch's _Blue Velvet_, an example of a "postmodern" narrative, permits the spectator to construct a critical reading of its narrative by setting up both a traditional narrative line and a consistent critique of that narrative by the film's self-conscious images; the dialectic between the narrative/anti-narrative lines allows the spectator to see the film as a critique of traditional narrative and its images.

I have concluded that both films encourage the spectator's involvement in making meaning and in constructing "alternative," critically "transgressive" readings that inspect each film's relationship to ideological concerns.

# Chapter One

## Critical Background: Theories of Narrative and Spectatorship

### I

1  The film-drama is the opium of the people.
2  Down with the immortal kings and queens of the screen! Long live ordinary, mortal people, captured in the midst of life going about their daily tasks.
3  Down with bourgeois fairy-tale scenarios! Long live life as it is.
4 The film-drama and religion are deadly weapons in the hands of the capitalists. By showing our revolutionary way of life we shall snatch that weapon from the enemy's hands.
5  Contemporary artistic drama is a hangover of the old world. It is an attempt to mould our revolutionary reality into bourgeois forms.
6  Down with the scripting of life: film is unawares, just as we are.
7  The scenario is a fairy tale dreamed up for us by the man of letters. We live our own lives and do not submit to anyone else's imaginings.
8  We all go about our daily work without interfering with the work of others and the task of film-workers is to film us in such a way that they do not interfere with our work.
9  Long live the Kino-Eye of the proletarian revolution!
(Provisional Instructions to Kino-Eye Groups, quoted in Realism and the Cinema, pp 25-26)

> You sit right opposite a tree, draw it as
> carefully as you can, and what becomes of
> that tree on paper?
> (Goethe, quoted in <u>Realism</u> <u>and</u> <u>the</u>
> <u>Cinema</u>, 120)

A remarkable moment occurs in Alfred Hitchcock's <u>Psycho</u>. It is not the notorious shower murder itself but the moments immediately following it.  The dying Marion grabs the shower curtain, pulling it from its supports;  then we see the shower head still spraying water, and blood spiralling counterclockwise down the drain.  Then a slow dissolve to Marion's staring right eye which seems to make a slow clockwise spiral, imitating the spiral of the water and blood flowing down the drain. This is the remarkable moment (a special effect created in post-production, not by the camera) in which the camera, and the audience along with it, seems to be exiting from Marion's dead eye.  The eye stares into the camera, this chilling shot accompanied on the soundtrack only by the sound of the water from the shower. After the slow spiral, an almost imperceptible cut occurs and a slow reverse zoom begins to take us away from Marion.  Though it is not often discussed in this way, Marion's eye is one of the most remarkable "self-reflexive" moments in so-called "mainstream" film, probably in any film.

4

Marion's eye and its eerie fixed stare into the
camera pose many of the questions currently
occupying film theorists:  What is the place of the
spectator (the eye stares at us, the film-watchers)?
What is the role of the "female gaze" (though the
character is dead, the gaze remains, implicating the
male spectator in Norman/Mother's voyeurism and
violence)?  What is the significance of film that
makes clear its status as film, that is, lets us in
on the secret rather than attempting to create an
illusion of "reality?"  Is the narrative an
authoritarian device, "cutting in" the spectator to a
world of manipulation and sadism?  Is the spectator a
"victim" of an ideology inherent in narrative or does
s/he have room for choice in accepting or rejecting
ideological propositions made by narrative films?
Whatever one might think of Hitchcock's
presentation of Marion in Psycho[1], the questions are
clearly posed.  In short, Marion's eye provides a
starting (and ending) point for a discussion of the
complex formed by narrative, spectator, and ideology
in film.

Narrative, Spectator, and Ideology:  The yoking
together of these three impressively general terms

5

smacks of academic over-reaching.  However, they do
have a relationship which requires that all terms be
present in any analysis of one term; how can one
attempt an analysis of filmic narrative without
taking into account the subject of that narrative,
the spectator, and the relation of that narrative to
the presentation of ideological concerns to the
spectator?

The problem for analysis begins with
determining film's relationship to ideology, because
ultimately the film theorist must decide whether
film, especially narrative film, is merely a means
for replicating ideology, in that it presumes to
represent a world "out there" which is already partly
an ideological creation, or whether film provides a
means for critiquing ideology or at least bringing it
"to light," in that the separation between film (as
technological and "artistic" creation) and the world
it represents creates a space which permits
questioning and criticism.  In short, what does film
do--and what does it permit the spectator to do--when
it represents "reality?"

Film as window:  This old metaphor reveals that
film has a fundamentally unproblematic relationship

6

to the reality it "represents."  Film, by the nature

of its use of photography, can "capture" reality more

accurately than other media more dependent on human

"intervention."  Bazin, the most noteworthy proponent

of this view of cinema, writes,

> For the first time, between the orginating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrument- ality of a nonliving agent.  For the first time, the image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man...All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence.  Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty (Bazin, <u>What</u> <u>is</u> <u>Cinema?</u>, quoted by Dudley Andrew, <u>Major</u> <u>Film</u> <u>Theories</u>, p. 138).

Bazin hails the cinematic apparatus because it

presents a "true " picture of the world, and this truth

often metamorphizes into a kind of "poetry" that

interprets the world but, by the purity of its

intepretation, delivers up a picture of the world that is

more true than the world itself, that is, a "poetic" view

of the world which reveals the essence of reality,

discovers something always there but not readily apparent.

Cinema becomes, in Siegfreid Kracauer's phrase, a
"redemption of physical reality," because it allows us,
unlike other art forms, to "simply" record the world
around us and bestow on it a sort of artistic benediction
without the impure elements, i.e. the overtly human
intervention, of other art forms.

An excellent example of this notion of poetic-
realistic cinema is provided by Eric Rohmer in an
interview with <u>Cahiers</u> <u>du</u> <u>Cinema</u>'s editors Jean-Louis
Comolli and Jean Narboni. Rohmer is responding to
Comolli's question regarding how cinema helps people to
"see better things which are right under our noses:"

> I would say what Astruc made Orson
> Welles say at the <u>Objectif</u> 49 Film Society. He
> was interviewing Welles, and he freely
> translated one of Welles's answers with a
> formula I find rather beautiful: "Cinema is
> poetry." Given that cinema is poetry in the
> realm of forms (and sounds), it widens our
> perception: it makes us see (and hear). This
> is a point I've made in an awful lot of
> articles, so forgive me if I take it up again:
> a film does not deliver a translation of the
> world for us to admire, but rather, through the
> translation, it delivers the world itself. The
> cinema, even in its works of fiction, is an
> instrument of discovery. Because it is poetry,
> it reveals, and because it reveals, it is poetry
> (<u>Realism</u> <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>Cinema</u>, 246).

This notion of film as discoverer of reality, as
the poetic means to truth, has come under substantial

attack from a number of sources, most of them
influenced by the European melding of Marxism and
psychoanalysis.  This critique regards film as
anything but an innocent or "poetic" portrayal of
reality;  instead, film is always a construction of
reality, a medium that "does not hover above History
and Ideology, but is totally inscribed within them."
(Cahiers, from interview quoted above, Realism and
the Cinema, p. 244).  Even the seemingly neutral
apparatus for film that Bazin mythologizes is an
ideological product, a technological response to the
ideological desire to place man--the bourgeois man--
at the center of the world.  Jean-Louis Baudry writes
that the invention of the cinematic apparatus
"represents a larger effort to order the world for a
'regulated transcendance,' that is, the elevation of
the perceiving eye to a position of dominance over
its World," thereby making the world an "intentional
object" whose "complexity is sacrificed to maintain
the subject's role as creator of meaning"  (Baudry,
"Ideological Effects of the Basic Apparatus", 292).

This critique becomes immediately relevant to the
construction of narrative within film, because
narrative--the unfolding of a story over time--

becomes an important method for fixing the film in a
certain relationship to the world and, in turn,
fixing the spectator in a certain role as the
addressee of the narrative (important ideas but not
without problems--something I'll discuss later).
Stephen Heath writes that the "reality" of film is
really a matter of "the match of film and world,...a
matter of representation [which is] in turn a matter
of discourse, of the organization of the images, the
defintion of the 'views,' their construction,"
("Narrative Space", 384, from Nichols);  narrative
allows film, which could otherwise indulge in an
"excess" of space not subordinate to another purpose,
to create a "coherent and positioned space," which
moves, thereby cutting in the spectator as the
subject and focus of "a process of vision, a
positioning and positioned movement" ("Narrative
Space," p.385).

In fact, the camera, for Heath, culminates a
historical movement, begun during the Renaissance, to
make space a "spectacle for the eye of the spectator"
(387). Narrative has become almost synonymous with
film because narrative is a way to contain "the
mobility that could threaten the clarity of vision in

a constant renewal of perspective" (392) and to

fulfill

> the Renaissance impetus...that Dekoonig
> can describe as follows: "It was up to the
> artist to measure out the exact space for a
> person to die in or to be dead already. The
> exactness of the space was determined, or, rather,
> inspired by whatever reason the person was dying
> or being killed for. The space thus measured out
> on the original plane of the canvas surface
> became a 'place' somewhere on the floor" (392).

The implications for the spectator of narrative

film are clear: s/he is "placed" before the screen

and becomes "the invisible base of artificial

perspective" (Baudry, 292). Because the spectator

participates in the illusory experience of being the

active center of meaning, s/he becomes an ideological

"victim," a falsely autonomous being whose experience

as the subject for whom the narrative takes place

duplicates the (equally ideological) experience of

being the falsely autonomous consumer of capitalist

society. In short, as this argument goes, the

bourgeois spectator for Renaissance painting has

become the bourgeois spectator for film narrative,

and the rules of narrative conspire in maintaining

the bourgeois status quo and the false assurance of

the subject as a totality; The subject sees his/her

"fullness" reflected on the screen in the "fullness"
of the narrative, that is, the so-called "reality" of
film allows the viewer to imagine that s/he is the
source of reality and is, hence, untainted by
ideology.  Jean-Louis Baudry probably puts the case
most strongly.  He argues that narrative film must
maintain an illusion of reality in order to sustain
the perceiving self's illusion of unity.  The reality
of the cinema, Baudry writes, is the reality of the
self:

> The transcendental self unites
> the discontinuous fragments of phenomena,
> of lived experience, into unifying
> meaning...what emerges here (in outline) is
> the specific function fulfilled by the
> cinema as support and instrument of
> ideology.  It constitutes the "subject" by
> the illusory delimitation of a central
> location--whether this be that of a god or
> any other substitute.  It is an apparatus
> destined to obtain a precise ideological
> effect, necessary to the dominant ideology:
> creating a phantasmatization of the
> subject, it collaborates with a marked
> efficiency in the maintenance of idealism
> (295).

Though his language is not as strong, Stephen
Heath essentially agrees.  Film, he says, ignores the
way the eye really works (constantly moving, bringing
in peripheral information) in favor of constructing

> ...a coherent image of vision, an image
> that then carries over into a suggestion of
> the world as a kind of sum total of
> possible photographs, a spectacle to be
> recorded in its essence in an instantaneous
> objectification for the eye...a world, that
> is, conceived outside process and practice,
> empirical scene of the confirmed and
> central master spectator serenely 'present'
> in tranquil rectilinearity ("Narrative
> Space," 388).

Film's ideological work occurs in the creation of its
ideal spectator, the "master spectator" of which
Heath speaks, whose eye floats free from all history,
practice and process.

According to this view of cinema, the
construction of that ideal spectator, the "master
spectator," involves a simultaneous work of
destruction;  the viewer voluntarily gives up his/her
potential for questioning ideology in order to submit
willingly to it.  The submission, the destruction of
the ability to productively critique ideology, is an
inevitable product of a kind of cinema that, as Heath
remarks, cuts off the spectator from filmic
production and performance and permits "the
specularization of reality for the coherence of a
subject outside contradiction" ("On Screen, In
Frame," 10).

13

Thus, ideology is reproduced.  In fact, that
reproduction, facilitated by the false construction
of an ahistorical, "coherent" subject, provides the
very basis for the definition of "ideology,"
according to Bill Nichols:

> Ideology involves the
> reproduction of the existing relations of
> production...Ideology operates as a
> constraint, limiting us to certain places
> or positions within these processes of
> communication and exchange. Ideology is how
> the existing ensemble of social relations
> represents itself to individuals;  it is
> the image a society gives of itself in
> order to perpetuate itself...Ideology
> [tries to] persuade us that how things are
> is how they ought to be and that the place
> provided for us is the place we ought to
> have (1).

Nichols's repetition of "place" is of crucial
importance here, because it underlines the conception
of the place of the spectator in front of
illusionistic, narrative film  as the place of the
(falsely) helpless victim of society's ideology.
Nichols could not be more explicit about what society
he speaks of or of what that society's most powerful
"weapons" are:  He is concerned with the modern,
industrialized, consumer capitalist society which
replicates itself by certain ideological conceptions
centering on money and the phallus.  Working from

Lacan and Althusser--the two most important
theoreticians behind the "construction of the
subject" theories I have been discussing-- Nichols
writes,

> The construction of the self-as-
> subject is very clearly a socializing
> function carried out by the various
> institutions characterizing the modern
> capitalist state (or any other society, for
> that matter).  The setting into place of
> the subject becomes the principal act in
> guaranteeing the reproduction of the
> relations of production (namely, class
> relations) and is an over-determined act
> practiced by all institutions from the
> family to the educational, religious, and
> legal systems (34).

Working further with Lacan as seen by Althusser,
Nichols establishes that ideologically-complicit
films work by maintaining the self in its "Imaginary
realm" (31) where the ego defines itself in
opposition to the Other, as a "paranoid construct"
(31), rather than in the "Symbolic realm" where the
self is defined in relation to the Other, in a realm
of exchange and communication.  Ideology traps the
self in the Imaginary, preventing the recognition
that each self is a social construct by maintaining
the notion that "our sense of self-as-subject is
given to us by an already meaningful world that

subjects us to an imaginary other whose authority we
freely accept [as we accept the authority of the
representational filmic image] in exchange for the
pleasure of recognizing the image of ourselves in the
world around us" (32). Further, "the grand deceit of
ideology in this context is that it employs
recognition and desire to convince us of our own
freedom, subject to no one...[believing] ourselves
free in order to freely subject ourselves to the rule
of ideology" (42).

