

**SIGNS OF TRANSGRESSION:
THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN WHO KILL
IN CONTEMPORARY HOLLYWOOD FILMS**

Isabelle Doyle

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SUMMARY

In my thesis I argue that the representation of women who kill is a construction of female identity that serves patriarchal ideology. Hollywood films are ideally suited for examining the contradictory representations of the violent, transgressive woman. My introduction establishes the link between the cultural ideals of womanhood and those systems of representation that denigrate women who do not conform. Chapter One, a discussion of the relationship between women and crime, is a exploration of the meaning of the 'transgressive woman', using instances of true crime, film and images from the media. I discuss how these representations support the view of women in patriarchal ideology, and why the existence of women who kill is seen as socially and morally disruptive.

The following four chapters deal with one film in detail. Chapter Two reviews the reactions to *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) and discusses the film as potentially subversive in a male-identified genre closely associated with law-breaking and criminality. Chapter Three on *Single White Female* (Barbet Schroeder, 1992) looks at the film in terms of its multifarious generic legacies. It examines the two women characters as expressions of the problems of representing femininity in the genres of gothic and horror.

Chapter Four looks at the role of the wife in recent Hollywood film. Using *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (Curtis Hanson, 1991), I examine the role of the wife as a figure who has the potential both to uphold and disrupt the nuclear family. Finally, Chapter Five is an analysis of *Jurassic Park* (Stephen Spielberg, 1993) that reveals that the film, while appearing to uphold family and paternal values, also provides a progressive and radical view of sex and gender.

INTRODUCTION

SIGNS OF TRANSGRESSION

For everyone who watches Hollywood films, the 'woman as killer' is now such a recognizable figure that she can be found in every film genre. From femme fatale to action heroine, the figure of the killer woman can represent, on the one hand, the possibility of equality and progression, and alternately, a ratification of women's anti-social and threatening presence. She is therefore a useful figure of dissent, who can be used simultaneously to uphold and to destabilize current social values. My thesis is an analysis of the killer woman in recent Hollywood films as a representation of current social and cultural anxieties about the 'woman's role' and the 'woman's place'. How do these representations of women who kill inform and reflect recognised ideals of womanhood and femininity? How do they interact with contemporary social values? What makes the representation of the transgressive woman so meaningful in contemporary culture?

I use the term 'transgressive' not simply as a useful all-encompassing term for female disorder, but also in the sense that it denotes the violation or infringement of rules and boundaries. The transgressive woman represents a suspect morality, a deviation away from the ideology of womanhood. The ideological processes that serve to inform us of women's position within culture also influence our recognition of such transgressions. These allow for a recognition of the horrors of anti-femininity: the witch, the lesbian, the prostitute, the femme fatale, the child-killer. Such labels are not for the benefit of women, but serve to place women in

a negative position in terms of patriarchy. In other words, these labels show, primarily, women's relationship to men.

Bill Nichols suggests that representations are useful points of reference that allow the individual to construct a coherent identification with social values:

Ideology uses the fabrication of images and the processes of representation 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

The ideological construction of the 'woman's place', however, tends to idealize some aspects of femininity while pathologizing others. The ideology that promotes the positive values of the essential nature of womanhood - nurturing, maternal and passive - at the same time warns of a dark side of dangerous, seductive sexual powers and a secretive and mysterious 'Otherness'. The femme fatale of film noir is a manifestation of deadly sexuality: the witch in popular mythology is an abject figure who threatens civilized folk with her mysterious powers. Figures of female transgression not only threaten to displace patriarchy but they typically do so in such a manner that their threatening natures can be applied to all women. Thus the tensions between the cultural ideals of femininity and the feared transgressive and antisocial properties that women are suspected to hold distorts the representation of the transgressive woman. For whom does she pose a threat?

Yet, one person's transgressive figure may be another's feminist heroine. 'Re-reading the Bitches from Hell: A Feminist Appropriation of the Female Psychopath'³, the title (only slightly ironic) of a article in *Screen*, sums up exactly some of the dilemmas surrounding feminist critiques of transgressive figures.

Should we dismiss such figures as nothing more than misogynist representations of male paranoia, or should we attempt to rescue such figures from their texts, revealing some of their more positive elements? Diane Waldman, in discussing the problems of the concept of the 'positive image', argues that the recognition of both 'negative' and 'positive' images merely reiterates the problems of representation.⁴ Recognition does not seek to establish the link between modes of representation and dominant ideological practices inherent in a capitalist, patriarchal, white-dominated culture. The theoretical position for feminism is, by definition, a reactive rather than proactive process, placing on top of the original meaning 'a further level of connotative reading'.⁵ The action of appropriation implies that representations of women, whether transgressive or not, have a underlying meaning that can be separated from their modes of representation. When that mode of representation is Hollywood cinema, other complications arise.

In *Dykes to Watch Out For*, a collection of cartoons by Alison Bechdel, one particular cartoon sums up for me the problems facing all cinema-going women.⁶ Two women are standing outside a cinema, which is decorated with posters for films called *Rambo Meets Godzilla* and *The Vigilante*, and one explains to ^{the} other that she has three basic requirements for any film: (i) it must have at least two women in it, (ii) the two women must talk to each other, and (iii) the topic of conversation must be about something other than a man. Hence, the last film she saw was *Alien*. After looking at the films on offer, the two women decide to go home. This cartoon pre-dates *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987) and *Black Widow* (Bob Rafelson, 1987), which were both released the following year. Would these erstwhile filmgoers have greeted either film with enthusiasm? Given that both films - *Black Widow* more so than *Fatal Attraction* - match the criteria (which cannot be described as particularly stringent), can the Hollywood film

industry be seen as becoming more progressive and appealing to women? While the industry is supposed to provide popular entertainment, its products can often be remarkably unappealing: formulaic, uninspired, conformist, and repetitive. But simultaneously, certain films have the knack of tapping into the cultural psyche: *Fatal Attraction* is the most obvious example of the fear that transgressive women engender at the heart of patriarchal ideology. Can this film, or any film, tell us anything about the woman's place in patriarchy, or does it merely provide a certain cathartic pleasure in the destruction of the transgressive woman?

Patriarchy, Adrienne Rich writes, is 'the power of the fathers', a universal system in which 'the female is subsumed under the male'.⁷ Rich's analysis shows that the system is one which forces all women, whatever their class, race or sexuality, to live under male patronage, and with tacit male approval. The economic unit that maintains patriarchy is the nuclear family, with its power to bestow its property on the next generation, within strict patriarchal guidelines. Only those children that are the property of the father, bearing his name, have the right to the property:

Through control of the mother, the man assures himself of possession of his children; through control of his children he insures the disposition of his patrimony and the safe passage of his soul after death.⁸

Paternity, the acknowledgement of a man's children as his, is not merely a social knowledge of a biological event. In view of the fact that men can never know for certain whether they have fathered a child, such a relationship needs to be defined by law - the marriage - and take place within it. In its most benign form, paternity can be defined as a recognition of a natural event, a simple admission of responsibility. But as a reflection of patriarchal values, it imposes meaning on all production in the patriarchal capitalist state, as well as reproduction. So, for patriarchy, an assumption of power that presumes itself to be natural and universal

depends on a construction of ideology to disguise its influence and maintain its own naturalness: as Catherine Belsey says, 'Ideology obscures the real condition of existence by presenting partial truths'.⁹

Therefore representations of women form a useful set of alternatives that serve the dominant patriarchal ideology. The image of the transgressive woman both upholds and undermines the ideological values of femininity: it establishes women as an ever-present threat. As Bill Nichols notes, 'Images are things that represent (re-present) something else'.¹⁰ The woman is never quite what she seems: this state of affairs is never more apparent than in the representation of women in film. As Laura Mulvey shows so effectively, film is a patriarchal construction, one that places women only as 'signifier of the male other'.¹¹ Representations of women are not only the manifestations of sexual difference, they *are* sexual difference. By implication, the resulting image of femininity must serve both to complement the patriarchal structure of the film and serve as a focus simply for male desire.

My thesis analyses four films that show the woman who kills as marked by her distance from the patriarchal ideal of womanhood. I have chosen to concentrate on not only the ideological nature of patriarchy, but its material presence in each film's narrative. My analysis reveals the forces that keep women in check, and the paranoia that ensues once she breaks free of patriarchal control. The important consideration is not that women's actions are condoned or condemned but that they are recognized as part of a system of representation that suspects all women of being potentially disruptive. Therefore, my choice of film has been guided by the appearance of those structures that appear to enforce patriarchal control: the woman's place in the family, and her relationship to the patriarchal economy.

My choice of films also brings together other elements of masculinity that appear to run concurrently with the figure of the transgressive woman. These are the over-production of the paternal role to the extent that it now includes maternity, and the exchange of autocratic patriarchal control for a more paternalistic and less threatening male figure of authority. Paternity in Hollywood films has recently become the most private and most benevolent face of patriarchy. It has attempted to represent itself as the true nurturing role, as patriarchy seeks to maintain a power base that can control maternity, in the light of women's continuing failure to do the job properly. It also appears that the ideological place of women as wives and mothers is the cornerstone upon which patriarchal, capitalist, heterosexual ideology is founded. Any potential female autonomy can be marked as dangerous and disruptive. However, within any film, this can only be represented in terms of her threat to the patriarchal economy.

All these elements appear to reflect current social anxieties about the continued existence of the patriarchal ideal of the nuclear family. Vivian Sobchack has traced the evolving relationship between the genres of horror, science fiction and family melodrama that reveal the family as a site of perpetual disorder.

[All three genres] attempt to narratively contain, work out, and in some fashion re-solve the contemporary weakening of patriarchal authority and the glaring contradictions that exist between the mythology of family relations and their actual social practice.¹²

In Steve Neale's discussion of genre, he describes the location of a narrative within a specific genre as relying on a multiplicity of codes or discourses, which rely in turn on audience recognition and knowledge. Genres are not mere categories by which films are identified: they are 'systems of orientation, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject'.¹³ A tenet of feminist film criticism is that the structural and often stereotypical format

of film genre is an ideological framework upon which sexual difference is inscribed. Christine Gledhill describes this reaction:

The Hollywood genres represent the fictional elaboration of a patriarchal culture which produces macho heroes and a subordinate, demeaning and objectified place for women.¹⁴

While many feminist writers see genre as a constricting edifice that promotes stereotypes, some genres like the 'woman's film' and melodrama have been produced specifically for women audiences. As they deal with female subjectivity and desires, feminist critics have found them useful repositories of cultural repressions about the status of women. Melodrama, especially maternal melodrama, can be a source of cultural anxiety about the maternal role and the woman's place in the family. Alternatively the very absence of female subjectivity may speak louder than its presence: feminist analysis of film noir has proved very productive in spite of the fact that one of the identifying features of the genre is its portrayal of destructive femininity. The femme fatale of film noir is manipulative, devious and deadly, but she is also a contradictory presence: an expression of male Oedipal desire to learn the truth about her. Helped by these contradictions, the figure of the woman is central to the narrative. Thus the film noir text, as Christine Gledhill argues, is 'anti-realist', a textual production that draws attention to its own artificiality.¹⁵ It is also a genre that exceeds its own boundaries: the *X Files* television series could be seen as film noir of the 1990s, where the deviousness of the woman is replaced by the manipulation of 'the truth' by the US Government.

Historically therefore the subject of generic study has proved useful in presenting contradictions of representation. Molly Haskell's description of the 1980s as 'The Age of Ambivalence' suggests that contemporary Hollywood has been undergoing

a profound change in its treatment of male and female roles.¹⁶ By seeing films as a cultural expression of the social ideology of womanhood, can the films then be studied in turn as confirmations of women's experiences? For Haskell, the relationship between women's experiences and the consumption of Hollywood film is a symbiotic system that ensures that women's self-expression can be vicariously achieved. It is her view that women look to the cinema to provide them with a reflection of their own lives. Of course, there is a counter-argument that expresses concern that the current Hollywood excess of female violence and deception may in fact encourage over-identification between the spectator and the role: 'the new wicked ladies have become distorted role models'.¹⁷ To discuss any representation, especially in terms of film, is to introduce the question of how such a representation might produce meaning, its connotations within the medium of the film, and the wider implication of its recognition.

Chapter One, therefore, deals with the reality of the woman in crime, to establish the relationship between 'true' crime and film representations. The idea that the behaviour of women in films has an influence over the women that watch them is a particularly pervasive aspect of patriarchal ideology which must be dealt with before looking at each film in turn. In the following four chapters, I look at the representation of female transgression as a product of the film's generic legacy. By revealing the generic conventions that help to construct the woman's transgression, I hope to reveal the inconsistencies and contradictions that lie behind each one. By showing that the representation of the woman who kills is a construction of patriarchal ideology, I hope to challenge the system that wants us to accept these representations as a true reflection of the woman of the 1990s.

NOTES

1. Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 1.
2. Ibid, p. 1.
3. Deborah Jermyn, 'Re-reading the Bitches from Hell: A Feminist Appropriation of the Female Psychopath', *Screen*, 37 3 (Autumn 1996), pp. 251-267.
4. Diane Waldman, 'There's More to a Positive Image than meets the Eye', in *Issues of Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 11-18 (p. 17).
5. Elizabeth Cowie, 'Women, Image and Representation', cited in Waldman, op. cit., p. 18.
6. Alison Bechdel, *Dykes to Watch Out For* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1986), p. 22-23.
7. Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1977), p. 57.
8. Ibid, p. 64.
9. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 57.
10. Nichols, op. cit., p. 1.
11. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 28-40 (p. 29).
12. Vivian Sobchack, 'Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange', in *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*, ed. by Gregory Waller (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 175-194 (p. 179).
13. Stephen Neale, *Genre*, 3rd edn (London: BFI, 1987), p. 19.
14. Christine Gledhill, 'Klute: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism', in *Women and Film Noir*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (London: BFI, 1980), pp. 6-21 (p. 7).
15. Ibid, p. 11.
16. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987)
17. Christopher Tookey, 'Here She Comes Again: The Rise of the Domestic Femme Fatale', *Prospect*, January 1996, p. 59 (p. 59).

CHAPTER ONE

"KILL THE BITCH!": WOMEN AND CRIME

A hoaxer who called himself 'Jack' sent a tape to the police. The police had it played on the loudspeakers of Leeds football stadium, hoping it would jolt somebody's memory, but the Leeds fans drowned out the voice with chants of 'Eleven-Nil'. Eleven was the number of the known victims. Nil was the police score.

Nicole Ward Jouve, *The Street-Cleaner: The Yorkshire Ripper Case on Trial*¹

'I'm supposed to die because I'm a prostitute. No, I don't think so.'
Aileen Wuornos, interviewed on NBC's *Dateline*²

Women and crime, and their relationship to one another, form a crucial element of what we recognize to be the moral and social framework of our culture. In this chapter, I discuss the implications of the appearance of the woman criminal, a process that is complicated by the idealized notions of women as peaceful nurturers and passive carers. Women who commit crimes are made 'doubly deviant', as the title of Ann Lloyd's book attests, because they have failed as citizens *and* as women.³ The woman criminal exists in opposition to the basic tenets of sexual difference. Statistically, she is in a minority: the violent female criminal is even rarer. The Home Office figures for England and Wales in 1991 for convictions for 'violence against the person' were 3,900 women (1.6% of women's total convictions) and 43,300 men (3.4%).⁴ Women who commit acts of violence are a small, freakish blip on the chart. In spite of my ever-increasing library of newspaper cuttings, true crime stories and video collection of real-life television dramas featuring the rise of the violent woman, she remains rare and in most respects, unquantifiable. Ultimately, crime figures show the truth of the apparent crime wave: the percentage of women who murder remains a fairly steady and

world-wide constant (10-15%) of all murder cases, and this figure has not changed since records of crime began.⁵

However, while statistics present a rational and objective picture, crime reportage in the media show a society deeply affected and deeply fascinated by crime, especially violent crime. The term 'crime' is a highly emotive subject, used in newspaper headlines to indicate a rising tide of lawlessness, a breaking down of traditional values, and a crisis to which society must respond. Crime can therefore be likened to a virus, a natural phenomenon, but parasitical, ever-threatening and constantly mutating into a more sophisticated version of itself. In a troubled and divided world, stories of crime, especially murder, appear to work on two levels: they give the reader a sense of personal moral identity, in providing an outlet for horror at the crime itself, and a wider sense of identity that separates the honest citizens (us) from the criminals (them). This may explain the phenomenon that while murder rates in England and Wales remain low compared to other industrialized countries, newspaper headlines tend to forefront murder above all other crimes.⁶ A recent survey of crime reporting reveals that 64.5% of accounts in British newspapers are devoted to stories involving personal violence, while crime figures suggest that actual physical violence occurs in less than 6% of all crimes. Women who commit violence account for one third of all newspaper reports on crime, while committing one-tenth of violent crimes.⁷

Statistics can distort the picture. The activities of women murderers occupy a tiny proportion of overall crime figures yet, due to their rarity, any increase will appear as a large percentage of female crime figures. While total figures for violent crimes continue to rise, it would appear that women are attempting to usurp the male position. As gender roles throughout society become

less differentiated, coverage of women's criminal behaviour, especially aggressive behaviour, seems to uphold the belief that women must become more masculine in order to succeed. Drawing a coherent picture, therefore, of the violent woman is always made more difficult by virtue of her relationship to the correct social order, and her rejection of idealized gender roles. Within the context of a culture where male criminality appears biologically determined and even socially acceptable means that female criminal behaviour is always seen as abnormal. As criminologists are fond of saying, the common element in practically all crime is the possession of the Y chromosome. Hence, female criminal behaviour is unlikely to be viewed objectively, but her recognition and her status informs all women of our precarious position within a culture that views us ideally as victims of crime, not aggressors.

Hence, as Ann Jones writes, 'the story of women who kill is the story of all women', in her detailed, historical account of American murderesses, *Women Who Kill*.⁸ These stories of women, mostly poor and non-white, non-English speaking and often first-generation immigrants, show that many women accused and convicted of murder could be considered alien to the commercially successful and prosperous population of America. Ignoring the salacious details of the murders, Jones concentrates on the legal processes surrounding the women, and on the construction of them as killers. The murders are the least important part of the story: the investigations, the trials and punishments of these women, and their positions in relation to law and order, form the bulk of the narratives. Jones argues that such analysis reveals, in turn, the historical constraints placed on all women to remain law-abiding, model citizens while having no political or economic control over their lives. The apparent differences between the poor, working-class woman, and the middle-class woman whose clothes she washed or

floor she scrubbed, are made less obvious in the face of domestic violence, unwanted pregnancy or the absence of divorce laws. Any woman has the potential to be made into a criminal, including Susan B. Anthony who, in 1876, was arrested and fined for attempting to vote.⁹

Part of my motive for writing this chapter is to address the apparent paradox of the woman's position. In general, society places the burden of good behaviour and respectability on women, and women, in turn, tend not to indulge too heavily in delinquent, violent or criminal behaviour. The relationship between these social expectations and their outcome raises the essentialist question of whether women are inherently more responsible and civilized, or whether as little girls, our socialization was simply more successful. The ideal woman is non-criminal, compliant and passive. The result of this apparent lack of criminality is that women who commit crimes can be viewed as mad, unstable, irrational and at the mercy of their hormones and menstrual cycles: in other words, they are victims of their own bodies. Alternatively, if no physiological basis can be found for their behaviour, women are labelled as evil, aberrant, abnormal. As they have indulged in what is effectively masculine behaviour, they become masculinized non-women. As Alison Young points out, the rules of gender identity often follow the rules of the social order: to break one set is to break the other.¹⁰

Both Lynda Hart and Alison Young, in seeking to re-define the woman criminal outside the 'crimino-legal tradition' (Young's term) suggest that criminologists still confuse sex with gender. Hart sums up the circular argument surrounding the recognition of the woman criminal:

Women are less likely to engage in criminal activity because they are not men.¹¹

Only men as a *sex* will take part in criminal activity. If sex is the only determining factor governing behaviour, then criminologists can ignore all other cultural, social, educational and political influences that help to create a person's identity. Because of this argument, women are always viewed as an exception to the rule in the crimino-legal tradition. Male criminal behaviour, however anti-social, is still seen as part of a culture that accepts even violent male behaviour as normal. In contrast, women's violence is always inexplicable, as Alix Kirsta points out:

Women who act in a similarly brutal fashion cannot be placed into any such understandable or traditional context and hence will be defined as totally aberrant or deranged.¹²

Women and the Law

Media coverage of the trials in England of Beverley Allitt and Rosemary West, and Aileen Wuornos in the United States, gave credence to fears that these women might represent not only their own aberrations but were also potent examples of society's moral decline.¹³ Their acts are seen as evidence of fundamental dysfunctions of traditional gender roles, where groups in society that were previously seen as victims of crime - notably women and children - now appear to be appropriating the more masculine role of perpetrators. This situation not only undermines previously held beliefs about the non-criminality of women, but also introduces instabilities in the narrative of crime itself. Crime, as Lynda Hart points out, 'is already gendered'.¹⁴ Indeed, the master narrative of crime always immediately calls for a dichotomy of criminal/victim. Within this relationship, one is always made passive, the other active. In the sign of crime, the victim is the signifier of criminal activity. However, the varied manifestations of victimhood

mean that narratives of crime are often re-constructed to provide an outcome of recognizability for victim and criminal alike.

The death of six year-old Lisa Steinberg in 1987 was a crime for which her adoptive father, Joel Steinberg, stood trial. The principle witness against him was his partner, Hedda Nussbaum, whom he had abused so severely during their relationship that her face needed to be rebuilt by plastic surgery. Nussbaum made a pathetic figure in court and garnered so much public sympathy that Joyce Johnson, who wrote a book on the case, describes her as 'the most famous victim in America'.¹⁵ However, Johnson points out that Nussbaum waited twelve hours to summon an ambulance when she discovered Lisa was unconscious, even though Steinberg was out of the apartment for the evening. Witnesses recalled incidents of Nussbaum ill-treating Lisa and her other adopted child, a boy of sixteen months who was found in a filthy condition, tied to his playpen, and who, after Lisa's death, was taken away by the social services. In spite of Nussbaum's marked inadequacies as a parent (both she and Steinberg were cocaine addicts, and had adopted the two children illegally), the court ruled that Steinberg was solely responsible for Lisa's death. The case raised a number of issues, for feminists especially, in the court's wholesale adoption of Nussbaum as the victim, and by its apparent legal endorsement of her passivity.¹⁶ Nussbaum's class, education and career as a book editor undermine her position as victim, but the wholesale adoption of her as such not only bypasses criminal proceedings but relegates the battered woman to something little more than an automaton, incapable of, and separated from, normal, human responses.

The Steinberg case attracted much publicity. In the more mundane cases of female crime, several feminist criminologists have pointed to the markedly different

assessments of male criminals and female criminals. Susan Edwards, in analysing women on trial, points out that often the aberration of the woman criminal is perceived as a problem of gender roles: a woman is not punished for her crime but rather for her lack in fulfilling certain social functions.¹⁷ The image of the good, loyal, hard-working wife who one day stabs her violent husband with the breadknife is an image that places women's conflicts solely in terms of domesticity: it is also an image that can be absorbed without rancour into the dominant ideology. A woman perceived as a neglectful or irresponsible mother will be punished more severely than a woman who is shown to be a good, self-sacrificing mother: the stereotypes persist whether the crime is shoplifting or murder. Nussbaum's status as battered wife actually exonerates her from her other roles. Edwards suggests that the situation reflects current cultural anxieties about the continuation of traditional gender roles, rather than anxiety about the presence of women on trial.

There is one further, crucial, gender difference: twice as many women as men who pass through the judicial system are judged to be in need of psychiatric care.¹⁸

Hilary Allen argues that this cannot be seen as a privilege; rather it reduces women to the status of victims within a system of law that requires its subjects to be rational, sane and able to speak on their own behalf.¹⁹ Those subjects deemed irrational are placed under the care of the law, but are not allowed full access to it. Rather, women defendants are more likely to be sent home to their families, where their irrationality and instability can be absorbed. In the trial of a couple charged jointly with a crime, both were sent for psychiatric assessment. The man, it was found, had suffered from mental illness for fifteen years: the woman, while having drug and alcohol dependencies, showed no signs of mental illness. The man was sentenced to two years in prison, while the woman was placed on

probation on condition she seek psychiatric help. Despite all evidence to the contrary, the man is perceived as 'bad', the woman as 'mad'.²⁰ Women are still deemed to be irrational, disorderly creatures whose behaviour can be modified by supervision rather than incarceration.

Similarly, women who conform to gender roles are more likely to achieve leniency from the courts, and sympathy from the media. Helena Kennedy cites a number of cases that showed that if a woman defendant in a murder trial showed remorse and proclaimed love for the partner she had killed, she is more likely to get a lenient sentence.²¹ Women who do not cry are labelled heartless: women who become angry are labelled deviant. Not surprisingly, they are more likely to be found guilty (as in the case of Sara Thornton). The woman can be seen as the signifier of positive social values. Such values tend to over-indulge the biological and nurturing status of the mother, the wife and preserver of the nuclear family. Therefore, the unmarried woman, the single mother or the woman who shows an inappropriate emotional response becomes the signifier of a threatening anti-social element that must be controlled and subsumed to current ideology.

The trial of Lindy Chamberlain in 1982 in Australia (the notorious dingo baby trial) is an excellent example of how women are punished for not acting out their pre-ordained gender roles. Chamberlain's forthright anger at being accused of murdering her baby and hiding the body made her, in the eyes of the law, and the general public, a woman who was capable of child-murder. Her anger was not read as grief but as a symptom of her non-conformity. Coupled with her outspokenness, Chamberlain was seen as an aberrant figure, as the woman who did not behave as a woman should, who questioned judicial authority, and who was finally sentenced to life imprisonment despite being six months' pregnant.

Chamberlain was not only an outspoken woman, but also carried with her connotations of religious fanaticism, being a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.²² This combination of religious fervour and unswerving conviction in her own story marks Chamberlain as a particularly troublesome figure within a system that pays little heed to a lone, angry, female voice.

Women are therefore placed in a double restraint. To express anger rather than passivity, and to demand justice rather than hope that justice will be done means that all too often the demands of women are read as a challenge to patriarchal law and order. However, in the conflation of gender and sex that the criminal woman represents, the absence or presence of 'correct' gender roles may seem to confuse the issue of equality in the eyes of the law. The recent publicity over the execution of Karla Faye Tucker, after thirteen years on death row, shows that the process of punishment of women killers is a difficult duty to perform, even in Texas, known as the execution capital of America. While thirty-seven men were executed last year in Texas (a third of all executions in the US), Tucker was only the second woman to be executed there since the Civil War.²³

Tucker, who became a born-again Christian in jail, was convicted of killing a man and a woman under the influence of a cocktail of drugs in 1983. Her reputation as a particularly violent woman is fostered primarily because of her confession that she had multiple orgasms while clubbing the couple to death. Her confession showed the anti-social and destructive relationship between sex and violence, for which she received the death penalty. However, in spite of public support for her sentence to be commuted to life imprisonment, her voluntary work in prison and even support from the victims' families who believed that she had truly repented, she was executed by lethal injection after thirteen years on death row. The interest

in Tucker re-introduces questions of retribution, justice and rehabilitation that the application of the death sentence confers on any murder trial, but is more polarized because of her gender. Tucker appeared to have acquired wholesale the appropriate values for her gender: conversion to Christianity, marriage to a pastor while in prison, repentance, and willingness to view her time in prison as an opportunity to help others. She was also an intelligent, attractive and feminine-looking white woman. However, it would appear that her *sex*, rather than her gender, precluded her from special treatment. As a woman, her escape from the death penalty would be seen as an inability on the part of the authorities to treat all prisoners equally under the law. Hence, all press interest was viewed not as a re-evaluation of the necessity of the death penalty, but as interest in the woman's place in the system. As one of her supporters sums up the situation, the international press attention, and calls for clemency, would be unlikely 'if it was Karl Tucker instead of Karla'.²⁴

Both Lindy Chamberlain's and Karla Faye Tucker's situation shows the impossible position of the individual woman in the eyes of the law. She invokes proscription, censure and denial. While appearing not to merit special treatment 'because she's a woman', she often does receive different treatment and the results are often not in her favour. Her difference as a woman is both denied and made obvious. But while the individual woman may suffer discrimination, it is groups of women who suffer most from such censure. Any organized movement by women usually invites the full authoritarian wrath of state, judiciary system and public opinion. As Ann Jones points out, the struggle for women's rights invokes a counter-movement that seeks to disarm this potentially disruptive element by reminding women of their real responsibilities, and warning society at large of the dangers of their deviance.²⁵ Two political movements of this century have suffered such

censure and ridicule: the women's Suffrage movement and the Greenham Common peace movement.