The complex formed by narrative, spectator, and
ideology becomes a place of struggle; ideology must
be broken or at least examined in order to allow film
to become oppositionally productive and to permit the
spectator to question the status quo. For Laura
Mulvey, the narrative tradition (which in terms of
film today primarily means an illusionistic,
representational tradition) is closely connected with
sadism: "Sadism demands a story, depends on making
something happen, forcing a change in another person,
a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all
occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an
end" (Mulvey quoted by de Lauretis, 103). This
sadism depends on the same kind of pleasure Nichols

speaks of when he discusses the "paranoid construct"
of the imaginary ego which receives pleasure in
seeing reproduced on the film screen the falsely
coherent image of itself;  both result in the triumph
(and its attendant pleasure) of a self which regards
itself beyond social forces, that is, beyond anything
requiring criticism or change.  The autonomous ego
exerts its will (the mini-narrative of "forcing a
change") and regards that exertion as the means
necessary to retaining its stability, i.e.
suppressing forces disruptive to its ideological
pleasure.  Hence, Mulvey calls for the "destruction
of pleasure as a radical weapon" (Mulvey 414) and
intends in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative
Cinema" to destroy the "satisfaction" and "beauty"
which comes from traditional narrative:

> The satisfaction and
> reinforcement of the ego that represent the
> high point of film history hitherto must be
> attacked.  Not in favor of a reconstructed
> new pleasure, which cannot exist in the
> abstract, or of intellectualized
> unpleasure, but to make way  for a total
> negation of the ease and plenitude of the
> narrative fiction film.  The alternative is
> the thrill that comes from leaving the past
> behind without rejecting it, transcending
> outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to
> break with normal pleasurable expectations
> in order to conceive a new language of

desire (Mulvey 415).

Even those who do not go as far as Mulvey
proclaim the need for an alternative to traditional
narrative and its ways of constructing the spectator
within ideology.  Heath asserts that "to fight for a
revolutionary content is also to fight for a
revolution of form, but that--in a dialectic which
defines the work of a specific signifying practice--
the content ceaselessly 'goes beyond'...and that a
political struggle is to be carried through in the
articulations of 'form' and 'content' at every point
of that process" ("Narrative Space," 411) and,
further, that the creation of a truly "alternative"
cinema requires a recognition that

> The narrative space of film is today
> not simply a theoretical and practical
> actuality but is a crucial and political
> avant-garde problem in a way which offers
> perspectives on the existing terms of that
> actuality. Deconstruction is quickly the
> impasse of formal device, an aesthetics of
> transgression when the need is an activity
> of transformation, and a politically
> consequent materialism in film is not to be
> expressed as veering contact past internal
> content in order to proceed with 'film as
> film' but rather as a work on the
> constructions and relations of meaning and
> subject in a specific signifying practice
> in a given sociohistorical situation, a
> work that is then much less on 'codes' than

18

> on the operations of narrativization...it
> may well involve an action at the limits of
> narrative within the narrative film, at the
> limits of its fictions of unity"
> ("Narrative Space," 411-12).

Heath can save narrative film only as far as it can become a self-conscious, self-critical instrument which will reveal the "fictions of unity" by exposing their artificiality, thereby exposing the artificiality of ideology, which, as Nichols reiterates, depends on making what _is_ seem natural, believable, acceptable, and obvious (Nichols, 2). Nichols, too, will salvage narrative but, again, only as an activity whereby the

> work of the image in addressing us, in/to
> an imaginary 'fix,' can, and must, itself
> be the focus of political and/or formal
> contestation.  Fracturing the solidity of
> the image's condensation toward a vanishing
> point [Nichols is referring to the
> Renaissance perspective upon which cinema
> is founded] fractures the solidity of that
> other place [the self-as-subject, the
> paranoid ego] reciprocally constituted"
> (54).

The possibility for change within the complex of narrative-spectator-ideology exists because, in cinema, "we are not simply put in our place, we are also moved;  and one possible direction that movement

may follow is through and beyond the position of self-as-subject to the realm of symbolic exchange where grace or order (in an open-ended, non-imaginary sense) may be realized" (Nichols, 103).

Though Nichols speaks of the possibility of the spectator's movement, the formulation above still depends on the notion of the spectator being controlled by the film--the _film_ positions or moves the spectator. According to this conception of cinema, the spectator's freedom vis-a-vis ideology is severely limited; the spectator may be held in the imaginary realm or allowed to enter the realm of "symbolic exchange," but it is always the film which controls "where" the spectator is.

As critics have noted, "subject-positioning" theories turn the spectator into little more than an unchanging receptacle for cinema's ideological operations, and the political consequences of such theories may be dangerous, or at least unproductive. Michael Ryan, in his essay "Politics and Film: Discourse, Psychoanalysis, Ideology" says that Heath's theory of the place of the film spectator "disallowed a politically enabling reading of popular film" (477) and calls for a different approach:

The "meaning" of popular film,
its political and ideological significance,
does not reside in the screen-to-subject
phenomenology of viewing alone. That
dimension is merely one moment in a
circuit, one effect of larger chains of
determination. Film representations are
one subset of wider systems of social
representation (images, narratives,
beliefs, etc.) that determine how people
live and that are closely bound up with the
systems of social valorization or
differentiation along class, race, and sex
lines. Audiences are not univocally
"positioned" by films; rather, they either
accept or reject cinematic representations
of the world, but they do so in accordance
with the social codes they inhabit. The
specifically cinematic discourse, whereby a
film addresses an audience, is determined
by broader social discourses, the systems
of significance and valorization that
determine social subjects as male or
female, working class or ruling class, and
so on (480).

Ryan argues for a theory of film spectatorship

which considers the spectator's subjectivities within

a larger socio-ideological context; the spectator

has the privilege of accepting or rejecting certain

cinematic portrayals of the "world," albeit in

accordance with the broader social codes--the

determinants of class, gender, sexual orientation,

etc.--each person "inhabits." The spectator becomes

an active participant in the making of meaning, and

film (here it is important to remember the central

21

role of "classical," narrative film in theories of
"subject-positioning") no longer exerts an
unavoidable authoritarian control over its audience.
Rather, the audience learns to view film by complex
processes of subjective acceptance and rejection as
well as long-term training in watching films.

David Bordwell, as author of <u>Narration</u> <u>in</u> <u>the</u>
<u>Fiction</u> <u>Film</u> and co-author of <u>The</u> <u>Classical</u> <u>Hollywood</u>
<u>Cinema</u>, has become one of the most important
proponents of a theory which permits the spectator an
active role while watching a film.  He criticizes the
so-called "diegetic" theories of film, which are
based on linguistic models, and attacks Stephen Heath
in particular for his theory of the place of the
spectator, as formulated in "Narrative Space."
Bordwell says Heath uses the concept of position in
four different ways:

> 1) the implied physical vantage
> point created by an image in linear
> perspective;  2) a totalized sense of space
> across several images, a sort of mind's eye
> view; 3) a coherent narrative "point of
> view;" and 4) "subject position," which
> refers to the stability and unity of the
> construction of the self (<u>Narration</u>, 25).

The problem with Heath's concepts of position,
Bordwell says, are that numbers 2, 3, and 4 are

22

merely metaphorical, and that number 1 falls back on old mimetic assumptions which require the concept of an ideal observer, presupposing "that shots create invisible observers and that editing creates ideal ones" (<u>Narration</u>, 25). In response, Bordwell offers an alternative view of the spectator which acknowledges "the importance of the spectator's conscious and preconscious work" during the activity of watching a film (29). His notion of the spectator is based on a "constructivist theory of perception" which turns the spectator from a passive viewer who is merely "cut in" or "sutured" to a film's overtly authoritarian ideological operations to an "active, goal-oriented, inference-making" consciousness (<u>Narration</u> 31).

For Bordwell, film viewing becomes a dynamic process in which the material and structures of film is only one part, the other parts being the "perceptual capabilities" and the "prior knowledge and experience" of the spectator (31-32). If a spectator of a film finds it easy to "absorb" the narrative of a film--if s/he is involved in an activity which, in Walter Benjamin's words, is "reception in a state of distraction" where "the

public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one"
(Benjamin 632)--it is only because the spectator, by
a long process of "training" in watching film, brings
a highly complex set of schemata to the viewing
activity.  These "schemata" (Bordwell's term borrowed
from Meir Sternberg) are "organized clusters of
knowledge" which guide the spectator's "hypothesis
making" (Narration 31).

Bordwell's theory of the active spectator
allows, in Michael Ryan's words, a "poltically
enabling" reading of narrative film, though Bordwell
himself rarely ventures into the realm of politics
and ideology, preferring to examine the mechanisms of
various film narratives and the characteristics of
classical Hollywood cinema. But, when combined with a
view of the spectator which puts her at the center of
meaning-making, close attention to the construction
of narrative allows a conception of ideology far less
constraining and paralyzing than those in which the
spectator is merely a vessel for the ideological
operations of an innately deceptive "illusionistic"
film.

II

The remainder of this thesis will be devoted to a close analysis of the interrelationships of narrative, spectator, and ideology in two closely-related films, Alfred Hitchcock's Shadow Of A Doubt (1943) and David Lynch's Blue Velvet (1986). Thematically, both seem straightforwardly concerned with the relationship between "evil"--whether in the form of the "Merry Widow" strangler Uncle Charlie, or the deranged, drug-taking, oxygen-sniffing Frank Booth--and the bland facade of a small American town. Each town--Santa Rose for Hitchcock and Lumberton for Lynch--seems to embody the primary qualities associated with that ideology: cleanliness, happiness, democratic prosperity, and, above all, the peace, order and correctness of the patriarchal family. Each film inspects that ideology and finds it hollow and false. Uncle Charlie and Frank Booth merely make clear that this wilfully naive ideology fails to understand that people and things exist beyond and outside its comprehension, that evil and disorder are better met with awareness than ignorance. Both films are also growing up stories in which a young protagonist--Jeffrey Beaumont or

Charlie Newton--confronts "evil" and "triumphs,"
though each film makes clear that the evil is not an
external force but something very much connected to
our young fresh-faced hero or heroine (in fact, both
films make a strong case for the young protagonist
creating, or at least calling forth, the "evil"
force).  Both films leave the town and family intact;
Santa Rosa and Lumberton will recover and regain
their ignorance by the defensive use of social
mechanisms of represssion.  Hitchcock and Lynch seem
to say that while the ideology is corrupt, it is not
easily destroyed.

     But to leave the analysis at this level would be
simplistic and unproductive;  a mere "content
analysis" does not ask the fundamental question of
whether the films represent any formal challenges to
the ideology they attempt to deconstruct in their
stories.  Moreover, the thematic analysis above says
nothing about the spectator's work in creating
meaning in each film.  Looking at how the narratives
are constructed in Shadow Of A Doubt and Blue Velvet
is necessary for understanding  how the spectator
participates in the construction of the "total" film
and for understanding the ideological effects of each

narrative.

A "subject-positioning" theory or even a theory
which merely identifies Hitchcock's film as a
"classical" narrative and Lynch's as a "postmodern"
narrative might regard both films as "ideologically
complicit," that is, as films which do _not_ allow the
spectator to engage in a productive critique of
ideology, because the narratives in each case are so
tightly constructed that they prevent anything but
programmed responses to the _story_--a kind of story in
both cases which, in Brechtian terms, takes the
spectator _from_ nowhere _to_ nowhere.

The case against the "classical" narrative, a
case that has a long history, might be summarized by
referring back to Stephen Heath's argument against
films which, by cutting off the spectator from filmic
production and performance, allow "the
specularization of reality for the coherence of a
subject outside contradiction" (_Questions of Cinema_,
10), or by citing Peter Wollen's identification of
the "seven deadly sins of the cinema" as exactly the
qualities often ascribed to classical narratives:
"narrative transitivity [following a clear chain of
causation], identification, transparency, single

27

diegesis, closure, pleasure, and fiction" (Wollen 501). Wollen associates these qualities with a series of terms--"fiction/mystification/ideology/ lies/deception/illusion/representation"--which make brutally clear the focus of his disapproval.

Understanding the critique of a "postmodern" narrative like that of Blue Velvet is a bit more difficult because "postmodernism" is neither as rigidly and clearly defined as "classical," nor is it as historically specific. What exactly makes Blue Velvet "postmodern" may be hard to define precisely. Perhaps its "postmodernism" lies in its pirating of a variety of genres--film noir, small town melodrama, growing up story--for a narrative which gives none of them priority and distorts them all to reveal each as a way of making images, rather than revealing a "truth" about the world. Perhaps its "postmodernism" lies in its shifting "tone," moving from wildly exaggerated depictions of brutality to wildly exaggerated depictions of middle-class family life; the film presents no coherent "world view" (in a way a Hitchcock film might) but rather a variety of images and scenes whose effect ranges from the comic to the horrifying.

The rejection of postmodernism relies on a link between the postmodern work--its status as pastiche, as parody, as a "neutral" deadpan appropriation of "culture" (regardless of whether it is high or low) for the purposes of a flattened, mediated art of surfaces--and the exhaustion of late capitalism. Fred Pfeil writes that critics of postmodernism regard its "power and attractiveness as the effect of its stylized (re) presentation of a recent twist in the long dialectic of capitalist alienation, a freshly extended set of fragmentations and reifications that postmodernist art now invites us to enjoy as the newly beautiful and true" (381). According to this view, a film like Blue Velvet submerges any critique it might attempt in a narrative that reflects and replicates the alienation in the culture that produced it and, in Fredric Jameson's words, "reinforces...the logic of consumer capitalism" by promoting a denial of history and encouraging us "to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve" (Jameson 125).

So, whether the narrative is "classical" or

"postmodern," according to many theories of narrative and spectatorship, the film viewer becomes the victim, "placed" as the empty vessel to be filled by ideology.  My intention in this thesis is to resist such crippling formulations dependent on essentialist notions of the effects of "classical" and "postmodern" narrative on viewer reception of ideological meaning, and instead to turn close attention to texts that, though they have been placed in these categories, do allow the spectator to "move somewhere."  That is, I want to identify the places in each supposedly spectator-constraining narrative where ideology is "worked on," subjected to a scrutiny in which the spectator is encouraged to participate.

I have chosen Shadow Of A Doubt and Blue Velvet because, while thematically similiar, they depend on very different narrative procedures and different ways of addressing the spectator which, nevertheless, allow the spectator to become an active consciousness and to create "alternative" readings opposed to the more "traditional" kinds of readings these films might generate.  Both films are, to borrow Althusser's words, "authentic art" which allow us to

"<u>see</u>, and therefore gives to us in the form of 'seeing,' '<u>perceiving</u>' and '<u>feeling</u>'...the <u>ideology</u> from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it <u>alludes</u>" ("A Letter on Art," 222).

For each film, I will choose several scenes or sequences which seem to me paradigmatic of the way each narrative works in actively addressing the spectator, and, from those moments, attempt to construct a reading which is "politically enabling" in that the spectator "sees" the ideology of which Althusser speaks, connects it to the reality to which it "alludes,' and, from that operation, creates the crucial space for questioning and development.

1.    For the purposes of my essay, I've introduced

the Hitchcock of <u>Psycho</u> as an important exposer of

ideology.   Nevertheless, this view is countered by

many critics, especially feminist critics, who see a

clear pattern of misogyny through Hitchcock's films.