In 1910 one hundred and thirty-five women suffered physical assault during clashes with the police on a demonstration outside the Houses of Parliament on 'Black Friday' when the British Government had decided to abandon a Bill dealing with women's franchise. The action of the women was described by *The Times* as 'an act of wanton and hysterical self-advertisement'.²⁶ Contemporary accounts emphasized the women's disregard for law and order (although being disenfranchised they had no part in defining these laws) and one anonymous journalist advised: 'As a rule political women can always be cured by a vigorous application of the birch'.²⁷ A more contemporary protest at the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp reveals strikingly similar attitudes in the media. Michael Heseltine visited Newbury Conservative Association in 1983, where he stumbled while being escorted through a crowd of protesters. The incident was reported in *The Times* as 'Jeering peace protestors punch minister'²⁸, and in the *Sun* as 'Angry peace girls rough up Heseltine'.²⁹ The women were also reminded of their supposedly abdicated maternal responsibilities:

It's time to go home [...] They have a duty to the families they left behind and the children they took to share the hardship.³⁰

Women who took their children to the camp were awarded special press attention. A May Day children's party was reported in the *Newbury Weekly News* as 'Naked babies thrust into front line of peace battle'.³¹ Greenham women could always be categorized as unwomanly, as the 'unfit mother' and the 'lesbian'. Both labels express the women's failure to be integrated properly in the social order. The very similar attitudes towards the two political movements, though separated by over

seventy years, reveal a complicated nexus of discourses around women and their roles. Women may be labelled as deviant and criminal for merely ignoring calls to modify their behaviour and return to their proper place in society.

The labelling of the Greenham women as deviant and dangerous, while parochial, does openly express fears about the collective agency of women. The more insidious attacks on women are again related to their failure to match up to idealized social roles. Ultimately, there is always a woman to blame. In 1993, the James Bulger case, in which two ten-year old boys killed the two-year old James, exemplifies the power of maternal care and neglect. The media coverage demonized the two boys, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, into psychopathic aberrations, representing a breakdown in normal familial and social relations.³² All three mothers - Ann Thompson, Susan Venables, and, initially, Denise Bulger - were placed under scrutiny in the press, and their skills and failings as mothers were discussed. To a lesser extent, the fathers were also evaluated, but as Robert Thompson's father was absent (later tracked down by the *Daily Mirror*) and the other, Neil Venables, was seen as a passive and gentle man, responsibility was eventually placed on the failings of Ann Thompson and Susan Venables.³³

As Alison Young points out, in her analysis of the coverage of the case, both mothers were vilified for not providing the right type of maternal care for their sons. Ann Thompson, with two children in voluntary care, was seen as a neglectful mother who refused to take responsibility for her son's crime, blaming teachers, police and social workers. Susan Venables, on the other hand, was described as a over-protective and suffocating mother. The analysis of the two women, and their failings, is, in effect, a retrospective attempt to place the murder in coherent, socially acceptable terms. As Young says,

Ann Thompson and Susan Venables are made to represent the breach in the maternal relation that *must* have occurred.³⁴

This particular crime inspired extensive media debate on the social costs of child deprivation and poor parenting, though little was said that challenged the specific roles accorded to women and children in our society. And in spite of the horror it inspired, the similarities between this case and the story of Mary Bell, the eleven year-old who killed two little boys in 1968, was mentioned only in terms of the appalling act of child killing child. The Bulger case was ultimately seen as a modern phenomenon, as an example of how monstrous children had become in the 1990s, as a result of a breakdown in care between the agencies of family, community and state. The pressure placed on the boys' mothers put their parenting skills in the dock as well. The relationship of the mother to the male killer is now so enshrined in culture that it is always scrutinized as damaging. As David Canter asks, with a touch of irony, 'Why do we get no women serial killers living with their over-indulgent, elderly fathers?'.³⁵

David Jackson's analysis of the Bulger case suggests that at its heart lies not the dangers of failed motherhood, but an identity crisis shared by the two young boys within a culture that idolizes the power of masculinity.³⁶ Jackson argues that the sexual elements of the attack on James could be read as a need to take control over a smaller, weaker body. Thus, the two boys were performing, as they saw it, an exaggerated masculine role:

Our culture and society have produced two boys who have killed in order to become masculine.³⁷

Jackson's view of the case points to one of the glaring omissions in the media coverage. In effect, the boys were de-gendered, referred to as children in the

context of their failure to be 'proper' children (innocent, non-sexual, separate from but answerable to the adult world); as evil monsters, and more tellingly, 'bastards'; and as criminals who had committed an adult crime and needed to be punished as such. However, they were not viewed as boys who had overtly sought masculine power.

Deborah Cameron and Liz Frazer, in a feminist study of sex killing (published in 1987) argue that there is a connection between sexual violence and the patriarchal construction of identity and sexuality that is available only for men to pursue.³⁸ Their conclusion, and it appears chillingly accurate in the light of the Rosemary West trial in 1995, was that a female serial killer would become part of this construction and kill women and children, rather than choose men as victims. The similarities between the coverage of the Bulger case, and the coverage of women killers, affirms the suspicion that those sections of society who would normally need protection - women and children - are becoming more violent. However, in terms of the gendering of crime, the victims remain weaker versions of the killers themselves. Therefore, the construction of roles in serial killing becomes an almost normalized enactment of the gendered roles of active and passive, regardless of the sex of the killer or victim.

The media coverage of Rosemary West as 'serial killer' does pose a particular problem in terms of equality in crime. Deborah Cameron's two-part article in *Trouble and Strife* is an attempt to bring a feminist analysis on the media coverage of the trial.³⁹ Cameron places Rosemary West within the construction of 'serial killer' while at the same time opposing the label. Cameron's argument is that in order to make West intelligible, she has become part of a discourse of female criminology that analyses her as 'an extreme example of something already known

to science'.⁴⁰ Rosemary West's activities enabled commentators to express concern about what the American criminologist Otto Pollack calls 'masked crime' - the possibility that women have committed these types of crimes before, but remained unnoticed. Cameron's argument is that while the methodology of 'equal opportunities' presumes women to be the same as men (meaning that they are capable of committing the same type of crimes), it simultaneously decries them as being worse than men. Hence the media coverage of the Wests showed a gender bias:

While commentators overtly made much of the equal depravity of the two partners in crime, it did not treat them equally.⁴¹

Rosemary West's role as mother came under special scrutiny: it was reported that the murders coincided with the times when she was not pregnant (under a headline that merged horror films and reality: 'Rosemary's Babies'⁴²). While Frederick West's attacks on girls and women were almost normalized as in each case there was little or no police action taken, Rosemary West's pathological behaviour was situated at the centre of a family - a potential site of female control and power. The West family is viewed as the product of Rosemary, as mother, rather than Frederick, as father. Even the *Observer's* general comment on the case as 'a ghastly mutation of normality' stresses a grossly perverse reproduction at the heart of the murders.⁴³

Echoes of a 'ghastly mutation' also occur in the case of Beverley Allitt, who as a children's nurse was supposed to save lives rather than destroy them. Allitt was charged in 1993 with the murder of four children and the attempted murder of nine others, over a period of fifty-nine days in 1991. During her trial, Allitt's fascination with the world of hospitals and medicine, and her mental illness, Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy, was revealed. Her media label, 'Angel of

Death' represents the worrying dichotomy between the socially constructed image of nursing as a vocation, and the possibility that such an image may be hiding something monstrous behind it. As Alix Kirsta points out, part of the anger directed towards Allitt is that her madness was in fact hidden so well:

Her gender and nurse's uniform seemed to grant her *automatic* immunity from suspicion.⁴⁴ (author's emphasis)

In the media Beverley Allitt was in turn categorized as evil, mad, deceitful and a lesbian. Her loss of weight was also read as a symptom of evil rather than as a consequence of anorexia. As Bronwyn Naylor points out, while weight loss in women is seen normally as a cause for celebration, Allitt's loss of weight is re-categorized to fit her crimes as an effort to gain pity and to make herself less threatening.⁴⁵ The re-categorization of women functions within the narrative of crime to inform the status of all women. Categories isolate the abnormal woman from the rest of us, to make her more monstrous and, in the end, less recognizable. The media attention devoted to Beverley Allitt and Rosemary West as unattractive women, and the media obsession with their appearance, displays or lack of emotion, and clothes, also becomes a reflection of their deviance from normal gender roles. Such a deviance is an important criterion in their definition as possible serial killers.

Serial killing can therefore be viewed as a crime that is gender-specific rather than sex-specific, in that the victims and their killers can be of either sex. Serial killing involves premeditation, obsessional behaviour, an unknown victim, and murder that has a ritualistic and sexual component. It is also seen as a culturally-specific form of killing in that serial killers are found in developed, urbanized countries. Joel Norris points out that the United States, which is home to 5% of the world's population, has produced 75% of the world's serial killers.⁴⁶ However,

the recognition of a male serial killer is shocking to society but not surprising. Jane Caputi, who argues in *The Age of Sex Crime* that sex crimes are given ritualistic meaning in patriarchal ideology, sees such killings as 'sexually political murder, as functional phallic terrorism'.⁴⁷ Caputi sees such murders and the consequent sensationalizing of the men who perform them as an extension of normal gender roles in society. Caputi's analysis of the heroic mythical figure of Jack the Ripper makes chilling reading:

For while Jack the Ripper can epitomize ultimate horror - the human monster - he can simultaneously be made to seem as domestic and ordinary as Jack Sprat, as playful as Jack in the Box, as familiar a crowd pleaser as Jack and the Beanstalk, as heroic as Jack the Giant Killer and as recurrent as Jack Frost.⁴⁸

The taming and domestication of Jack the Ripper as a figure to whom writers dedicate their books ('not forgetting JACK who brought us together'⁴⁹) has the effect of effacing the murders of five women. As Jack the Ripper is made into a heroic figure of folklore who taunted the police with letters, created his own nickname and then disappeared, the story of Jack is in effect Jack's own. The story of the dead women is only as silent, mutilated victims and their bodies reduced to mere physical evidence of Jack's teasing absence. Suzanne Moore's article describing her visit to 'The Jack the Ripper Experience' at the London Dungeon, mentions 'shoddy dummies' with 'pretend blood', but she also marvels at the success of Ripper merchandising that have re-invented him as a major London tourist attraction.⁵⁰ How can an exhibition, in Moore's words, 'based entirely on the slaughter of women', be made into entertainment? Jack the Ripper, even as an absent anonymous figure, can be made into an acceptable part of our culture: a man who kills women may be monstrous but he is also understandable within the gendered terms of killing. As Lynda Hart points out, 'The Ripper murders seem to have been eminently suitable for dramatic displays'.⁵¹ As the Ripper appears to

have made a point of displaying his victims openly, as grotesque exhibits of his own craftsmanship, so too does the 'Ripper Experience'.

The Visible Female Criminal

The representation of the Ripper is normalized to such a marked degree that we forget that he is unidentifiable. To some extent, Jack the Ripper shares the characteristics of invisibility with the female criminal, who also appears as elusive, undefinable and unrepresentable. The Italian biologist Cesare Lombroso, often described as the father of modern criminology, wrote *The Female Offender* in 1893. Frustrated with inconclusive legal definitions of crime, he studied the physiology of women in prisons in order to draw up a recognisable portrait of the female criminal. However, it became increasingly difficult to quantify his results: attempts to make her visible only confirmed that the female criminal was indistinguishable from the rest of the female population. As this study proved less successful than similar studies on the male criminal (all of whom conveniently showed physical deformities) Lombroso argued that the female of the species, being less differentiated than the male, was more susceptible to criminal tendencies: 'their evil tendencies are more numerous and more varied than men's'.⁵² As Ann Jones points out:

He seemed haunted by the fear that an apparently good woman might, at any unexpected moment, turn out to be bad.⁵³

The difference Lombroso was able to recognize lay in a psycho-social analysis of female offenders: all showed what could be described as unfeminine attributes, a lack of maternal affection, and sexual precocity. Lynda Hart, in summing up Lombroso's research, reaches this conclusion:

The exemplary characteristics of his culture's idea of Victorian white womanhood - piety, maternity, absence of sexual desire, weakness, and

underdeveloped intelligence - keep the 'latent' criminality of *all* women in check. When any of these traits are in abeyance, 'the innocuous semi-criminal present in the normal woman must be transformed into a born criminal more terrible than any man'.⁵⁴ (author's emphasis)

Lombroso's research was carried out at a time when physiognomy was viewed as a useful research tool. Diagnosis by image was a popular legitimization of medical discourse, as a photograph, unlike an artist's drawing, was deemed to present an objective representation. Elaine Showalter's study of women and madness shows the Victorian fascination with photographs, both as a record of illness and as a therapeutic tool used to help asylum inmates. The most famous collection of photographs are those of the hysterics studied by Jean-Martin Charcot, who gave lectures on the condition, illustrated by his hypnotized women patients. Such was the interest shown in his work that the hospital set up a studio and employed a full-time photographer. Showalter describes the hospital as 'an environment in which female hysteria was perpetually presented, represented and reproduced'.⁵⁵

This fascination with the image of the transgressive woman is not simply a nineteenth century phenomenon. In the media there is a specific iconography (which could be called 'the face of evil') which is applied to the face of any woman who commits a violent crime. The press treatment of Maria Hnatiuk, a woman who killed another woman, Rachael Lean, in an apparently motiveless knife attack is a good example. As Hnatiuk failed to give a rational account of the murder, and admitted to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility, explanations for her behaviour were sought and found in her sexual behaviour. Hnatiuk's bisexuality, interest in sado-masochism, and advertising for female sex partners to share with her boyfriend all point to a deviant woman whose sexual appetite was out-of-control. On the other hand, the tabloid press were quick to reassure readers that Rachael Lean was heterosexual and that her friendship with

Hnatiuk stemmed from the fact that they were neighbours who used the same keep-fit studio.

The *Mail*'s headline reads 'Smiling face of student's "wicked killer"'.⁵⁶ Hnatiuk is an attractive blonde, and the picture is obviously a studio shot, showing an innocent-looking and appealing woman [*Figure 1*]. However the 'picture of innocence' is unmasked in the text as a woman who has not only carried out a fatal stabbing, but had also in the past falsely accused one man of rape and two other men of indecent assault. The placing of the image with tales of deceit and murder undermines the apparent innocence of the studio shot, but in another way strengthens the possibility that the picture bears witness to Hnatiuk's deviant and vengeful nature.⁵⁷ A photograph of Hnatiuk in the *Sun* [*figure 2*] is one of the woman celebrating her engagement, and the article begins, 'This is the laughing face of crazed lesbian murderer Maria Hnatiuk - wielding a knife as she cuts a cake'.⁵⁸ The juxtaposing of this image (which, unlike a wedding photo that might show a couple together, shows Hnatiuk alone) with text that describes her as 'lesbian knife fiend' means that, even in retrospect, an apparently innocent image may reveal traces of guilt. The difficulties of producing coherent and objective pictures of women who commit violent acts are governed by an ideology that gives credence to a woman's appearance, but also seeks to impose further secondary meanings onto the image. The emphasis on the woman's image is symptomatic of an ideology that places all women into a context of sexual attraction; the secondary emphasis on the woman's hidden nature is evidence of a metalanguage at work that replaces the initial, innocent meaning of the image - a woman at a party, cutting a cake - with another, more terrifying, meaning.



Smiling
face of
student's
'wicked'
killer

THIS is Maria Hnatiuk, the killer of 18-year-old student Rachael Lean.

At her trial yesterday, 29-year-old Hnatiuk was said to be a bisexual who got a 'buzz from a variety of sexual activities'.

There was no suggestion, the court heard, that her victim was a lesbian, but Hnatiuk may have had a sexual motive in stabbing the RAF technician's daughter to death shortly before she was due to start university.

She denies murdering Miss Lean, but admits manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility.

FULL STORY: PAGE 5

Maria Hnatiuk: She may have had a sexual motive, the court was told

[Daily Mail 12/11/96]

Figure 1: 'Smiling face of student's "wicked" killer'.

KINKY KILLER



Lesbian knife fiend Maria is given life for Rachael murder

EXCLUSIVE

THIS is the laughing face of crazed lesbian murderer Maria Hnatluk — wielding a knife as she cuts a cake.

The sex-mad blonde was jailed for life yesterday for ruthlessly stabbing her teenage girl Rachael Lein more than 50 times.

Rachael's parents burst into tears as a jury decided Hnatluk was guilty of cold-blooded murder and rejected her plea that she was not responsible for her actions.

Other members of the 18-year-old victim's family cheered "Yes!" as the verdict.

Bisexual Hnatluk, 26, may have killed Rachael because the teenager — who had no interest in lesbianism — spurned her advances.

But she took the full

By GORDON RAYNER and CHRIS PHARO

time with us until the day we die is "Why?"

"My daughter just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people."

Mr. Lein, on RAE television, added: "The only person who knows the answer is Hnatluk. And if she told you the reason, would you

[Sun 29/11/96]

Figure 2: 'Kinky killer'.

A common feature in the media coverage of this case is that they portray the murder as a potential threat lurking in the very nature of Hnatiuk's sexual appetites. Rachael Lean's murder was a heinous and seemingly pointless act of violence; however, her story is notably absent from the newspaper reports, who illustrate their coverage with photographs of Hnatiuk in thigh-boots, interviews with her past lovers, and in one bizarre instance, an interview with an ex-lover of one of Hnatiuk's ex-lovers.⁵⁹ As the sexual partners queue for media attention, what is most striking about the case is that Hnatiuk, unlike the majority of women murderers, killed someone with whom she was not intimate, or knew particularly well. In spite of Hnatiuk's predilection for whips and hand-cuffs, her lovers remain alive, while a woman she had known for five weeks is killed. Hnatiuk's act of violence strikes me as a particularly *masculine* act in that it appears to be the random selection and stabbing of a woman. There is, of course, a possibility that Rachael Lean may have rejected her sexually. This murder, therefore, places Hnatiuk in a position that is impossible to define in current crime reportage. How can this blonde blue-eyed woman, her image a symbol of femininity (even to the extent that it masks her deviance), be analysed as a woman of violence in terms of the violence rather than the sex? The newspapers, by seeking to cast the facts to fit the image - the femme fatale who lured innocent victims to her bed - manage to erase the murder altogether.

The relationship between sex and violence makes women killers fascinating both to the media and its consumers. Bronwyn Naylor explains the fascination:

Violence by women offers not only human drama and emotion, but *sexualized* drama and emotion.⁶⁰ (author's emphasis)

Media attention to actions of violence by women appears to be motivated by, first of all, an interest by the public in reading newspapers that forefront violence, and

secondly, a fascination with stories that sexualize crime. As women who kill are most likely to murder their sexual partners, the details of their crimes are replete with the power struggles of apparently normal relationships pushed to the edge. The press pictures of Tracie Andrews, who stabbed her boyfriend, Lee Harvey, and afterwards claimed that he was the victim of a road-rage attack, illustrate the fluidity of the 'face of evil'. Andrews' tear-stained face, with blotchy mascara, wide eyes and set mouth, was seen on 3rd December 1996 on national television as she made an emotional appeal for witnesses to come forward. As her own guilt was established, the same tear-stained image was recycled in newspapers [figure 3].⁶¹ Viewed retrospectively, the image denies her grief and strikingly confirms her deviancy and madness: looking like Alex in *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), with wild blonde hair, a jutting, masculine chin, and staring eyes. Armed with the knowledge of her guilt, Andrews possesses exactly the type of face you would expect of a woman who stabbed her boyfriend, and then lied to cover her guilt. Indeed, interviewed in the *Daily Telegraph*, Lee Harvey's parents recall watching *Fatal Attraction* with Andrews, who, comparing herself to Alex, made the ominous remark, 'I could really be like that'.⁶²

Apart from re-reading the woman's image in order to confirm it as evidence of criminality, images of transgressive women may also become interchangeable. An article in the *Guardian*, 'Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know', is a serious discussion of the legal double standards applied to male and female murderers [figure 4].⁶³ This article is illustrated by pictures of twelve women. However, pictures of Sara Thornton and Kiranjit Ahluwalia (both of whom killed their husbands after domestic violence) are reproduced together with pictures of Ruth Ellis and Myra Hindley, and publicity shots of Juliette Lewis (*Natural Born*



[Guardian 30/7/97]

Figure 3: 'Road rage attack that never was'.



Myra Hindley



The Last Seduction



Natural Born Killers



Sara Thornton



Dolours Price



Susan Christie



Christine English



Anna Reynolds



Kiranjit Ahluwalia



Blue Steel



Terminator 2



Ruth Ellis

[Guardian 8/5/95]

Figure 4: 'Mad, bad and dangerous to know'.

Killers, Oliver Stone, 1994) and Linda Hamilton (*Terminator II: Judgement Day*, James Cameron, 1991). The journalist begins:

Violent, gun-toting women, who wreak bloody revenge and kill with the sang-froid we are used to in our super-macho screen heroes, are the stuff of fashionable films [...] All this may make good box office but it is bad for the women, who, in real life, end up before the courts for violent offences.⁶⁴

Reading the article, which is a serious, analytical piece of journalism, no further reference is made to any women in a film beyond these first two paragraphs.

What purpose does the display of such disparate images serve? Perhaps, the image of the violent woman may indeed be better and more safely expressed by film stars than by ordinary women. The pictures of the 'real' women are depressingly undangerous and ordinary-looking, clad as they are in high street fashions. In fact, most of the photos could sit innocuously in anyone's family album. Far from expressing either innocence or guilt, Sara Thornton's picture is a blurred holiday snapshot showing crooked teeth and over-plucked eyebrows. The images of the filmstars, by contrast, all wear t-shirts to emphasize their sleek and worked-out bodies, and all stare moodily away from the camera. They are also anonymous: their identification is only made by the names of the film in which they appear. The selection of these particular images could be read in two ways. Either, no one single image can hope to represent the unimaginable face of female violence, or else female violence is so multi-faceted that any image may do. Both readings conspire to reduce all the women pictured to one absolute common element - they all, even the film images, represent the reality of female violence.⁶⁵

The instantly recognisable picture of Myra Hindley (taken in 1965, during her interrogation) is an image that fulfils both criteria: it can be used to illustrate any article on violent women, and it serves in its own right as the definitive

representation of Britain's most evil woman. Hindley's own attempts, as well as those of her supporters, to distance herself from the image of thirty years ago have been in vain: in a letter to the *Guardian*, she refers to it as 'that awful mugshot'.⁶⁶ The content of the photograph is immediately transgressive. Gordon Burn describes Hindley's expression as inherently masculine: 'frontal, insolent, the unintimidated direct address to the camera'.⁶⁷ What the public is shown, and therefore constantly reminded of, is not Hindley as she exists today, but an eternal image of perverse femininity, 'the unknowable blonde with a heart of steel'.⁶⁸

As Helen Birch points out, the image of the blonde, especially the peroxide blonde, is seen in cinematic terms as a sign of sexual activity and aberration.⁶⁹ In the *Guardian* article [figure 4], Ruth Ellis' picture, in keeping with her reputation as 'tart with a heart', is an informal and relaxed snapshot, while Hindley's is a police photograph taken at the time of her arrest. Because of the obvious criminal connotations of producing an image for purely identification purposes, it is assumed to show more of the 'real' Myra Hindley. Helen Birch believes that this image is an evocative denial of what society expects of young womanhood:

It seems to distance us from the 'monster' it depicts, while reminding us of our own potential for 'evil'. This is perhaps one reason why we find the gaze of a sexually active, childless woman who killed children so profoundly disturbing.⁷⁰

Helen Birch returns to this picture, in an article in the *Independent* comparing the parallels between Rosemary West and Myra Hindley.⁷¹ This article is illustrated by a picture that could be said to show both the power and the instability of the 'face of evil'. The image is a face made up of two halves: one half is that of Myra Hindley and the other, Rosemary West [figure 5]. The words surrounding this image read 'Women Killers', and Birch asks:



[Independent 23/11/95]

Figure 5: 'Women killers'.

Could it be that the image of a dumpy 41-year-old motherly-looking woman in oversize glasses and cardigan takes the place of Hindley's fatal blonde as the modern archetype of womanhood gone bad?⁷²

This is, without irony, a serious question for a newspaper to ask, and Birch's article is a serious discussion of the media condemnation of the two women, whose actions are seen as far more evil than those of their male partners. But the image goes further than simply representing a photo-editor's dilemma. West's image does not have the immediacy of Hindley's, the face that speaks volumes without the need of newsprint. West's image lacks the convenience of recognition. But the juxtaposing of the two faces does presume a recognition that goes beyond the crimes of the two women. As Roland Barthes suggests, 'The journalist [...] starts with a concept and seeks a form for it'.⁷³ The sign of 'woman killer' steps beyond its twinned signifieds, presuming not only an immediate recognition of the faces but also the recognition of their productive value as images. As a result, the image teasingly implies that its primary meaning is about 'the new standard by which female evil is judged'⁷⁴, as if it were a type of bizarre beauty competition.

However the secondary meaning, far removed from the words of the article, imply that women are interchangeably monstrous, that the female criminal is still evading detection, and that the two women are somehow joined in presenting a united front in the face of public outrage. In effect, the doubled face warns what women might become. But by putting the two faces together, a real face is not revealed at all. The end result is that of a police photo-fit of a suspect, marking the potential of a new cultural reference point for representing evilness. It would be impossible to picture a similar exercise featuring Ian Brady's or Frederick West's faces put together in the same way. For women, their image conveys their identity. As male actions are supposed to define their masculinity, their behaviour,

however anti-social and violent, is not illustrated by their image but by reputation. In spite of the revulsion inspired by Frederick West, I cannot find any reference to him as 'manhood gone bad'. But as Frederick West committed suicide and Ian Brady has now been declared insane, both men are conveniently out of the picture.

Furthermore, Hindley's image, rather than West's, continues to be controversial. The portrait of Myra Hindley by Marcus Harvey is a composite of the original police photograph, reproduced using replicas of a child's handprints [figure 6]. Part of 'Sensation', a collection of work by young British artists at the Royal Academy, and measuring eleven feet by nine feet, the size of the image is both uncompromising and inescapable. The representation of Hindley, the archetypal child-killer, as if she is part of a child's artwork is shocking and thought-provoking. In fact, the word 'portrait' is defunct here: the picture has nothing to do with the face of Hindley, but is a telling reminder of the use of her image in our culture. As a powerful and provocative image, Hindley-as-art reduces the reality of the woman: it reiterates the statement of the image as myth. Though the photograph is endlessly reproduced at every opportunity in newspapers, the obvious reference to its artificial existence as an icon of female criminality effectively displaces the real Hindley, and instead opens up the question of how this image can be re-represented as art. The demonstrations outside the gallery, and the media coverage of the art exhibition show the extent to which this particular image still invokes fear and revulsion. The portrait had to be removed for cleaning for three weeks after paint and eggs were thrown at it: the *Daily Mirror*, which itself is not adverse to displaying Hindley's photograph, stated in a banner headline that the artwork was 'Defaced by the People in the Name of Common Decency'.⁷⁵



[Reproduced in *Independent* on Sunday 31/8/97]

Figure 6: Marcus Harvey's 'Myra'.

Marcus Harvey, the artist, describes the power of the Hindley image as 'the realisation of a certain kind of Nazi/Marilyn Monroe/Frankenstein fantasy'.⁷⁶ His description sums up the process by which this particular image has been organized: the legend of Hindley and Brady's fascination with fascism, the cultural fascination with the blonde woman, the manufacturing of Hindley's identity as an eternally-threatening persona. In a culture where images are circulated endlessly, Hindley's police photograph is now far removed from its original purpose as identification of her as a suspect identity.

'True' Crime

The full extent to which identification of violent women can be manipulated is illustrated by Aileen Wuornos, currently on death row after receiving four separate death sentences for killing seven men. There is no doubt that Wuornos, who was working as a hitchhiking prostitute, did kill these men, though she claims that the killings were carried out in self-defence. Wuornos' appeal against her death sentences is in part a plea to have the media label of 'America's first female serial killer' removed. She argues that the term 'serial killer' implies that the murders were premeditated, that she stalked her victims and that the killings sparked some sort of cathartic sexual release. Lynda Hart quotes a woman presenter from NBC's *Dateline* programme who describes Wuornos' killings as a reversal of normality:

This is a story of unnatural violence. The roles are reversed. Most serial killers kill prostitutes.⁷⁷

Wuornos has therefore committed doubly unnatural acts. The prostitute who kills her clients, in a reversal of the Jack the Ripper role, undermines a notably heterosexual economic relationship. As Hart points out,

As an 'unrepentant' prostitute, Wuornos circulated herself; and as a lesbian, she simultaneously insisted on controlling the terms of that exchange.⁷⁸

Wuornos' actions also undermine the idealized notion, again rooted in heterosexual orthodoxy, that women may kill their abusers, but only if they have been married to them and have suffered years of domestic violence. The presence of Wuornos, who refuses to show remorse for her killings, negates the neat ideological constructions of women who kill. The first construction is that murder by women is a passionate event, sparked by emotion. Thus women who kill abusive husbands denote not an attack on current social and cultural values, but a breakdown within and hence contained by an intimate family relationship. Secondly, women who kill outside this construction can be instantly pathologized into 'not-women', as deviations from the ideal of femininity, and again contained. Wuornos' continuing assessment of herself as the victim of events, as Harts points out, draws attention to:

A cultural, collective trauma, a systematic, normative violence in which straight, white, middle-aged 'everymen' repetitively assume their right of access to women's bodies.⁷⁹

Nick Broomfield's documentary, *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer* charts the bizarre, mercenary reactions to this definition of Wuornos.⁸⁰ Her attempt to commute her multiple death sentences to life imprisonment is based on the evidence that police officers involved in her investigation and capture sold their stories to Hollywood film companies. Wuornos argues that her title was created, not by psychiatrists or counsellors, but by police officers in order to increase interest over film rights. Wuornos' lover, Tyria Moore, although implicated in some of the murders, was granted immunity in exchange for her testimony, and was also given a contract for film rights. It is theoretically possible that evidence

that police officers have profited from the Wuornos case may help to overturn her death sentences.⁸¹

This situation strikes at the heart of the possible 'real' representation of crime: reality must be watered down to provide entertainment. Finally, Wuornos, as a lesbian, prostitute, and man-killer is re-constructed in cinematic mythical ideology in the film *Overkill* (Peter Levin, 1992) as an attractive blonde femme fatale: her sexual relationship with her 'roommate' is effectively erased. While, in reality, their relationship was openly discussed in court, with Wuornos stating that she confessed to all seven murders in order to protect Moore, this professing of lesbian desire is deleted in the film. Its absence confirms that the tailoring of Wuornos' story for public consumption leaves little space for the woman's story in dominant ideology. Wuornos, in spite of her efforts to re-evaluate her role as a producer in the male economy, becomes an object of exchange, circulated within a mode of representation over which she has no control. Wuornos appears transgressive enough - a prostitute and a murderer - without further complications.

The filmed story of Wuornos is not so much about her, but how she should be perceived within a fantasy society that is moral, benign and tolerant. The criminal is the 'evil' person that must be caught and punished so that ordinary citizens can go about their business. *Overkill* is no worse than most other made-for-television true crime stories in that it sells itself on the promise of a shocking expose, but tends, in the end, to restrict the woman's story to one that is coherent only within the terms of patriarchal ideology. True crime becomes another genre rather than a mode of representation that reveals a 'truth'. Helen Birch argues that the boundaries between the representation of the woman who kills and the real woman 'become so blurred as to be almost indistinguishable'.⁸² The film that best

exemplifies this blurring of boundaries is *Fatal Attraction* which became the second highest-earning film in the year that it was released (1987). This was due less to critical acclaim than to the collective response of the general public and the media.

The story of how a brief extra-marital affair becomes at first an embarrassment, and then a nightmare, for its male participant/victim, produced a range of vehement emotions in its audiences, which in turn sparked off an enormous media response which can only be described as an attempt to expose the 'reality' of the film. As Chris Holmlund says, 'Clearly this film, more than most, was and is attuned to something in our national psyche'.⁸³ Susan Faludi describes the audience participation of *Fatal Attraction*, according to a young female cinema usher:

Sometimes I like to sneak into the theatre in the last twenty minutes of the movie. All these men are screaming, "Beat that bitch! Kill her off now!" The women, you never hear them say anything. They are all just sitting there, real quiet.⁸⁴

Newspaper articles and television interviews showed how the film revealed to world-wide audiences not only the universal problem of the 'eternal love triangle', but also the more contemporary and conspicuous dilemmas of the 1980s: the fear of the stalking single female, and ultimately, the precarious position of the middle-class nuclear family. Judith Williamson's apt description of *Fatal Attraction* sums up its emotional, psychological and political stance: 'a horror film in yuppy-melodrama land'.⁸⁵

Liahna Babener stresses its important cultural legacy in the introduction to the *Journal of Popular Culture* special issue on the film:

Fatal Attraction is more than a memorable and provocative movie; it is arguably the most forceful cultural emblem of its era, a phenomenon which has become deeply imbedded in the national consciousness.⁸⁶

For such an excessively mainstream, commercial and formulaic Hollywood film, *Fatal Attraction* has inspired much public and critical attention, dwelling especially on the figure of Alex. Paradoxically, even the most bizarre and vindictive of Alex's actions seem to provoke discussions on the nature of the single woman, and the threat she posed to the married man. For Joan Smith, many of Alex's actions, as well as her appearance, can be read as reliant on a historically constructed fear of witchcraft.⁸⁷ The route to Alex's apartment in the New York district of Hell's Kitchen 'resembles a journey through the outer circles of the Inferno'⁸⁸, where carcasses of slaughtered animals are displayed for sale. Even the connection between Alex's status as a single woman and her close proximity to the 'cattle market' aptly sum up the film's attitude to women who remain outside the normalizing influence of the nuclear family.

The film has left a lasting legacy. Chris Holmlund mentions that 'the term "fatal attraction" has become part of our natural vocabulary'.⁸⁹ Liahna Babener describes how criminologists now assess women who hound or stalk ex-partners as suffering from 'fatal attraction syndrome'.⁹⁰ (This is, of course, a far more evocative term than the original clinical condition known as 'Clerambault's syndrome'.) Reality appears to become so conflated with the film that Oprah Winfrey can introduce an interviewee on her chat-show as "Ann is Glenn Close, she's living it".⁹¹ Thus, the relationship between the transgressive woman, the role and the actress who portrays her are conflated into one dreadful persona.

Chris Holmlund describes how both Adrian Lyne the director, and actress Glenn Close, as well as other people involved with the film, revealed 'true-life' instances of a fatal attraction in their lives, presenting the situation as both a common

occurrence and as a possibly dangerous situation. The legal recognition of stalking as a crime are juxtaposed with Alex's needs which are based on emotions shared by everyone: the need for love and acknowledgement. Amy Taubin's reaction to the film seems a remarkably honest assessment of how the film affected women on a personal level:

My immediate response [...] was not so much to identify with Alex as to be terrified that others might spot a resemblance between us.⁹²

Taubin's fears of being 'recognized' show how the film has successfully played on the fears surrounding the single woman, whose status marks her as alien to the normality of the nuclear family, and an embodiment of the choice between children or career. The logical progression of the choices made available to the female characters in the film seems to be a stark matter of life or death. The conclusion must be that all women existing outside marriage do pose a threat. Their fate is neatly and bluntly summed up by Susan Bromley and Patricia Hewitt:

In the 1980s the single career woman must be killed in order to preserve the sanctity of the family.⁹³

Fatal Attraction makes such fears visible: thus it not only reflects current social anxieties but it also allows for a sense of cathartic pleasure that such fears are exposed and resolved, made manifest in the figure of the transgressive woman. The film's concern about a 'hidden menace' that may threaten the sanctity of the family paradoxically reveals that its enemy is the woman who would appear to be perfect wife material: heterosexual, white, and appears to want nothing more than a husband and children. Such an active desire reveals the transgression: rather than waiting to be asked, the woman who actively desires marriage and motherhood undermines patriarchal strictures that require her to be passive in order to be desirable.

Writers on the film have mentioned that test audiences were dissatisfied with the original ending of the film, in which Alex kills herself but implicates Dan as her murderer.⁹⁴ The revised ending of the film culminates in a fight in Dan and Beth's home. Dan apparently drowns Alex in the bath, but she re-emerges, to be shot by Beth. The closing moments of the film show Dan and Beth hugging each other, with the police arriving to take Alex's body. The film is therefore intent on showing their reconciliation, and on leaving the narrative closed prematurely without any recourse to the possible illegality of Alex's death, or of the possibility of a murder trial. Jim Hala's analysis of *Fatal Attraction* uses Propp's inventory of functions that occur repeatedly in Russian and Eastern European folklore.⁹⁵ For Hala, Beth is the 'hero-seeker' whose task is defined as soon as she banishes Dan, the hero-victim, from the family home: due to her position in the narrative, *she* must destroy the villain, Alex. Dan has been emasculated to the extent that, while the film's narrative is told from his point of view, he is not in control of events. Hala argues that the film's success may be in part to do with the portrayal of Dan's feminization and lack of control rather than due to the excesses of Alex:

Fatal Attraction argues not only that women like Alex who take on traditionally male roles are psychotically disturbed and dangerous, but also that men who abdicate their expected roles are equally dangerous and disturbed and will prove destructive to those around them [...] *Dan fails because he surrenders male authority to women.*⁹⁶ (my emphasis)

It would appear that part of the anxiety around the preservation of gender roles is the likelihood of a crossing of boundaries. The possibility of female action poses a question around the borders of sexual difference. As critical and media reactions to *Fatal Attraction* reveal, the portrayal of female violence is viewed as more disturbing when set against male helplessness.

Both *Fatal Attraction* and an early prototype, *Play Misty for Me* (Clint Eastwood, 1971), reveal the terrifying prospect of a man at the mercy of a sexually active woman. In each film, the male characters initiate sex with a woman stranger, in spite of having existing female partners: David, the DJ in *Play Misty for Me* appears to be single but has an estranged girlfriend. Therefore, the reason for the woman's transgression is shown first by her participation in alleviating male sexual need. Her consequent behaviour can be read as a reluctance to acknowledge her own lack of agency in this heterosexual conquest. Her story becomes a pathologized need. With the narrative providing no insight into the female characters' mental state, apart from their obvious madness, both films deal entirely with the male characters' fears and desires: male subjectivity is privileged over the female.

While the reality of male violence towards women or each other may upset social relations, it does not undermine an apparently fixed and irrevocable social order. In Hollywood film, cross-gender violence, while seeming to disrupt such an order, emphasizes the gender disruption by focusing on the 'unfemininity' of the aggressive woman. In *Play Misty for Me*, Evelyn has short hair, wears trousers and has a habit of voyeurism, spying on David and his girlfriend, Tobie. Adam Knee's analysis of the film shows that Evelyn's gaze dominates throughout the film and has the consequence of both eroticizing and victimizing the figure of David.⁹⁷ In fact her appropriation of the male gaze is made explicit when at the violent climax of the film she destroys a portrait of David, beginning by stabbing at his eyes. Knee argues, however, that the killing of Evelyn by David repudiates any notion that the film may be viewed as an enlightened exploration of masculinity in the light of modern social values:

The film's conclusion finally serves not to question [David's] masculinity so much as to violently attack the feminine forces which insist upon such questioning.⁹⁸

Within a system of narrative that pathologizes female aggression, men who are victims of female violence are placed in a masochistic and therefore feminized position. This serves to accentuate the unnaturalness of both their position and the status of their aggressor. In *Misery* (Rob Reiner, 1990), a writer with broken legs is imprisoned by Annie Wilkes, his 'Number One Fan', who gives him both the expert nursing care he needs and punishes him when he tries to escape. This 'particularly prolonged and brutal sadistic reversal'⁹⁹ is made more traumatic as the figure of Paul Sheldon, unable to walk, becomes over-feminized in a number of ways. The horrors of helplessness arising from the reducing of a healthy male into infantilized dependence place the film's emphasis entirely on Paul's prone and defenceless body. Shots of the room in which he is imprisoned are shown from the level of his bed. From Paul's point of view, Annie's face becomes monstrous and distorted: at such an angle, the lower half of her face is accentuated and eye contact is minimal. From these camera angles, what we notice of Annie is her mouth and huge lower jaw, as Paul strains to understand her and her motives, to forestall her rages and gain her approval.

Paul becomes a baby again, in the care of an all-devouring oral sadistic mother. Annie's oral powers, her sudden irrational outbursts coupled with a cosy bedside manner, extend to the control of Paul's use of language. Under her nurturing, Paul must re-learn language and write more innocent prose. Annie burns the transcript of his new novel when her favourite character, 'Misery' dies in childbirth and orders him to write another, showing her death to be an error. The name 'Misery'

reflects both the downtrodden status of the fictional heroine, and Paul's situation at the hands of Annie. The irony is that Annie identifies with Misery, a pathetic figure of submission, while continuing to imprison and torture Paul. Paul's powers of creation again point to his uniquely feminized position, as only he can give life to Misery. Not only is male subjectivity privileged, the male figure also appears as a controlling creative influence. There is more than a passing similarity between the DJ who is continually asked to play a record (the title of the film, *Play Misty for Me*, refers to a song that Evelyn constantly requests David to play) and the writer who is forced to write. Male creativity or male control over creativity are in sharp contrast with the women who appear to make no creative or productive contribution to society.¹⁰⁰ Such insistent demands also have connotations with the grossness of heightened female sexual appetites demanding a better male sexual performance.

There are obvious similarities between *Misery* and an early Clint Eastwood film, *The Beguiled* (Don Siegel, 1971), where Eastwood plays a soldier wounded in the American Civil War who takes sanctuary at a girls' school. In *Misery* Paul Sheldon's injuries, though severe, are temporary - he is shown at the end of the film walking with a stick. In contrast, McBurney, Eastwood's character in *The Beguiled*, has his leg amputated by the school's teachers, an unnecessary operation motivated (apparently) by the conflicts between female sexual frustration and fear of male sexual desire. McBurney is outraged at this attack on his body, and the staff and pupils, fearing his anger, eventually poison him. Paul Smith argues that *The Beguiled* was not a commercially successful film because its attack on the male body, especially on such an icon of masculinity as Clint Eastwood, does not follow the normal Hollywood code of the transcendence of the male body over destruction:

The masochistic stage of such narratives cannot be presented as a complete castration, and the [...] possibility of transcendence must always be kept available. The masochistic trope in this sense must be no more than a *temporary* test of the male body.¹⁰¹ (author's emphasis)

In order to reduce the anxiety that the feminized male body may produce, Smith sees the male figure of masochism as one that must always overcome the demands placed on his body.

Thus, it would appear from these films that male passivity and female aggression become entwined in a symbiotic relationship. Such a relationship develops beyond a simple 'cause and effect' scenario. Does Dan's passivity provoke Alex's aggression, or does her aggression invoke his passivity? Likewise, in a different context, is Paul's accident rather than his novels the real impetus for Annie's obsession and sadism? Can these films portray only the terrors of male victimization, made tangible where men are at the mercy of pathological women? If this is the case, male victimization becomes the most disruptive element in the narrative: female aggression is merely the most convenient method in which to express it. *Fatal Attraction* - and this might explain its popular appeal - bypasses the anxieties of cross-gender violence by pitting woman against woman. This appears to be the most effective way of defeating the challenge to the patriarchal order, by electing another woman to subdue the threat.

Victims and Killers

The popularity of films like *Fatal Attraction*, *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992), *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), *Blue Steel* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1990), *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), as well as the continuing saga of Ripley in

the *Alien* quartet of films, show that the portrayal of certain types of aggressive women makes good box office sense. However, in *Fatal Attraction* the dichotomy of the female role - the angel versus the whore, the good wife versus the bad career woman - symbolizes the contemporary fears surrounding the family and normal gender roles. According to Liahna Babener, many of the films released at the end of the Reagan era 'seem ultimately to enforce a markedly conservative and simplistic social ideology'.¹⁰² The woman who kills is a threat, not to the individual, but to society at large. She undermines patriarchal relations, gender roles, family structure and the idealized image of femininity in one swift, stabbing action. Paradoxically, while the real woman who kills remains difficult to define, her counterpart in Hollywood film is now easily recognized.¹⁰³ She becomes the visible part of a cultural need to identify female transgression, and place her in a coherent position where the damage she inflicts is made obvious. Viewed in this way, the woman on screen has much in common with the perceived notion of the threatening figure of female criminality. Unlike the male killer, she poses a challenge to 'acceptable' limits of violence.

The continuing interest in the figure of the transgressive woman reveals one particularly successful facet of patriarchy. Feminist campaigns on rape and domestic violence have sought to show that abuse of women is a symptom of patriarchal authority which places *all* women under threat.¹⁰⁴ In other words, our culture creates the conditions where such violence can occur. However, rape and domestic abuse are still viewed as events of violence that occur between *individuals*. Within the law, each crime receives individual attention, as a breakdown of personal relations that affects only the perpetrator and the victim. Feminist rhetoric cannot compete against patriarchal ideology that states that individual men are to be held accountable for their actions. However, when

violent crimes are committed by women and children, a different set of criteria are applied. The woman or child is viewed as a representative of a covert, anti-social and disruptive force that undermines patriarchal norms. Helen Birch's comment on the 'blurring of boundaries' between reality and representation holds for only certain sections of the community. The public concern over the availability of the film *Child's Play III* (Jack Bender, 1991) and its possible influence over the two young killers of James Bulger (though this claim was later shown to be unfounded¹⁰⁵) is one example of patriarchal ideology seeing connections between culture and violence. Women, children and teenagers are seen as particularly susceptible to influences from which adult men are immune.

This view of susceptibility is upheld by the responses from critics on seeing *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991). It was seen as a film expressing the very worst and unhealthiest aspects of female misandry, feminist rhetoric and promotion of women's violence. As *Thelma and Louise* has proved popular with female audiences, it appears that even though the film does not deal seriously with the issues of date rape, arming women or the breakdown of marriage, its popularity shows that women are interested in films that address these issues. More worrying, we appear to derive pleasure in a film that shows law-breaking as a way to resolving them. Responses to the film have been extreme: 'an explicit fascist theme' linked to 'the bleakest form of feminism' is a description from one critic, 'degrading to men', 'a recruiting film for the National Rifle Association' from others.¹⁰⁶ Another critic described the film as 'a post-feminist howl of self-immolating fury'.¹⁰⁷ As the violence (and fury) in the film is minimal, it would appear that such evaluations of the film stem from a reaction against (female) audience pleasure. What would happen, the reviewers appear to be saying, if the film became reality?

The concern that life may be imitating art, at least in terms of female criminality, can be seen in newspaper reports linking *Thelma and Louise* to real crimes. In Alix Kirsta's study of female criminality, she gives one example of two women arrested in Florida after robbing men at gunpoint, who became known as 'America's first Real-Life Thelma and Louise'. Journalists were quick to stress the relationship between the film and the real crimes being committed by the women. The *Independent's* report of the arrest and trial of the two, Rose Marie Turford and Joyce Stevens, begins:

Two women who imitated the film *Thelma and Louise* by leading the FBI on a five-month cross-country hunt last year have come to the point where reality and the script part company: instead of a slow-motion plunge over a cliff in their car, their ending features the long-arm of Texan law.¹⁰⁸

This style of reportage bypasses objectivity by inviting the reader to draw a parallel between the film and the unrelated crimes of Turford and Stevens, who set up a bogus escort agency in order to rob customers. That the victims were male, were unharmed, and often too embarrassed to report the robberies brings a humorous element to the story. The reportage is both a reductive analysis of the women's crimes, and also an attempt to give them a mythologized status and motivation separated from reality. As in Aileen Wuornos' case, such reporting ignores the conflicts of the inverted economic relationship set up by the two women: the theft of money from the male client by the escort. The women become imitators of crime rather than innovators, and the threat of women reversing the system of power between prostitute and client is side-stepped. The two women are obviously sharing an entertaining fantasy. Why else would two apparently normal women, one married with three children, the other the daughter of a minister, commit robbery if not to imitate a film?

Ultimately, the use of the term 'Fatal Attraction' or the description 'Thelma and Louise' becomes a shorthand term, a myth that needs no further analysis, only recognition that women are once again acting out of line. In the case of Turford and Stevens, establishing a connection between myth and reality makes their crime meaningless when placed out of context with the film. And the flexibility of the myth means that one standard formula can be tailored to fit any women, whatever the circumstances, as this excerpt from the *Daily Telegraph* reveals:

Police find runaway pensioners: Mrs Winifred Bristow, 76, and Mrs Joan Payne, 74, were dubbed 'Thelma and Louise' after the film in which two women went on the run. The sisters were discovered in a rented cottage [...] in Bury St Edmunds.¹⁰⁹

While these two particular cases have a comic element to them, it should be noted that this same label of 'Thelma and Louise' was also applied to Aileen Wuornos and her lover before they were caught.¹¹⁰

There appear to be a number of ways in which both *Fatal Attraction* and *Thelma and Louise* can be assimilated into current ideological values: as reliable insights into women's psyches; as a motivating factor for women criminals; even, as witnessed by the Peugeot 106 advertising campaign based on *Thelma and Louise*, as a successful marketing ploy. This last aspect is one way of reducing the threat, of subduing those elements in the film that might cause difficulty, by circumventing the women and making the car the star.¹¹¹ But the most successful method, heralded by those newspaper reports which compound fact with fiction, is the subsuming of both films into a mythology of transgressive women who

threaten us all. The following chapters will, I hope, provide a means of destabilizing and questioning the myth of the woman who kills. Looking at each film in depth will reveal the construction of the transgressive woman as a product of film, culture and ideology. That these women represent cultural anxieties about women's autonomy and women's roles is not surprising. Produced by a system of representation in which women are already a source of disquiet, desire and potential disorder, Hollywood films, in particular, become conduits for expressing the fears of patriarchy. To paraphrase Ann Jones, the story of women who kill in films is the story of all women in films.

NOTES

1. Nicole Ward Jouve, *The Street-Cleaner: The Yorkshire Ripper Case on Trial* (London: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 31.
2. Aileen Wuornos, quoted in Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 142.
3. Ann Lloyd, *Doubly Deviant, Doubly Damned: Society's Treatment of Violent Women* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994)
4. Total convictions for all offences were 236,000 for women and 1,269,100 for men. (Home Office figures in Lloyd, op. cit., p. 55).
5. Overall, the proportion of murders committed by women has never been higher than 15% of the total figure: this is a percentage quoted by many sources, notably Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), and Elliott Leyton, *Men of Blood: Murder in Modern England* (London: Constable, 1995).
6. Leyton, op. cit., p. 10. To put the figures into perspective, Leyton points out that, in 1993, the murder rate in New York City was twenty-five times the murder rate in England. Recent comparative figures for cities in 1997, announced on BBC Radio news (19.8.98), put London's murder rate at 2 murders per 100,000, while New York has a rate of 17 per 100,000 and Brussels, 18 per 100,000.
7. Figures given in Bronwyn Naylor, 'Women's crime and media coverage', in *Gender and Crime*, ed. by R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash and Lesley Noaks (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1995), pp. 77-95 (p. 80).
8. Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), p. xvii.

9. Ibid, p. xxviii.
10. Alison Young, *Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), p. 42.
11. Hart, op. cit., p. 13.
12. Alix Kirsta, *Deadlier than the Male: Violence and Aggression in Women* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 138.
13. Beverley Allitt was convicted in 1991 for the murder of four children; Rosemary West was convicted in 1995 for the murder of ten women and girls; Aileen Wuornos was convicted in 1992 for the murder of seven men.
14. Hart, op. cit., p. 13.
15. Joyce Johnson, *What Lisa Knew: The Truth and Lies of the Steinberg Case* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p. 247.
16. Hedda Nussbaum's lawyer was Barry Scheck, who recently defended Louise Woodward.
17. Susan M Edwards, *Women on Trial* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
18. Figures given in Hilary Allen, *Justice Unbalanced: Gender, Psychiatry and Judicial Decisions* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), Appendix 1.
19. Ibid, p. 35.
20. Case investigated by Hilary Allen, cited in Sylvie Frigon, 'A genealogy of women's madness', in *Gender and Crime*, ed. by R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash and Lesley Noaks (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp. 28-48 (p. 41).
21. Helena Kennedy, *Eve was Framed: Women and British Justice* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 218.
22. For an excellent discussion of the multiple representations of Lindy Chamberlain, see Briar Wood, 'The Trials of Motherhood: The Case of Azaria and Lindy Chamberlain', in *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, ed. by Helen Birch (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 62-94. John Bryson's *Evil Angels* (Victoria, Australia: Viking, 1985) is the story of the trial and the media-orchestrated campaign against Chamberlain, and was used as the basis of the film, *A Cry in the Dark* (Fred Schepisi, 1988), starring Meryl Streep.
23. Joanna Coles, 'A Few Hours to Live', *Guardian* Second section, 3 February 1998, pp. 2-3 (p. 2).
24. Ibid, p. 2.
25. Jones, op. cit., p. xx.
26. *The Times*, 3 March 1912, cited in Sylvie Frigon, 'A genealogy of women's madness', op. cit., p. 39.

27. *The Englishwoman*, 1 1 [n.d.], cited in *A Feminist Dictionary*, ed. by Cherris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler (London: Pandora, 1985), p. 435.
28. *The Times*, 8 February 1983, cited in Carola Addington, 'Greenham and the media', in *Out of Focus: Writings on Women and the Media*, ed. by Kath Davies, Julianne Dickey and Teresa Stratford (London: Women's Press, 1987), pp. 118-125 (p. 120).
29. *Sun*, 8 February 1983, cited in Addington, 'Greenham and the Media', p. 120.
30. *Sun*, 26 August 1983, cited in Addington, p. 121. (ellipses as cited).
31. *Newbury Weekly News*, 5 May 1983, cited in Addington, p. 120.
32. The Labour Government's introduction of curfews for children last summer was seen as an attempt to reduce child crime. However, the killing of James Bulger took place in the afternoon, with both boys making sure that they were home in time for tea.
33. In Gitta Sereny's two-part article in the *Independent on Sunday* (6 February and 13 February 1994), she reports that while questioning Jon Venables, the police asked his father for help, saying, 'it's time for you to be a man.' Cited in Young, *Imagining Crime*, op. cit., p. 122.
34. Young, op. cit., p. 125.
35. David Canter, *Criminal Shadows: Inside the Mind of the Serial Killer* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 217.
36. David Jackson, *Destroying the Baby in Themselves: Why Did Two Boys Kill James Bulger?* (Nottingham: Mushroom Publications, 1995)
37. Ibid, p. 41.
38. Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder* (London: Polity Press, 1987), cited in Deborah Cameron, 'Wanted: The First Female Serial Killer', *Trouble and Strife*, 33 (Summer 1996), 21-28, and 34 (Winter 1996/97), 44-52 (p. 21).
39. Deborah Cameron, 'Wanted: The First Female Serial Killer', *Trouble and Strife*, 33 (Summer 1996), 21-28, and 34 (Winter 1996/97), 45-52.
40. Ibid, p. 25.
41. Ibid, p. 28.
42. Nicci Gerrard, 'Rosemary's Babies', *Observer*, Review Section, 26 November 1995, pp. 1-2
43. Ibid, p. 2.
44. Kirsta, op. cit., p. 271.
45. Naylor, op. cit., p. 90.

46. Joel Norris, *Serial Killers: The Growing Menace* (London: Arrow, 1990), p. 38.
47. Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 2.
48. Ibid, p. 17.
49. Dedication by Donald Rumbelow in *The Complete Jack the Ripper*, cited in Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime*, op. cit., p. 15.
50. Suzanne Moore, 'Murder most profitable', *Guardian*, Second section, 6 August 1993, p. 5.
51. Hart, op. cit., p. 63.
52. Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (1895), cited in Lloyd, *Doubly Deviant*, op. cit., p. 39.
53. Jones, op. cit., p. xxii.
54. Hart, op. cit., p. 12.
55. Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 150.
56. Michael Seamark, 'Smiling face of student's "wicked" killer', *Daily Mail*, 12 November 1996, pp. 1 and 5 (p. 1).
57. The *Daily Express* titled the story as 'Face of Evil', and commented on Hnatiuk's 'deadly smile'. Bob McCowan, *Daily Express*, 29 November 1996, p. 1.
58. 'Kinky Killer', *Sun*, 29 November 1996, p. 1.
59. Dawn Ramsey, interview, "Crazed Maria kept staring at me with her dead eyes", *Sun*, 29 November 1996, pp 4-5.
60. Naylor, op. cit., p. 80.
61. Vivek Chaudhary, 'Road rage attack that never was', *Guardian*, 30 July 1997, p. 8.
62. Caroline Davies and Maurice Weaver, "'Stop seeing her or she'll kill you", said sister', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 July 1997, p. 4.
63. Angela Neustatter, 'Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know', *Guardian* Second section, 8 May 1995, pp. 4-5. The title of the article is taken from Lady Caroline Lamb's journal and is actually a description of Lord Byron.
64. Ibid, p. 4.
65. I have tried to find similar uses of of film images to denote male crime: the only example I have come up with is the image of Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal Lecter (*The Silence of the Lambs*, Jonathan Demme, 1990). Pictures of Lecter (complete with hockey mask) were used to illustrate the trial of Jeffrey Dahmer in 1992 when reports of Dahmer's cannibalism came to light. Later that year,

pictures of Lecter were used again during the trial of a Russian man, Andrei Chikatilo, when bitemarks were found on the bodies of some of his fifty-two victims. According to psychiatric reports, Chikatilo was not a real cannibal, but his striking resemblance to Hannibal Lecter was obviously too good an opportunity for tabloid newspapers to resist making the connection. Lecter's pathology is very specific: what I have failed to find is the use of a general image of male violence.

66. Myra Hindley, letter to *Guardian*, dated 4 October 1995.

67. Gordon Burn, 'The Height of the Morbid Manner', *Guardian Weekend Magazine*, 6 September 1997, pp. 14-21 (p. 14).

68. Helen Birch, 'If looks could kill: Myra Hindley and the Iconography of Evil', in *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, ed. by Helen Birch (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 32-61 (p. 53).

69. As if in keeping with this tradition, Ruth Ellis' only request to the governor of Holloway Prison was that she might have a bottle of bleach with which to touch up her roots before her trial. The request was granted. This story about Ruth Ellis, and details of her trial, can be found in Frank Jones, *Murderous Women: True Tales of Women who Killed*, (London: Headline, 1991), pp. 23-39 (p. 34).

70. Helen Birch, op. cit., p. 53.

71. Helen Birch, 'A special kind of evil', *Independent*, Second section, 23 November 1995, pp. 1-3.

72. Ibid, p. 2.

73. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973), p. 139.

74. Birch, 'A special kind of evil', p. 2.

75. 'Exhibited by the Royal Academy in the So-Called Name of Art', *Daily Mirror*, 19 September 1997, p. 1.

76. Marcus Harvey, quoted in Burn, op. cit., p. 16.

77. Jane Pauley, NBC's *Dateline*, broadcast 25 August 1992, quoted in Hart, *Fatal Women*, op. cit., p. 142.

78. Hart, op. cit., p. 153.

79. Ibid, p. 153.

80. *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*, documentary by Nick Broomfield (shown as part of the *True Stories* documentary season, Channel 4, 1993).