Regarding <u>Psycho</u>, Pam Cook writes in <u>The Cinema Book</u>:


               It has been argued recently (see
          Mulvey, 1975) that  Hitchcock's films
          organize the play of looks between
          characters and cinema audience in terms of
          the dominance of  the male (heterosexual)
          gaze, i.e. that the relationship  between
          male and female characters is a struggle
          based on  dominance and subordination in
          which the former finally  dominates the
          latter, thus neatly resolving the narrative
          in favour of patriarchal ideology...This
          account is very  useful in discussion of
          the ideological implications of
          Hitchcock's films, especially in <u>Psycho</u>,
          where fear and  guilt is induced in the
          female protagonist by the  investigatory
          looks of male characters, and her inability
          to escape these looks places her in a
          subordinate and  vulnerable position.  The
          notorious attack in the  shower...could
          also be seen in terms of an attempt to link
          the 'look' of the camera and of the
          audience with the  aggression of the
          stabbing , thus reducing the female
          protagonist to the status of object rather

than subject:  the female transgressor is
not, as she thought, in command  of her own
destiny, the power of the 'look' is taken
from  her (the image of Marion's dead,
unseeing eye is  significant in this
respect) and she is fixed as an object
(127-28).

This interpretation certainly has validity;

however, linking the "'look' of the camera and of the

audience" might also have the effect of implicating

the audience, especially the male audience, in the

aggression and reification.  Thus, Marion's staring

eye is an accusation, a "look" that is still very

much "alive" because it condemns patriarchal ideology

by linking voyeurism (the male voyeurs in the

audience who experience pleasure in Marion's nudity,

etc.) and aggression.  Marion's "look," then, is not

taken from her but turned on the audience, taken

"outside" the narrative.

## Chapter Two

## Shadow Of A Doubt: The "Classical Text"

A "traditional" reading of Shadow Of A Doubt might sound like the following: Uncle Charlie is an embodiment of "evil" who disrupts the important (American) values of a peaceful, innocent, small town in California. His expulsion and death represent the triumph of these values. Uncle Charlie's talk of nightmares and his description of the world as a "foul sty" are merely the rantings of a mind which has become unhinged by despair (his deranged, impotent despair is signaled in the film's first scene, in the seedy urban rooming house). The family—especially "young Charlie"—which Uncle Charlie invades must be protected because they are, in fact, the bearers of real value. For this reading Detective Graham's words to young Charlie at the funeral of her uncle are critical:

> Things aren't as bad as that [Charlie has commented that her uncle believed "people like us had no idea what the world was really like"]. But sometimes it needs a lot of watching. It seems to go crazy every now and then, like your Uncle

34

Charlie.

Uncle Charlie has been an inexplicable,
irrational occurrence of "evil"--his existence was
"crazy" and, with his destruction, the good people of
Santa Rosa can get back to living their <u>correct</u>
lives.  The authority of the patriarchal order
receives the film's benediction, the final shot
presenting a convergence of state authority  (the
detective), religious authority (the church), and its
combined patriarchal authority (the suggestion of
Charlie's impending marriage).

Raymond Durgnat sees the film in these
conventional terms and says, "it respects Hollywood,
and perhaps an authentic American, convention in
respecting the generally complete division between
normally tensionless families and abnormally tension-
wracked ones" (183) and calls the film's link between
innocence and crime "weak or...carefully camouflaged"
(188).  Durgant even goes so far as to suggest an
alternative, "more sharply barbed" (187) version of
the narrative:

> Rather than being introduced by
> association with the big cities of the
> East, Uncle Charlie would be presented as a
> local salesman who left home after the

death of his first wife, a woman too old
for him.  His niece's love for him has
always been intense, and when her
suspicions become near-certainties, she
almost destroys the evidence which might
give a definite answer one way or the
other.  When she questions her uncle
closely, he laughs at her, seduces her,
playfully admits the crime, and leaves her.
She is tempted to denounce him, partly out
of injured pride. Her motives for not doing
so are a mixture of selfless love, selfish
hope, fear of conviction for suppressing
evidence, fear of scandal, and concern for
her family's reputation, and illusions.
Finding herself pregnant, she rapidly
allows the detective to seduce her, and
marries him...(187).

Durgnat's substitute narrative seems more like

daydreaming than criticism, and his analysis has the

major flaw of concentrating solely on the story and

"themes" of the film with no attention to the

filmmaking, the means of "presenting" the story.

Close attention to the narrative reveals a rather

different kind of story, one that is even more

"sharply barbed" than Durgnat's idiosyncratic

replacement.  This other narrative often makes direct

addresses to the spectator, the effect of which is to

take the spectator "from" the story into a "place"

where s/he can reflect on the story, allowing the

film to become something more complex and difficult

than the Hollywood "product" Durgnat seems to take it

36

for.  In fact, Hitchcock's concern for the spectator
makes the label "classical" highly problematic for
this film, since the term indicates an "invisibility"
or "transparency" of style that keeps the spectator
involved only in the actions and emotions in the
narrative, discouraging any kind of critical activity
on the narrative, and this film seems to me to reveal
its deepest meanings at the moments when the
narrative "breaks" to address the spectator.

I do not mean "breaks" in the way the Cahiers
editors use "structuring absences" in their famous
analyis of John Ford's Young Mr. Lincoln to describe
"what is already there [in the film], but silent,"
what "while intending to leave unsaid, it is
nevertheless obliged to say" (Young Mr. Lincoln,
497).  Rather, I mean places where the film actively
invites the "breaking" of the so-called "transparent"
narrative to make the workings of the narrative
clear, to present not merely a narrative but the
creation of that narrative. Shadow Of A Doubt, by
inviting the participation of the spectator, plays
against the notion of "classical" film whose
"reception has been totally dictated by this system
[the system which "subtends and unifies" the concepts

37

of "analogical representation and linear narrative ('transparence' and 'presence')]--and limited to a kind of non-reading of the films assured by their apparent non-writing, which was seen as the very essence of their mastery" (Young Mr. Lincoln, 495).

Hitchcock's film begins with the image of waltzing couples, anonymous and elegant, dressed with Victorian formality; the credits appear, accompanied on the soundtrack by the "Merry Widow Waltz." Truffaut, in his famous interview with Hitchcock, seems to have picked up on the importance of the image of the dancing couples, though he does not develop his thoughts. Nevertheless, his brief exchange with Hitchcock, indicates that the image had some sort of special importance in the film:

> F.T. I was wondering where you got the idea of illustrating the tune of "The Merry Widow" with dancing couples. It's an image that appears several times.
>
> A.H. I even used it as a background for the credits.
>
> F.T. Was it a stock shot?
>
> A.H. No, I made it up especially for the picture. I can't remember now whether Uncle Charlie is the one who first had the idea of whistling a few bars of "The Merry Widow" or whether it was the girl (153).

As Thierry Kuntzel demonstrated in his analysis of _The Most Dangerous Game_ in "Film-work, 2," the credits sequence of a film may have a crucial role in revealing the obsessions within the film;  in _Shadow Of A Doubt_ the credits sequence reveals a way of reading the narrative.  Of course, any credits sequence, even in the most staunchly "classical" film, is an address to the spectator (here are the people who made this film; here are the stars behind the characters--we provide these names for you to read), but Hitchcock's film is different in that the credits sequence does more than merely acknowledge the presence of the spectator;  it provides the spectator with a way of understanding the film, a set of directions that are not "in" the narrative but "above" it, extra- or non-diegetic rather than diegetic.

The image of the waltzing couples has "nothing" to do with the narrative proper. That is, it serves no function _within_ the story; nevertheless, it provides the spectator with a non-narrative means to understand the significance of the narrative. William Rothman writes,

> This image is never placed. If
> the scene of dancing is real, surely its
> world must be long past, viewed through a
> screen of nostalgia. If the scene is only a
> vision, whose vision is it? The film's
> opening raises the questions of who or what
> commands the camera and what motivates the
> presentation of this view.  Shadow Of A
> Doubt begins by declaring itself engimatic,
> even before it announces that its projected
> world harbors a mystery within it.
> Charles's mystery is from the outset linked
> to the author's gesture of opening the film
> as he does (Rothman, 179).

Rothman perceptively notes the importance of this
image and asks the crucial question of whose vision
it represents. Nevertheless, he answers by referring
to the presence--the "author"--behind the camera and
by regarding the image as "enigmatic."  Asking what
this image does for the presence before the screen
is an attempt at answering Rothman's question and
resolving at least part of the enigma.

Whose vision is it?  The image of the waltzing
couples is the meeting place between the "vision" of
the film's "author," Hitchcock, and the equally
important "vision" of the film's "reader," the
spectator.  Certainly the couples are not "real"
(i.e. motivated by the story's narrative), but
fictional--they signal to the film's viewers that
they are entering a fictional world where meaning is

not "given" but made, and where style is not "transparent" but a significant presence which does not _transmit_ meaning but rather _holds_ it.  If Uncle Charlie is a mystery and the motivation behind the image of the dancing couples is a mystery, the narrative of this film is a mystery, too, in that it takes the mind of a "detective"--the spectator--to piece together the clues.

The role of the dancing couples as "clue" is apparent if we take a look at the other places this image appears:  immediately after the scene in which Uncle Charlie gives young Charlie a ring (in a sort of symbolic marriage);  after young Charlie discovers the article describing the "Merry Widow" murders; and, finally, after Uncle Charlie's death.  The image is the same each time it appears, introduced by a dissolve rather than a cut;  it depicts almost identical couples, dressed with old-fashioned formality (tuxedos and long Victorian gowns), waltzing across the frame with an elegant precision. Always, too, the image is accompanied by some variation of "The Merry Widow" waltz.

The recurrence of this single mysterious non-diegetic image paradoxically "unifies" the narrative

as it acts as a signpost, first indicating young
Charlie's enthusiastic role-playing as Uncle
Charlie's double, then connoting the destruction of
any of her remaining doubts about her uncle's guilt,
and, ultimately, marking Charlie's loss of innocence
simultaneous with her uncle's "accidental" death on
the train; but this motif of the waltzing couples
works in a way that requires the spectator to analyze
and re-analyze the potential meaning of the image in
relation to its place in the narrative at each of its
three appearances after the credits sequence. In
short, the non-diegetic image interrupts the
narrative and directs the spectator to the activity
of hypothesis-making and testing of which Bordwell
writes. This activity involves the _meaning_ of the
narrative, not merely the piecing together of the
story.

At the first appearance of the image, the
spectator, of course, knows nothing; s/he can merely
attach evocative descriptions to it--nostalgic,
indicative of "elegance," formality, earlier social
codes given form in the rigid, repetitive conventions
of the dance. Though "unrevealing" of the film's
story, the image provides what Bordwell calls

(borrowing from Meir Sternberg) a "primacy effect"
which "triggers strong first impressions" that
"become the basis for our expectations across the
entire film" (Classical, 37). Already, as Rothman
has noted, an enigma has been posed and the spectator
is confronted with a problem of meaning as of yet
unconnected to any real narrative; in fact, the
conjunction of the image and the credits (the clear
address to the spectator) pose the question of "What
kind of narrative will this be?" rather than "How
will this story work out?" since no story has
presented itself yet.

After the last of the credits--"Directed by
Alfred Hitchcock"--the dancing couples dissolve to a
slow pan across an urban landscape near a river. We
see men (destitute? despairing?) sitting on the
banks, then the hulk of a car as the waltz on the
soundtrack becomes louder, brasher, more "urban." We
see a street where boys are playing, then two tilted
compositions, the first of the front of a rooming
house and the second of a window in the house.
Another dissolve and we see Uncle Charlie (though we
do not know him by name yet) for the first time.
Regarding this introduction, Ronnie Scheib writes,

> The camera pans over barren
> wastelands, through shabby streets to rest
> finally on the snake who is soon to enter
> Eden...He lies like the effigy of a dead
> king on his tomb at the center of the junk
> yard representing the city, yet his very
> catatonic immobility and strange delphic
> utterances read as energy and will. His
> refusal to react to or even look at anyone
> or anything in the frame accentuates the
> power of the profile close-up to abstract
> and objectify its object, to insist upon a
> point of view outside of a reciprocal
> exchange of glances, and seems to ascribe
> this power to Uncle Charlie....Almost
> whimsically, Uncle Charlie stresses his
> option to keep  the spectator in his highly
> uncomfortable position as long as he
> chooses;  his remarks to the landlady
> supply perfect verbal counterpoint to the
> visual mystification practiced by the
> camera placement (55).

Of course, the disturbing camera placement has been determined by Hitchcock, not by Uncle Charlie, and it is the director who decides to keep the spectator in the "highly uncomfortable position as long as he chooses."  Scheib is right in considering Uncle Charlie's apathy paradoxically as a display of "energy and will" and noting that Uncle Charlie refuses the reciprocity of an "exchange of glances;" nevertheless, an important exchange does exist,--the exchange between the "author" of the film (the real determinant of the camera placement, the force which has introduced us to Uncle Charlie in this way) and

44

the spectator of the film who has the task of making meaning from this scene. In a sense, the "exchange" in this scene diegetically mirrors the non-diegetic "exchange" between author and spectator in the credits sequence, the enigma of the waltzing couples now "transferred" to the enigma of Uncle Charlie.

The film's viewer, now faced with the beginnings of a narrative, can make a few more tentative statements: Uncle Charlie is a guilty man, though we cannot link his guilt to any specific crimes. He is apathetic and despairing, though his will is powerful. He seems to have contempt for himself (he hides away in a seedy rooming house, though he could afford much better), for others (he treats the landlady with condescension by speaking coldly and cryptically--"It's funny. They're not really friends of mine," etc.), for money (the money, revealed by a downward tilt, is scattered carelessly on the table and floor), and for the forces of authority ("You're bluffing. You've got nothing on me"). Nevertheless, Uncle Charlie is a man of action, a deliberately violent kind of action which arises from his despair and contempt. When he stands, back to camera (to audience), and smashes the glass, he affirms his

45

paradoxical ability to act in a world he despises.

Further, the scene affirms a central concern in its

presentation of the narrative:

> The camera records cause and
> effect, menace and fait accompli, never the
> two together (cf. his murder attempts).  It
> insists upon the discontinuity of action
> and upon the unreadability of the see/seen
> relationship, creating a problematically
> inhabited place of mystery and terror:  the
> off-space.  Thus when the snake sheds
> another skin, evading the two men we do not
> yet know are detectives--and who, like us,
> want to know more about Uncle Charlie--
> instead of the heralded confrontation, we
> see only that Uncle Charlie will always
> elude us, that his mastery lies in control
> of the off-space.  We are suddenly
> transported to a place of omniscience and
> domination over the detectives to witness
> their frantic intersection of Uncle
> Charlie's magical absence, his seeming
> violation and transcendance of physical
> space.  Then, impelled, the camera pans
> left to show us that the God's eye view is
> Uncle Charlie's.  Thus, from the first, the
> spectator's privileged point of view is
> structured not by the logic of
> comprehension, but by the compulsion of
> fascination;  not by the decoding of a
> chain of signifiers, but by the exercise of
> a power of elision (Scheib, 55).