81. Reported in Colin Wilson, *A Plague of Murder: The Rise and Rise of Serial Killing in the Modern Age* (London: Robinson, 1995), pp. 490-491. He also debates whether Wuornos is a real serial killer or an opportunist thief who shot her victims to conceal her crimes. However, the front cover of his book is illustrated

by three photographs of Wuornos. His discussion of Wuornos and her crimes can be found on pp. 486-492.

82. Helen Birch, Introduction, *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, ed. by Helen Birch (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 1-6 (p. 1).

83. Chris Holmlund, 'Reading Character with a Vengeance: The *Fatal Attraction* Phenomenon', *Velvet Light Trap*, 27 (1991), 25-36 (p. 26).

84. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), p. 140.

85. Judith Williamson, 'Nightmare on Madison Avenue', *New Statesman*, 115 (1988), cited in Susan Bromley and Pamela Hewitt, 'Fatal Attraction: The Sinister Side of Women's Conflict About Career and Family', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26 3 (1992), 17-23 (p. 18).

86. Liahna Babener, Introduction, Special issue on *Fatal Attraction*, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26 3 (1992), 1-3 (p. 1).

87. Joan Smith, *Misogynies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 27.

88. Ibid, p. 26.

89. Holmlund, op. cit., p. 25.

90. Babener, op. cit., p. 1.

91. Quoted in Holmlund, op. cit., p. 26.

92. Amy Taubin, 'Too Close for Comfort', *The Village Voice*, 15 December 1987, cited in Holmlund, op. cit., p. 25.

93. Susan Bromley and Pamela Hewitt, op. cit., p. 23.

94. See, for example, Holmlund, 'Reading Character with a Vengeance', p. 31, and Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women*, pp. 146-152.

95. Jim Hala, '*Fatal Attraction* and the Attraction of Fables', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26 3 (1992), pp. 71-82.

96. Ibid, p. 77.

97. Adam Knee, 'The Dialectic of Female Power and Male Hysteria in *Play Misty for Me*', in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. by Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 87-102 (p. 92).

98. Ibid, p. 100.

99. Carol J Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: BFI, 1992), p. 63. In the light of Clover's objective and intelligent analysis of other horror films, this seems a particularly emotional response.

100. Many writers have mentioned the fact that Alex in *Fatal Attraction* has a highly-paid executive career without appearing doing any work. On the other hand, Alex is castigated as a career woman who disrupts normal family life. Even

her pregnancy is viewed as a malignancy. Which ever way she is viewed, she is a non-productive figure.

101. Paul Smith, 'Eastwood Bound', in *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. by Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 77-97 (p. 87).

102. Liahna Babener, 'Patriarchal Politics in *Fatal Attraction*', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26 3 (1992), pp. 25-34 (p. 25).

103. She is so recognizable that she can be parodied in, for example, *Addams Family Values* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1993), *Serial Mom* (John Waters, 1994) and *So I Married an Axe Murderer* (Thomas Schlamme, 1993).

104. See, for example, Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976; repr. 1977); Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1979; repr. 1991); Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (London: The Women's Press, 1988). A more recent collection is *Critical Condition: Women on the Edge of Violence*, ed. by Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1993).

105. 'Despite police efforts, there was not a scrap of evidence that the boys had watched the film.' Martin Baker, 'The Newson Report: A case study in "common sense"', in *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate*, ed. by Martin Baker and Julian Petley (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 12-31 (p. 13).

106. Unnamed critics, cited in Sheila Johnston, 'Hidden Gender', *Independent*, 29 June 1991, p. 30.

107. Unnamed critic, cited in Kirsta, op. cit., p. 15.

108. David Usbourne, '"Thelma and Louise" end up deep in the arms of Texas law', *Independent*, 28 February 1996, p. 9.

109. Michael Fleet, 'Police find runaway pensioners', *Daily Telegraph*, 31 January 1995 [n.p.].

110. 'Both [Wuornos and Moore] were the subjects of a nationwide hunt, which was likened to the film *Thelma and Louise*, a story of two abused women who went on a shooting spree.' Hugh Davies, "'Damsel of Death" on trial for five murders', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 January 1992 [n.p.]

111. The ad was a parody of the closing moments of *Thelma and Louise*: two young women are driving their car through Hollywood when they are approached by a film director, who says, 'You've got what I want.' Assuming he wants to make them filmstars, they agree to be filmed driving the car across a desert. When they stop at the top of a cliff, he asks for the 'real' actresses to step forward for the close-up. The two women decide that no-one else should be allowed to drive their car, and drive over the cliff. In doing so, they reveal the edge of the cliff to be a painted backdrop.

CHAPTER TWO

"WHERE DID YOU LEARN TO SHOOT LIKE THAT?"

THELMA AND LOUISE AND THE RISE

OF THE FEMALE CRIMINAL

Since my wife bought her own car she's been a different woman. To be fair, she worked part-time for the deposit - but I don't approve of two-car families. Once the wife gets this kind of freedom she can go off where and when she wants [...] I feel our marriage will never be the same again. (Letter seen in agony column)¹

To the anonymous writer of the above letter, there is a direct link between his wife's purchase of a car and the rocky state of his marriage. Apart from the evident insecurities about a wife working and so having an independent income, the writer goes on to express other anxieties, most explicitly the fact that she would now be able to sleep with other men without his knowledge. This man's association of car-ownership with sexual promiscuity presumes his wife's car to be a vehicle fuelled by illicit desires: she, transformed by car ownership into 'a different woman', would develop a sexual appetite unfettered by domesticity and he would have no power to control it. Rather than a simple purchase of an alternative means of transport, buying a car is an individual expression of freedom and mobility, a provocative statement for someone who is considered a housewife.

The writer of this letter does not say whether he has seen *Thelma and Louise*, but he does make explicit those fears revealed by the film in its exploration of women's mobility, women's work and women's sexuality. Perhaps the most revealing fear is the disavowal of what many would consider to be a rise in social status, from owning a single car to being a 'two-car family'. However, since this

status is achieved by his wife's efforts and not his own, his dual roles as breadwinner and car-driver are now under threat. The uneasy relationship between the increasing economic power of women and the role of the nuclear family is laid bare.

Women's lifestyles have changed to the extent that selling cars to women is one of the major advertising drives of the 1990s. Women now buy half of all new and used cars in the UK.² The advertising campaigns show women pushing aside benign paternalism in order to attain independence, as in the Renault Clio ads ('Nicole?' 'Papa!'). 'The Nissan Micra: Ask Before You Borrow It!' advertising campaign shows male partners being pushed out of windows or being struck down by voodoo magic. As the manufacturing and purchasing of cars is one of the key factors of economic growth, cars also define national as well as personal prosperity. Their ownership reflects the state of the nation, its emergence through industrialization to the emergence of a lifestyle wholly dependent upon the car. Such dependency invites us, in turn, to continue to see the car as an expression of material desirability and individual consumption. The popularity and instant recognizability of the 'road movie' as a genre reflects the dichotomy between a rebellious desire to escape the confines of society and an identification with an extremely desirable consumer product.

The remarkable number of road movies released in America in the late 1980s can be seen, according to Michael Atkinson in *Sight and Sound*, as indicative of a crisis of identity:

A new psychosocial gridlock in which questions of mass identity and national meaning become too big for traditional answers.³

He argues that while the road movie brings to the fore the notion of individual freedom set against social restrictions, the genre cannot be described as addressing socio-political issues. Instead it concentrates on 'abject lawlessness and haphazard bloodletting'⁴, where the car is less a symbol of a refusal to abide by rules than it is a symbol of irresponsible and illegal consumption. However, Atkinson argues that the modern road movie has become such a part of our cultural consciousness that any example of the genre becomes a self-conscious echo of the films made before:

Characters hit the road less for any concrete, plot-driven reason than because they've seen a lot of movies and that's what you do.⁵

Such self-conscious reflections on society are a narrative feature of *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) which has been seen as the archetypal road movie in its search for an alternative, more rural, America. In an inversion of an earlier generation's arduous treks across an unwelcoming continent to escape the confines of Europe and the cities of the East, the journey of the protagonists is from the hedonistic West Coast, where they have accomplished a major drug deal to fund their travels, to the East. The two travellers, Captain America (whose motorbike is decorated by the Stars and Stripes), and Billy, his enigmatic sidekick, encounter prejudice and scorn at their lifestyle, long hair and powerful motorbikes. The barriers between the city life they hope to escape and the country they hope to find are expressed by the rigid and parochial attitudes of the inhabitants of the small towns they pass through. Through a meeting with an alcoholic lawyer, George Hanson, the film takes a more overt appreciation of the men as outsiders. George explains to the two bikers that they represent a type of freedom that is too threatening and inexplicable for the stolid inhabitants of middle America. As all three men are later killed by those who despise their individualist lifestyle, it would appear that cinematic road travel involves both a searching for and a

destruction of identity. Jack Boozer, in his discussion of *Thelma and Louise*, points out that the road movie is 'already associated nostalgically with a closed frontier'.⁶ The individual, rather than rebelling against society, is forever doomed to evade it.

While the genre of road movie has been used to explore virtually every kind of relationship - gay hustlers in *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991), the outlaw couple in *Badlands* (Terence Malick, 1973), a mother and son in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (Martin Scorsese, 1974) - it has been traditionally associated with a specifically masculine rite of passage: as Lynda Hart says,

Whether they are hetero-subversive, homoerotic, or disruptive of the distinction, the form has been presumed to be inherently masculine.⁷

In Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* (1957) the journeys across America with Dean Moriarty become an Oedipal search for Moriarty's father, while simultaneously avoiding Moriarty's own paternal and familial responsibilities. David Laderman, in his discussion of the road movie as part of American culture, argues that the frontier spirit of the genre does invest it with a certain idealism and 'a reassertion of a traditional expansionist ideology'.⁸ As Laderman points out, there is an ideological tension in the novel in that it privileges the white male experience while allowing the hero to explore alternative cultural, social and sexual experiences. Hence *On the Road* and *Easy Rider* show simultaneously 'a rejection of *and* a rediscovery of Americanism'.⁹ Such a dilemma at the heart of the genre points to why the road movie remains such an enduringly popular and recognizable form, combining a rebellious escape from the artifices of modern society with a search for a more authentic and traditional reality.

Historically, the road movie's exposition of both masculinity and anti-social rebellion is part of its inheritance of three classic film genres: the Western, the gangster film and film noir. As a result, the road is represented as a dangerous space in which to travel, but holds the possibility of adventure, albeit always temporary. David Laderman argues that such an heredity establishes the position of women in road movies as 'either a passive accomplice to the man or a threat to him'.¹⁰ The early appearance of the 'outlaw couple', Eddie and Joan, in Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once* (1937) shows the early proclivity of the genre for crime, law-breaking and the doomed relationship. As in film noir, the representation of criminality and life set on the margins of society is coupled with the failings of heterosexuality. The rebelliousness of male characters is matched by the deviousness of female ones. The dangers of women on the road are made explicit in Edgar Ulmer's noir *Detour* (1945) where a hitchhiker becomes ensnared by a woman blackmailer, and in their hotel room accidentally strangles her with a telephone cord. Jack Boozer argues that post-war road movies, like other post-war genres, establish a link between aggressive women and the rearguard action of patriarchy that seeks to control, making them 'significant scapegoats for failed mainstream conventions and values'.¹¹ In the early noir road movie *Gun Crazy* (Joseph Lewis, 1949), hero and heroine were brought together by their mutual love of guns, but Hollywood's powerful and censorious Production Code insisted that the heroine should be made ultimately responsible for the couple's crimes.¹² It would appear that such a generic heritage also tinges the opening moments of *Thelma and Louise*, when the monochrome image of the American landscape slowly moves into colour.

The release of *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) saw a heightened media interest in the levels of violence shown in films and the appropriateness of

showing such violence to a young and impressionable audience. The notorious Warner Brothers' slogan that sold the film - 'They're young, they're in love and they kill people' - celebrates the couple as both criminals and lovers. As both characters are shown as sympathetic, unlike the police and bounty hunters that chase them, their exploits - bank robbery, murder, high speed car chases - are instantly tinged with glamour; having the two leads played by popular and attractive filmstars, Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway also helped the film's popularity. Al Auster and Leonard Quark, in a discussion of 1960s American cinema, argue that *Bonnie and Clyde* was the most important film to be made in the 1960s.¹³ Financially it was certainly one of the most successful: in the first year of its release, it recouped its production costs ten times over.¹⁴ Set in the Depression, the film appeared to express, for disenchanted youth of the 1960s, a contemporary distrust for an increasingly autocratic political and economic system.

The story of Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker has been neatly turned into American myth, making the two protagonists into folk heroes who stole from the rich and protected the poor. Instead, the reality shows that the couple were feared by the poverty-stricken victims of the Depression as much as they were hated by the establishment. Bonnie and Clyde were so despised by the criminal underworld for their violent crimes that gangsters were as likely as ordinary citizens to turn them over to the authorities.¹⁵ But the couple's luck at evading roadblocks, ambushes and posses (sometimes numbering up to 1,000 men) gave them almost mythical powers. The film's controversially violent death scene is taken directly from accounts of the police involved in the real-life ambush: the couple were killed by a total of 167 bullets by policemen who believed the pair to be indestructible.¹⁶ The newspaper publications of Bonnie's poetry also helped to maintain their presence in the public arena, while her poems claimed that the

couple were victims of over-zealous policing and exaggerated media reports of their activities.¹⁷

The poems, and the photographs that the couple took of each other and left behind in their hideouts, show an effective use of the media and a sophisticated insight into their own roles as victims of law and order. The legend of the real Bonnie and Clyde colludes with the film to produce a couple 'as much in love with the media image of violence as with each other'.¹⁸ Rather than concentrating on the violence, the film develops a psychosexual explanation of the couple's antisocial behaviour and affirms the heroic nature of the 'doomed couple'. Clyde's fascination with guns and fast cars is a substitute for sex. Bonnie becomes the sexual initiator, and part of her reluctance to leave Clyde is tempered with her hope that the pair will be able to settle down to a normal family life.

Unfortunately, within their relationship with each other and the external constraints of the law, this is a desire that is always deferred. In an oblique reference to the real-life Bonnie's literary skills, the film shows Clyde finally able to have sex with Bonnie only after reading (and enjoying) her poem, 'The Story of Bonnie and Clyde' in the newspaper.

Like *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Thelma and Louise* generated a huge amount of critical interest, both supporting and reacting against certain controversial elements in the film: rape, murder, armed robbery and suicide. While the contents of the film remain unresolved, the public debates about women, crime and violence surrounding its release raised the film's profile and fuelled its success. As with *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), the film appeared to show a threat to institutions held dear to the American public: public morality, social mobility and gun ownership. But rather than the threat of a lone, psychotic woman threatening

the safety and security of the nuclear family, *Thelma and Louise* apparently shows the logical outcome of allowing a pair of apparently sane and ordinary women access to guns and fast cars. The film's narrative is as follows: two friends, Thelma and Louise decide to spend a weekend in the mountains. Thelma has been unable to tell her husband that she plans to go away, and eventually leaves him a note. After driving for a few hours, the women visit a roadside bar to have a drink. Thelma gets drunk and dances with a man, Harlan, who takes her outside when she starts to feel ill. He then begins to rape her, and is only stopped by Louise holding a gun to his head. He releases Thelma, but Louise shoots him dead when he says 'suck my dick'. The two women then flee the scene of the crime. Louise persuades Jimmy, her boyfriend, to bring them some money so that the two women can escape to Mexico. This money is stolen by JD, a hitchhiker they pick up en route. Thelma then stages an armed robbery with Louise's gun. Stopped by a policeman, they imprison him in the boot of his car, determined not to get caught. The film culminates in a high speed chase across the desert, where the two women drive off the cliff.

Thelma and Louise, seen by some critics as an expression of specifically female anger and revenge, was also viewed as an antidote to the Hollywood ideals of womanhood, a rejection of the traditional role of women in films in favour of a wholesale appropriation of a 'masculine' genre. An adherence to the structure of the road movie and the outlaw couple gives *Thelma and Louise* a recognizable identity. Does its apparent reinforcement of the generic conventions of the road movie disrupt or affirm the possibility of female autonomy? Manohla Dargis argues that *Thelma and Louise* reframes the existing terms of reference for the road movie in its attempt to reconstitute the idea of road travel as a female experience: 'Tired scenarios and cliched landscapes alike are reinvented'.¹⁹ By

seeing the American landscape afresh, as a space to be appropriated by female criminals, it becomes invaded by people who do not obey the normal rules, as shown by the black Rastafarian dope-smoking cyclist who discovers the policeman trapped in the boot of his patrol car. After hearing shouts and banging from the car, the cyclist eventually realises that there is someone locked in the boot. He then watches a tiny phallic finger emerge from one of the airholes that Thelma has thoughtfully provided, pointing to the location of the keys. The white finger's impotence, contrasted with the expanse of black, shiny metal of the car body, is firmly fixed in the gaze of the black male. As Dargis says, 'The American landscape has ceased to be the exclusive province of white masculinity'.²⁰

Female appropriation of an inherently masculine film genre seems to have paved the way for a recognition of women's appropriation of male crime. Given that screenwriter Callie Khouri's original concept for the script was 'Two women go on a crime-spree'²¹, *Thelma and Louise* is a comedy that bypasses the gritty realism of *Bonnie and Clyde* in favour of beautiful landscapes and female bonding. As Yvonne Tasker says, the film is an example of 'carefully contained criminality'.²² However, the reactions to the film are far more indicative of cultural assumptions about the relationship between women and crime than the film, even in its most ambitious moments, can ever hope to address. The crimes against the two women, namely rape, robbery, and sexual harassment, were ignored by many critics who concentrated on the methods employed by the women to deal with these situations. Angela Lambert in the *Independent on Sunday* walked out of the film in disgust:

What most upset me was the fear that audiences will conclude that this is what feminists are like and what feminists want: to be as foul-mouthed, irresponsible and self-indulgent as male Hollywood stereotypes.²³

Sheila Benson, a critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, argues against what she sees as the political stance of the film:

As I understand it, feminism has to do with responsibility, equality, sensitivity, understanding - not revenge, retribution, or sadistic behaviour.²⁴

Both writers are quick to point to the film as an expression of a *feminist* stance with which they do not wish to be associated. From their comments, they are anxious to read the women's roles as an inappropriate and ultra-radical interpretation of feminism. Thus, feminism becomes the bad element in the film, and women who appear active rather than passive, criminal rather than law-abiding, are its proper representatives. As both commentators see the two women as 'acting' like men, the logical conclusion to their argument is that feminism in its most radical form runs the danger of being interpreted as the masculinization of female behaviour. But *Thelma and Louise* does counter such an argument through the episode of Harlan's attempted rape of Thelma.

Rape and Other Crimes

While the women's journey begins officially as a weekend in the mountains, the narrative of the road movie starts at the women's fleeing of a crime scene. Their legal position is made more complicated by the fact that the crime is a murder for which there appears no defence except one defined by a moral dilemma. Louise's assertion that her action cannot be justified is set against a backdrop of a genre that takes its morals from the American frontier, but becomes anachronistic when updated to the 1990s. By taking the law into her own hands (literally), Louise bypasses the dynamics of the rape trial extremely effectively. Though Harlan releases Thelma, he is neither willing to accept Louise's interpretation of his

actions nor contrite about his treatment of Thelma. Indeed, it is his words, "Suck my dick", as the women turn to walk away that provoke Louise to shoot him dead. As his killing could hardly be judged as self-defence, Louise has committed premeditated murder. As Thelma's husband or male lover her actions may have been justified. But as a woman, and a woman who is unthreatened, her actions go beyond the boundaries of 'reasonable force' and are placed in a milieu of a suspected political agenda.

Kirsten Marthe Lentz, writing about the relationship between women and guns, points out that whether the link between feminism and violence is helpful or not, such a conclusion ensures that some feminist discourse has entered the public consciousness. In her analysis of gun advertisements directed at women, she shows that each one simultaneously stresses women's vulnerability to attack and rape within a context of their right to protect themselves without turning to an appropriate male for help. Advertising which appears to support women's freedom from rape, and men in general, is juxtaposed with urgent messages that women are increasingly more likely to be attacked.²⁵ Lentz writes:

This strategy, employed by both advertisers and proponents of gun ownership, cemented a popular version of liberal feminism to the women-and-guns equation.²⁶

Instead of increasing women's options, Lentz argues, this method of advertising produces a compelling and chilling message that 'no-gun' equals 'rape'. Gun-ownership is therefore a step that all independent and responsible women must take. Such stress placed on the idea of women's 'independence' in the face of male threat also puts women's self-protection at the highest levels of moral and public decency. Such justification, Lentz argues, also establishes itself as a link between women's 'special relationship to moral purity' and instances of female

aggression.²⁷ The issue of moral justification sets a controlling element into the equation. Rape, assault, robbery or the anticipation of such attacks, places the responsibility of crime prevention on the potential victims, and not their aggressors. The issue of morality effectively by-passes any political calls for arming all women, for example, or by reviewing attacks on them as a problem caused by the male population in general. Therefore, any use of guns not sanctioned by an attack on a woman's 'purity' is immediately made suspect. By individual women taking responsibility for potential attacks on their person, any feminist argument, other than that of a democratic right to carry firearms, is negated. Hence Susan Brownmiller's statement that rape is 'a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear' (author's emphasis)²⁸ can be recycled as an advertising slogan to sell more weapons, and not as a rallying cry to examine masculine power.

In *Thelma and Louise* the rape is the initial driving force of the narrative. The consequence is that it is a film about rape that does not discuss rape at all. Rather it shows women's alleged helplessness in the face of rape, and their knowledge that the law cannot help them. While according to Ridley Scott, the film is 'not about rape'²⁹, it cannot be denied that it looks at the aftermath of rape and its effects on the victim. Within the dynamics of legal proceedings, the rape victim is on trial: Louise's experience of rape in Texas (and as it is known to the police, we must assume that she reported it) is also her experience of the invasive questioning of the victim's sexual history, the morality of her submission, the bodily evidence and the possible effects of her appearance on the rapist. If the rape can only be read as a means by which the women become outlaws, then the logical conclusion must be that what is wrong with rape is that it makes women neurotic, and potential murderers. But when the trajectory from rape to murder

takes only a minute of film-time, *Thelma and Louise* cannot be placed within the genre of rape-revenge films. Rather it picks apart the process of cause and effect without dwelling on the 'victim status' of either woman, or on their bruised and battered bodies. By disassociating their anger, the film not only avoids equating the practice of rape with vengeance or victimhood, but also allows for a radical assessment of women's position within the law.

Susan Brownmiller's analysis of rape is as a means of control to keep women in the home. As long as women remain inside and answerable to their husbands, the fear of rape can be banished outside. It is the realm of 'outside' that is to be most feared. Regardless of statistics showing that women are far more likely to be raped and battered within their own homes by a man they know rather than a stranger, women's fear of rape is one that is articulated by a fear of venturing beyond their home especially at night.³⁰ Current research on adolescent fears shows that there is a specific point in girls' education where the fear of the unknown takes precedence over a wish to socialize.³¹ Jo Goodey investigates not only why 'male/female fear of the outside is different, but why women's fear is positioned outside'.³² Her research shows that teenage boys are far more likely to express fear of spaces ('badly-lit passageways') than cite a specific person or group that they fear. Equally, fear of strangers, while evident in both boys and girls, is more likely to be voiced by girls. At the same time, Goodey's research shows that a large number of the girls had experienced physical or verbal abuse from a boyfriend or someone they knew. Fear of strangers seems to begin as a realization of difference between teenage boys and girls, a time in which sexual activity becomes valorized into social roles of activity and passivity: as Brownmiller says, 'To simply learn the word "rape" is to take instruction in the power relationship between males and females'.³³

Thus society is made safer by maintaining a curfew on those thought to be at risk. As violent crime is seen as a threat from outside, in the public sphere rather than the private, 'sexual violence against women is curtailed and placed (literally) behind closed doors'.³⁴ The curtailing of freedom becomes an effective way of keeping public order while maintaining the protection of women. Therefore, *Thelma and Louise*, by choosing to explore the issues of rape, violence and freedom in a genre like the road movie, where the women carry on their journey rather than return to the safety of their homes, opens up the possibilities of seeing the women as figures in a male landscape, negotiating and redressing their active status rather than as victims concerned simply with their own personal safety.

Thelma and Louise is therefore a paradox for feminists. On the one hand it shows two women gaining a sense of personal autonomy, even, in the crudest sense of the phrase, 'a women's movement', in that their journey, especially Thelma's journey, could be said to be one of consciousness-raising. Almost in answer to Betty Friedan's anonymous, desperate housewives in *The Feminine Mystique* who talk about the 'problem that has no name', Thelma says, "Something's crossed over in me and I can't go back - I just couldn't live". On the other hand, the women's appropriation of apparently male behaviour and male characteristics appear to show that the only way to survive in a man's world is to 'become' a man. Margaret Carlson's review in *Time* (called, tellingly, 'Is This What Feminism Is All About?') shows the extent to which this reading of the film could be seen as a confirmation of the worst aspect of male behaviour:

[They] behave like - well, men. [They] act out a male fantasy of life on the road, avoiding intimacy with loud music, Wild Turkey, fast driving - a gun in the pants.³⁵

The conclusion of some writers appears to be that if Thelma and Louise do not 'act' like women, they must be men. Likewise, by rejecting femininity and all its worldly trappings, they must become more masculine. Such a belief enforces a rigid binary system based on mutual exclusive differences. Yvonne Tasker analyses this attitude by pointing out that if the two are made symbolically male, then the threat of two armed women in a fast car is negated.³⁶ But, equally, they are poor representatives of men: one reviewer calls them 'parodies of men'.³⁷ These reactions to *Thelma and Louise* seeking to explain the women as 'pseudo-men' indicate the extent to which murder and other crimes are marked by gender. Alternatively the identity of the female criminal can be hard to recognize as anything other than masculine. Freda Adler, in her analysis of the relationship between feminism and female crime, argues that women seeking equality with men will eventually commit the most violent of crimes in order to express their emancipation. She cites the case of a woman bank robber, Marge, whose criminal behaviour she sees as indicative of a new breed of female offenders who cross 'an imaginary boundary line which once separated crimes into "masculine" and "feminine"'.³⁸ But Marge's own version of her criminal activities is less evidence of a feminist agenda than a frank appraisal of her skills and professionalism, having progressed from shoplifting to armed robbery. Furthermore, she knows that her experiences are set within a system that defines her as abnormal as she recalls her disappointment when the media reporting of her first bank robbery described her as a 'male dressed in women's clothing'. Marge's response is, 'I know I'm no beauty queen, but I didn't think I was that bad'.³⁹

The ease with which *Thelma and Louise* is 'recognized' as a lesbian film derives not from their sexual activities (reassuringly heterosexual) but from their identities as criminal women. To step beyond the bounds of femininity, even for a weekend

in the mountains without male partners, is to jeopardize their position as 'normal' women. Alison Young, in her discussion of female criminality, explains that femininity is hard to recognize:

Femininity is [...] both known and unknown for criminology. It is unknown in that it can only ever register in criminology's symbolic order as the inverted negation of masculinity.⁴⁰

Arguably, to place two women in a space such as the road movie normally reserved for men, and then see them on the run for murder shows a deviance (and anti-social defiance) that would not be so readily available for a male couple in the same position. As Young points out, the female criminal is always viewed as 'an inversion of an inversion'.⁴¹ The step from 'inversion' to the noun 'invert' is a small one when the female criminal does not possess the reassuring nature of the masculine body. Lynda Hart points out that it was the aggressive nature of the female invert rather than her sexual activity that brought her to the attention of criminologists.⁴² Underlying Thelma's and Louise's possible identities as lesbian is their explicit denial of the 'normal', passive state of femininity. This is not simply a rejection of gender roles, but a result of the film establishing that there is a complex interaction between the states of femininity and masculinity, consumerism and identity, and criminal behaviour and the law. The first pairing, that of gender identity, is perhaps the most obvious, but can only be a symptom of the crisis rather than its cause.

Gender Bending

Articles arguing both for and against the implied gender roles of the women in *Thelma and Louise* appeared in *Time* magazine under the banner of 'Gender Bender', in which the possible appropriation of masculinity by the two women

characters was forefronted.⁴³ The implications of using such a description for the women in the film highlighted the way in which the two characters appeared to reject femininity, and the distress of reviewers forced to witness such an act. As Yvonne Tasker points out:

Images of the active heroine disrupt the conventional notion - often significantly present as an assumption with feminist film criticism - that women either are, or should be, represented exclusively through the codes of femininity.⁴⁴

A contemporary view of gender is that it is the visual and cultural construction of the way in which sex as a biological entity is viewed. Any conscious manipulation of gender roles reveals gender to be a marking system, and the attempts to obscure gender become a method of showing its importance. As Alison Young argues in her discussion of criminality, 'Gender is only re-marked when femininity is in question'.⁴⁵ By defining gender as a construction, a method of establishing identity rather than a means of revealing identity, the idea of two mutually exclusive sexes whose attributes and defects complement each other is questionable. It is made so by those figures who over-represent aspects of each gender type, from butch dykes to drag queens. As gender shifts and settles into new positions of cultural and social importance, the idea of a 'starting point' on which to look theoretically at sexual identity becomes simplistic. Butler's own definition denotes a schema that leaves space for feminist analysis of gender roles, while recognizing that absolute gender identity is not fixed:

Gender can be understood as a signification that an (already) sexually differentiated body assumes, but even then, that signification exists only *in relation* to another, opposing signification.⁴⁶ (author's emphasis)

Gender becomes a system that is marked by contrast, and cinematically, it is contrast *per se* that takes precedence over gender. In *Thelma and Louise* even though the relationship between the women is placed in a hierarchical context of

difference, the end result is that they resemble each other to a marked degree.

While the film is at pains to mark their difference at points along the journey - one takes control as the other loses control - by the time they reach the edge of the clifftop, the two women seem to have fused into one proto-lesbian identity, marked by the labels of 'murder' and 'armed robbery'. Cathy Griggers argues that the two women have constructed their own gender identity:

Not restricted to strict codes of femininity or masculinity [...] they signify the multiple and contradictory regimes of signs from which they construct, day to day, a sense of identity.⁴⁷

But simultaneously, new binary systems spring into place as if to reaffirm that harmony can only exist in opposition: the forces of law and order now battle against the outlaw women in order to maintain the status quo. As time passes, and their crimes grow more serious, the labels that define their status become more criminal, and the calls for their capture grow more urgent. Such is the belief in their 'armed and dangerous' status that the final chase reveals an ever-increasing number of police cars and armed law-enforcers.

Recognition of such identities also forms part of the realization that the women are performing roles within a generic space that previously had no room for them at all. But that space continues to be male-defined. The paradox is that the setting of relational rather than absolute categories also distorts as well as determines the parameters of gender. Therefore the recognition of gender difference is both defined by that recognition, and limited by it. Lynda Hart makes the point that *Thelma and Louise* enacts the familiar territory of woman as object that must be pursued, but she points out:

Of course, we have seen the plot structure of two heroes on the lam many times before; what we have not seen is simply two women occupying the same topography. The issue is whether this substitution constitutes difference, sameness, or the same difference.⁴⁸

At the beginning of the film the establishment of the characters of the two women is based entirely on an establishment of their differences. Louise is at work; Thelma is at home. Louise's confident handling of both her colleagues and her customers is at odds with Thelma's inability to tell her husband that she is going away with Louise for the weekend. Thus Louise's excellent communication skills already show her to be a decision-maker, while it is established that Thelma cannot articulate her needs. Their differences are again reinforced during the packing scene: as the camera cuts from one woman to the other, Louise's careful packing of articles into plastic bags before placing them in her small suitcase seems obsessive when compared to Thelma's chaotic dumping. Incapable of deciding what to take, Thelma eventually takes all her own possessions, and then anything else she feels will be useful: the gun, the lantern, the butterfly net. Cathy Griggers, in her discussion of the 'butch-femme' relationship between the two women, sees this packing scene as a sign of the material excess of femininity, a commodity that can be packed up and carried away:

Typically, men carry luggage that women overpack [...] [W]orse than having to carry a woman's luggage is the prospect of opening and unpacking of the psychic baggage of femininity.⁴⁹

But here it is Louise who drives the car filled with Thelma's excesses. While it is important to the narrative that Thelma packs the gun, it is also important to show that Thelma does indeed pack everything - she leaves nothing to chance. This excess baggage is discarded on route: it reminds us that Thelma, as a married woman, has more to lose than Louise. It also shows Thelma as someone who is incapable of decision-making, and that she is unable to sort out what is useful and what can be discarded - in other words, an inability to sort out the 'good' from the 'bad'. But far more significantly, the taking of the gun signals her fear of

leaving the safety of home. When Thelma pulls out her gun and asks Louise to look after it, her excuse for bringing it is to list the dangers that await them in the mountains: 'Psycho-killers, bears, snakes'. In their version of the road movie, there is no dichotomy between bad culture/good nature, as there is in *Easy Rider*. All parts of the system, whether natural or man-made, hold terrors, especially for Thelma.

The implications of the women's actions tend to invert the progress of the narrative, to the extent that the film becomes a road movie almost by default. By an action that is supposed to affirm control (the prevention of rape, and the killing of a rapist), the women's journey is started by a hysterical wheel spin and uncontrolled exit from a car park, nearly under the wheels of a truck. This lack of control becomes more marked by the fact that as the women attempt to gain control of their own destiny, they appear to discard the trappings of femininity. More precisely, the film charts their shedding of headscarves, jewellery, blouses and make-up before revealing them, at the end of the film, as androgynous figures in jeans and t-shirts. To emphasize this transformation the Polaroid photo, taken by Louise at the start of their journey, is blown out of the car as they drive over the cliff. The photograph reinforces the changing roles of the women, from apparent 'normality' to the status of outlaws, and perhaps worse. Chris Holmlund's description of the two women at the end of their journey sums up their position:

By the time the two stop their car in the Arizona desert, they are as sweaty, dusty, nonchalant and hardened as any pair of male outlaws would be.⁵⁰

In *Thelma and Louise*, the women's gender identity, always in question through their actions, is firmly established as they drive over the cliff - they return from

being 'parodies of men' to female victims once more. Only femininity as a manifestation of social convention is so easily discarded, and in the film, Louise goes one stage further. It is not enough for her simply to discard femininity: she also makes the positive step of acquiring a man's sunglasses and hat. Louise's cross-dressing tendencies are allowed to go no further, as the two women die at the end of the film. But the ease with which she discards and rejects her job, her home, her boyfriend, his offer of marriage and Detective Slocum's offer of help show her actions to be beyond the excuse of 'economic necessity'. Like the late jazz musician Billy Tipton, whose true female sex was discovered when s/he died in 1989, after marrying and becoming the father of adopted sons, the original excuse of cross-dressing merely to pursue a career seems suspect.⁵¹ Louise's new career, that of armed killer on the run, does not demand of her that she begin to cross-dress in an effort to escape her own femininity: but it does, on the other hand, allow her, for perhaps the first time, to appreciate a new sense of power and freedom with another woman. This charting of the progress of liberation can be seen in its effects on the women's bodies.

It would appear, therefore, that image does inform identity. According to Jane Gaines,

'Personality' and 'dress' are so often confused that it would seem they have become the same thing.⁵²

If women need only to wear jeans, carry a gun and don a pair of masculine sunglasses to complete their transition, the mechanisms of reversal remain fluid: the image is everything and the body becomes a mere clothes horse: 'she is what she wears'.⁵³ As Judith Butler argues,

'The body' appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. In either case,

the body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related.⁵⁴ (author's emphases)

As if a comment on the state of their dress, the women's car bursts through a washing line during the final police chase, breaking the line and throwing the clothes to the ground. This final reminder of domesticity, and its accompanying message of cleanliness and respectability, is ignored.

The Economy of Gender

Such a rejection of the expectations of femininity reinforces Thelma's and Louise's positions in the hinterland of gender. Their choice of clothing warns against seeing femininity as a method of control, and as a device that signals desire. Rather, their stripping away of one form of identity for another points to a rejection of gender roles, a radical choice in a culture which presents women as consumers and not producers of image. *Thelma and Louise* reiterates the balance between femininity and masculinity by showing it to be not a system based on articles of clothing, but a complex relationship between consumerism, economics, male power and female needs. Manohla Dargis' analysis of this relationship strikes at the heart of the dilemma of the lack of possible exchange mechanisms between femininity and masculinity:

In a culture where the female body is traded, circulated in a perverse exchange, for a woman to seize power over her body is still a radical act.⁵⁵

Therefore *Thelma and Louise* is more than another manifestation of the male road movie, with women performing the roles usually reserved for men. Unusually for Hollywood film, it shows the two women not as helpless victims of crime but as protagonists who discover their own potential as criminals. Equally uncommonly,

it presents a pair of women who do not compete with each other, but who work together to preserve their partnership in the face of male aggression. This, in part, is another reason why *Thelma and Louise* has been read as a lesbian film, a progression from femme to butch. But equally the film upholds gender difference as the cornerstone of its appeal. While Thelma and Louise must leave behind the constraints of femininity that bind them, even loosely, to domesticity, the film never relinquishes its hold on the fact that it is two women in the starring roles. While revisiting the traditions of the road movie, the film re-affirms women's distance from its utopian possibilities. According to Jack Boozer,

Where woman has at best represented a nurturing escape from socioeconomic realities for the male hero in patriarchal narratives, there is no analogous alternative haven for woman through man, whose largely objective psychosocial roles have been directly aligned with the cultural dominant.⁵⁶

Thelma's marriage and Louise's relationship, both with men who fail to satisfy them or address their needs, are given as one reason why the women will not stop their flight. Thelma's words to the police officer as she holds him at gunpoint ("My husband wasn't sweet to me and look how I turned out") reinforce the film's dynamics of the constraint of domesticity, but there is also a refusal to limit the experience of the women to a simplistic notion of running from abuse. Chris Holmlund, in her discussion of violent film heroines of the 1980s, points out that 'in Hollywood, it is axiomatic that the family, like capitalism, is sacrosanct'.⁵⁷ In *Thelma and Louise*, these two elements are welded together to place both women in a socio-economic class that reduces their role to that of a provider of food, and little more. Not only is Thelma's marriage to Darryl seen as an irksome and restricting burden which she must discard in order to discover her true identity as 'armed and dangerous', he is also shown and described as sexually unattractive ("You could park a truck in the shadow of his ass") and later revealed to be

sexually incompetent. His relationship to Thelma is one based on control rather than equality. Louise says to Thelma in exasperation, "He's your husband, not your father", a comment Thelma in turn repeats to Darryl on the phone when he discovers that she has left him for the weekend. Clearly this relationship, unlike, for example, Dan and Beth's marriage in *Fatal Attraction*, is not worth saving.

Therefore the film's most radical departure from the values of mainstream Hollywood is its insistence that the family and capitalism are two sides of the same coin. As Jack Boozer says, the film shows the 'deeper problem of subjectivity in contemporary consumer culture'.⁵⁸ The film makes explicit the fact that the two women are at the bottom end of the wage scale. However, the differences made manifest at the beginning of the film between Thelma and Louise are not as great as those that separate them from the rest of the economy: both women are on the periphery of the capitalist system. Thelma, as a housewife, is dependent on her husband's goodwill to provide her with some income: Louise, as a waitress, is dependent on her customers' goodwill to provide her with tips. The women's realization that both of them are victims of the system rather than its masters places the dynamics of the film beyond that of a simple gender-exchange. For Thelma and Louise, the outward discarding of femininity is merely a signifier of the impossibility of escaping the straitjacket of the 'sex/gender system'.

Gayle Rubin's 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex' argues that women are exchanged and traded in order to nullify male debt.⁵⁹ For Rubin, the strategies involved in sex and marriage are part of a political economy by which the domestication of women, male sexual need and the exclusion of women from participation in their own exchange is achieved. Rubin's essay concludes with the view that women's oppression cannot be adequately explained

in her discussion of the relationship between patriarchy and capital, 'each woman is oppressed by her own man alone; her oppression seems a private affair'.⁶²

The difference between housewives, who are not paid for their labour, and waitresses, who are paid very little for theirs, can be defined, in Marxist terms, as the difference between entry to the labour market and exclusion from it. But the position of housewives outside the economy is an entirely different situation from the oppression of workers within capitalism. The family remains both the basic unit of modern consumerism and a natural (and therefore ancient) site of nurturing. Engels' description of the privatization of the family, the 'nucleus around which society and the state gradually crystallized'⁶³, describes the historical development of capitalism as a rejection of kinship ties in favour of personal wealth and individualism. Eli Zaretsky points out that the seventeenth century saw a growth in the promotion of individualism: at this time came 'mirrors, the spread of autobiography, the building of chairs instead of benches'.⁶⁴ Family values now had established meaning within the framework of society: they had become less machines for production than, as they are today, ideological units of stability through which a society's morals are measured. Simultaneously, with the growth of importance of the individual (man) came the ideals of womanhood: women's status within marriage was higher than the status they could achieve as spinsters or widows. Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* argues that the family becomes 'the vinculum through which the psychology of power can always be smuggled'.⁶⁵ The establishment of a social system that promotes masculine achievement is set against the cost of female independence.

Cathy Griggers sees *Thelma and Louise* as showing a rejection of a long-term economic investment based on women's precarious position in the labour force, in

either by the Marxist view that it exists because of their exclusion from paid labour, or a psychoanalytic account of female masochism and acceptance of the primacy of the phallus. The sex/gender system that Rubin pieces together from the work of Marx, Engels, Freud and Levi-Strauss is a complex system upheld by the demands of biology, kinship and marriage, economics and the privatization of the family: a 'mutual interdependence of sexuality, economics, and politics'.⁶⁰ The sex/gender system precludes women's full participation in the economic world.

The sexual division of labour is shown effectively in Thelma's conversation with Darryl before he goes to work. When she questions the fact that large numbers of people always wish to buy carpets from him on a Friday night, he says, "It's a good thing you're not Regional Manager and I am". The gulf between his social importance and her ineffectualness is made perfectly explicit, even more so as we realize that she is going to be unable to ask him if she can go away for the weekend. Her isolation is complete:

Just as capitalist development gave rise to the idea of the family as a separate realm from the economy, so it created a 'separate' sphere of personal life, seemingly divorced from the mode of production.⁶¹

Thelma's isolation from meaningful production is contrasted with the sight of Louise at her workplace. However, later in the film, when the police search Louise's flat, the shot of her obsessively tidy kitchen with its solitary glass up-ended on the draining board also marks Louise's isolation as an unmarried woman. Her entry into the waged economy does not bring privilege. Rather it re-asserts her unnaturalness as a woman who lives on her own. Women, even those in the workplace, are in a subordinate position. Louise is more aware of this problem than Thelma: at best, she might earn more than the minimum wage. However, she, like Thelma, is still not a 'Regional Manager'. As Heidi Hartmann points out

return for lesbian adventure and independence. Griggers' reading tends to concentrate on those positive elements of the film in which the women express their freedom, rather than the negative aspects of being on the run. Her view of the women's relationship is that it is 'as much an outcome of material and social condition as a sexual preference'.⁶⁶ Griggers' position is, however, an impossibly utopian one as she fails to notice that the destruction of capitalist oppression leaves little time for desire. The possibility of freedom is always deferred 'until Mexico', though for Thelma the extent of her freedom is that she will be able to look for work in Mexico, a pleasure denied her during her marriage to Darryl. Meanwhile, the 'pleasures of surplus erotic expenditure' that Griggers describes, pleasures in which the spectator may be able to invest, are unavailable to Thelma and Louise who finally must choose between prison (another exclusion from the market economy) or death.

As the women are forced to choose between options that have already foreclosed on the possibility of erotic expenditure, it appears that the film, far from merely establishing a female version of a male genre, exposes to a sophisticated degree the economic exploitation of women. Gayle Rubin argues that Levi-Strauss' basic notion of kinship as 'an exchange of women between men' does not take into account the use of dowries, nor the exchange of women between men of different rank, nor the exchange of gifts which all serve to implicate other, more consumerist, factors involved with the exchange of women.⁶⁷ *Thelma and Louise* effectively exposes the underlying deficiencies of this exchange system by showing the fate of two women who relinquish the legitimacy of their homes, male partners and identities. Eventually, these male partners deliver the women into the hands of the police. All the men involved are willing to give information on the women: their loyalty is to the patriarchal enforcers of the sex/gender system. Darryl gives

up the privacy of his home to the police in order that Thelma's phone calls to him can be monitored; Jimmy tells the police about his visit to Louise to give her her money; JD (in spite of his criminality) tells them that the women are heading for Mexico. In contrast, the only woman interviewed, the waitress at the Silver Bullet Bar, tries to persuade Detective Slocum that the two women could not have killed anyone. A further complication, evoked by Luce Irigaray in her essay, 'Women on the Market', is that in order for a woman to have value, 'two men, at least, have to invest (in) her'.⁶⁸ The increasing value of Thelma and Louise, the cost of the final police chase, is enhanced by the exchanging of each woman from man to man. Thelma passes from Darryl to Harlan to JD, while Louise passes from Jimmy to Hal Slocum. Finally, each woman is valued so highly that the FBI take over, and Max, the FBI agent, is forced to tell Hal that he cannot be involved in the final apprehension of the women: "You're no good to me anymore." Male investment in the two women has now reached national rather than local levels, and Hal's interest in Louise is now over-subscribed.

Within a patriarchal system of woman-exchange, there is no room for lesbian desire. The 'traffic in women', by establishing heterosexuality as its only value system, denies all women's sexual desires, as well as any possibilities that they would have desire for each other. Indeed, lesbian desire becomes impossibly disruptive. In a system where each man was promised a wife of his own, Rubin asks what happens if a woman 'not only refused the man to whom she was promised, but asked for a woman instead?'.⁶⁹ This disruption of the economy precludes heterosexual exchange, social control and male supremacy in a single act. Likewise, in *Thelma and Louise*, the women's disruption extends far further than the usurping of a genre, or appropriation of a gender role. They strike at the heart of a male economy of exchange. Patterns of exchange are reversed, or

undermined, or rejected outright. Jimmy gives Louise 6,700 dollars, the same amount that she has in her savings account, which she promises to pay back. At the same time he also presents her with an engagement ring. The rules of normal exchange would show that he has come to realize 'how much' she is worth to him. He assumes that his money and his ring represent an investment in Louise. But for Louise, the money ("our future") is an investment in her own and Thelma's future, rather than with Jimmy. Almost at the same time, Thelma's sexual liaison with JD shows him stealing the rings off her fingers, an act she doesn't notice in the throes of passion. Therefore, men provide women with rings in order to marry them, or alternatively may take the opportunity to steal them, but the choices for women are that they can only express gratitude or maintain better personal security.

Both women avoid entering into this normalizing economy. Louise does take Jimmy's ring, but later swaps it, along with all her other jewellery, for an old hat. Thelma, while being initially upset and angry about JD's theft, accepts the situation philosophically. After all, her loss has been made good by her first orgasm, and JD's lesson on how to commit armed robbery. Both women undermine the existing economy, either by bartering or by entering it on their own terms. Thelma, as a housewife who has never worked, discovers she has a 'natural talent' for crime. Within this alternative economy, with Thelma's refusal to let herself be a victim of crime a second time, JD's position becomes that of a rent boy. As if to emphasize the economic aspect of their relationship, the large sign on the front of the store where JD first approaches Thelma and asks her for a lift reads 'Payroll checks cashed'.

But the far-reaching complexities of the economy mean that the women do not really find an alternative. Other clues like Hal using his credit card to gain entry to Louise's apartment, or Thelma losing a twenty-dollar bill out of the car window (she can't handle money) show that while the women may disrupt the system, they will only be able to do so temporarily. At one point, when Thelma goes to buy chocolate and alcohol for the journey, she confuses the man who is serving her by buying handfuls of miniature bottles of whisky instead of the larger 'economy size' bottle he suggests. Her preference shows that her analysis of the system is not based on money or profit, but on her own choice and appetites. After all, 'economy' is a system that excludes her: 'size' isn't everything. Women's choices, in a consumer culture, can disrupt the normal economy.

Thelma's refusal to buy economy size is like Marion Crane's stand with the second-hand car salesman in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). The scene in the garage forecourt, where Marion hopes to escape police attention by switching cars, is another example of disruptive female economic choice. While the salesman wants her to take her time about trading in her old car, she is adamant that she does not want "the usual day and a half to think it over". Marion's anxiety is also accentuated by catching sight of the police officer, who found her sleeping in her car, watching from the other side of the street. As the salesman's suspicions about her grow, he tells her "this is the first time a customer ever high-pressured the salesman". While in *Thelma and Louise*, the disruption of the normal economy forms part of their reluctance to engage with men, in *Psycho* the money is part of a specifically 'marital' economy into which Marion hopes to buy a place. The money she steals from her employer comes from a customer who wants to buy his daughter a house for her marriage. Marion hopes to use this money in order to help her boyfriend, Sam, who is paying his ex-wife alimony, as well as paying off

his father's debts. As this is the reason he gives to Marion for not marrying her, she believes, somewhat naively, that stealing this money will help them overcome these problems. William Rothman argues that, for Marion, time is running out:

She has long since given her virginity away, and not for much longer will her sexuality be a marketable asset.⁷⁰

But women's access to money is strictly curtailed. Marion cannot buy her own way into the marital economy. Her attempts to do so only disrupt it. As she drives, she imagines the conversation between her boss, Mr Lowry and the customer, Mr Cassidy, when they discover that the money and 'the girl' are gone: she imagines Cassidy threatening to replace any missing money with Marion's "fine, soft flesh". Equating money with flesh, and specifically a woman's flesh, denotes the problems this particular economy has with disruptive women: Sam's ex-wife, too, makes demands on the system that affect Sam's relationship to Marion. Divorce, and by logical extension, women's appetites to remain within a marital economy (for what are the alternatives?), are the fixed points on a male map of economy that chooses to imagine itself besieged by female demands. In *Thelma and Louise*, a more modern version of marital economy, the women plan to spend a weekend in a mountain cabin that Louise's boss believes he will lose in his divorce settlement. This supposed process of female demand has, to balance it, a flipside of supply: Harlan is not so much an example of perverse masculinity, but a 'logical extension of learned expectations of immediate gratification'.⁷¹ As he has bought drinks for Thelma, he expects a payment in return. Such an equating of sex with money is at its most fundamental level a method of reducing all women to 'fine, soft flesh'.

A Question of Silence

Thelma and Louise's explorations of transgressive female appetites echo those expressed in the Dutch film, *A Question of Silence* (Marleen Gorris, 1982). Directed as a feminist film, this film explores the relationship between capitalism and women's violence. Three women, strangers to each other, beat a shopkeeper to death when he catches one of them shoplifting. Such an act appears, in the eyes of the law, to be motiveless, and a female psychiatrist is engaged to find out why the three apparently normal women committed murder. The psychiatrist's job is to put into words the motive(s) of the women, and to discover if they are 'mad' or 'bad'. Over the course of her interviews, the psychiatrist realises that their motive cannot be articulated in words that the patriarchal workings of the court would understand. Her findings are that the women are 'lucid and rational when judged against the logic of patriarchal oppression'.⁷² Eventually, after being unable to describe the mental states of the women, the prosecuting counsel asks her,

"What difference does it make? I see no difference than if they had killed a woman, or if three men had killed a woman."

The resulting shout of laughter from the defendants, the spectating women in the gallery and the psychiatrist herself, forces the judge to clear the court of women.

As Andrea Weiss points out, the film reverses the normal positioning of women: as subjects for analysis or as mysteries to be revealed:

Rather than relying on psychological motivation to understand the three murderers, the psychiatrist (and by extension, the spectator) comes to understand them by rejecting psychological tools.⁷³

The rationale of the women's position is shown by scenes of each of them before and after the murder. The three women appear to have little in common: Christine

is a mother of two children, Annie works in a cafe and Andrea is a secretary. All three, however, live in a system that degrades and marginalizes them. Christine, the mother, is in an almost catatonic state, and the psychiatrist tells the court that this is not due to the murder. She has been like this for months, unnoticed by her husband or the rest of her family. Her refusal to speak is based on the recognition that no-one will listen to what she has to say.⁷⁴

The silent and vicious attack on the shop manager is watched by other female shoppers who do not intervene. His murder is cold-blooded and unjustifiable.

Mary Gentile points out:

If Gorris had wished her viewers to sympathize unquestioningly with the three murderers [...] she would have made a very different film.⁷⁵

Instead the film chooses to show women's rage expressed towards a man who appears within the context of the film to be an innocent bystander, but occupies a position of authority within the context of an economy that, for example, wants women to look as attractive as possible but expects them to pay for the privilege. Shoplifting, rather than murder, is thought to be a specifically female crime. It takes place in those areas that women, rather than men, inhabit: the shopping centres and supermarkets where women shop for themselves and their families. As Mary Gentile points out,

The film murder has everything to do with the gender-based oppression of women, the economic servitude of women, and the silent isolation of women.⁷⁶

In *A Question of Silence*, the refusal to speak becomes a symbol of the impossibility of expressing the position of the three women in a coherent way. The only weapon with which to deal with the forces of law is laughter, given by the women in response to the prosecuting counsel's attempts to posit a gender-

reversed situation. The women know full well such a utopian idea of reversibility is impossible in a culture that allows a customer in Annie's cafe to say,

"The only thing women know about economics is to take a man's pay and open their legs in reward".

A dichotomy of silence/laughter can be read politically as a refusal to enter language and engage as a speaking subject, but could also be a portrayal of a perpetual state of victimhood that places the three defendants into a state of legal limbo. Andrew Ross argues that the laughter may give the film an illusory satisfaction of narrative closure but it is a divisive tactic: 'it clearly leaves unexamined and unresolved the question of difference'.⁷⁷

However, the structure of the film shows that tactical non-disclosure is empowering precisely because it cannot be articulated. Rather than reducing the argument of the film to a didactic tract, non-disclosure allows for women's anger to be expressed to a point at which questions of reason and sanity are made unintelligible. Equally, while the film cannot satisfactorily resolve the question of difference, the problem of women's silence in the face of patriarchy remains:

A temporary, and desperate, strategy, a defense against domination, a holding operation, rather than a politics that looks toward women finding a viable place for themselves in culture.⁷⁸

So writes E. Ann Kaplan, in her discussion of Marguerite Duras's *Nathalie Granger* (1972). Both films show the possibilities of women's silence, but as Kaplan points out, when used as a strategy of female defiance, it becomes a contradictory tool. If women's essential difference is their distance from the Symbolic - according to Lacan, the realm that is language - then the alternative is that they remain in the pre-verbal state of the Imaginary. The implication is that women's refusal to enter the Symbolic is a statement of defiance. But silence

becomes then less of a celebratory tool than a way of confirming women's position outside language. Kaplan points out the dangers and the possibilities of this position:

If we believe in the symbolic order as fixed, change is impossible for women. However, if language has rather merely been *used* to oppress women, we can begin to change it once we become aware of its oppressive nature.⁷⁹ (author's emphasis)

Silence becomes at best a coping strategy; a far better proposition is the notion of changing language. *Thelma and Louise* shows - and this is its most radical element - a method of turning 'man-made' language back on itself, by asserting its illogic, and pre-empting male speech.

By beginning the road-movie narrative after the rape scene, it establishes, as the pivotal moment of the film, a point at which women's speech rather than men's speech becomes defunct and unreliable. Any rape story will be a variation on a theme of 'I thought she said "yes" to sex'. Or, 'she might have said "no" but didn't make the meaning clear'. That 'no' can be confused with 'yes' shows the inconsistencies of women's speech, rather than the unreliability of male hearing. But women's speech is not always to blame: the fault may lie in her inability to grasp the fundamentals of language. Witness the infamous words of Judge Wild in his summing-up at a rape trial in 1982, 'Women who say "No" do not always mean "No"'.⁸⁰ The burden of meaning is placed solely, not on the hearer, but the speaker of the words. Likewise, it is the body of the rape victim which has to supply the burden of proof of rape rather than the inconclusive veracity of a verbal statement.⁸¹ Louise shoots Harlan not because he physically threatens her but only after he says, "Suck my dick". She then whispers over his dead body "You watch your mouth, buddy". He is killed not because of his action, but his words. He refuses to listen to Louise, and fails to understand that "When a woman's crying

like that, she's not having any fun". She, on the other hand, has listened to his words and understands that whatever weaponry she has at her disposal, she cannot overturn his own assumption of power. What, after all, would be the female equivalent of "Suck my dick"?⁸² Louise takes an option that produces some equivalence. In death, Harlan's body, is open to invasion - a police investigation, an autopsy, a court case (where he cannot speak for himself). Harlan becomes the passive victim.

Lynda Hart's analysis of the film is that it becomes an 'anti-Oedipal' narrative, one that does not give up its secrets (the story of Louise's rape that is never told is a recurring theme in the film) and one which is propelled by the women's refusal to allow Hal to help them:

Thelma naively believes that simply telling the 'truth' will exonerate them. Louise has to teach her that the symbolic order is a masculine imaginary in which their truths have no credibility.⁸³

Indeed, as Hart argues, the women's actions might become more understandable if Louise's secret was articulated. Instead, it becomes the unspoken element of the film. The women's method of bypassing the system is to refuse to enter into a debate about their position. As Louise says, "Thelma, you've got to stop talking to people". If the film could be read simply as 'a female-driven outlaw movie'⁸⁴, the women's brushes with the law could be read as the natural outcome of committing a crime. But women's relationship to the law is complicated by their distance from the 'normal' economy and 'normal' gender. Frances Heidensohn defines three levels of law-making that have a direct influence on the way women are treated in law: the formal, judiciary system, the ideological system that upholds moral rather than legal concerns, and the practice of law, which often criminalizes women, in particular, without realizing its own gender bias.⁸⁵ Even though Hal

tells Louise that both women are only wanted for questioning in relation to Harlan's murder, they know that the ideological strictures regarding women's behaviour with men in bars will confuse the issue of Thelma's rape because she was seen drinking and dancing with him prior to the attack.

It is the realization of these conflicts between the formal and the ideological letter of the law which lead Thelma and Louise to re-define their route to freedom and self-expression. This radical re-routing defeats their own original objective - the escape to Mexico - and instead focuses on an undermining of the conventions of the road. The film therefore revisits old sites of conflict and rewrites the outcome for its feminist heroines. Within this scenario, Thelma represents the idealist liberatory side of feminism in that she believes that by usurping patriarchy and using it to her own ends, she has already defeated it. Louise, on the other hand, knows that the problem lies deeper, and that isolated acts of terrorism will temporarily disrupt the system but not bring it down.