Within the first few minutes of Shadow Of A

Doubt the film powerfully demonstrates its ability to

make gaps, to construct a narrative which is not

dependent on the creation of gaps in order to fill

them later (one of Bordwell's characteristics of a

46

Hollywood "classical" film) but rather a narrative which defines itself as the creation of gaps in order to create even more. Surely, the scene I've discussed at length answers decisively the question of Uncle Charlie's guilt; the mastery Scheib speaks of, the place of "mystery and terror" that Uncle Charlie controls, do not allow us to entertain the possibility that Uncle Charlie might be "innocent." The revelation of the exact nature of Charlie's crime is a minor event. Here, in this opening scene, what might be considered a major "gap" in the plot (Is Uncle Charlie guilty of something?) is already "filled" in favor of more substantial gaps in the narrative itself, questions of what controls the spectator's point of view and what controls the puzzling introduction of Uncle Charlie so quickly after the images of the dancing couples, whose origin we will never know.

With the enigmatic quality of the image of the waltzing couples, the spectator senses that the film has not been conceived in the simplest way to transmit a story, but rather that the story is inseparable from what might be considered stylistic excesses (we don't need the waltzing image to follow the

plot). As Scheib accurately points out, the
spectator's point of view is not constructed by a
"chain of signifiers" which require a simple
"decoding" but by a narrative which relies on
"elision," the activity of omission. Consequently,
in the absence of clear diegetic pointers for
understanding the motif of the waltzing dancers, the
spectator must actively (re-) interpret each
appearance as an "outside" commentary on the "inner"
events that constitute the narrative. The image's
status as a non-diegetic "commentary" provides a
useful tool for constructing an "alternative" or
"transgressive" reading of the film.

The image reappears after Uncle Charlie presents
the ring, stolen from a murdered widow, to his neice
in a scene which strongly suggests a link between the
two relatives; now the image forces an evaluation of
all that has come between it and its first
appearance. We have understood Uncle Charlie's
guilt, isolation, despair and power. We have seen
young Charlie's boredom with her comfortable,
respectable bourgeois family and her close
identification with her mother whom she regards as
its primary "victim." We have seen the truth of her

48

complaint:  the father is a dullard who responds to her criticisms by mentioning his raise at the bank; the younger children are absorbed in various fantasy worlds (the romantic novels Ann reads and regards as true and Roger's obsessive "scientific" counting); the mother is consumed by domestic concerns. Nevertheless, we can see that young Charlie expects too much and wrongly focuses her desires on an almost mystical hope that Uncle Charlie will make everything better.

Thus, Uncle Charlie and young Charlie are linked by their status outside the family.  The other characters are relegated to a position of opposition; that is, they become representatives of an order that neither Charlie can accept, though for different reasons.  Nevertheless, though Uncle Charlie and young Charlie are linked at this point, each represents an opposing outlook toward the world; Uncle Charlie no longer regards the world as "wonderful" while young Charlie is caught up in a vision of rebirth centering on her uncle.

Consequently, the image of the waltzing couples which appears after the kitchen conversation has now been "placed" to some extent as a reflection of an

illusory vision of a past age.  The image is not
exclusively connected to Uncle Charlie's point of
view, even if it is linked to his sour nostalgia. The
reappearance of the image would not have its
importance as a "placemarker" for the spectator if
its meaning was limited to its relation to Uncle
Charlie;  this time the image begins a slow transfer
of corruption to young Charlie.  The talk in the
kitchen, with its connotations of courtship, marriage
and sexual love, permits the spectator to see a
connection between young Charlie, Uncle Charlie and
the dancing couples--the echoes of ritualized romance
in the kitchen ("It would spoil things if you should
give me anything.  We're not just an uncle and a
niece.  It's something else.") find a perfect
complement in the formalities of the waltz.

Of course, the image "belongs" to neither
character, because it represents an "exchange"
between them which must be witnessed by the film's
spectator;  neither character has the knowledge
necessary to see that their symbolic union represents
an unhealthy meeting of Uncle Charlie's despairing
refusal to look beyond the present ("What's the use
of looking backward?  What's the use of looking

50

ahead?  Today's the thing.  That's my philosophy"),
and young Charlie's dangerously naive quest for
excitement ("I don't believe in good intentions any
more.  I'm waiting for a miracle").

Though they spring from different sources, Uncle
Charlie and young Charlie's outlooks are founded on a
denial of the reality of the past;  Uncle Charlie
idealizes the past, and his neice recognizes no
connection with it in her desire for a transforming
miracle.  However, the past returns in the form of an
image which opens a gap in the narrative (Always the
question of where does this image come from?  What is
its origin?) and permits an understanding of the
narrative which comes from neither the characters nor
the scene itself but from the juxtaposition of the
scene and the image of the dancing couples.  This
juxtaposition requires a point of view outside the
film--that of the spectator--to formulate its meaning.

Significantly, the "Merry Widow" waltz, which
had been limited to its non-diegetic place on the
soundtrack as accompaniment to the motif of the
waltzing couples, intrudes into the narrative itself
immediately following the first reappearance of that
motif.  Young Charlie enters from the dining room,

51

humming "The Merry Widow."  Ann notes, "Sing at the
table and you'll marry a crazy husband," to which
Roger responds "Superstitions have been proven one
hundred percent wrong."  The discussion centers
around the bank (Uncle Charlie wishes to transfer
money "from the East") and the government (Ann tells
Roger, "You're not to talk against the government").
Charlie hums the waltz again and says, "I can't get
that tune out of my head.  Maybe if someone tells me
what it is, I'll forget it."  Uncle Charlie denies
knowing the name of the waltz, later lying that it is
the "Blue Danube."  When Charlie is about to name the
tune correctly, Uncle Charlie spills his glass to
create a diversion.

This scene provides a stunning confirmation of
the ability of the non-diegetic world to comment on
the diegetic one;  the "leaking" of the waltz into
the narrative indicates that the events in the story
cannot be taken at face value, that they are not
presented "transparently."  The humming of the waltz
certainly has diegetic importance in that it
foreshadows Charlie's discovery of the truth about
her uncle.  Nevertheless, I think it works most
effectively as a way of linking young Charlie to the

enigmatic world of the dancing figures, thereby transporting her into a mysterious world poised barely inside the narrative. As a result, the spectator is again forced to consider the significance of the events in the narrative and open up the film to a non-traditional, "alternative," reading.

The transfer of the tune to young Charlie ("I think tunes jump from head to head," this tune jumping from the "head" of the non-diegetic world to the "head" of the diegesis) allows the spectator to link her to that dangerous illusory world of the past which, so far, has been most closely linked to Uncle Charlie. Thus, Charlie is slipping into a closer alliance with her uncle. The narrative--what Charlie herself knows--regards this alliance as a good thing; the spectator, however, knows that Charlie is being brought closer to something dangerous, closer to the sinister Uncle Charlie that was revealed in his first scene. Furthermore, the spectator can surmise that this closer alliance has an important relationship to the ideology Charlie's family represents, since the scene is filled with references to the "agents" of this ideology: the power of money (the talk about

the bank), marriage (Ann's comment about the "crazy husband"--perhaps a foreshadowing of the detective who will propose to Charlie), state power (the children's exchange about the government), and patriarchy (before Charlie hums the tune, her mother, in the "off-space," says, "Goodness, the way men do things"). What Charlie's relationship to this ideology will ultimately turn out to be is uncertain at this point; however, the elements of the struggle are in place. The spectator has been able to perceive these elements and the beginnings of the struggle between young Charlie and her Uncle and both "against" the family, because the film has opened up a space for questioning; an exchange "above" the narrative (the transfer of the tune, the "sharing" of the image of the dancers) directs attention to an analysis of the narrative and its ideological stance.

If we return to the "traditional" reading that began this chapter, we are forced to ask how that reading accounts for this "exchange" between young Charlie and Uncle Charlie. That reading posits each character as opposing forces; to put things allegorically, young Charlie supposedly represents wholesome small-town America while Uncle Charlie

represents a corrupt, urban, alien evil force.  The

narrative, in order to sustain that allegorical

interpretation, must eliminate the kind of ambiguity

the image of the waltzing couples presents, because

that image's content links the two Charlie's

sexually, while its formal aspect--as interruption,

as gap immediately following the "marriage" in the

kitchen--suggests young Charlie's growing familiarity

with corruption and that her character is beginning

to take "on the features of another [Uncle Charlie]

so that the question of a fixed identity attributable

to one person [to young Charlie] becomes problematic"

(Cook, The Cinema Book, 127).

This transfer of guilt or corruption is not

merely of psychological interest since its occurrence

takes place while the family is gathered around the

dinner table--the site of the patriarchal ideology in

this film.  The table is a symbolic place where the

family gathers, not merely to eat but to affirm their

solidarity and values. The status of the dinner table

is indicated by the guidelines for mealtime:  no

reading (a rule Uncle Charlie breaks), an inflexible

seating arrangement (disturbed when Ann no longer

wants to sit next to her uncle), a concern that

dinner not be interrupted (Emma says of neighbor Herb, "He always comes when we're eating").

Uncle Charlie disturbs the ideology represented by this cozy arrangement around the table. He, not the father of the family, sits at the head of the table and the camera is placed in Emma's position, emphasizing both that Uncle Charlie is addressing us, the audience, and that Uncle Charlie has a close bond with his sister which violates the (ideologically appropriate) bond between husband and wife. Uncle Charlie tells a story about a yacht, which suggests his connection to a lifestyle far removed from that of Emma's family. In a later scene, he will introduce the notion of wine with dinner, and Emma will respond, "Sounds so gay," thereby initiating reminiscenses which clearly annoy her husband because they deny his intervention in Emma's life.

When young Charlie and Uncle Charlie share their bond in the kitchen before dinner (before the first reappearance of the waltz motif), they do not only proclaim a transference of guilt (in psychological terms), but also a displacement of Uncle Charlie's threat to ideology onto young Charlie. Young Charlie had already shown a potential to break from her

family's bounds when, in her first scene, she
proclaimed that she had given up and rejected her
father's high evaluations of work and money.  She
moves further toward that break--at whose center is a
compassion for and fear of ending up like her mother
("She works like a dog, just like a dog") as the
faithful adjunct to the power of patriarchy--when she
"conjures" up Uncle Charlie and affirms her
commitment to him in the kitchen, away from the
family table.

After the first scene at the dinner table, the
image of the waltzing couples takes on a significance
it did not have when it appeared during the opening
credits;  now it is an item of "exchange" between
young Charlie and Uncle Charlie.  As it is
"exchanged," not within the narrative but "above" it,
its meaning is not restricted to the confines of the
typical "classical" text which supposedly operates by
a seamlessness of narrative, a constant immersion of
the spectator in the story.  These assertions still
need testing, though, by examining the other places
where the image appears.

After Charlie runs to the library and discovers
the truth about her uncle, a truth the spectator has

already strongly suspected since the first scene, the waltzing motif appears again.  This time its link to young Charlie is even clearer;  like Oedipus, she has actively sought out knowledge which would transform her totally, not in the sense of her hoped-for "miracle," but in a permanent destruction of her thoughtless innocence.  If the image worked as a means of "exchange" between Charlie and her uncle when it appeared in the narrative for the first time, now it appears as a sign that the "exchange" is completed;  Charlie, when she learns her uncle is a murderer, is irrevocably removed from the small-town morality and innocence she represented earlier in the film.

Young Charlie's acquisition of her transforming knowledge comes as the culmination of a continuing invasion into her life and a continuing threat to the sanctity of the ideology she "inhabits," albeit restlessly.  Outside of Uncle Charlie, the arrival of the detectives, posing as survey-takers, best represents this invasion.  Significantly, the detectives pretend to be working for the government as "agents" investigating the concerns of the "average" American family.  When young Charlie

objects to the label "average," the detective Graham
(bland but more personable than his sinister partner
Saunders) says, "Average families are the best.  Look
at me--I'm from an average family," thereby linking
the notion of "average" to the deceitful workings of
a detective whose disruption of the Newton family's
"order" is as profound as Uncle Charlie's disruption.

The detective, however, hides his disruptive
force behind the label "average," and his
introduction into the narrative could be considered a
"middle position" between young Charlie, as "average"
and wholesome, and Uncle Charlie, as the alien
disruptive force in Santa Rosa (who has nonetheless
sprung from the same "average" family as Emma).
However, if Charlie is responsible for "calling up"
her uncle ("He heard me"), and the image of the
waltzing couples signals some kind of transfer of
guilt and corruption to young Charlie, the appearance
of the detectives must also be traced back to young
Charlie.  The adoption of the label "average" by a
detective trailing a brutal murderer mocks the very
concept of "average" while simultaneously suggesting
that detectives and Uncle Charlie are really part of
an "average" world, and hence, that young Charlie's

innocence and the seemingly untroubled family life she enjoys are founded on delusion and ignorance.

Hitchcock emphasizes this point by providing complementary scenes in which young Charlie is admired by her friends while walking with an older man, first Uncle Charlie and then Graham. Both men are suggestively portrayed as potential sexual partners for Charlie and both are highly disruptive forces in her life since they threaten her position within the family, within Santa Rosa, and, by extension, within patriarchal ideology. When Charlie first discovers that Graham is a detective, she is outraged and hurt and demands that he "go away," just as she will later demand that Uncle Charlie go away-- go away from the self-contained and false ideology embodied by Santa Rosa, which, despite its facade, cannot keep disruption outside its borders. Behind the bland and "nice" face of the young man who says to Charlie,

> Charlie, when we were eating tonight and talking about our folks and what we've done and how we felt, we were like two ordinary people, weren't we? I mean we've both been brought up about the same. You like me, I know you do, and I like you.

is the detective who brutally reminds her,

> 'Cause if he's the guy, I'm going
> to catch up with him, Charlie--remember
> that.  And you're going to keep your mouth
> shut.  You're going to keep your mouth shut
> because you're a nice girl, you're such a
> nice girl you know that you'd help me if
> you knew your uncle was the man we want.

Behind the potential for romance and marriage
that Graham represents is the truth of his
occupation, inextricably linked to the murders of
Uncle Charlie and the facts of life scrupulously
rejected by Santa Rosa's ideology.  The authority
which is meant to protect the patriarchal ideology of
Charlie's family is simultaneously the force which
destroys Charlie's belief in its invulnerability.