Acts of Terrorism

The women's first run-in with the law occurs after Thelma's robbery of the store; their speeding car attracts the attention of a patrolman on a deserted mountain road. Despite being on the run, and reputedly wanted in two states for violent crimes, the women do not behave like hardened criminals. In fact, this scene reiterates the women's precarious position in the eyes of the law. As they try to negotiate with the officer to let them off the speeding charge, his dark, mirrored glasses make it impossible for them to see his eyes. The male gaze is both penetrating and impenetrable. In fact their nervousness, and Thelma's desperate flirting, appears to arouse his suspicions. His position as a representative of law

and order is accentuated by his appearance. Looking at him in the rear view mirror, in his peaked cap and dark uniform, Louise says, "Oh my God, It's a Nazi!". As a figure of authority, he appears to be over-masculinized, his close-fitting uniform exaggerating the taut, erect body. As a representative of a very male law and order, the women's efforts to define their position within his law - "How fast was I going, Officer?", "Am I in trouble?" - emphasize the patrolman's status in relation to their own.

There are a number of similarities between this scene in *Thelma and Louise* and *Psycho* when Marion is woken by a policeman, after he finds her sleeping in her car by the side of the road.⁸⁶ As she is on the run, with a large amount of stolen money, the sight of the policeman tapping on the car window is terrifying to her. This is one of the few moments in the film where terror is not heralded by music: in fact, the soundtrack at this moment is almost silent. The policeman is, as in *Thelma and Louise*, an anonymous and unreadable figure of male authority. His eyes, too, are covered by dark glasses, through which it is impossible to register any emotion or expression. Marion's feelings of fear and paranoia are heightened by this lack of human response: he is in control of the situation.⁸⁷ The window that Marion winds down in order to speak to him is, by contrast, a barrier so transparent that it provides no comparable protection for her. While she has not broken any formal laws, she has obviously violated the ideological laws that deal with women's safety and mobility. A woman sleeping alone in a car is both vulnerable and a cause for suspicion. Therefore, he advises her, in a line that foreshadows her fate, to sleep in a motel "just to be safe". When Marion asks him, "then I'm free to go?", she sounds as if she is questioning his authority. Thus challenged, he reluctantly admits that she has not broken any laws, but still follows her as she drives away.

In *Thelma and Louise* the incident with the patrolman shows the extent to which the women have progressed in their criminal behaviour. While Marion Crane only wishes to hide the fact that she has stolen some money, Thelma takes action in order to disrupt male authority. Before he speaks into his police radio, Thelma appears, smiling at the window of the patrol car. When he asks her to return to the car, she holds a gun to his head. In order to prevent him revealing their whereabouts, Thelma asks Louise to shoot the radio. The women's roles are now reversed. At this point, it is Thelma, not Louise, who understands the necessity of precluding male speech. The policeman, now with a gun held to his head, and unlike Harlan who refused to take the potential threat of an armed woman seriously, starts to weep. His potential paternal (as opposed to patriarchal) authority is ratified by Thelma as he tells her that he has a wife and children: she replies, "Well, you be sweet to 'em, especially your wife". As a symbol of masculine law and order, his patriarchal authority has been blocked, albeit temporarily. But paternal authority, in the form of his family, is shown to him by Thelma as a position of responsibility rather than power. As a symptom and not a cause of their outlaw status, the policeman is not hurt: he is merely placed in the boot of his own patrol car, while Louise strips him of his belt, his beer, and finally asks to swap sunglasses with him.

A road movie that invokes similar male fears is an early film by Steven Spielberg, *Duel* (1972). It stars Dennis Weaver as 'David Mann' (a name that contains both a biblical reference and a universal status), a harassed salesman who is chased and nearly killed by a truck while he is driving to a business meeting. The first shot of the truck, with its smoky exhaust and rusting body, is combined with a phone-in programme on Mann's car radio where a man talks about the difficulties of

calling himself the 'head' of the household, when his wife works full-time and he looks after the children all day. The truck is a mysterious entity on the road: the driver is never seen and the truck bears only a faint 'flammable' sign on its body, and a collection of registration plates, as trophies from other duels. The film becomes an allegory of the paranoia of masculinity: the male position of 'head' of the family is slowly being eroded away. The salesman, whose work signifies tenacity and aggression, feels lost in a world in which the importance of men's work is slowly subsumed. This is made explicit by the phone calls Mann makes to his wife in which she complains about what he feels to be mere domestic problems: disciplining the children, his long absences from the home, and most significantly, his ineffectualness at dealing with a neighbour, who, his wife says, tried to rape her at a party.

Duel explores the consequences of male aggression, by taking apart some of the unwritten rules that help to keep it in check. The rules of the road that emphasize safety, politeness and patience with other drivers are made meaningless by a truck driver who refuses to allow another vehicle to overtake him.⁸⁸ In *Thelma and Louise* the trucker is trying to assert his masculinity, but as his target is two women driving in an open-top car, he is not trying to run them off the road. His tactics are to launch a verbal assault of abuse and blasts on his horn in order to attract their attention. Unlike the rusting truck in *Duel*, his truck is extremely shiny, reflecting the scenery around them: one writer describes it as 'a big silver bullet rifling along and blocking the view'⁸⁹, referring back to the Silver Bullet Bar where Louise killed Harlan. But as in *Duel*, rather than showing a company logo, his commercial identity is anonymous. In place of registration plates, his trophies are metallic plates of naked women on his truck's mud flaps, conveniently placed

at eye-level for anyone driving past. Consequently, everywhere they look, the two women see themselves being reflected back as a distorted image.

On the first occasion, he allows the women to overtake him in order to make obscene gestures and remarks from his cab window. The second time they pass his truck, both women ignore him. Later, when he is spotted on the third occasion, having decided that the tactic of silence is not enough, they make an unspoken agreement to deal with him.⁹⁰ The truck-driver assumes, on being assured that the two women want to 'get serious', that they want to have sex with him. He removes his wedding ring (like Harlan, another married man), puts a packet of condoms in his pocket and walks eagerly over to the women. Louise warns "Where do you get off on behaving like that with women you don't even know?". The women ask for the meaning of the gestures he made to them, a desire not only to obstruct his abusive language, but to show its effects. The similarity of the women's position both here and at the Silver Bullet Bar is accentuated by Thelma inquiring whether a certain gesture (the truck-driver pointing to his lap) means "Suck my dick". Finally, after asking him to apologize for his words, which he refuses, both women fire on the truck, and cause it to explode. It would appear that the women have learnt the true value of their relationship to capitalism: while shooting a rapist is merely the start of their journey, by shooting the truck they draw a direct relationship between economic control and male dominance over the road.

The brief dialogue at the end of the scene seems to add to its air of fantasy (Ridley Scott describes this scene as 'almost a cartoon'⁹¹). Louise asks Thelma "Where did you learn to shoot like that?", to which Thelma replies "Off the TV". To learn to shoot a gun with such accuracy from watching television is indeed a

feat, but one which adds to the fact that the women are imitating male behaviour to their own advantage. In this context, guns are far more useful than voices: it means that they have no need to explain their actions. Margaret Carlson's complaint that the two women avoid intimacy by drinking and listening to loud music is backed up by reports that Ridley Scott cut scenes that focused on the women's growing closeness.⁹² But as Kirsten Marthe Lentz argues, a woman with a gun bypasses the necessity of having to explain a political position:

Her gun pre-empts the possibility of a more overtly politicized feminist theory of women's subordination. Since the woman has a gun with which to protect herself, she needs no social critique.⁹³

With both the truck-driver and the shooting of Harlan, the gun is used, not to protect against male action, but to punish men for their words. Both men refuse to apologize and, by not doing so, are attacked. By refusing to enter into the system that denigrates the female voice, the women draw attention to it by focusing on the words of the men, and the power that these words have. Thelma needs only to hear two words from Darryl ("Thelma, hello") in order to guess correctly that the police have contacted him and that her call is being monitored. In another instance, she uses JD's words as a means with which to rob the store. Both women use dialogue which could belong to another film. As Thelma shouts, "the Call of the Wild!", or Louise explains, when Thelma cautions her for driving too fast, "I want to put some distance between us and the scene of our last goddamn crime!", it shows us that the two women would prefer to play with words than engage in dialogue.

After all, they have found that male speech is never benign under any circumstances. Louise's two phone conversations with Hal show that the women's motives for communication are radically at odds with the motives of the police.

While she is anxious to define their legal position, he is equally anxious to find out their current location. Louise attempts to reaffirm the balance between them, by offering first to tell Hal the whole story, "over coffee sometime - I'll buy". Meanwhile, Hal's motive for asking Louise about her rape is a pretence only to keep her on the phone. In spite of his sympathies towards her, he does not want to hear her story. Instead, he wants to tell her his own interpretations of her actions. Finally, Thelma, who has now learned the impossibilities of using either silence or speech against male oppression, uses the third option of disruption and breaks the phone connection between Hal and Louise.

The open road becomes a metaphor for the impossibilities of role reversal: the two women cannot do a U-turn and attempt to return to what they had before. No other option is open to the women other than to continue to move in the same direction. As they move further away from their home, the possibilities of their returning to their male partners become less likely. Darryl's attempt to establish a paternal relationship with Thelma is subsumed by both Louise's attitude (Darryl calls her "a bad influence") and the figure of Hal, the detective chasing the women. Paternalism is not destroyed - in fact the film reiterates that it cannot be avoided - but the power is shifted onto the figure of the detective and the role he plays in upholding law and order. He becomes the figure that the women must escape.

However, compared to Darryl, Harlan and the truck-driver, the law enforcement officers appear benign. At one telling moment, as the men wait for a phone call from Thelma to Darryl, they watch a film on television. Perhaps not coincidentally, the film is *Dark Victory* (Edmund Goulding, 1939), starring Bette Davis who is dying of an incurable disease. Darryl's attempt to change channels

in order to watch the football causes the men to look at him in disbelief until he changes the channel back to the film. The rapt attention they give to what is undoubtedly a 'woman's film' points to a major part of the film's appeal. For this film to be labelled both feminist and anti-feminist, such scenes of apparent gender role reversal undermine the notion of 'equal and opposite' roles for men and women. This scene emphasizes the film's own paradox that gender roles are not reversible. The end result is to confirm that if men have difficulty in maintaining patriarchy in the face of female defiance, women cannot hope to imitate male power and authority. And while men can learn to enjoy melodrama, femininity and domesticity (and even learn to love their wives and girlfriends), women are still the victims of tragedy. To reinforce this, a later scene shows one of the policeman intently reading a woman's magazine called *Boudoir*, while Louise and Thelma remain defiantly at large.

For the women, their journey takes them only a certain distance. They learn that, away from domesticity, male figures only offer a limited potential for sexual release or financial gain. None of the men, not even Hal, can offer escape or protection. Hal's hysterical outburst: "How many times do they have to be fucked over?", when he sees the women cornered at the top of a cliff, also refers to his own impotence in the face of the law. It would be correct to say that all the male characters are presented as potential victims of the system of patriarchy. Even Hal, despite his wish to help rather than punish the woman, finally reveals the impossibilities of re-negotiating their position. Poised at the edge of the cliff, there is nowhere for Thelma and Louise to go but forward into oblivion. The two women have done their best to show that male authority is a complex and institutionalized assumption of female consent, but neither they nor anyone else can ever hope to break free of it.

The ending of *Thelma and Louise*, as the women drive over the cliff, brings the 'incoherent geography'⁹⁴ of the film into play, for the credits immediately provide the audience with another, highly-edited replay of their journey. This is a timeloop that feeds back into the memory of the film, emphasizing the circular nature of the women's flight. Within the film, as Louise drives, Thelma compulsively watches the road from her side mirror, 'a miniature movie within a movie'⁹⁵, as if she is watching the disappearance of her own past framed by the possibilities of the future. This ability to look forward as well as behind is at the centre of the difference between the two women. For Thelma, identity is a constant shedding of the old: she now knows that she can assume and discard anybody's identity. "I'm Louise", she says, pretending to smoke a cigarette. Later, she 'becomes' JD as she carries out an armed robbery. As Louise drives to escape from an exposure of her true self as a rape victim, Thelma seems to be rushing headlong into multiple identity changes until she find one that she enjoys: probably that of 'armed criminal'. Such an identity is, of course, a fantasy.

Some of the criticisms of *Thelma and Louise* have been levelled at the fantasy nature of its depiction of women. In other words, 'real' women do not behave in this manner, and indeed, should not, as the consequence of their actions would be both socially and economically disruptive. Given that the film is a fantasy, it is furnished by Thelma and Louise's own fantasies about, primarily, a refusal to submit to domesticity and, later, a wish to challenge the constraints of patriarchy. Going beyond the spectacle of two women in a fast car, the film reveals both the social and cinematic generic conventions that might inhibit women's autonomy. Yet, in spite of its controversial subject matter, the film is still a comedy, and a self-conscious parody of the road movie genre. As Leo Braudy points out, the

film is a 'hard-edged satire of wannabe heroism and consumer identity' that passes through 'satiric reality into myth'.⁹⁶ It is this process of myth, partly through the film's successful commentary on its generic legacies and partly its apparent collusion with mainstream values, that designates the women's journey as, in Roland Barthes' words, 'a whole new history'.⁹⁷

As a women's road movie, it expresses, quite uniquely, the relationship between gender and genre, first by using a masculine genre to call attention to the sex/gender system, and then by exposing the potential dangers of disrupting the system. Critiques of the film tend to focus on individual effects of the disruption - murder, guns and cars - without looking for the original cause. Hence, these readings reveal far more about the cultural paranoia evoked by women's potential criminality than anything to do with the film. They also reveal that mainstream culture continues to be antagonistic towards any possible manifestations of feminism. In my analysis, the strategies that the women employ are actually far more subversive, and hence more politically aware, than first impressions allow.

NOTES

1. Letter in Problem Page, *TV Quick*, 31 May 1997, p. 66.
2. Hester Lacey, 'Baby, you can drive my car', *Independent on Sunday*, 17 March 1996, Real Life section, p. 7. (Figures from the RAC).
3. Michael Atkinson, 'Crossing the Frontiers', *Sight and Sound*, 4 1 (January 1994), 14-17 (p. 14).
4. *Ibid*, p. 16.
5. *Ibid*, p. 17.

6. Jack Boozer, 'Seduction and Betrayal in the Heartland: *Thelma and Louise*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 23 (1995), 188-196 (p. 189).
7. Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 72.
8. David Laderman, 'What a Trip: The Road Film and American Culture', *Journal of Film and Video*, 48 (1996), 41-57 (p. 42).
9. Ibid, p. 43. One of the most obvious examples of this attitude is the story of Sal Paradise (the narrator of *On the Road*) taking time out from travelling to live with a Mexican woman and her young son in a camp for itinerant cotton-pickers. Paradise recalls the poverty of the camp, the exhausting work and the fact that the pair of them pick only enough cotton to pay for food for an evening meal. However, these family responsibilities are forgotten when he wishes to move on. The episode is romanticized into a travelling 'experience' rather than an appreciation of immigrant living and working conditions.
10. Ibid, p. 45.
11. Boozer, op. cit., p. 189.
12. Manohla Dargis, 'N for Noir', *Sight and Sound*, 7 7 (July 1997), 28-31 (p. 30). When the married couple lose their jobs as sharpshooters in a travelling fair, Annie Laurie Starr's hunger for a more comfortable lifestyle is shown to be the reason that leads the couple to holding up banks. The conclusion is that Bart, her husband, in spite of his obvious fetish for guns and time spent in a reform school, would not have committed these crimes without her influence. Hence the original title of the film, *Deadly is the Female*.
13. Al Auster and Leonard Quart, 'American Cinema of the Sixties', *Cineaste*, XIII 2 (1984), 4-12 (pp. 8-10).
14. Figures from J. Hoberman, 'Bonnie and Clyde', *Village Voice*, 1 December 1992, reprinted in *Flesh and Blood: The National Society of Film Critics on Sex, Violence, and Censorship*, ed. by Peter Keough (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1995), pp. 318-323 (p. 319).
15. Lew Louderback, 'Clyde, Bonnie, Buck and the Boys', in *Couples Who Kill: Terrifying True Stories of the World's Deadliest Duos*, ed. by Richard Glyn Jones (London: True Crime/Virgin, 1993), pp. 81-125 (p. 115).
16. Ibid, p. 124.
17. According to Louderback, in spite of the enormous price on Clyde's head, their biggest robbery haul came to only 1,500 dollars.
18. Linda Grant, 'It's Pay-Back Time', *Guardian*, Second section, 7 September 1995, p. 6.
19. Manohla Dargis, '*Thelma and Louise* and the Tradition of the Male Road Movie', *Sight and Sound*, 1 (July 1991), reprinted in *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. by Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (London: Scarlet Press [n.d.]), pp. 86-92, (p. 92).

20. Ibid, p. 88.
21. Cited in Rebecca Bell-Metereau, *Hollywood Androgyny*, 2nd edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 247.
22. Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 139.
23. Angela Lambert, 'What do you call a successful woman?', *Independent on Sunday*, 25 August 1991, p. 23.
24. Sheila Benson, 'Thelma and Louise', in *Love and Hisses*, cited in Bell-Metereau, *Hollywood Androgyny*, op. cit., p. 247.
25. According to figures published by the FBI, a woman is raped every six minutes in the United States. However, crime figures for rape and sexual assault are notoriously unreliable as the crimes are under-reported and under-estimated. Official figures for 1979 give a figure of nearly 76,000 for rapes reported to the police: victimization surveys give a figure of 192,000 for that year. In 1986, the official figure was 90,434, showing a rate of 73 per 100,000 women. See Margaret T. Gordon and Stephanie Riger, 'The Realities of Rape', in *The Female Fear: The Social Cost of Rape*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 23-39. In the more recent *Critical Condition: Women on the Edge of Violence* ed. by Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights, 1993), the figure for the rate of rape in the USA is said to be every 1.3 minutes.
26. Kirsten Marthe Lentz, 'The Popular Pleasures of Female Revenge (Or Rage Bursting in a Blaze of Gunfire)', *Cultural Studies*, 7 (1993), 374-398 (p. 381).
27. Ibid, p. 378.
28. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976; repr. 1977), p. 15.
29. Ridley Scott, interviewed in *Sight and Sound* 13 (July 1991), pp. 14-19 and pp. 55-56 (p. 19).
30. Media attention, in general, focuses on 'stranger-rapes' as being more newsworthy to the general public. This, in turn, draws attention away from domestic sexual abuse. For a detailed analysis, see Keith Soothill, 'Sex crime news from abroad', in *Gender and Crime*, ed. by R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash and Lesley Noaks (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), pp. 96-114.
31. Jo Goodey, 'Fear of Crime: Children and Gendered Socialization', in *Gender and Crime*, ed. by R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash and Lesley Noaks (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), pp. 295-312. See also Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), and *Growing Up Good: Policing the Behaviour of Girls in Europe*, ed. by Maureen Cain (London: SAGE, 1989).
32. Ibid, p. 296.
33. Brownmiller, op. cit., p. 309.
34. Goodey, op. cit., p. 298.

35. Margaret Carlson, 'Is This What Feminism is All About?', *Time*, 24 June 1991, cited in Chris Holmlund, 'A decade of deadly dolls: Hollywood and the woman killer', in *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, ed. by Helen Birch (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 127-151 (p. 148).
36. Tasker, op. cit., p. 135.
37. Richard A Blake, 'The Deadlier of the Species', *America*, 29 June 1991, cited in Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression*, op. cit., p. 73.
38. Freda Adler, *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Criminal* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), p. 7.
39. Ibid, p. 47.
40. Alison Young, *Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations* (London: SAGE, 1996), p. 27.
41. Ibid, p. 29.
42. Hart, op. cit., p. 9.
43. Richard Schickel, 'Gender Bender', *Time*, 24 June 1991, pp. 52-56, cited in Holmlund, 'A decade of deadly dolls', in *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, op. cit., p. 145.
44. Tasker, op. cit., p. 132.
45. Young, op. cit., p. 27.
46. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 9.
47. Cathy Griggers, 'Thelma and Louise and the Cultural Generation of the New Butch-Femme', in *Film Theory goes to the Movies*, ed. by Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (London: Routledge/AFI, 1993), pp. 129-141 (p. 139).
48. Hart, op. cit., p. 73.
49. Griggers, op. cit., p. 136.
50. Holmlund, op. cit., p. 140.
51. More information on Billy Tipton can be found in Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), pp. 67-70.
52. Jane Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, ed. by Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (London: Routledge/AFI, 1990), pp. 180-211 (p. 184).
53. Ibid, p. 1.
54. Butler, op. cit., p. 8.

55. Dargis, op. cit., p. 87.
56. Boozer, op. cit., p. 190.
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61. Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p. 30.
62. Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union', in *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: A Debate on Class and Patriarchy*, ed. by Lydia Sargent (London: Pluto Press, 1981), pp. 1-43 (p. 18).
63. Frederick Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* [translator's name omitted] (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1948; repr. 1977), p. 100.
64. Zaretsky, op. cit., p. 43.
65. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), p. 20.
66. Griggers, op. cit., p. 140.
67. Rubin, op. cit., pp. 174-5.
68. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 181.
69. Rubin, op. cit., p. 183.
70. William Rothman, *Hitchcock - The Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 256.
71. Boozer, op. cit., p. 193.
72. Andrew Ross, 'No Question of Silence', in *Men in Feminism*, ed. by Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 85-92 (p. 89).
73. Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in the Cinema* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p. 120.
74. The action of silent protest can be used by a range of characters to refuse to enter into the system of their own oppression: the silent Native American narrator of Ken Kesey's novel, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, is presumed by fellow inmates and staff to be a deaf-mute.

75. Mary C Gentile, 'Feminist or Tendentious? Marleen Gorris's *A Question of Silence*', in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 395-404 (p. 397).
76. *Ibid*, p. 403.
77. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
78. E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 103.
79. *Ibid*, p. 103.
80. Judge Wild, quoted in Helena Kennedy, *Eve Was Framed: Women and British Justice* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 111.
81. According to Susan Brownmiller's original research, out of 2,415 allegations of rape reported to the New York Police in 1971, only one hundred men were brought to trial and of these, only 18 were convicted - less than a 1% conviction rate. See Brownmiller, *op. cit.*, p. 372.
82. Perhaps there is no need to find a female equivalent: after all, Demi Moore uses the same phrase in *G.I. Jane* (Ridley Scott, 1997). Ridley Scott says of the line, 'It was one of the best lines in the movie [...] She'd earned, if you like, her dick.' Adam Smith, 'Missing in Action: interview with Ridley Scott', *Empire*, December 1997, 110-118, p. 114.
83. Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
84. Elayne Rapping, *Media-tions: Forays into the Culture and Gender Wars* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1994), p. 64.
85. Frances Heidensohn, *Women and Crime* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1985), p. 32.
86. I am indebted to Dr Sue Vice for initially pointing out the similarities between these two scenes.
87. Stephen Rebello writes that Alfred Hitchcock never drove because he had a phobia about being stopped by the police. See Rebello, *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* (London: Marion Boyars, 1990), p. 99.
88. As the identity of the truckdriver is not revealed, it is possible that a woman is driving it.
89. Anthony Lane, 'The women's movement hits the road', *Independent on Sunday*, Review section, 14 July 1991, p. 20.
90. Though many writers have commented on the women's disorganized route, no-one has commented on the likelihood of their passing this particular truck on three separate occasions.
91. Ridley Scott, cited in Sheila Johnston, 'Hidden Gender', *Independent*, 29 June 1991, p. 30.

92. According to one reviewer, 'Scott wouldn't know a friendship between two characters if it showed up for dinner'. Reggie Nadelson, 'Toxic feminism at the box office', *Independent*, 10 July 1991, p. 14.
93. Lentz, op. cit., p. 395.
94. Hart, op. cit., p. 174.
95. Atkinson, op. cit., p. 16.
96. Leo Baudy, 'Satire into Myth', *Film Quarterly*, 45, cited in Boozer, op. cit., p. 189.
97. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973), p. 128.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SPECTRE OF THE OTHER WOMAN:

SINGLE WHITE FEMALE AND LETHAL FEMININITY

Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you *shall* be mine, and you and I are one for ever".

J. S. LeFanu, 'Carmilla'¹

As a road movie, *Thelma and Louise* shows what might happen if women were to escape their pre-ordained and constrained female identities to explore other options. The women's identities become more radical and less recognizable as they move freely through a space where they are no longer tied to domesticity. All too often, though, narrative closure for female characters involves a seeking of security, and an entering or rejoining of the family unit. In *Thelma and Louise*, escape becomes impossible for the two women who have strayed too far to return to their original roles. Even in a film in which gender roles are supposedly reversed - the women on the open road, the men at home - these roles are not so much challenged as overtly emphasized to draw attention to the women's distance from social norms. On the other hand, the road movie as a film genre does enable identity to be presented as fluid and mobile, representing the road as a space where social convention can be broken, and where characters can be unknown and anonymous: 'passing through' rather than engaging with the world.

The next film I discuss shows a complete reversal of the possibilities of open spaces, mobility, and women in partnership. *Single White Female* (Barbet Schroeder, 1992) is set in a domestic space, and shows two women in conflict. While *Thelma and Louise* underlines the problems of female identity within a generic space that disavows female autonomy, *Single White Female* reiterates the problems of identifying a coherent female identity within cinematic traditions that have always pathologized femininity. As the film obsessively and compulsively explores female identity, it reveals the artifice that lies behind these representations. *Single White Female* highlights the problems of female independence, the pathological face of masquerade and the dangers of female spectatorship. The women's compulsion to identify themselves and each other, to negotiate and re-define the limits of their identities, is mirrored by the camera's compulsion to identify and re-identify the component parts of femininity. At the film's conclusion both characters are shown to be marginalized and fragmented. It therefore reveals the consequence of exploring female subjectivity, and an awareness of the subversive elements that may lie at the margins of women's representations. These problems of representation stress the cinematic limits of female identification within a dominant ideology that reproduces femininity as both passive and pathological.

The narrative of the film is as follows: Allie Jones advertises for a roommate after throwing out her fiancé, Sam, when she discovers that he recently slept with his ex-wife. Hedy, the new flatmate, while first of all appearing shy and diffident, starts displaying an over-obsessive and jealous appropriation of Allie's identity. Allie is at first mildly irritated when Hedy borrows her clothes, then is disturbed to discover that Hedy has in fact been buying exact replicas of all her clothing. While Hedy has told Allie that she had a still-born twin sister who did not survive

after birth, Allie later discovers from newspaper cuttings that she finds in Hedy's room that Hedy's twin drowned at the age of nine. Hedy's possessive nature becomes even more apparent when Allie and Sam decide to continue with their relationship. After Allie is sexually assaulted by Mitch Myerson, the man for whom she has been working, Hedy reveals her aggressive side by threatening him over the phone. She later takes Allie to the hairdressers, and, at the same time, has her own hair cut and dyed to match exactly Allie's shade and style. Becoming increasingly concerned about Hedy's odd behaviour, Allie discovers the phone number of Hedy's parents and leaves a message for them on their answerphone, to Hedy's fury. She and her neighbour, Graham, discuss Hedy's problems and decide that she needs professional help, a discussion that Hedy overhears. She enters Graham's apartment and attacks him, leaving him for dead. Hedy's threatening nature only becomes apparent to Allie when she realizes that Hedy has killed Sam. The film culminates in a battle between the two women when Allie is finally able to outwit Hedy and kills her.

The film *Single White Female* is based on the novel *SWF Seeks Same* by John Lutz.² The difference between the title of the novel and the title of the film underlines the differences between the two texts. Both titles are a reference to the shorthand used in small ads, and refer to the phrase used by Allie to describe herself when she advertises for a flatmate. The title of the Lutz novel heralds the fact that Allie is looking for the 'same', and unfortunately finds her. Hedra (in the novel, her name is never shortened to 'Hedy') is a predatory creature, a manifestation of the anonymity of urban life. Set in New York, *SWF Seeks Same* explores the fear that loss of identity and loss of community are part of the modern urban experience:

People did strange things in New York. People came and went for their own reasons, and life continued its raucous, zigzagging slide toward eternity.³

The publisher's blurb on the back cover describes the novel as 'a chilling portrayal of urban terror' set in the 'frantic scrum' of New York. The city is a dehumanizing place, and the problems faced by Allie are part of an urban lifestyle where personal expression becomes little more than a matter of consumer choice. The predicament that faces the 'single white female' is one that modern, urban life has forced upon her. She no longer has the traditional protection of the nuclear family, and the feeling of paranoia that the city evokes means that all strangers are treated with suspicion. The deception involved in maintaining human relationships is made explicit in the novel: both Sam and Hedy must pretend that they are not sharing the apartment with Allie, as her lease stipulates no sub-letting. Graham is a writer living upstairs and is working on his play (called *SWF Seeks Same*), based on what he can hear of Allie's experiences in the apartment below. Graham's fascination with Allie, though voyeuristic and detached, is a relationship that runs counter to the normal processes of the city, where neighbours are unlikely to know or care about each other.

In the novel, Hedra's pathology is one based on pragmatism - she chooses to kill because, for her, this is the easiest method to maintain her lifestyle. Her murders remain unsolved in a city rampant with crime and her victims remain anonymous, mere statistics in a teeming, transient population. Thus Allie is only one of a long line of people whose identities and homes are stolen. Hedra is exposed as a killer indirectly by Graham, as Alice's bizarre story of stolen identity is only believed by the police when they find his unfinished play. As Hedra has managed to cover her tracks though the city with ease, her real persona cannot be discovered, nor

can an underlying reason be given for her behaviour. Therefore, unlike the film, the Hedra of the novel is characterized as a modern, specifically urban, serial killer whose femininity is a weapon with which she charms and seduces her victims, both male and female. Allie is the woman who is at odds with the city and who must finally escape to a new job in the country, surrounded not by uncommunicating neighbours, but by woodland:

The company's real-estate division found her an affordable place to live, a small house on an acre of wooded land just outside of town. It was always quiet there.⁴

Hedra's arrest and Allie's escape to a rural idyll are only part of an urban cycle of destruction and deceit. After all, Allie's old apartment is re-let within days of her departure to 'a pair of single women who said they were sisters'.⁵ Women, specifically single women, the novel suggests, are particularly duplicitous, and continue to maintain a threatening presence together in the absence of men. The new tenants may indeed be a lesbian couple, who are at pains to conceal their real identities.

The differences between the novel and the film are of particular interest in identifying the problems of female representation in film. The 'female' in the title of the novel is a specific label of anatomy that defines Allie's possible future flatmates. But in the film, as a film, the label defines not only the limits of the sexed body but also the visual possibilities of gender identity. Female identity co-exists uneasily with the problematic value of femininity. Criticisms of the film suggest that its own awareness of the problems of representation can undermine the tensions of the narrative. According to *Halliwel's Film Guide*, the film merely treads through old ground: 'its subject matter is too familiar'.⁶ Lizzie Francke in *Sight and Sound* writes that the film 'seems too much like familiar territory' but

adds that it also 'reverses some expectations'.⁷ Such ease of recognition in this film is not only to do with the nature of the danger - another woman - but the methods the film employs to highlight specifically female fears about identity, attractiveness and interchangeability, foregrounded in a milieu of domesticity. A film that appears so 'recognizable' points to the fact that it is aware of its own manipulation of audience expectations. It is part of the film's generic legacy that it expects its audience to stay one step ahead.

Steve Neale's definition of genres as 'systems of orientation' shows that the recognition of film genre relies on both the multiplicity of codes and discourses within the film itself and audience recognition of such codes.⁸ *Single White Female* turns the problems of female identity into a problem of genre identity. Part of *Single White Female*'s familiarity is that the film is working within a multiplicity of generic conventions, shifting between elements of the woman's film, gothic, and horror, all of which are related to each other by their emphasis on women's subjectivity and the consequent destabilizing of male subjectivity. By way of comparison, Chris Holmlund suggests that the shift in genre in *Fatal Attraction* from family melodrama to horror is the moment when Dan finds Alex in his house, talking to his wife. While the film does not subsequently displace male subjectivity, the jerky camera shots, taken from what appears to be a hand-held camera, show Dan's distress at Alex's invasion of his home. After this, Holmlund says, 'Alex is transformed from masochistic victim to sadistic villain'.⁹ The shift of the woman from the passive to the active, the victim to villain, gives credence to the idea that malevolence lurks beneath the multitudinous folds of female identity, whatever may lie on its surface.

The ambiguity of *Single White Female's* title means that it can refer to either of the two women. Does it therefore refer to Allie and the vulnerability of the 'single white female'? Or does the title refer to Hedy as the aggressor, with the 'single white female' seen as a dangerous and anti-social force to be contained? It is the confusion between the two women in the film that reviewers have suggested to be one of its most interesting developments. Deborah Jermyn describes Allie as 'frequently smug, sulky and selfish'.¹⁰ Lizzie Francke points out that there is:

A constant slipping and sliding between the two personas [and] a mutual and guilty fascination is established between the two.¹¹

Allie remains a cold and unsympathetic character, in direct contrast to Hedy, who appears vulnerable and eager to please. As Allie remains aloof, her possible pathology is unrevealed. Hedy, for all her obvious madness, does invoke sympathy. For Joan Juliet Buck, the ambiguous positions of the two characters present an unexpected dimension:

It's the crazy person who is tender, sympathetic, and understandable, and the sane one who is detached, hermetic, and just a touch repellent.¹²

Hedy's desperation for affection is matched by Allie's reluctance to see Hedy's relationship with her as anything other than an economic necessity, forced on her by Sam's departure. In spite of her supposed sophistication, Allie's vulnerability is stressed at many points in the film: she is new to New York, she is far from her family (in the original novel, she has no family) and the only person she appears to know in the city, apart from her boyfriend, is her gay neighbour, Graham. Her feelings of isolation and her lack of friends are revealed at the beginning of the film: in her conversation with Sam about their wedding, she tells him it will have to be a small event as she knows so few people in New York. When he tells her that she will soon make friends, "people like you, you know", she tells him, "You're the only friend I need". As the narrative unfolds and her isolation

becomes more acute, Allie's problems appear to be directly linked to her lack of insight into the dangers of being single.

Lynda Hart points out that the implications of the label of 'single' now extend beyond the simple aspect of the unmarried woman to include such contemporary labels as the lesbian and the single mother.¹³ Worse still, the definition of 'single woman' is a paradoxical status fraught with the conflicting pressures of undesirability (the frigid spinster) *and* sexual predation; over-ambition and masculine identification (the career woman) *and* the embodiment of a rampant maternal instinct (the single mother). In other words, the single woman implicitly denotes a rejection of the male sex. Such a status has widespread social implications, for in order for patriarchy to succeed, women must only accept their single status if they treat it as a temporary event.¹⁴ The 'single' of the film title is a warning about the possibilities of interrupting the normal heterosexual process. It is no coincidence, then, that directly after the title sequence, after an establishing exterior shot showing the apartment building, the film begins in the middle of a conversation between Sam and Allie about their forthcoming marriage and the number of children they will have. As if to emphasize her loyalty to her man, Allie says to Sam, "I want them to look like you." In wanting Sam's children, and significantly, in having them look like him, she shows that she is a 'normal' woman. As Lynda Hart succinctly puts it:

[Allie] is willing to accede to the conditions of motherhood as it is constructed under the reigning ideology.¹⁵

In order to show the maximum disruption that a woman like Hedy can inflict on the process of heterosexuality, the film must show Allie's willingness to accept her biological fate. In the assumption of her role as a sexually mature woman, Allie's wish to give birth to Sam's sons (all 2.2 of them) shows that Allie will 'fulfil her

role in sexual function and perform her invaluable social tasks'.¹⁶ Hart concludes that the primary role of the single white female must be, in ideological terms, to reproduce the white man. All other permutations may be damaging to white patriarchy, and such reproduction is part of an important process of the 'normalization' of the single woman:

In that the nonreproductive woman is located in a category constructed as sexually abnormal, women who aspire to normality are simultaneously enjoined to reproduce and to be heterosexual.¹⁷

Allie and Sam discuss their forthcoming marriage as a ceremony with an infinite number of permutations and finally settle on "naked sky-diving" as a way of sealing the knot. Marriage can be usefully disguised as unconventional, as a process that appears to offer options to the couple, but still confirms heterosexual, normal identity.

Part of the process of normalization is to deny the importance of women's work in the marketplace. Allie's professional skills are undermined during her first business meeting with Mitch Myerson, the man for whom she is to design computer programmes.¹⁸ When he mentions contacting Allie's former business partner, Allie explains that the two of them parted on very bad terms: "it wasn't a friendly split." As if talking about a divorce settlement, she explains that she got the apartment and the hardware: her female partner took everything else, including the client list. Therefore, like Hedy, Allie has something in her past - a 'split' that is recriminatory and which is still having repercussions. Myerson, realising she is desperate for work, takes the opportunity to reduce the amount of money he is willing to pay her. The message here is double-edged: beware the single white female as she will take what is rightfully yours, and if you are a single white female, take care not to reveal your own vulnerable single status. The sexual

attack on Allie by Myerson takes place in his company premises where Allie, and the other women in his workforce, are surrounded by mannequins in various states of undress. The images on the computer screen, produced by Allie to help the dress designers choose fabrics and make alterations, show an endless supply of images of women, whose appearance can be changed at the touch of a button. The only appearance of women in the workplace in this film is as interchangeable commodities and potential sexual partners.

Hedy's arrival as an economic replacement for Sam (she pays his share of the rent) specifically shows the relationship between economic exchange and heterosexuality. The tensions that arise between Hedy and Allie are initiated by a financial arrangement that can only ever be a second-rate substitution for the correct permutation, that of Allie and Sam together. Therefore, the women's economic relationship is viewed as a stop-gap, a temporary alternative to the patriarchal economy. However, when Hedy's presence threatens to become permanent, the full horrors of the implications of a strictly female economy are made clear. Women setting up home together, enjoying their independence and economic stability, and bestowing gifts of jewellery and clothing on each other, is in itself a disrupting element: that one woman should wish for something more from the other exposes the sinister side of female economic relationships.

The emphasis that the film places on the dangers of such a relationship has meant that *Single White Female* has been seen as a lesbian film. Jackie Stacey includes the film in a recent list of mainstream Hollywood films that show lesbians 'as psychopaths or potential murderers'.¹⁹ Chris Holmlund refers to the film as a further extension of the violent lesbian characters prevalent in films of the 1980s.²⁰

Barbara Creed describes the film as a 'female friendship film with lesbian undertones'.²¹ She goes on:

We see the image of the lesbian as narcissist in films about lesbianism [...] In *Single White Female* the mentally disturbed girl, in love with her flatmate, deliberately vampirizes her appearance and behaviour until they look like identical twins.²²

Hedy's obsession, therefore, represents an aberration that goes beyond the inevitable consequences of disrupting both potential paternity and the heterosexual economy. Her love for Allie is distinguished by a wish to both emulate her idol and escape her own identity. Whether or not Hedy can be identified as a lesbian is not the point: rather, what is interesting, and what my reading of the film will concentrate on, are the processes behind the recognition of her lesbian status. Part of this process is the absence of any stable identity for Hedy, sexual or otherwise. Instead, her desires and motives are only offered as proof of her inherent instability. The connection between lesbian desire and madness is one of the themes that has tended to identify lesbian desire in past mainstream Hollywood films - others include narcissism, obsession, voyeurism, over-identification - and all are present in *Single White Female* to a marked degree.²³

The cold and reclusive Allie does become an object of illegitimate desire for Hedy, a mad, violent, child-like figure whose needs and desires are abnormal and anti-social. Apart from these personality flaws, the fact that the two women do begin a relationship independent of men is suspicious in itself. As Chris Straayer suggests in her analysis of the 'hypothetical lesbian heroine':

The focus on two women together threatens to establish both asexuality and homosexuality, both of which are outside the heterosexual desire which drives mainstream film and narrative.²⁴

Therefore any two women may pose a potential threatening lesbian presence and Hedy's identification as a lesbian appears conclusive. But according to the director, Barbet Schroeder, the possibility of lesbian desire between the two main characters is not an aspect of their relationship that he chooses to acknowledge:

No, no, it was completely innocent. Completely innocent. I did not, did not try to put an idea of sexual desire between them, no.²⁵

Lesbian desire remains a mystery that cannot be revealed within the constraints of the film: the proscription of lesbianism to somewhere beyond the limits of representation means that its presence can only be inferred rather than recognized. Its threat, according to Lynda Hart, is ever-present, yet unrevealed:

What emerges is a sexual subjectivity that eludes detection, confounds discernment, and is dangerously fluid.²⁶

Desire cannot be seen as something that happens simultaneously between the two women: its presence is referred to obliquely, as a delayed reaction to an event. The delaying tactics in *Single White Female* - one woman watches another having sex with herself - become an oppressive denial of what could be interpreted as lesbian desire. In effect, the absence speaks louder than words: 'the space most vividly *disarticulated*,' as Valerie Traub describes the lack of lesbian subjectivity in *Black Widow* (Bob Rafelson, 1987).²⁷ In *Single White Female*, recognition of the lesbian, rather than lesbian desire or eroticism, is important to the coherency of the plot. This unidentifiable threat of transgressive desire is transmogrified into something more amorphous and universally feminine. When Hedy borrows Allie's identity in order to 'pass' for something other than herself, the revamping of her image into a more attractive, presentable figure heralds an instability that might lurk within all women, and worse, an instability that can lead to violence.

A film in which such fears are excessively explored is *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1991), where, in spite of the ending, the identity of the murderer is never satisfactorily revealed. The two women who are suspected of murder, Beth and Catherine, both tell the same story: that while they were at college together, one of them was obsessed with the other and compulsively copied the other's appearance. However, each woman names the other as the obsessed, and herself as the victim. The difficulties of distinguishing between the two women, of knowing which one is telling the truth, also means that both women are equally capable of murder.²⁸ Appearances, therefore, can be misleading, and women's abilities to manipulate their appearance are especially dangerous to men. In *Black Widow*, Catharine has the ability to mimic heterosexuality to the extent that it becomes another form of masquerade.²⁹ She carefully selects her victims, marries them and then kills them, almost, as the title of the film implies, as a biological imperative. For all male figures in the film, Catharine is a consumer-driven fantasy figure: she has the ability to mould herself into whatever men most desire. Both films, notwithstanding their popularity with lesbian audiences, emphasize the fluid and unidentifiable nature of women, where the 'revamping' of the image signals a woman's possible appropriation of the patriarchal economy, as well as an anti-social and secret sexual identity.

The Masquerade and the Mirror Image

The image of the two women reflected together in a mirror is a recurring motif in *Single White Female*. The mirror becomes a source of both attraction and repulsion for Hedy as Allie becomes both the idealized representation of the twin sister that Hedy has lost, and the embodiment of an unattainable beauty (in Hedy's eyes) that also represents her grief and loss. The mirror as a device that reveals

rather than reflects is used frequently in the film to highlight the gulf that separates the two women, and more specifically, to show Allie's increasing isolation in the face of Hedy's obvious pathology. Hedy finds her own image both disturbing and unfinished, as a representation of 'something missing', and sees Allie's reflection as the perfect image that she wishes to emulate. At the same time, when faced by her own reflection, Allie is unable to see beyond her own image to the reflection of Hedy beside her. The film becomes complicit in its own representations and reflections of each woman: to borrow a phrase from Laura Mulvey, it 'builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself'.³⁰

Mary Ann Doane's article, 'Film and the Masquerade', sets out to theorise a position for the female spectator within the constraints of classical Hollywood cinema. For Doane, the theoretical model that Laura Mulvey posits, of a male gaze that is both fetishistic and voyeuristic, leaves unresolved the presence and participation of the female spectator. Her exploration of the possible outcome of such a model is one that produces over-identification rather than the comfort of distancing oneself from the object of desire:

For the female spectator there is an overpresence of image - she *is* the image. Given the closeness of this relationship, the female spectator's desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism - the female look demands a becoming.³¹

Doane describes the position of the female spectator based on a reading of Freud's analysis of the knowledge of sexual difference, 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes'. Such a knowledge has implications for both sexes. For the female child, the knowledge of her lack of a penis is made more traumatic by the significance placed on its presence. For the male child, on the other hand, the knowledge of sexual difference is only made significant in the light of the threat of castration, allowing for a distancing between

'the visible and the knowable'.³² To stand back from the immediacy of the image is to know more. In film therefore, Doane argues, the female spectator's lack of distance from the image is at odds with the male spectator's ability to reduce the threat of castration by the comforts provided by the male cinematic gaze of voyeurism and fetishism. Doane writes:

It is precisely this opposition between proximity and distance, control of the image and its loss, which locates the possibilities of spectatorship within the problematic of sexual difference.³³

Doane turns to Joan Riviere's 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' as a possible stopgap for the essentialist position of woman's closeness to her own image. Riviere's patient is a woman who over-feminizes herself as a consequence of her intellectual achievements: Riviere analyses her as a woman whose life 'consisted alternately of masculine and feminine activities'.³⁴ As a way of deflecting possible reprisals for her masculine activities, the patient wears a 'mask' of femininity in order that she appear 'guiltless and innocent'.³⁵ Riviere's conclusion is that womanliness is a masquerade, whether used as 'a primary mode of sexual enjoyment' or as 'a device for avoiding anxiety'.³⁶ Either way, the masquerade of femininity, whether used for passive or pathological reasons, is always a distancing device to hide what may be lurking underneath.

Doane's motive for inserting the possibility of masquerade into a Freudian analysis of sexual difference is to refute the essentialist claustrophobia of femininity:

To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image [...] Masquerade is anti-hysterical for it works to effect a separation between the cause of desire and oneself.³⁷

As she confirms in a later essay ('Masquerade Reconsidered') her earlier analysis of the unlucky position of the female spectator moves from the viewpoint of the

spectator watching the film to the problem of female spectatorship within the film itself.³⁸ The codes and conventions of classical Hollywood cinema serve to deny the possibility of a coherent, unproblematic female gaze, and, as a result, deprives female subjectivity within the film. The consequence of women possessing sight, wishing to become the subject rather than the object of the gaze, is, as Doane points out, always traumatic for women characters.

In *Single White Female* the name that Allie innocently bestows on Hedra, 'Hedy' - after Hedy Lamarr, the 1940s filmstar whose screen appearances coded her as 'the other woman' and 'the foreign woman' - denotes, first of all, the potential of film as a *source* of masquerade, as a point of identification with the glamour of the film-star. But the name also becomes a poignant reflection of Hedy's ill-fated attempts to appropriate Allie's identity. When Allie asks whether she was called 'Hedy' at school, Hedra drily remarks, "I wasn't that exotic in grade school". And Hedy remains 'not that exotic'. In her appropriation of Allie's 'look', her actions become a pathological extension of her identity crisis. But Hedy cannot be using masquerade as a device to avoid anxiety: using Allie as a model becomes a source of tension between them, and recreates Hedy's feelings of guilt over the death of her twin. Conversely, it is only as 'Allie' that she is able to find sexual pleasure. Hedy is not only able to manufacture distance between herself and her own image, but she is also able to measure the difference between her self and Allie's image. While Allie may deny her own masquerade, Hedy appears to know the true value of masquerade and is able to use it to what she thinks will be her advantage. But her awareness of the possibilities of masquerade does not explain her pathology: for her, masquerading is a symptom rather than a cause.

Ilsa J. Bick suggests that masquerading is the solution to cope with feelings of envy and shame. Both feelings are part of a recognition of 'difference between self and other, and a wish to obliterate that difference'.³⁹ The root of shame is an Indo-European word 'skam', meaning 'to hide'. From 'skam' also comes the word 'skin'. Thus the word 'hide' in both its contexts gives meaning to masquerading, as shame implies both hiding away and a fear of exposure. Masquerading becomes a means of 'reversing humiliation *and* of restoring the integrity of the self'.⁴⁰ Joan Riviere argues that there is no difference between femininity or the masquerade of femininity: 'whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing'.⁴¹ Bick's definition proposes that masquerading is a self-defining and active position, not specifically to do with femininity. The idea, then, of masquerade as a pathological abnormality arises not from the shape it takes, but rather from the motives underlying its use. In her analysis, Riviere concludes that her patient's use of masquerade was to hide sadistic impulses. Likewise Hedy's pathology is not so much the stealing of Allie's identity - this is merely symptomatic - but due to the impulses that motivate her behaviour. Whether such impulses are sadistic or even masochistic in origin is never made clear: Hedy's manipulations of her own identity, and consequently Allie's identity, spring from a need to re-define her position in the family.

As if to further confirm Hedy's lesbian identity, her willingness to take on different roles for another woman come suspiciously close to butch/femme role-playing. While Joan Riviere sees the masquerade as 'reaction-formation', a method of reducing tension, Sue-Ellen Case argues that such role-playing is self-determining and proactive. Rather than relying on gender roles formed by biological identity, the butch/femme position is one that 'play[s] on the phallic economy rather than to it'.⁴² Furthermore Hedy's role-playing skills are not

confined to merely dressing-up. She first moves into the apartment with the hope that Allie will become a sister to her. But due to Allie's real or imagined superiority, Hedy sees Allie as a mother figure (again, a displacement for lesbian desire) and subsequently fantasizes that she will replace Sam in Allie's life: she 'becomes the father and takes his place'.⁴³ To complete the fantasy family, she gives Allie a child - the puppy, Buddy. For a while this is a happy family: as the three of them, Hedy, Buddy and Allie, lie on Allie's bed watching television, Allie takes a polaroid photograph which Hedy suggests is a "family portrait". The film at this point shows the positive possibilities of two women living together.

Allie's rejection of Sam after he sleeps with his ex-wife mirrors Hedy's rejection of her family. Old family ties must be broken before a new identity is taken up. By having Sam sleep with his ex-wife, rather than another woman (a real rival to Allie), the film actually confirms the importance of marriage and emphasizes the family as a site of significance. One of the first conversations between Hedy and Allie is about their families, where Hedy tells the story of her still-born twin. As this story is later revealed to be untrue, it would appear that women who attempt to re-define the nuclear family and control their own roles within it are the most threatening to its existence. Obviously the efforts of maintaining both emotional and economic control over the family unit are too much for either of the two women: patriarchal authority will win every time. When Hedy's father speaks to her on the phone, he threatens to cut off her allowance if she continues to ignore his efforts to contact her. This threat is further confirmed by the clerk in the post office where Hedy picks up her 'family allowance'. Simultaneously the woman clerk compliments Hedy on her new look and asks if she is an actress, as her appearance changes so often. This linking of parental control and masquerade is

part of the narrative strategy of the film to present the strained relationship between the patriarchal family economy and female identity.

As a contrast to Hedy's problematic relationship with the patriarchal economy, the neighbour Graham's relationship with Allie is one of barter. Both return favours for each other: feeding the cat, watching the apartment, even to the extent of Allie using Graham's phone number for business contacts. Graham's phone call to his psychiatrist friend about Allie's problem flatmate is also not an economic transaction: "You're not charging me for this", but seen as a favour for a friend, for which he is nearly killed by Hedy. The gay man therefore exercises a relationship with the patriarchal economy that positions him as a non-productive worker - he is also an out-of-work actor - but is viewed as a helpful rather than disruptive presence. Graham's non-productivity and single status is extended to place him as a benevolent, paternal character: as the *Single White Man*, he is made completely benign and non-sexual. The unthreatening nature of masculinity upstairs is in direct contrast to the problems of femininity below.

On Sam's return to Allie's life and the shared apartment, Hedy is reduced again to the status of child, experiencing intense jealousy at Sam and Allie's relationship. She also feels sibling rivalry with Buddy the puppy, kicking him when they are left alone together in the apartment. Similarly, Joan Riviere describes the sadistic impulses of her patient:

Extremely intense sadism develops towards both parents. The desire to bite off the nipple shifts, and desires to destroy, penetrate and disembowel the mother and devour the contents of her body succeed it.⁴⁴

The mother in this parent-child relationship is 'the more hated, and consequently the more feared'.⁴⁵ Hedy's appropriation of Allie's identity is a desire to devour

her entirely. Meanwhile Sam, as the father, though hated, 'must be placated and appeased'.⁴⁶ Vivian Sobchack points out that in family melodrama, paternity is in control and, inevitably, the drama lies in the relationship between mother and daughter. This imagined mother/daughter relationship is another method of recognizing Hedy's possible lesbian status. In the realm of the fantasy family that Hedy creates, Allie fits Sobchack's description of the mother in melodrama: 'hard, strong and selfish'.⁴⁷ Allie's anger at Hedy's behaviour is not understood by Sam who sees Hedy as entirely innocent. Therefore Hedy manages to manipulate the relationships of the two adults in order to fit her own image of herself as daughter. The endless permutations of this fantasy family places Hedy as a pre-Oedipal Peter Pan-like figure who will never grow up to full womanhood.⁴⁸

One night, after Sam and Allie have sex, Allie goes to the bathroom for a glass of water. On her return she finds Hedy has fetched Sam a cold beer from the fridge, and is standing in the doorway. Joan Juliet Buck describes how Hedy exudes child-like precocity at this moment:

Chatting, smiling, her tubby little stomach protruding over a pair of innocent white underpants under a bathrobe that isn't quite closed.⁴⁹

Allie's anger at Hedy's intrusion is more complex than a realization that Hedy might want Sam, or that they need privacy for their relationship. Hedy's presence is both provocative and innocent. Unlike Sam, Allie recognizes instantly (because she was once a prepubescent daughter herself?) what the mixture of guile and apparently unwittingly bared flesh represents. Joan Riviere suggests that women can see through the artificial screen of masquerade: like Alex seeing through Catherine in *Black Widow*, the mask remains transparent.⁵⁰ At this point, Allie realizes that not only are she and Sam now responsible for Hedy, Hedy's presence is a permanent fixture in the apartment. It is the place where *she* belongs:

consequently Allie and Sam search for another apartment for themselves so that they can avoid having to ask Hedy to leave.

If Hedy is to be the perfect, wanted child, she must be the only child. She therefore gets rid of the puppy. When Buddy falls out of one of the apartment windows and is killed, the incident is assumed by Allie to be a tragic accident. Sam is however ultimately responsible as it was his task to mend the bars on the windows to prevent such an accident happening. Thus Hedy can have her retribution against the family, but can also pretend to take responsibility as it was she who distracted Sam from his task by making him breakfast. Thus Hedy appears doubly grief-stricken and only Sam can console her. Neither Allie or Sam, embroiled in this family melodrama, can recognize the danger that Hedy poses to them. Only the neighbour, Graham, has the ability to look beyond the relations of heterosexuality (in whatever bizarre shape they might take). He advises Allie that Hedy's behaviour is dangerous and that she needs professional help. As a gay man and an actor, it could be assumed that not only does he recognize masquerade when he sees it, he is acutely aware of its effects. Graham is able to recognize Hedy as Hedy even when she has successfully transformed her appearance into an exact copy of Allie's dress, shoes and hairstyle. In contrast, Sam, the heterosexual, does confuse Hedy with Allie, even when she is not wearing any clothes. Hedy's body, for heterosexual men at least, has the capability to be 'manipulated, changed or dis-assembled'.⁵¹

The emphasis the film places on identity within the family starts even before the film narrative begins. In the title sequence of the film a little girl applies lipstick before a large mirror. She is wearing costume jewellery: a large ring on her middle finger and a pair of dangling earrings. She reaches across to a second

figure, out of shot; as the camera pans across, it becomes obvious that the second figure is her identical twin. The first child applies lipstick to her sister sitting passively, with her back to the mirror. She then pulls her twin around so that she can admire herself, and her twin's handiwork, in the mirror. While the second child continues to gaze at herself, her sister kisses her on the cheek. This sequence lasts only for a few seconds, enough to show that this application of make-up is a serious game of role-playing: neither girl is old enough to be aware of the sexual allure of lipstick, but by their actions seem to be aware that it transforms their appearance. But as we watch the two girls at play, the notion of masquerade as a mask of femininity becomes more complicated. The apparent naturalness of the little girls is belied by the slow formality of their gestures. Masquerade in their hands becomes ritualized, and, perhaps more ominously in the context of the film, the sequence reveals the interlocking framework of passivity and activity behind its use. The relationship underpins the binary combination of gender roles, between the masculine active and the feminine passive. The fact that these manipulations of identity and image are manifest in prepubescent girls is a warning of sexual precocity that needs to be channelled.

Moreover, the filming of a ritual normally carried out in privacy becomes an oblique early reference to the invasion of the private space of domesticity that Allie wishes to preserve and Hedy disrupts. An early example of how the film reveals visually the potentially dangerous relationship between Hedy and Allie occurs when Hedy first moves into the apartment. She finds an old silver tray under the sink and polishes it until she is able to see her own reflection in it. As Hedy looks at her face reflected in the lower left-hand surface of the tray, the blank space beside and above her is filled with the reflected image of Allie smiling. Hedy becomes aware of Allie's presence and turns her head to look at

Allie's face, rather than looking at the uncomfortable comparison of Allie's reflection with her own. As Allie smiles at her own reflection, she seems unaware that Hedy's face is so close to hers. Indeed, she seems to be gazing, not only at her own reflection, but also at the pleasing results of Hedy's efforts, echoing the position of the 'passive' twin in the title sequence. The cleaning of the silver tray shows the beginning of a potential new family, and a space that precludes male influence. For Hedy, Allie becomes 'an objectified other'⁵², a representation of the feminine that she must emulate. For Allie, the gaze at her own reflection produces a narcissistic response: there are times when she appears to freeze, to be lost in her own image. Laura Mulvey describes such a pose as one that is the classic role for female Hollywood film stars - always to be seen as 'isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualized'.⁵³

If the image of the woman is always to be sexualized, one woman's obsession with the image of the other can always be read as lesbian desire. And Hedy's appropriation of a 'pretend family' also manifests the threat of this illicit, anti-patriarchal and destructive force. In Deborah Jermyn's analysis of the film, she sees Hedy as a figure of abjection who performs those functions that Allie would wish to do: she becomes 'the external representation of the victim/wife's own internal battle'.⁵⁴ In Jermyn's interpretation, Hedy's killing of Sam, especially as she is dressed as Allie, becomes Allie's 'revenge fantasy' for Sam's unfaithful behaviour. The violent, vengeful woman represents the repressed, internalized anger of the threatened woman, a manifestation of the 'abject', anti-social side of femininity. As a figure of abjection,

She crosses the borders other women are forced to maintain, lives out their fantasies about escaping their place in the Symbolic, and, in her defeat at the end, represents women's necessary attempts to expel their desire for the abject.⁵⁵

However, if Hedy can be read only as representing the repressions in Allie's identity, to what extent does Allie reveal the repressions of Hedy? The narrative of the film reveals that Hedy is more at risk. Hedy's positioning of Allie as a fantasy mother-figure, and her subsequent inability to separate herself from this fantasy is further evidence of the contradictory nature of femininity. Allie becomes the figure of 'proper' femininity and maternal authority that threatens to swamp and destabilize Hedy. As Julia Kristeva points out, if true subjectivity is to be accomplished, the child's 'idyllic dual relationship' with the maternal must be rejected.⁵⁶ The prohibitions surrounding this relationship informs us of the true nature of the abject: that it is potentially present in all women. Allie's surveillance of her is less an investigation of Hedy's true identity (as Hedy is capable of keeping this covered) but as an obsessive quality, brought on by her contradictory fears of isolation and invasion. Hedy's fear of being revealed is thus made more stressful by a woman who refuses to acknowledge any contradiction between her image and her self. Allie's style and dress is, to her, simply a natural extension of the woman within. "I never met anyone so scared of being a woman", Hedy sneers at her, and this remark is partly based on Allie's reluctance to acknowledge Hedy's own instinct: that one has to *become* a woman rather than simply be one.