Charlie's doubts concerning her uncle ("Are you
trying to tell me that I shouldn't think he's so
wonderful?") accompany a serious anxiety about
protecting her mother from this new destructive
knowledge ("He knows it would kill mother").  Since
the mother has already been identified as the most
recognizable victim of the patriarchal ideology, as
well as a source of Charlie's worry about her own
future (Will she get married and follow the dismal
pattern of "dinner, dishes, and bed?"), Charlie's

anxiety about her mother could be regarded as an attempt to keep an ideology, revealed as shallow in certain respects, in place, since its destruction would involve the destruction of her mother. Nevertheless, Charlie's recognition that there _is_ an ideology to keep in place, something that is being threatened from the "outside," is already a recognition that her place within this ideology is problematic and that she possesses a terrifying potential for choice. Her recognition reveals the true "subtext" in her mother's unwittingly profound observations that her house "owns" her and that her brother is "just in business, you know, the way men are."

In the scene of discovery at the library, Charlie's recognition of her uncertain status within patriarchal ideology at this point is accompanied by a sense of helplessness communicated by the crane shot which isolates her within the library's dark shadows:

> The great crane shot that culminates in this framing reminds us of Charles, even as it marks Charlie's frightening yet exhilerating acquisition of self-consciousness. But it also represents the film's most perfect manifestation of

62

> its author's power over Charles and
> Charlie, and over us.  Hitchcock's
> formulation of Charlie's coming to self-
> consciousness declares the camera's
> autonomy as well.  With this gesture
> Hitchcock definitively shows his hand.  Yet
> with this gesture, the author forswears his
> acts of withholding information from
> Charlie and from us...With this camera
> movement and framing, Hitchcock renounces,
> for the remainder of the film, the practice
> of cloaking his narration in mystery. From
> this point on, the status of the narrative
> and our relationship to it are transformed"
> (Rothman, 211).

This transformation, arriving at a climactic
point in the narrative, constitutes the most overt
address to the spectator yet;  the combination of the
crane shot with the appearance of the waltzing motif
immediately afterwards indicates not only Charlie's
"coming to self-consciousness" but the integral role
of the spectator's consciousness in making meaning in
this film.  The crane shot and the image of the
dancers are for the eyes of the spectator only.
Rather than displaying Hitchcock's "power," they
display his partnership with the film's spectator.
In this scene, Hitchcock combines a shot which
(literally) takes us above Charlie, to reveal her new
psychological position, with a shot that exists
"above" the narrative, to reveal Charlie's new
ideological position.  Of course, both work together,

emphasizing a site in the film where the self-consciousness of Charlie, Hitchcock, and the spectator meet in a resounding rejection of the so-called "invisible continuity style."  Rothman is correct in noting that this scene renounces the withholding of information;  however, he does not say that it continues, albeit more spectacularly, a process of revelation that has been already at work in the narrative, something which began with the image of the dancers in the opening credits sequence.

The return of that image in the context of the library scene must be (re-) read as the completion of the exchange initiated during the mock "marriage" in the kitchen;  Charlie has accepted the exchange, but with it has come a radical transformation, the "self-consciousness" Rothman notes.  Now that the waltzing motif is associated with Charlie <u>alone</u> (an aloneness emphasized, of course, by the crane shot), it signifies the bond with Uncle Charlie that she cannot break;  the "disorderliness" of the image as it "breaks" the narrative indicates young Charlie's bond with disorder itself in the person of Uncle Charlie (as well as the spectator's bond with a "disorderly," in terms of reading a "classical" style, narrative).

Ironically, the break in the narrative indicates a break young Charlie is unable to make with her uncle. Charlie still regards her uncle as family (earlier she had answered the detective's question, "What do you really know about your uncle?" with "He's my mother's younger brother," as if that response would deflect all suspicion from Uncle Charlie). Charlie's difficult position requires both that she embrace Uncle Charlie as a member of the family in order to protect her mother and herself from the disruptive forces of the revelations about him, and that she reject her uncle in order to attempt to reconstruct her life as it existed before the disruptions. Consequently, she is forced to accept a new role as an outsider who possesses knowledge sufficient for destroying the life she knows. Charlie's rejection of her uncle would involve a rejection of her family and the ideology they represent. The discovery in the library puts Charlie in the position of a figure still embedded within ideology but possessing the potential to reject it.

Like Charlie, the narrative "identification figure," the spectator remains uncertain vis-a-vis his/her position toward the ideological conflict

65

occurring within the narrative.  Therefore, Rothman
is not really accurate in saying that the scene in
the library has made the narrative totally readable
and that Hitchcock has renounced further mystery.
Since we do not yet know how or if Charlie will
reject Uncle Charlie, or what the consequences of her
"self-consciousness" will be, neither the narrative
conflicts nor the ideological conflicts the narrative
raises have been resolved. Certainly, the motif of
the dancers is <u>not</u> an image whose "meaning has been
[fully] told" (Rothman, 211);  its final appearance,
after Uncle Charlie falls from the train, possesses
further significance for the film.

There the image signals Charlie's irrevocable
loss of her innocence; "dream and nightmare are
momentarily superimposed, and the entire film is
coalesced into a single image" (Rothman, 242).  The
image, which was transferred to Charlie alone in the
library as a sign of her realization of an exchange
with her uncle, returns immediately after the
resolution of an <u>overt</u> struggle between uncle and
niece.  The exchange has turned to confrontation, and
its resolution confirms, on one level, young
Charlie's alienation from Santa Rosa and its

ideology.  Like its previous appearance, the image of

the dancers indicates the conclusion of a process of

separation and of Charlie's increased consciousness

of herself as outsider, only this time the process

has been much more disruptive.  Charlie is forced to

kill the bearer of her "miracle," and she is not even

permitted the liberation of confessing the truth

because she is so deeply implicated in covering up

Uncle Charlie's crimes (if she had told the police

all she knew, she might have prevented the death of

the man in Maine; clearly, too, Mrs. Potter, the

woman Uncle Charlie spots on the train, would have

been in danger if Charlie's uncle had lived).

In order to understand the signficance of the

waltzing motif's final appearance, it is necessary to

go back to the library sequence which begins the

accelerated process of young Charlie's alienation

from Santa Rosa and her family and provides more

support for the spectator's construction of

alternative narrative meanings from extra-diegetic

cues. In the library sequence, the theme of the

"Merry Widow" again intrudes into the narrative as a

sort of messenger from the extra-diegetic world.

Soon afterwards, Emma hums the waltz while preparing

dinner in the kitchen.  Charlie, fresh from her

discovery in the library, tells her mother, almost

threateningly,

> Now you're humming that waltz. Whatever
> you do, please don't hum that tune anymore.
> I just got it out of my head and I don't
> want to get it started again.  Please
> remember, don't hum that tune.

Charlie quickly changes her tone, in order to deny

the force of her words, now directed at the most

"innocent" member of the family (i.e. the person most

firmly implanted within the patriarchal ideology).

Charlie's words earlier in the film, "I think tunes

jump from head to head," come true, but she is no

longer interested in her own fanciful theories, since

they have been revealed as dangerous and destructive;

the transference of the tune to Emma mirrors the

transference of Uncle Charlie's corruption to young

Charlie, while the confirmation that Charlie's

earlier words were indeed true underlines the ugly

truth behind her earlier claim, "He heard me."  The

intrusion into the narrative of the extra-diegetic

world of the waltz here opens up another break which

permits the spectator a chance to reflect on the

events in the narrative preceding and surrounding it

and which complements, in narrative terms, Charlie's growing estrangement from the world of her family and Santa Rosa.

Charlie's verbal violence toward her mother indicates the most serious undermining of her place in the family; Charlie is no longer in solidarity with Emma. Charlie even reveals a secret contempt for her mother's role by telling her, immediately after the verbal violence, "You just sit there and be a real lady," as though her mother had not been a "real lady" while washing dishes, preparing dinner, etc. Charlie's contempt is further evidence of a break with the ideology surrounding her and of the confusion accompanying this break, because at this moment, she cannot respect Emma's role as housewife and mother, and immediately slips into the patriarchal habit of dismissing the "domestic" woman in favor of a concept of the "real lady," an object meant for just sitting and "being there" (usually as a passive recipient for the male look). Against her will, Charlie slips closer to an alignment with her uncle, whose contempt and hatred for women motivates his murders, and, therefore, closer to a complete break with Santa Rosa.

69

Charlie's new status is confirmed by her new
relation to the dinner table.  She is no longer the
calm "resident" who escapes into the kitchen for the
romance and excitement of being with her uncle, but
instead the outsider who desperately tries to
reassert herself at that table, into its ideology, by
taking on the role of mother and serving her family.
However, Charlie's recently-displayed contempt for
her mother's role makes this gambit ineffective and
only serves to underscore her confused distance from
her family.

During this second scene at the dinner table,
Charlie seems to be in constant movement, as though
trying to escape from the presence of her uncle.  She
leaves the table when she relates her "nightmare"
about Uncle Charlie leaving town, but rather than
disengaging herself from her uncle and the threat he
represents, Charlie seems to be pulled toward a
closer alliance with him.  As co-keeper of Charles's
secret, Charlie is pulled into a cat-and-mouse game
with her uncle, carefully speaking her lines with a
double (hidden) meaning, simultaneously informing him
of her new knowledge and threatening him with
exposure:  "You can throw the paper away--we don't

need to play any games with it tonight."

The double meaning of Charlie's words parallels the spectator's activity of seeking a "double," i.e. "alternative," reading of Hitchcock's overt narrative through extra-narrative cues.  In a sense, then, Charlie and the spectator are placed in a similiar position. Hitchcock twice during the dinner scene emphasizes this similiarity  by placing Charles alone in the frame, supposedly meeting Charlie's off-screen look: first, when Charlie enters through the door between the kitchen and dining room just as Charles says, "Here she is," and, second, when Charles responds to Charlie's cry, "But they're [the widows] alive!  They're human beings!" with the ice-cold, "Are they?"  Both occurrences momentarily place the spectator in Charlie's position as the object of her uncle's gaze, thereby linking him/her again with Charlie's uncertain status, simultaneously inside and outside ideology.  Charlie cannot refuse to return to the familial table, and is, hence, subject to the scrutiny of her uncle's gaze, a gaze which implicitly includes her in Charles's "world" and dares her to destroy her own "world" by revealing her secret.

The "traditional" reading of this film might

regard Charlie's challenges (though cryptic) to her uncle as signs of resistance, signs that Charlie remains uncorrupted and a defender of traditional patriarchal ideology. This reading would depend on the notion that Charlie remains "in control" during her confrontation with her uncle. A "subversive" reading reveals something quite different; the dinner scene, both formally (the cutting between Charlie and her uncle, the point of view shots I have mentioned) and thematically, indicates that Charlie is at a disadvantage in relation to her uncle who possesses a powerful authority within her own family.

Charles sits at the head of the (symbolic) table, controls the handling of "Papa's paper," initiates the sharing of wine--in short, acts as the head of the Newton family. Furthermore, Emma engages Charles in intimate reminiscences that effectively displace her husband's authority--both sexual and otherwise--onto her brother. These reminiscences, in whose hermetic intimacy (with its suggestions of incest) and blind innocence Charlie must see a connection with her own earlier idolization of Uncle Charlie ("We're sort of like twins, don't you see?"), destroy Charlie's ability to continue her calm game-

playing; the harmless talk between Joe and Herb serves as a pretext for her explosion of frustration, despair, and confusion. When Charlie "breaks" and runs from the table (she can no longer bear her connection to it), she "loses control, relinquishing the upper hand to Charles" (Rothman, 217).

This scene works as a sort of convergence point for the lines of tension, in the struggle between Charlie and ideology, that the spectator has perceived by means of the film's diegetic and extra-diegetic cues. Both young Charlie and Uncle Charlie have been linked to the graceful and orderly world of the waltzing heterosexual couples; now, however, the dance seems to be turning to a struggle, which will culminate (though not resolve itself) in the real struggle on the train. Charles's command of the dinner table indicates that he is no mere threat to the ideology but is, in fact, its "relation" (its uncle, its brother). Certainly he displaces Joe's patriarchal authority, but only to replace it with a more virulent strain which overtly preys on independent women, women ("Merry Widows") who live without men (young Charlie, too, is a woman without a man). In his self-revelatory speech at the table,

73

**Uncle Charlie says,**

> Cities are full of women, middle
> aged widows, husbands dead, husbands who've
> spent their lives making fortunes, working
> and working.  Then they die and leave their
> money to their wives.  Their silly wives.
> And what do the wives do, these useless
> women?  You see them in the hotels, the
> best hotels, every day by the thousands.
> Drinking their money, eating the money,
> losing the money at bridge, playing all day
> and all night.  Smelling of money.  Proud
> of their jewelry, but of nothing else.

Charlie's speech combines notable characteristics besides a hatred for independent women:  a dislike and distrust of cities, a strong work "ethic," and a resentment of people who have not _earned_ money. Are these not the same qualities of the upright, respectable people in Santa Rosa?  Doesn't this speech reveal Uncle Charlie as a true son of Santa Rosa?  Charles is not a rich urban "devil," but the product of a small town--"46 Birnham Street"--who has returned to his origins.  Charles most likely regards himself as an avenger for the _hard-working men_ who could not take their money with them in death.  He is not a threat to ideology;  he _is_ the ideology of patriarchy and capitalism itself in its most naked and brutal form.

Young Charlie's alienation from her family and her attempts to deny her connection to Uncle Charlie are the effects of a struggle with ideology, trying to escape it while continually coming up against the realization that she lives within it. Her dream has always secretly contained a nightmare waiting for her to bring it to consciousness. Uncle Charlie, as conjured up by Charlie in her desire for a "miracle," was well-equipped to bring that nightmare to the surface, as he tells his niece in the unsavory "Til Two" bar (which represents a repressed reality now confronted--"I've never been in a place like this before," Charlie says):

> What do you know really? You're just an ordinary little girl living in an ordinary little town. You wake up every morning of your life and you know perfectly well that there's nothing in the world to trouble you. You go through your ordinary little day and at night you sleep your untroubled, ordinary little sleep filled with peaceful, stupid dreams. And I brought you nightmares. You live in a dream. You're a sleepwalker, blind. How do you know what the world is like? Do you know the world is a foul sty? Do you know that if you rip the fronts off houses you'd find swine? The world's a hell. What does it matter what happens in it? Wake up Charlie. Use your wits. Learn something.

Uncle Charlie speaks accurately when he says he

brought nightmares, but his speech reveals that he doesn't understand that the "ordinary" world inhabited by his niece called him __back__ in order to renew itself (a "miracle"), but was forced to confront a reality it was unprepared for. That reality can be understood not as some sort of symbolic darkness nestling in the "human soul" but as a very worldly concern with making money and killing women, an activity resulting from despair and a negation of all values. Hence, Uncle Charlie is an expression of an ideology which "destroys" the world by its concerns with acquiring wealth and eliminating what it perceives as the threat of women.

The last image of the waltzing couples signfies the persistence of the "nightmare" in Charlie's life. Though Uncle Charlie dies, the image remains the same, almost as if it were a "nightmare" hanging over the film. In narrative terms, perhaps the images has "come from" the region of negation that Uncle Charlie represented; its "vision" was his own despairing vision. In extra-narrative terms, the image's reappearance, even after Uncle Charlie's death, "comments" that the narrative refuses resolution, refuses to tie things up neatly the way a "classical"

film is supposed to.

The spectator who seeks to use this image to construct a subversive commentary on the film must conclude that, though she pushes her uncle off the train and eliminates a specific threat to herself, Charlie cannot resolve her confusion regarding her place within the dark ideology her uncle embodied. That is, she is no longer free to return to the safety and comfort of her family (the family may breed and shelter a killer), though she still has not completed a total break with it. The struggle on the train is merely a recognition that a struggle exists, and the death of Uncle Charlie is merely an accidental "triumph" which cannot eliminate the transformative knowledge Charlie has gained; this knowledge is certainly a more powerful and radically disruptive force than Uncle Charlie himself. The spectator knows, too, that a real resolution has not occurred.

Perhaps this recognition is why the image of the waltzing couples can be considered "the entire film coalesced into a single image." Its ultimate refusal to give up all its meaning and effect a "closure" links it to Charlie's unresolved choice between allegiance

to the forces that created her (Santa Rosa, the
institutions of family and marriage), and radical
action based on an awareness of the inadequacy and
dangerous potential of these forces.  Uncle Charlie
represented one kind of choice:  negate the world
while profiting from it, idealize the past, reject
the future by attempting to mold the present into
this past.  Charlie's struggle with her uncle stands
as a constant reminder to her of the necessity for
choice.  The various transfers of the waltzing couple
motif indicate a continual raising of the stakes and
an increasing insistence on the need for choice (What
will Charlie do after each of the shocking
revelations?  How will she live with each new bit of
information?)..

For the spectator, the reappearance of the image
of the waltzing couples keeps Uncle Charlie and young
Charlie in a dialectical relationship.  As more is
revealed about Uncle Charlie, and young Charlie must
react to each new piece of information, the spectator
must evaluate the narrative in terms of an opposition
between the two characters. The spectator must
continually evaluate young Charlie's choices and
allegiances, a process which ultimately leads to the

questioning of the values of Santa Rosa and, by
extension, the values of American life.  Hence, the
problem of ideology and the spectator's "work" on it
are never far off.  The gaps in the narrative, where
the mysterious image appears, solicit the spectator
to undertake an active process of making meaning
beyond that of the apparent causal links between
scenes; in effect, each appearance directs the
spectator to recall the previous appearance and to
ask how its significance has altered, in light of the
narrative material which has passed between.  The
image "speaks" outside of the narrative in order to
illuminate what is deep inside the narrative.

Signficantly, something falls outside the
narrative between the first and last appearance of
the waltzing couples:  the scene at the church in
which Charlie and the detective discuss Uncle Charlie
while the lavish funeral is in progress.  So many
conventional narrative questions arise here:  Will
Charlie and the detective marry?  How will Charlie's
secret (now shared with Graham) affect her future?
How will Charlie's knowledge affect the marriage, if
it occurs?  What is the status of a romance created
under such conditions?  However, none of these

questions are answered.  The film refuses to provide strong clues for a spectator creating a "most likely" scenario after the fade-out.  The ending's "ambiguous and disquieting" (Rothman, 243) nature places the final burden of meaning-making on the spectator in Shadow Of A Doubt's last gesture of partnership with its audience.  Hitchcock has refused narrative closure on any level and has firmly placed the ambiguity so often suggested by the waltzing motif into the narrative's last moments, directing the spectator to further questioning beyond the last shot.  The narrative's last moment--the preacher's words, "The beauty of their souls, the sweetness of their character, live on with us forever"--are, like the image of the dancing couples, meant for the spectator alone.  They again draw attention to Santa Rosa's unshaken ignorance (it has not shared Charlie's "awakening"), and point out the discrepancy between the site of what the narrative "knows" and what the spectator for this film knows.  Shadow Of A Doubt seems to be saying to its viewers, look beyond the ideological "beauty" and "sweetness" which the traditional reading restores to the film:  the film, like the world, really does need watching.

## Chapter Three

## Blue Velvet: The "Postmodern Text"

In Shadow Of A Doubt's final scene--a "love" scene
between Charlie Newton and the detective, Graham--
Hitchcock achieves irony by placing the young lovers
in a bleak tableau against the plain backdrop of
Santa Rosa's clean, respectable church.  Charlie
Newton holds the hand of her detective boyfriend (and
future husband?) more out of desperation than love.
When we hear the words "The beauty of their souls,
the sweetness of their character, live on with us
forever." we note the discrepancy between the
"official" version authorized by the pastor, a
representative of ideological power, and the reality,
and we realize Charlie is permanently scarred--a
product and victim of the bourgeois ideology which
the film has allowed the spectator to see through.
The irony may not be subtle, but it is complex,
locating the tensions of the entire film in an
ambiguous, disturbing, downbeat ending.  Hitchcock's
"lesson," as I've noted, often speaks "above" the
narrative;  here Hitchcock addresses the spectator

through the amplification of the words of the
preacher (which seem to be for our ears only), a
technique consistent with his extra-diegetic method
of spectator address throughout the film and, hence,
ultimately not unexpected or disruptive (disruptive
of the model for "classical" narrative, of course,
but not of the expectations of the spectator for <u>this</u>
<u>film</u>).

Blue Velvet shares a similar "love" scene at a
church (occurring in the middle of the narrative
rather than at its end), though this scene is far
more disruptive of normal spectator expectations and
far less complex than Hitchcock's concluding scene.
However, these statements about complexity and
disruption should not be taken as critical judgments,
praising Lynch for his narrative disruption and
Hitchcock for his complexity while damning Lynch for
his obviousness and Hitchcock for his
conventionality.  The two films are both concerned
with differing ways of presenting the relationships
between narrative, spectator, and ideology.  Though
Lynch is clearly indebted to <u>Shadow</u> <u>Of</u> <u>a</u> <u>Doubt</u>, his
film is not a mere rip-off or remake;  rather it
places the concerns of Hitchcock's film in a new

context, one which demands a different understanding of the way the film's spectator "works" and the way the film constructs its own critique of ideology.    A discussion of <u>Blue</u> <u>Velvet</u>'s own "church scene" will help to clarify my points.

Jeffrey and Sandy, now deeply implicated in the bizarre Frank Booth-Dorothy Valens story, park their car beside a church, apparently during a ceremony, since we hear unnaturally loud organ music, and Jeffrey tells  Sandy about  Frank's strange and brutal rape of Dorothy (neglecting, of course, to tell her of his own sexual manipulation of Dorothy) and pieces together the story of the kidnapping and sexual extortion.  Jeffrey, anguished, asks, "Why is there so much trouble in this world?  Why are there people like Frank?," and Sandy, in response, tells him the story of the robins:

> I had a dream.  In fact, it was
> the night I met you.  In the dream, there
> was our world and the world was dark
> because there weren't any robins and the
> robins represented love and for the longest
> time there was just this darkness and all
> of a sudden, thousands of robins were set
> free and they flew down and brought this
> blinding light of love and it seemed like
> that love would be the only thing that
> would make any difference and it did.  So I
> guess it means there is trouble until the

robins come.

When she finishes, Jeffrey tells her she is a "neat
girl;" Sandy responds, "So are you." They laugh
nervously and Sandy corrects herself, "I mean, you're
a neat guy." Their awkwardness, their exchange of
banal, adolescent compliments indicates that a strong
attraction is developing between Sandy and Jeffrey.
The scene prefigures that Sandy will leave her
football-player boyfriend, Mike, for the more
"mature" and "mysterious" Jeffrey. Their "wholesome"
courtship (which superficially seems to follow the
guidelines for teenage dating) will develop
simultaneously with Jeffrey's deeper involvement in
the destructive sado-masochistic relationship of
Frank and Dorothy.

My re-telling does not indicate that the scene
seems comic, ludicrous, disturbing and touching all
at the same time. The reasons for this mixed
reaction are to be found in Lynch's style; the
scene's ripe sentimentality is further exaggerated by
the light which comes through the church's stained
glass windows, (Pauline Kael calls the film's style a
"hallucinatory clinical realism" [99]), the booming,

syrupy tones of the organ nearby, and the dopey earnestness of Jeffrey and Sandy. Jeffrey and Sandy speak in horrible platitudes, though their awkwardness and inarticulateness is exactly right for portraying two adolescents "falling in love." Nevertheless, the content of their speech is a story involving murder, rape, sexual perversion, kidnapping and mutilation. Lynch frames their discussion claustrophobically--they are in the dark (where much of the film takes place), inside a car, and the church looming behind seems ready to crush them.

In short, the scene is an uneasy mixture of elements designed both to bring the spectator into the story and to "distance" her/him. Though the scene does not prevent an emotional involvement with the characters and the story, the outrageously exaggerated organ music and the light from the church undercut the narrative "reality" of the filmmaking and the sentimentality of the two protagonists. The presence of the church (unnecessary in purely story-telling terms) seems like an ironic commentary on the phony idealism represented by Christianity, whose own message of hope is not far from Sandy's story of the robins, while the organ music seems like a parody of

the filmic convention of underlining a sentimental scene with appropriately "mood-enhancing" music.

A word to sum up this scene, and Blue Velvet's narrative as a whole, might be "postmodern" which, of course, brings up all the debates and confusions surrounding that term. Nevertheless, I think its use is important and accurate in describing Lynch's film, if there is agreement that Lynch's film in some way fits a workable definition of the "postmodern" work as "decentered, allegorical, schizophrenic" (Owens, 57) or as a "conflict of new and old modes" (Foster, 11). The attempt to pin down just what makes Blue Velvet postmodern involves a concurrent attempt to explain what the spectator for this film does while watching, and what "decentered, allegorical, and schizophrenic" mean as qualities that are defined by the reception of the work.

Like the term "classical," "postmodern" is often used perjoratively. The "postmodern" work, some critics says, somehow lacks authenticity because it does not have "a personal, private style" which will "generate its own unique vision of the world and...forge its own unique, unmistakable style" (Jameson, 114). Instead it raids both "high" and

"low" culture to create a style which is not unique

but rather totally derivative, a style which depends

for its effect by providing a simulation of other,

unique styles.  To provide a clear example of the

negative connotations of "postmodern," I want to

quote in full a recent review of a Philip Glass film

score:

> Remember the Steven Wright joke
> in which, when he woke up, everything in
> his apartment had been stolen and replaced
> with an exact replica?  That's what's
> happened in Glass's new soundtrack, only
> instead of the replicas being exact,
> they're caricatures.  The melodies (Glass's
> first in years) are symbols of melodies,
> the ubiquitous little syncopations are
> signs of the (ungratified) desire for
> rhythmic interest, the African instruments
> are generic references to cultures other
> than that of the listener.  Nothing is the
> real thing.  Welcome to postmodernism
> (Gann, Village Voice, 78).

The operative words in this passage are

"symbol," "sign," and "references;"  they make clear

that the reviewer's main complaint about this music

is its "inauthenticity," its "insincerity," in that

it is music which only alludes to "real" music.  The

melodies, rhythms, and African instruments are merely

substitutions for their genuine counterparts.  The

music is postmodern because it is not "the real

thing," yet attempts to evoke the surface of "real" music.

Without much strain, this objection could be applied to Blue Velvet, the scene I've discussed above is indicative of the film's overall "falsity." Thematically, everything is undercut in the conversation between Jeffrey and Sandy--love, intimacy, faith, and hope are each ridiculed, made to seem absurd by their juxtaposition with the ugly (though equally contrived) events surrounding Dorothy Valens and Frank Booth. The story of the robins provides a crude caricature of any real hope or faith, and is a mockery of sentimentality substituted for genuine compassion. Formally, the scene undercuts the spectator's genuine attempts to make sense of the narrative, to construct a coherent understanding which would seem to be the prerequisite for any moral judgment of a film dealing in subjects requiring an ethical response. If the spectator could not undertake this judgment in the face of events centering on sustained brutality, especially to women, the film is cynical and sensational. Blue Velvet, then, would be an allusion to serious concerns which also attempts to trivialize them by

relentless mockery.  This view of the film might be summarized by a reviewer who wrote, "True pornography, which does not pretend to be anything else, has at least that shred of honesty to recommend it;  Blue Velvet, which pretends to be art, and is taken for it by most critics, has dishonesty and stupidity as well as grossness on its conscience" (Simon, 54).

Extending this attack on the film itself can lead to an attack on the notion of postmodernism itself with its "decenteredness" and "schizophrenia" seen as only symptoms of (and not commentaries on) the sickness of the culture which produced it. Fredric Jameson defines postmodernism's most distinctive qualities as a sort of vacant pastiche and a schizophrenic "textuality" or "peculiar way with time" (118) which has a direct link to the logic of late consumer capitalism:

> I believe that the emergence of postmodernism is closely related to the emergence of this new moment of late, consumer or multinational capitalism. I believe also that its formal features in many ways express the deeper logic of that particular social system.  I will only be able, however, to show this for one major theme:  namely the disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by

little begun to lose its capacity to retain
its own past, has begun to live in a
perpetual present and in a perpetual change
that obliterates traditions of the kind
which earlier social formations have had in
one way or another to preserve....the two
features of postmodernism on which I have
dwelt here--the  transformation of reality
into images, the fragmentation of time into
a series of perpetual presents--are both
extraordinarily consonant with this process
[the process of "historical amnesia"].  My
own conclusion here must take the form of a
question about the critical value of the
newer art. There is some agreement that the
older modernism functioned against its
society in ways which are variously
described as critical, negative,
contestatory, subversive, oppositional and
the like. Can anything of the sort be
affirmed about postmodernism and its social
moment?  We have seen that there is a way
in which postmodernism replicates or
reproduces--reinforces--the logic of
consumer capitalism;  the more significant
question is whether there is also a way in
which it resists that logic. But that is a
question we must leave open (Jameson 125).

Jameson's tone here indicates that he is highly

skeptical about the potential of postmodern art to

operate "against its society" critically or

progressively;  rather he sees its characteristics as

reflections of capitalism's own ideology. If this is

true, postmodernism--and <u>Blue Velvet</u>--is another trap

much like the "illusionism" and "transparency" of the

classical film;  the audience for postmodernist art

and the viewer for Lynch's film are again caught up

90

in the act of replicating ideology, this time by an
art which mirrors schizophrenia by cutting off our
links to the past and distorting reality into
"images," as well as encouraging the constant
"consumption" of "perpetually present" screen images
that refer to no "reality" beyond themselves, and
hence, prevent the viewer from making a politically
progressive match between the film and the world.

Moving from this bleak general picture of
postmodernism to an analysis of a specific example of
postmodernist work, Blue Velvet, provides some reason
for hope apart from blanket theorizing like
Jameson's, when one considers the spectator's
relation to the film as an "open" one which can
create potentially progressive ideological work.
Unlike the analysis of Hitchcock's Shadow Of A Doubt
which proceeded by showing that the so-called "closed
classical text" can allow opportunities for the
spectator's active involvement and reflection on
ideology through a specific patterned series of
extra-diegetic cues, this analysis of Blue Velvet
will proceed by a more generalized approach which
tries to take account of how certain characteristics
of this "postmodern" narrative might operate

constructively on a viewer.

Jameson's first objection to postmodernism is its reliance on the method of "pastiche" which he defines in the following way:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language:  but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic.  Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor: pastiche is to parody what that curious thing, the modern practice of a kind of blank irony, is to what Wayne Booth calls the stable and comic ironies of, say, the 18th century (Jameson 114).

Blue Velvet could be accused of achieving both "blank parody" and "blank irony" simultaneously (for instance, in the scene at the church), but to remain with Jameson's accusations is to misunderstand the level at which the film works best--as a commentary about images and a dissection of both conventional ideological "morality" and conventional narrative signs.

Blue Velvet resolutely refuses to construct a narrative that fulfills the expectations of seamlessness and coherence;  further, it alludes to

92

the genres of _film_ _noir_ and small town melodrama
without really being comfortably within those genres,
or making a fully developed comment on them (the way
The Long Goodbye does for _film_ _noir_, for example).
This distinguishes Lynch's film from Hitchcock's
because Hitchcock relied on a consistent synthesis of
these two genres in order to provide something
different, a "third term" which violated both genres
while relying on conventions in each, and Lynch
simply provides "signs" of his genres, never
bothering to work out their interrelationships.

Lynch's small town setting is signified by the
strange montage which begins the film and reappears
near the end as a sort of framing device:  the camera
tilts down from the blue sky to reveal red roses
(noticeably artificial) against a white picket fence;
then we see a fire truck, the fireman waving to us in
slow motion (is he staring into the camera?); then
yellow tulips against a white picket fence;  then a
crossing guard allowing some very young children to
cross the street.  The photographic style of this
sequence ranges from the unnaturally bright and
flattened colors of the shots of the  flowers, sky
and fence to the diffused, but richly saturated

93

colors of the crossing guard and fireman shots.

Like Shadow Of A Doubt's almost surreal
reappearing dancers, these hyperreal images in
Lynch's film force the spectator to come to terms
with the narrative's unusual method of working.  In
Hitchcock's film the image of the dancers contains a
message to look for meaning as a commentary "above"
the narrative, and to reevaluate the narrative's
information at each recurrence of the image.  In
Lynch's film, the hyperreal sequences framing the
narrative signal that the narrative between is as
artificial and as posed as the flowers, the waving
fireman, or the mechanical robin at the film's end.
If these sequences were merely "blank parody,"
Jameson's complaints would be valid and we could
dismiss Blue Velvet as a cynical and hypocritical
attack on a vision of "middle-America" which the film
itself says doesn't really exist.

However, the sequence works in a way similiar to
the "photo-realist" method in painting which "looked
like a return to representation...until people began
to realize that these paintings are not exactly
realistic either, since what they represent is not
the outside world but rather only a photograph of the

94

outside world or, in other words, the latter's image"
(Jameson, 123).    Thus, Lynch's film places itself
within an "image," beginning with a setting that is
deliberately artificial and superficial, rather than
one which attempts to ground the story in a
believable place (following codes of narrative
"realism").   Hitchcock desired to represent the "real
world" of the small town and went to great pains to
film on location in Santa Rosa and to create a sense
of the reality of that town.   Lynch, on the other
hand, cares little about "realism," and his town is
merely an assemblage of images alluding to a town out
of "cinema" rather than out of/ with reference to
"reality."   The trailer truck, filled with logs, that
drives past Arlene's diner, and the messages from the
radio station WOOD--"At the sound of the falling
tree, it'll be 1:30," etc.--suggest a town without,
of course, characterizing it in any depth.   The one-
dimensionality of Lumberton is necessary for
establishing the artificiality of the story which
takes place in it.

The extraordinarily self-conscious sequence
which introduces the spectator to Lumberton works
somewhat analogously to the waltzing dancers in

Hitchcock's film:  it signals a _way_ of reading the narrative that is not dependent on "getting caught up" in a narrative based on "invisible" continuity stylistic conventions and a seamless, "logically" coherent progression of events.   It sets up the viewer to regard the events which follow as little more than suggestive "surfaces" of a story which the viewer must interrogate, not to discover a kernel of narrative meaning which can be neatly summed up, but rather to establish a _way_ to maintain the tension between attempting to understand the film as an illustration of "themes" played out in the story, and attempting to understand the film as inexorably self-critical, as a work which "consumes" every image and theme it presents by encouraging a consistent critique by the spectator.

In other words, _Blue Velvet_ poses a rigorous problem of "readability" to the spectator as it forces him/her to perform the simultaneous operations of making a narrative interpretation and critiquing that same interpretation.  For example, the church scene I've discussed above is different from parody or satire in that it is meant to be taken straight _and_ as a joke.  In Jameson's term, the scene is

96

"blank," though not through a denial of meaning as much as by making meaning a dialectical operation between the text and the spectator. So what Jameson terms "schizophrenia" is actually the strength of a work like Blue Velvet, when one considers the issues of spectator, text, and ideology--Lynch's film sacrifices a coherent narrative "personality" for a "split personality" which requires a nimble and adaptable response from the spectator.

Blue Velvet, in a sense, drains itself of meaning in order to deny the authority of the text, and in order to resist what Craig Owens calls the "master narrative:" "man's placing of his stamp on everything that exists--that is, the transformation of the world into a representation, with man as its subject" (Owens, 66). Blue Velvet denies turning the world into a representation by turning representation into its world. That is the meaning of the film's first (and penultimate) sequence: we are introduced to Lumberton as a world of images whose relation to our own world is already made problematic by looking almost, but not quite, like our own world.

As the film's opening sequence continues, it maintains the relentless piling up of images, though

97

now elements promising some sort of narrative emerge
as the flowers, fence, etc. give way to a
comfortable-looking middle-class home, a man watering
the grass, a woman sipping coffee while watching TV.
Then, while the song "Blue Velvet" plays on the
soundtrack, Lynch cuts between the man watering the
grass and the twisted water hose building up pressure
at its source. Suddenly, the man grabs his neck,
falls to the ground in paroxysms of pain; he remains
holding the hose at the level of his groin, so the
nozzle and shooting water seem like a grotesque
parody of ejaculation. In a slow-motion shot, a dog
excitedly leaps at the water. Then the camera begins
a slow zoom through the grass and down beneath the
surface of the yard, revealing a writhing mass of
bugs engaged in what appears to be a vicious
struggle.

In the space of several minutes, Blue Velvet has
gone from its dazzling images of artificial
wholesomness to an equally dazzling image of bestial
struggle beneath these surfaces. Moreover, it has
indicated its main narrative/thematic concerns in a
few images: the absent, speechless father who will
be replaced by Frank Booth as "Daddy;" the

fascination with watching violence and brutality (the gun on the screen); the link between sex, pain, and bestiality (the father's stroke/the nozzle as phallus/the greedy dog); the gap between the brutality of life and the comforting romantic representations we try to create (the sentimental "Blue Velvet" accompanies the opening scenes); and, seemingly most narratively significant, the dark and ugly reality which exists right beneath the surface of supposedly clean, wholesome, and ordered middle-class family life (neat white house and well-tended yard vs. the hideous mass of bugs beneath the ground). For the critic trying to unearth the film's "meaning," this sequence would seem to be obvious in its thematic suggestiveness.

Nevertheless, this "obviousness" masks a deeper purpose, as does the "obviousness" of most serious postmodern art. The spectator-critic who is used to mining for the "deeper" meaning in modernist films (like Shadow Of A Doubt), or rejecting anything but traditional ideological meaning (regarding films as little more than an "unconscious" reflection of the dominant ideology) in some popular films, must forego both processes of meaning-making in favor of

something quite similiar to the method of "narrative allegory" Gregory Ulmer attributes to "postmodern" writers like Derrida:

> Grammatology has emerged on the far side of the formalist crisis and developed a discourse which is fully referential, but referential in the manner of "narrative allegory" rather than of "allegoresis." "Allegoresis," the mode of commentary long practiced by traditional critics, "suspends" the surface of the text, applying a terminology of "verticalness, levels, hidden meaning, the hieratic difficulty of interpretation," whereas "narrative allegory" (practiced by post-critics) explores the literal...level of the language itself, in a horizontal investigation of the polysemous meanings simultaneously available in the words themselves--in etymologies and puns---and in the things the words name. The allegorical narrative unfolds as a dramatization or enactment (personification) of the "literal truth inherent in words themselves" [Ulmer quoting Maureen Quilligan]. In short, narrative allegory favors the material of the signifier over the meanings of the signifieds ["The Object of Post-Criticism," 95].

Blue Velvet's strange opening sequence is surely allegorical, but what I am arguing here is that it works as, to borrow Ulmer's terms, "narrative allegory" rather than simply "allegoresis." What seems at first to solicit a reading of "verticalness" in which "hidden meanings" are discovered beneath the

100

"suspended" surface of the text also requires an
examination of the images (replace "words" with
"images" in the passage above) themselves, without
"looking behind" them to uncover their "thematic"
information.  To put this simply, _Blue_ _Velvet_ is a
film about conventional _images_ of good against
conventional _images_ of evil (the comforting TV mother
with her cup of tea versus the looming gun on the
TV's screen), not a film in which "good" and "evil"
are meant to correspond to real presences "out there"
in the world.

Therefore, the spectator who sees the father,
the mother, the TV screen, the bugs as images which
self-consciously call attention to themselves _as_
images--by the "hyperreal" cinematography,
"intrustive" techniques like slow-motion or the long
travelling zoom into the grass--is faced with a film
which  reveals its meanings through a simultaneous
attention to the "material of the signifier," the
"meanings of the signifieds," _and_ the relationship
between the two.  The spectator watches the strange
opening sequence, attempts to put it into manageable
terms by constructing it as nothing more than a
metonymic metaphor for the remainder of the film, the

101

bugs "as" Frank and Dorothy and the clean middle-
class world "as" Jeffrey, but remains unsatisfied
because the images themselves are too disturbing and
excessive, and their presentation too transgressive
of the way the opening of a narrative "should be"
constructed.  The images are as emphatic as the story
they begin to (re)present.  Unlike the image of the
waltzing couples in Hitchcock's Shadow Of A Doubt,
the images which begin Lynch's film are not narrative
"breaks" which reveal the significance of the
narrative non-diegetically, but rather become icons
of the idea of "narrative" itself, revealing the
entire film as a sort of "break," an uncertain region
for establishing meaning which requires the
spectator's constant attention.

By mentioning the "relationship" between the
"meaning of the signifieds" and the "material of the
signifiers" I am departing from Ulmer somewhat to
emphasize a dialectical relationship, not one which
emphasizes one term over the other.  To discuss Blue
Velvet dialectically is important, because while it
does have a story, it is a story which simultaneously
builds itself up and breaks itself down.  The
spectator who has been made aware of these impulses

by the film's opening moments is, subsequently, always on the lookout for these narrative breakdowns since they are integral to the way the film operates. Rather than regarding this breakdown as a sign of Lynch's inability to tell as story, as many reviewers have ("Actually it's easy to forget about the plot, because that's where Lynch's naive approach has its disadvantages"--Kael, 102), I see the story's incoherence as a tactic to permit a more non-narrative structure to exist between the film's scenes and images (and, of course, their relation to the spectator) alongside the suggestions of a more conventional narrative in order to upset a traditional interpretation which takes <u>Blue</u> <u>Velvet</u> as little more than a story about "filth beneath the ordered surface of American life, etc."  As Lynda Bundtzen writes,

> The story refuses to make complete sense as "a boys' adventure tale" or even as Lynch describes it, "a sophisticated coming-of-age movie about Jeffrey, who becomes a man through experience, albeit violent experience:" Jeffrey enters this danger, the danger of knowledge, and he gains insight because of it.  He also does some good in the world that he enters; he helps Dorothy" [Bundtzen is quoting "Laurie  Winer's paraphrase" of Lynch's statements about his

film]. It may, of course, be possible for some viewers to lose themselves in the story by adopting this traditional perspective and its implicit generic expectations but too much of the film remains outside this closed circle (Bundtzen, 5).

The spectator who wishes to follow a "traditional perspective" for Blue Velvet will come across problematic scenes like the one in which Jeffrey tells Sandy what he has discovered by staking out Frank Booth's apartment.  He tells her,

> Number 1:  Today I staked out Frank's place with a camera.  Now there's another man involved in all this.  I call him the yellow man.  You saw his back the other day at Dorothy's apartment.  Today I saw the yellow man go into Frank's building, laughing with Frank. Now the only trouble is what does that prove?  [Sandy answers, "Nothing really.  But it's interesting."]  Number 2:  I saw the yellow man come out and meet with a well-dressed man carrying an alligator briefcase.  They went to this factory building downtown, stood on a staircase, and looked off into the distance.  Now get this, in the distance there was a murder;  this drug dealer was shot to death and a woman had her legs broken.  And these two guys told me the police would find a huge amount of drugs in the dead dealer's place.

Any attempt to put this in traditionally "coherent" narrative terms is bound to fail.  The drug dealer's murder, the reasons Frank disguises

himself as the "well-dressed man," the extent to
which the police are invovled with Frank, etc. are
never explained, because their explanations are
unimportant in <u>Blue</u> <u>Velvet</u>.  What is important is the
<u>allusion</u> to a crime plot and the exaggerated images
of the subterranean world Jeffrey has "uncovered."
The grotesque parody of a murder--dead "drug dealer"
hanging from a window and a woman, her legs broken,
shrieking on the sidewalk--noted offhandedly by
Jeffrey emphasizes the artificiality of the film's
plot and the critical role of self-conscious,
constructed <u>images</u>, whether they be "postive" (the
peaceful home, the crossing guard, etc.) or
"negative" (the woman with her legs broken, the dead
dealer, etc.),  as messages to the spectator to look
for meaning, not in a seamless story, but in the
interplay between a deliberately "opaque" and playful
narrative and the suggestiveness of its images.

The point is made even more overtly in the
film's "resolution" of its story. Jeffrey returns to
Dorothy's apartment, finding the corpses of the
"yellow man" and Dorothy's husband, Don, in a
strange, static tableau:  Don is propped up on the
sofa, his hands tied in front, with a piece of blue

velvet stuck in his mouth.  The "yellow man" is
standing, swaying slightly, bleeding profusely from
the head.  Apparently, he has been connected to the
tireless image-producer, the TV, and electrocuted
(later the body will react with comic automatism to
the police instructions on the walkie-talkie, "Get
back and stay down" and "Stay in place").  Though the
scene is bloody and initially quite shocking, it
possesses the same kind of unreality as the story of
the murder "in the distance."  Lynch heightens the
unreality, undercutting its brutal impact, by cutting
to a shootout at Frank's apartment, accompanied on
the soundtrack by "Love Letters."  The shootout is
presented in a brief montage, elliptical and absurd:
various weapons, including a bazooka, are shown
firing in close-up; a cop rolls across the ground;
Detective Williams is shown briefly speaking into his
walkie-talkie;  a shot in slow motion shows shards of
glass being shot out of Frank's windows.  Perhaps the
entire sequence lasts fifteen seconds.  Jeffrey is
trapped by Frank in Dorothy's apartment.  He takes a
gun from the "yellow man" and hides in the closet.
The gun seems hideously large.  When he is discovered
in the closet, Jeffrey shoots Frank dead center

through the forehead.  Immediately afterwards, both
Sandy and her father, Detective Williams, are in the
apartment.  Detective Williams (always referred to in
this way, always wearing his shoulder holster--even
at home!) seals the film's conclusion in the well-
worn way of TV cop shows:  he breaks into the room,
pistol held with both hands in front of him, and,
seeing that Frank is dead, announces, "It's all over
now, Jeffrey."

Though this scene "resolves" the story by
killing off Frank and reuniting Jeffrey and Sandy,
its  "feel" is all wrong by standards of traditional
continuity and story "coherence."  Rather, it
operates by a series of staged images:  the corpses
in the apartment, the shootout at Frank's, the late
"rescue" by the forces of authority, and the reunion
of the lovers.  Every element necessary for a
satisfactory "wrap up" which smooths out all the
disturbances in the film is in place, but, as a
"postmodern" text, Blue Velvet has simply "alluded"
to these elements, denying the traditional pleasure
of the smooth, logical, causal links between events
leading to narrative closure. The sequence does not
refuse closure, but rather makes this closure

outrageously self-conscious and "stagy."

These scenes are relevant to Jameson's objections to "postmodernism," because they seem, at first glance, to be merely more sophisticated (i.e., more cynical) versions of the traditional ways to end films--preserve the hero, kill the villain, bring the lovers together.  Rather than operating as a critique of traditional narrative and its ideological consequences (the facile resolution of contradictions which provides a false sense of fullness and coherence to the spectator, turning the world into representation without acknowledging its operations), the film turns "reality into images" by creating unreal "allusions" to death and destruction, images alienated from their sources, and makes "time into a series of perpetual presents" by using the technique of "pastiche" which somehow denies a normative view of the world, that is, one which is anchored in history and tradition, in favor of a nihilistic "stylistic diversity and heterogeneity" (Jameson, 114).  The film turns the resolution of several narrative points into an opportunity for a series of absurd sequences, sketchily developed as though they were some kind of shorthand for a "real" ending.

However, Jameson's objections ignore the points I've made at the beginning of this discussion; <u>Blue Velvet</u> works by creating two narrative "lines" which work together simultaneously, the first a "traditional" narrative relating the discovery of evil by an "innocent" hero as the film documents Jeffrey's "education," and the second an "anti-narrative" line which works by representing, alluding to, a "narrative" as a series of self-conscious images. I do not mean that each line can be separted from the other, since the film's "meaning" comes from their interaction: the images, the "anti-narrative" devices (which, by the way, include the repetition of certain motifs, such as lightbulbs burning out and wind-blown flames, that operate in a way similiar to the waltzing couples in <u>Shadow Of A Doubt</u>) and the large gaps in the story <u>intersect</u> with the growing up/crime story to create a self-critical narrative.

Because any film must necessarily turn "reality into images" (since it cannot capture reality itself), a filmmaker has two options in creating a "progressive" film: reject traditional narrative altogether in order to create films which are entirely anti-narrative or non-narrative, or use

traditional narrative in a way which draws attention to its own manipulations of the spectator, so that spectator becomes aware of her/his place as a subject being addressed in a certain way. Both ways are equally crucial for making a critique of traditional narrative, but in choosing the latter <u>Blue</u> <u>Velvet</u> opens up the possibility for the spectator's dialectical operation of making meaning from a "schizophrenic" postmodern narrative. The film can critique traditional narrative by presenting a warped version of that tradition, one which does not distort "reality into images," but distorts certain kinds of film images--in this case those of "good" and "bad"-- in order to point out that those images were <u>always</u> distortions.

Therefore, the criticism that a postmodern work like <u>Blue</u> <u>Velvet</u> somehow severs its ties with a real historical past and formally keeps its spectator "trapped" in a perpetual present, denies the film's concern for how <u>past</u> images have constructed our <u>current</u> image of the world. That is, the film relies on a very real connection to the past, but it is a past of "images" not reality. The film scrutinizes images from the past, and if we allow that it is

important to understand past representations of the world, we can allow that <u>Blue Velvet</u> has something important to say.

Lynch himself has said his film is "like the '50s meeting the '80s" (<u>Voice</u>, 20), though he might have put it better by saying his film is like images created by and of the '50s meeting '80s postmodernism.  In short, <u>Blue Velvet</u>'s presentation of "good" and "evil," romance and family life, crime and authority rely on an audience's familiarity with images in and of the past.  The film's title, from Bobby Vinton's song, indicates that velvet is not so much a Freudian fetish as a marker of the sentimentality and idealized romance in a particular <u>portrayal</u> of the world (the film even uses an image of blue velvet as a background for its opening and closing credits).  Roy Orbison's "In Dreams," which accompanies the scene in which Frank beats up Jeffrey, is not merely an ironic comment on the brutal actions but a remarkably concentrated world view centering around isolation, escapism, and disillusionment (But just before the dawn/I awake to find you gone/...Only in dreams/In beautiful dreams)--in short, a projection of '50s teenage

<u>angst</u>, molded in rock and roll, onto the film.
Dorothy is, of course, a <u>film</u> <u>noir</u> "dark" lady, and
Sandy an updated version of Sandra Dee (she even has
a poster of Montgomery Clift on her bedroom wall).
Jeffrey is one of the Hardy boys whose darker urges
and interests are made apparent.  Even the casting in
the film provides intertextual evidence of its
supreme concern with the past of American image-
making:  Hope Lange, heroine of the film <u>Peyton</u> <u>Place</u>
and staple of TV comedy (<u>The</u> <u>Ghost</u> <u>and</u> <u>Mrs.</u> <u>Muir</u>) and
drama, portrays Sandy's mother, and Dennis Hopper,
described by the <u>Village</u> <u>Voice</u> as "nothing if not a
walking signifier of harm, self-inflicted and
otherwise" (11), cannot help but conjure up not only
images of '50s icon-making (his association with
James Dean) but '60s mythmaking (<u>Easy</u> <u>Rider</u>, of
course). <u>Blue</u> <u>Velvet</u>, then, has a complex
relationship to its past unless Jameson intends to
make a distinction between the "real" past and the
"interpeted" past and to deny that image-making has a
profound effect on the "real" world.   For the
spectator the continual build-up of images of and
from the past  forces a confrontation with the
meaning of those images in relation not only to the

contemporary elements in the film (the frankness of
its sexuality, the explicitness of its brutality,
and, most importantly, its constantly shifting tone),
but to the spectator's own relation to those images
(Where was I in the '50s?, Do I know anything of this
past outside of its mediated presentations? etc.).
Jameson fails to note that postmodernist works are
hardly the first to turn "reality into images," and
that they can offer a commentary on that very
process.

Blue Velvet's climactic gun battles, then, work
on two levels. First, Jeffrey's shooting of Frank
allow us to see the forces of repression go into
action by killing the bad "daddy" who brought
nightmares (literally, in Jeffrey's case), but who
also made the simple observation, "You're like me,"
thereby showing that corruption and innocence,
sickness and health, are hardly easy dichotomies.
Second, and most important, I think, the film's
strange resolution allows the spectator to see the
images take their traditional places and line up in
their traditional oppositions, only, this time,
everything in the film preceeding this has undermined
the spectator's confidence in their "reality," and

113

permitted the formation of a critical sensibility,
one that "sees through" both the ideology of a
socially-constructed "normality" (as represented by
Jeffrey and Sandy) and the ideology of traditional
narrative.

Hence, the film's penultimate sequence--the
restoration of Jeffrey's father to the family, the
arrival of the robins, etc., which are all filmed
with the hyperreal, glaring brightness of the
opening--only underscores the film's productive
"schizophrenia," in that it seems "ideologically
recuperative, but also provokes laughter" (Bundtzen,
6).  At Blue Velvet's conclusion, then, the images
seem settled again, placed within the family (and its
ideological structures) and within their traditional
places in narrative.  But the spectator who has
watched the film this far and perceived how much of
it remains "outside [the] closed circle" of
"traditional perspective" and "generic expectations"
(Bundtzen, 5), can hardly be fully recouped into
traditional ideology again.  The robin which heralds
that Sandy's dream has come "true" is mechanical, but
the bug in its mouth is real, indicating, on one
level, that the darkness "underneath the surface" of

114

Lumberton and its ideology is more real than the mechanisms of repression which seek to create placid surfaces to hide it. On the level most profoundly addressing the spectator and her/his relation to the narrative, this shot indicates that the narrative's move toward conventional closure and recoupment, a move to deny its status as image, is misleading; it is mechanical and awkward, like the robin, while the disturbing and disruptive narrative gaps, derailments, and self-conscious images are the reality (alive and wiggling, like the bug). The repetition of the opening montage--waving fireman, roses against a white fence--confirms this for the entire film with its structural circularity.

Significantly, though, like Shadow Of A Doubt, something remains outside the formal framing of this repeated motif. The film's last shot is Dorothy's pensive embrace of her recovered son (shown with his back to the camera/spectator). Like the ending of Hitchcock's film, this scene is pointedly ambiguous, its difficulty underlined by the return of "Blue Velvet," sung by Dorothy, on the soundtrack as the camera tilts up to the blue sky. The ambiguity is compounded because the slow motion in the scene

recalls both cliched film reunions and some of the
most disturbing images in Lynch's film (the dog
snapping at the water from the hose, Jeffrey's
flashback of Frank raping Dorothy).  Like <u>Shadow Of A
Doubt</u>, this scene, too, offers spectators the signs
of a traditional happy ending while simultaneously
leaving them doubtful about its "closure:"  Has
Dorothy really recovered?  Is the reunion happy?
What will Dorothy and the child's life be like?
These questions remain unanswered.  The final shot
daringly confronts the spectator with perhaps the
most cherished ideological image of traditional
narrative and the culture it represents:  the
redeemed, contented mother with her child.  In its
last moments, <u>Blue Velvet</u> again signals its concerns
are hardly empty and ideologically complicit.  Here,
for example, the question of woman as image (Dorothy
Valens/Isabella Rossellini trapped imagistically
between passive victim of male violence and idealized
mother roles) will necessarily involve the question
of an oppositional stance toward the dominant
ideology.  Though its surface narrative indicators
allow spectators to construct a traditional good vs.
evil, young man's "rite of passage" narrative, it is

clear <u>Blue</u> <u>Velvet</u> also offers ample opportunity to be read as a "progressive text."  The film's postmodernism does not prevent, but rather encourages, the spectator's critical engagement with problems of narrative and ideology.

# Chapter Four

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis I quoted Louis Althusser's words to the effect that "authentic art" provides its audience "in the form of '<u>seeing</u>, '<u>perceiving</u>' and '<u>feeling</u>...the <u>ideology</u> from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it <u>alludes</u>" (222). I hope I have demonstrated here that narrative films which might otherwise be dismissed as "ideologically complicit" by subject-positioning theories of narrative and spectatorship can create the necessary conditions of "<u>seeing</u>, <u>perceiving</u>, and <u>feeling</u>" which allow the spectator to not only become an active partner in meaning-making but to create a progressive critique of ideology.

The analyses of <u>Shadow Of A Doubt</u> and <u>Blue Velvet</u> are examples of an approach which permits the spectator an active role in creating meaning, especially meaning that is critical of ideological values, and so requires a re-evaluation of labels

like "classical" and "postmodern," as adherence to
such critical labels may prevent, rather than
promote, a clear understanding of the
interrelationships of narrative, spectatorship and
ideology.  My discussion of these two films is not
meant to deny that certain critiques of "classical"
and "postmodern" narratives may be accurate and
important in discussing films, since certainly every
Hollywood film is not _Shadow Of A Doubt_ nor every
postmodern work a _Blue Velvet_.  Nevertheless, some
theorists have used these labels generally and
abstractly to condemn film "practices" rather than to
analyze specific films, and in their theoretical
fervor have neglected to point out that there are
substantial differences among individual "classical"
narratives, and among individual "postmodern"
narratives.  Consequently, important films like
_Shadow Of A Doubt_ and _Blue Velvet_ might either be
neglected or subjected to traditional interpretations
that overlook their questioning of both the
spectator's relation to filmic narrative and the
spectator's relation to the ideology the films'
narratives "allude" to (in Hitchcock's film, the
American values represented by Santa Rosa, and in

119

Lynch's film, the images that represent those values).

In order to prevent such films from slipping through the cracks of excessively abstract film theory, critics should concentrate on, in Michael Ryan's words, " a more differentiated and situational understanding of how specific films address different audiences and generate meaning effects in varied contexts" (480). Critics should also reject the notion of the passive spectator in favor of a conception of the film viewer that permits her/him to actively engage in making meaning for films, including films which might be considered "classical" or "postmodern." The alternative is a crippling view of the spectator in which the filmic text dictates meaning, the spectator becoming merely an object to be "placed" or "positioned." A <u>dialectical</u> approach to narrative, spectatorship, and ideology is necessary, because neither the text nor the spectator can have a monopoly on meaning.

My "case studies" on <u>Shadow Of A Doubt</u> and <u>Blue Velvet</u> only partially fulfill Ryan's suggestion, since I have limited myself to pointing out what the attacks on "classical" and "postmodern" narrative

120

usually neglect.  What remains is a look at how these films might "address different audiences" in "varied contexts," thereby generating "different meaning effects."  However, critically enabling film viewers (at least in a general sense) by demonstrating what kind of pluralistic readings (particularly "transgressive" or "anti-traditional") might result, may help in directing the discovery of filmic meaning as a process, as the meeting place between the film, the spectator, and the ideological determinants (class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) that influence both.

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# Vita

Michael Frisoli, son of Richard and Nancy
Frisoli, was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania on
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His thesis had a gestation period somewhere between
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