Kristeva's description of the abject as whatever 'does not respect borders, positions, rules'⁵⁷, could be a description of Allie, and not Hedy. After all, it is Allie who breaks the rules and invades Hedy's space. The scene in which Allie hears noises coming from Hedy's room and goes to investigate is a perfect example of Allie's voyeurism. Acknowledging the generic link between the gothic heroine and the furtive gaze into the forbidden room, she is dressed in a white nightdress, the apartment is dark and filled with large forbidding shadows. At the

door of Hedy's room, left slightly ajar, she is transfixed by an image reflected in Hedy's wardrobe mirror: that of Hedy masturbating. Allie watches until the puppy whines, and guiltily runs back to her bed, pretending to be asleep when Hedy comes to check on her. Allie's interest in the noises emanating from Hedy's room should be compared to her later embarrassment when Graham tells her that, due to the old-fashioned ventilation system of the building, he can hear everything that goes on in her bedroom between her and Sam. Allie is immediately seen to be blocking up the ventilation shaft. Allie's fear of lack of privacy is matched by Hedy's fear of revealing her true identity. Both women, therefore, could be said to represent the repressions of the other. Indeed, the film's own manifestations of the excesses and artificial nature of film spectatorship become the figures of the women themselves. Both reveal in each other the oppressive qualities of sadistic voyeuristic tendencies and scopophilic identification. For both women, therefore, repression is the inevitable result of representation.

The Flatmate from Hell

In Lynda Hart's assessment of the film she argues that Allie will be punished because she insists in choosing a roommate who appears, on the surface at least, to be similar to her: 'By seeking the same, she risks forfeiting her own identity'.⁵⁸ In the film, Allie specifies her own brand of femininity ('single' and 'white') but does not define who she wishes to live with, leaving a space to be filled by any 'professional female'. Hence while she is the archetype of femininity, a sexually available heterosexual white woman, the women she sees and rejects fail to match up to her own definition of 'proper' femininity. Other applicants, marked by their visual labels of race, sexuality, and obvious mental disorder, are in Allie's eyes (and by implication, the audience's eyes) not similar enough, though the film

discreetly codes them in the credits as 'mannish', 'talkative' and 'exotic'. However, Hart points out that any of these women would have been the better choice. The only black woman to be seen in the film is one of these potential roommates ('the exotic').⁵⁹ The audience are allowed a quick glimpse of her, as she walks slowly around Allie who looks nervous and ill-at-ease. This woman, unlike the others who are interviewed, says nothing at all. The fact that she is silent speaks volumes: there is no need for her to speak because her difference is established by a look alone: she is the 'exotic'. As Homi Bhabha writes: 'Skin [...] is the most visible of fetishes'.⁶⁰ The audience already know that she will not become Allie's future roommate. She is dressed provocatively: her walk establishes her as predatory. In this context, 'professional female' when applied to a black woman can have only one meaning: a 'working girl'.

In her analysis of the film Lynda Hart asks whether the 'White' of the title is 'only an incidental remark, perhaps just a slip of the film-maker's pen'.⁶¹ In Hart's reading of the film, and its precursor text, it is clear that this is not the case. 'White' specifically informs us about the presentation of femininity in the film, and how this one particular type of femininity is characterized by sterility, isolation, malevolence and madness. White skin becomes a symbol of purity: it becomes the outer layer that hides the possibility of danger lurking within it. In a film which is primed with the possibilities of displaying racial difference, is there a context in which the whiteness of the two women can be compared? As both women are white, it would appear that the importance of whiteness is not so much a visual commodity but a way of comparing the identities of the two women: who, after all, is more white? Perhaps Hedy's confession that she is 'not that exotic' also denotes her racial identity, that she in the end will prove to be the 'white female'. But the film seems reluctant to explore racial difference as anything more

than a type of immediate visual fetishism: almost a denial of race, in spite of its title. According to Richard Dyer,

When whiteness *qua* whiteness does come into focus, it is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death.⁶²

The marginalizing of black identity in *Single White Female* also confirms that the identity of the white woman does become a symptom of disorder when no longer attached to a white man. What is left, after the disruption of the (white) nuclear family, is that the sight of whiteness can become a confirmation of death. The fairy story of Snow White is an obvious example of where beauty, purity, and impossible whiteness become conflated into the body of a woman. Snow White represents the ideal of feminine beauty as objectively defined by a speaking mirror, which decides 'who is the fairest of them all'. In spite of being murdered by her evil stepmother, Snow White defies death and its inevitable decay and is placed in a glass coffin where her beauty is on display. The whiteness of Snow White's skin, an indication of both racial and moral purity, marks her as the obvious candidate for the ultimate in feminine beauty.⁶³

The fetishizing of the dead, beautiful woman who defies death is part of the gothic fantasy of *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940). The revival of Rebecca's identity is part of the new wife's paranoia that she can never compete with the memory of her husband's dead first wife. The transgression of class barriers and the reversal of the roles of mistress and servant are a particular feature of the paranoia of the gothic female subject, in that she always feels 'out of place'.⁶⁴ The house 'Manderley' is the site of both fear and beauty that stands in for the dead woman. Manderley, with its grim and hostile housekeeper, archaic traditions based on patriarchal land-ownership, and forbidden rooms where no-one must enter, is the archetypal gothic castle, and its heroine the woman who guiltily and subversively

exposes its secrets. This furtive exposing of secrets is carried out, not as a straightforward investigation as a male protagonist is able to do, but as an almost incidental gathering of details that finally has to reveal the 'true' image.

It is from within this fetishizing of whiteness that *Single White Female* can be seen as a gothic film. While dealing with 1990s issues - a woman working as a computer programmer, a co-habiting couple, an out gay man as neighbour - the film has a repressively retrospective feel. In spite of problems in the workplace, the home is the space where Allie is most at risk and most vulnerable. In a particularly significant scene Allie, thinking Hedy is out, enters her room in order to give her a present - an old lamp that Hedy found in the basement which Allie has decorated for her. A brief shot reveals to the audience that Hedy has left a box of photographs and newspaper cuttings on her bed. As the camera pulls back, the box is forefronted as 'central' to the image of Hedy's room. Allie, however, after leaving her bag on Hedy's bed, fails to notice it. Instead, she looks first at what might be a diary, a small red book that Hedy has beside her book. All the pages, however, are blank. Allie moves to the dressing table and finds a perfume called (ominously) 'Moi Meme' contained in an ornate and antique-looking bottle which she smells and then applies the dropper to her neck. She then picks up a pair of pearl earrings, and holding them against her ears, she admires herself in Hedy's mirror.

It is at this point that she hears a floorboard creaking behind her and suddenly catches sight of Hedy in the doorway, back from her shower. This is one of the few instances in the film when Allie is startled into looking straight at Hedy's reflection. Hedy's anger appears not to stem from Allie's invasion of her space, nor her interest in her jewellery, but her realization that she has left the box in full

view of Allie. Allie is only aware that Hedy seems defensive and apologizes for being in her room. As Hedy moves towards Allie, she notices that Allie is wearing her perfume. She tells her, "It smells good on you", and places some on her own wrist. While Allie apologizes for trying the perfume, Hedy removes her bathrobe and standing naked before her, saying, "Anything of mine that you want, just go ahead. Share and share alike". This is the only point in the film where Hedy's actions could be read as overtly sexual towards Allie. But when Hedy removes her robe, Allie immediately turns her head away and keeps her eyes averted until Hedy has put on her nightdress. As Allie has, by not looking, refused to enter into the possible sexual exchange that a look might initiate, Hedy instead offers Allie the pearl earrings. In order to affirm the possible purity of their relationship, the gifts they exchange are white. But when Allie turns to admire herself again in the mirror, Hedy stands directly behind her sniffing the back of Allie's neck that now smells of her own perfume. Hedy's extreme proximity to Allie is another indication of something awry, literally, something 'going on behind her back', which is again made obvious to the audience. But Allie appears not to notice, so caught up in her own image that she is unaware of Hedy behind her.

The problems of vision between both protagonists of *Single White Female* lie in their failure to recognize the dangers that the other poses. As in *Samson and Delilah* (Cecil B. De Mille, 1949), when Victor Mature as Samson is blind to the dangers of Hedy Lamarr's Delilah, Allie is the figure who while being made uncomfortable by the results of Hedy's actions is unable to see the consequences of Hedy's madness or her own passivity. Investigating Hedy reveals to Allie only the evidence of Hedy's deceit. She fails to notice the clues in Hedy's room - the box left on the bed, the blank diary, the name of the perfume - and in her failure,

reveals her own limited notion of what should constitute the 'proper' normal identity of one's roommate, as well as the boundaries of that roommate's privacy. These limitations are part of the relationship between the two women that remains enclosed, introspective and ultimately unresolved:

Until the end, Allie avoids confrontation and the polite dissimulations and compromises that make up the *unsaid* are remarkably loud.⁶⁵

Femininity in this context is little more than a handicap which prevents women seeing much further than their own internalized conflicts. These conflicts between women's sight and women's subjectivity are further upheld by the camera's gaze as an objective 'third eye' that keeps the relationship between the two women at a (safe) distance. Point-of-view shots which privilege the gaze of one woman over the other are kept to a minimum, so that they are only used at times of crisis, as when Allie furtively watches Hedy masturbating, or later, when she sees her shoes covered in blood on the bathroom floor and realizes that Hedy has killed Sam. The camera also provides other clues to the generic complications of the film by warning the audience to expect more of the same. These are shown by the film's own slippage of identity from the generic characteristics of the woman's film, to its more exaggerated forms of gothic and horror.

As the film seeks to find an appropriate container for transgressive female identity, it uses a complex web of genre conventions. The name 'Hedy' signals the film's dependence on a genre more prevalent in the 1940s and 1950s. *Single White Female* could be seen as a 'woman's film' in that it has two central female protagonists with the male characters relegated to the margins of the narrative. Maria Laplace defines the woman's film as dealing with 'the traditional realms of women's experience: the familial, the domestic, the romantic'.⁶⁶ Mary Ann Doane

points out that the central feature of the woman's picture deals with the mental health of the main protagonist:

There is an almost obsessive association with the female protagonist with a deviation from some norm of mental stability or health, resulting in the recurrent investigation of psychical mechanisms frequently linked with the 'feminine condition' - masochism, hysteria, neurosis, paranoia.⁶⁷

Doane does not see the woman's film as a 'pure' genre but one which has links with family melodrama, film noir, gothic and horror films. In the woman's film, however, certain conventions appear: the house containing a forbidden space, there are problems involved with women's sight (what she calls a 'crisis of vision'⁶⁸) and linked to this problem, the unstable formation of female subjectivity. Doane argues that because these films anticipate a female spectator, the gaze is no longer associated with voyeurism and fetishism, and hence becomes 'object-less, free-floating'.⁶⁹

As if to emphasize the women's vulnerability, the huge apartment building is a gothic castle transported to the middle of the city. Its exterior is ornately carved with figures, with deep recesses of shadows. Inside, the building is old and decaying with broken lifts and long, gloomy corridors. Shots of Allie climbing the staircase show her to be a tiny figure, made more tiny by flights of stairs that appear to descend to the bowels of the earth. The apartment itself has enormous cavern-like rooms, sparsely furnished and decorated in muted tones of grey and brown. The basement, which Allie has described to Hedy as "kind of creepy", a place she would never visit at night, resembles a dungeon or torture chamber, only entered via a creaking ancient lift, and containing individual cages, an enormous furnace, and dark corners inhabited by rats. As well as the 'look' of the film, the sounds of the building and of the city become central to the soundtrack of the film. At certain tense moments, a siren or a car alarm sounding like an unearthly

scream stands in for the scream of the possible victim. Allie's waking in the night, stretching to touch Sam and finding an empty space is heralded by a screeching of brakes from the traffic outside. Coupled with the muffled noises emanating from the ventilation shafts, the building is filled by monstrous noises that appear to have no human origin.

Such gothic motifs relate to the film's central fear: the terrifying prospect of the woman being other than what she appears to be. The woman as an 'inversion' of the visible, is a central feature of a genre whose central concerns, according to Ellen Moers, give 'visual form to the fear of self'.⁷⁰ The gothic as a literary genre has traditionally been written by and for women and its compulsion to give space to the forbidden realm of female subjectivity also shows its cultural links with the woman's film and the horror genre. Robert Miles defines the genre thus:

The gothic represents the subject in a state of deracination, of the self finding itself dispossessed in its own house, in a condition of rupture, disjunction, fragmentation.⁷¹

Single White Female's recurring theme of the possible end of domesticity, a domesticity threatened by internal strife rather than an external threat, shows its links to a genre used to explore the potential of a crisis in domestic space and the family. Robert Miles points out that the popularity of gothic novels reached its height at a time when the importance of the patriarchal family was appearing to decline in the late eighteenth century. According to Foucault, there was an explosion of discourses around sex, marriage and procreation.⁷² The gothic genre reflects specific patriarchal and paternal anxieties around the preservation of the family, primogeniture, and property rights. It is also the first literature concerned with the problematic human subject, who exhibits:

Compulsive, repetitive, superficially meaningless behaviour [which] somehow addresses a deeper 'wound', a rift in the psyche.⁷³

With such behaviour comes what Ellen Moers calls 'the compulsion to visualize the self'.⁷⁴ The morbid obsession with the self becomes translated into a fetishizing of the power of sight. The glimpsing of something that is forbidden, coupled with a compulsion to gaze, awakens a sense of fear and shame in the subject and induces a state of masochism that is an inherent part of the represented female subject position. According to Ellen Moers the central character of the gothic novel is almost universally a young woman 'simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine'.⁷⁵ The direct ancestress of the 'final girl' in modern horror films, the gothic heroine is a feminine but resilient character. Therefore Allie's furtive searches of Hedy's room are not so much an investigation (as she fails to spot the clues) but an exploration of the forbidden room with herself as the gothic heroine. Allie's wish to discover the truth is a device that marks the important difference between the two women: Allie's repressions, her willingness to accede to a position of masochism, shows her pathology to be that of a 'normal', heterosexual woman. Allie becomes the reference point of normal femininity, even though, for most of the film, the line between the normal and the abnormal has been disturbingly undefined.

The point at which Allie sees Hedy's madness and realizes its potential threat also signals the film's slippage into horror. This scene takes place in the hairdressing salon, an obvious site of the re-forming of women's images, in a space where mirrors line the walls and women are invited to gaze at their own reflections. While Sam is away, and after Myerson's sexual attack, Hedy persuades Allie to have a haircut, ostensibly to cheer her up. As the stylist finishes the trim, and removes her wrap, Allie glances at the mirror and becomes transfixed by what she sees: the legs of a woman walking down the stairs. The composition of the shot

is such that Allie and her reflection in the mirror are separated by the figure on the stairs. The camera does not show us Allie's point of view, but looks at her looking at what is emerging down the staircase. She reacts before the whole woman is revealed, and indeed Allie's head blocks our vision of Hedy's transformation as she turns her head to see, not the mirror image but the 'real' image of Hedy. Thus Allie's reaction is played as if she recognizes Hedy before she sees her. The next shot is of Hedy's hand resting on the handrail, a delaying shot before Hedy moves slowly into the frame to reveal that she has not only copied Allie's hairstyle, but dyed her hair to match. Hedy and Allie now look like identical twins.

The woman on the staircase is a cinematic motif of the female image, almost static, but never quite frozen: it allows the spectator a uniquely privileged view. In terms of the gothic, this spectacle is one that mirrors death: for example, in *Rebecca*, the new wife, tricked by Mrs Danvers, appears on the staircase dressed as the double of Rebecca. In *Single White Female* it is only after Hedy's transformation into 'Allie' that Allie can now recognize Hedy for who she really is. After the visit to the hairdresser, Allie finally finds Hedy's box of secrets that contains details of the death of Hedy's twin sister, letters from Hedy's parents which show Hedy's real name, 'Ellen', and a letter from Sam to Allie, containing his keys to the apartment. Now that Allie has found the clues that make up Hedy's true identity, she sees Hedy as a monstrous figure for the first time, but, far worse, she also sees what appears to be her 'self' as monstrous. As Linda Williams points out, the relationship between woman and monster is one already designated by sexual difference:

She not only sees a monster, she sees a monster that offers a distorted reflection of her own image.⁷⁶

Hedy can now gaze into the mirror and see her true reflection, as it is not herself but Allie that she sees. Her feelings can now be made explicit: she says, as she strokes the back of her neck, "I love myself like this". Linda Williams' analysis of the woman's look in horror films concludes that the monster and the woman represent 'a surprising (and at times subversive) affinity'.⁷⁷ Both monster and woman represent an alien body, a body that deviates from the norm and whose disturbing reality shows the limits of bodily representation. However, the woman and the monster in *Single White Female* are now practically identical.

Rather than being 'outed' by Allie's riffling through her closet, Hedy's identity becomes more intangible and more threatening. We are forewarned in two separate scenes. One early scene shows the two women out shopping together, after Allie has promised Hedy that she will show her how to dress in a more upmarket 'New York' style. Both of them try on a pair of black stiletto heels. Allie tells Hedy to buy them as they go with her outfit, but Hedy tells Allie that she should buy them and then Hedy will 'borrow' them. These impossibly high heels are undoubtedly a fetish-object, a substitute for the mother's missing phallus, masochistically painful and impractical to wear, yet bearing sadistically long sharp spikes. In the light of Hedy's fantasy relationship with Allie, they represent the power that Allie possesses and which Hedy wishes to borrow. In this relationship, the only way Hedy can possess the shoes is if Allie owns them. The second scene is one in which Allie, after being sexually assaulted by Mitch Myerson, comes home and is comforted by Hedy. As Sam is away on a business trip, Hedy decides that she will confront Myerson about the incident, something that Allie feels unable to do. When Hedy phones his home, a change comes over her voice. It takes on a deeper, gruffer tone, as she threatens Myerson, telling him, as Allie, that she will destroy him, his business and his family. At this point, Hedy's voice

speaking revenge becomes almost proof of 'possession', that somewhere within her lurks an evil spirit. Hedy's anger, though directed at a man she has never met, is another item borrowed from Allie. 'Hedy as Allie' is a far more threatening figure than Hedy alone.

"Gee, Hedy, I hope you never get mad at me!"

Hedy's final identity is one that can be revealed only after all other possibilities have been exhausted. The role of the audience now mirrors that of Allie as she searches Hedy's room: the clues are only there if we know what to look for. This is further evidence of why the film appears so familiar as it reaches a point where the oppressions involved in identifying and stabilizing femininity are excised and its true repressions are revealed. Hedy, as the woman who often cannot be seen in the mirror, and who indeed will not look at herself in the mirror, who emerges late at night to seek out sexual partners, and uses sharp instruments as her killing tools to stab and penetrate her victims, is a creature of the night who breeds others like herself, the vampire.

The female vampire is the most abject of monsters: within her identity is the unnaturalness of the woman who penetrates, the desire for blood, the woman who stands on the boundaries between life and death. Hedy has, from the beginning of the film, been marked as one of the 'un-dead'. Her attempts to recreate and revive her dead sister (who, as her identical twin, is a figure who confirms that the borders of identity are impossibly confused) reveals her fascination and identification with death. Hedy, especially 'Hedy as Allie' comes to embody the fragile border between the living and the dead: she is now 'out of the category of the living'.⁷⁸ Therefore Hedy's pathology stems not from her appropriation of

identity, but from her non-productive appropriation of the family. Hedy represents, not the abject side of Allie, but the abject nature of what must be considered, in the gothic tradition, the 'original single white female'. As Richard Dyer points out, the traditional figure of the female vampire, connected forever with a secret, cursed lifestyle and perverse nature, is linked unmistakably, in both literature and films, with lesbian desire.⁷⁹ The idea of a double life, where one's true nature is hidden and only recognizable to another suffering from the same condition can also be associated quite pointedly with lesbian and gay identity: Dyer points out that many books written in the 1950s and 1960s with lesbian and gay themes have suggestively gothic titles.⁸⁰

Not only does the female vampire represent aggressive female sexuality, her victims are of either gender, promoting a mis-recognition of natural gender identity. The boundaries of the family, sanctioned by marriage, and dependent on the continuation of the line through the production of children, are threatened by the presence of a woman who breeds without men. More horribly, she is able to breed 'sideways' without the proper generational boundaries that separate parents from children. The vampire therefore becomes the point of negation of the natural order that differentiates between life and death, good sexual practices and bad. Sue-Ellen Case argues that the lesbian vampire is so queer that she has to be re-identified as something else, before being destroyed. In effect, she becomes a double negative of abjection:

Outside of the mirror, collapsing subject/object relations into the proximate, double occupancy of the sign, abandoning the category of woman as heterosexist, and entering representation only in a guise that proscribes her. You still can only see her, in horror and fear, when you don't.⁸¹

It is the double negation of Hedy that shows her as an impossibly pathological and unrepresentable figure. The film's charting of the development from 'vamp' to 'vampire' is self-evident: not only in this film do they have the same meaning but both are creatures that have found a natural home on the cinema screen. Linda Williams points out that the vamps of the silent cinema are 'an obvious example of a female look'.⁸² Hedy's predatory desires are the logical outcome of the historical repressions of the female gaze, developed into an aware, acquisitive and avaricious look.

Hence Hedy's identification as a lesbian appears not to be a result of negative personality traits that identify lesbian behaviour, but as the recognizable face of something more abject. In Patricia White's analysis of *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963), the haunted house becomes a metaphor for the 'dark continent' of femininity.⁸³ Hill House appears passive and open to scientific investigation, but its eccentric design and strange angular architecture turn the house into a maze. White argues that the ghostly activities are a 'stand-in' for lesbian desire, a desire that is never consummated between the two women investigators. White's reading of the film is that it shows:

A deficiency in relation to visibility or visualization - in *The Haunting* we never see the ghost but we do see the lesbian.⁸⁴

Lesbian desire remains mysterious, undefinable and dangerous. Therefore, a woman's desire for another becomes, in the context of the film, and as described by Dr Markway, as something uncanny that cannot be seen, measured or proved. After his investigation of Hill House, he says in disgust, "Don't ask me to give a name to something which hasn't got a name". White's strategy is to reveal the metaphorical nature of lesbian desire as an invisible and secret force that confounds the patriarchal forces that seek to analyse it. Similarly, in *Single White*

Female, we cannot see the vampire, but we do catch sight of the lesbian.

However, unlike *The Haunting*, the problem is not the existence of lesbian desire, but the exposure of sexual practices that threaten to destabilize patriarchy, and turn women away from their biological destinies. Thus the monstrous aspect of Hedy that is finally exposed is not one that simply threatens Allie: Hedy has challenged the very existence of Allie's relationship to patriarchy and paternity. Really, lesbian desire is the least of Allie's worries.

Tanya Krzywinska argues that the female vampire is not so much an unrepresentable figure but an 'unrepresenting' one:

The representation of abjection through the vampire and specifically the queer female vampire betrays the social projections that determine the inscription of boundaries and thresholds [...] The vampire's 'power' as an icon lies in her ability to 'stand in' for a multiplicity of meanings.⁸⁵

In this film of the 1990s, the vampire becomes the abject face of the lesbian. Or perhaps more accurately, the lesbian is the acceptable and more recognizable face of the vampire. In the era of AIDS, the vampire is the true embodiment of unsafe sex and contaminatory bodily practices. 'Hedy the vampire' is indeed far more dangerous than 'Hedy the lesbian'. Indeed, Susan Sontag's metaphorical description of the HIV virus as 'a menace in waiting, as mutable, furtive, as biologically innovative'⁸⁶, could be a description of both Hedy in the film and Hedra the serial killer portrayed in the novel. Both texts, while apparently featuring very different protagonists, reveal similar anxieties about Hedy/Hedra as a site of instability that has the ability to mutate to escape identification and contaminate those in its path.

After Allie finds her letters, Hedy's desires become linked with perversity. Allie follows her to an unnamed and anonymous underground nightclub/fetish club where Hedy is apparently a regular and is known to the bar staff as 'Allie'. With its atmosphere of bisexuality and sadomasochism, the category of normal sexuality that Allie represents is now threatened and outnumbered. Allie is first propositioned by a leather-clad woman who follows her and asks her, "Do you want to play?". Moving away from the woman, she is then stroked by a man who stands passively in a cage. The nightclub's striking similarity to the basement of the apartment building is partly due to its dark and oppressive atmosphere, but also due to the fact that in the geography of the film, 'underground' becomes a metaphor for the underworld. But significantly it is in this upside-down world of aggressive, leather-clad women and caged men that Hedy is most at home: Allie, while dressed in almost the same outfit, looks out-of-place. She finds Hedy flirting with a man who looks very similar to Sam, and telling him about her "sister". Allie's words to the taxi-driver to follow Hedy's cab, "Don't lose her: she has something of mine", now seem particularly apt. The film's slippage into horror heralds the demarcation of the boundaries between the two women. Hedy becomes, for Allie, the 'Other', a monstrous figure who is a constant reminder of how close Allie has come to be misrepresented as such. In order to retain the label of normality, Allie must defeat Hedy.

Steve Neale suggests that in horror films what terrifies is the Other's possession of human traits, its similarities to the human, especially where these traits signal possible human sexual identity: either by 'exceeding the categories of masculinity or femininity' or by 'mixing them dangerously together'.⁸⁷ The precarious borders that designate 'normal' gender and sexuality are one method in which the identity of the Other can threaten the boundaries of our own identity. It is within the

horror of a sexual identity unable to be contained within the natural constraints of heterosexuality that marks Hedy as a truly abject figure. As Richard Dyer says:

Marriage contains female sexuality - hence the horror of the female vampire, walking the streets at night in search of sex.⁸⁸

The single white female is already a contender for such a position, reversing expected gender positions and leaving heterosexuality in a precarious position. The film shows us both women looking for sex, having sex, and, as Allie does with Sam, designating the limits of male sexual activity. Therefore, female sexual appetite is at the expense of male sexuality. The actor, Steven Weber, says of his role as Sam:

I have the traditional female role. I prance around naked and then get killed after sex.⁸⁹

As the embodiment of anti-heterosexuality and queer sexual practices, Hedy's abject sexuality irrefutably links sex with death.

Later that night, after visiting the nightclub, Hedy visits Sam in his hotel room, sporting only her new hairstyle, Allie's black stilettos and a raincoat. In terms of the film's narrative, Hedy hopes that Sam will mistake her for Allie, but as her outfit and behaviour are also reminiscent of a prostitute visiting a client, she appears to wish, as Allie, to take part in a sexual fantasy of anonymous sex in a space that is non-domestic. She changes herself into the ultimate sexual trophy. In her disguise, she is an active sexual protagonist and an unmistakably phallic woman. Hedy's identity is fused into a fetishistic sexual monster, who evokes all the terrors of castration, and eventually reduces even sexual difference as nothing more than role-playing. Roger Dadoun, in his discussion of fetishism in vampire films, argues that the vampire is an eroticized 'phallus-fetish', dwelling in a place that represents the absence of the archaic mother: the silent forest, the echoing

castle, the shadowy vault, 'an emptiness full of fantasmatic activity'.⁹⁰ The horror of the vampire is that it becomes a cultural deposit of fetishistic activity:

The vampire, marked and fascinated by the mother's missing penis and identifying with the archaic mother, doesn't have a phallus but becomes one instead.⁹¹

As Barbara Creed points out, the female vampire dispenses with much of the fetishistic value of the male vampire: 'there is no need to infer her shadowy presence'.⁹² Without turning on the light, Hedy gets into bed with Sam and crawls down under the bedclothes. Such are Hedy's oral powers that Sam, though realising after touching her hair that Hedy and not Allie is giving him a blow job, is helpless. The vampire's need for fluid, as Tanya Krzywinska points out, 'resists the boundaries of "good taste"'.⁹³ Both blood and semen can be drawn from the helpless victims. Ultimately it is the fluid's destination that measures the perversity of the act: the vampire's mouth is a sexual organ that both bites and sucks, and with the female vampire, she truly possess the *vagina dentata*. In Sam's hotel room, Hedy can be open about her oral sexuality as she drinks from a glass of wine after the act, wiping a drop off her chin, which she sucks off her fingers, and then biting and kissing Sam's flesh.

Hedy's choice of weapon also reveals her vampire tendencies. The heel of the stiletto shoe that she uses to kill Sam is a sharp, penetrative weapon, which she thrusts into Sam's eye moments after he 'sees through' her. Thus Allie's shoes, in more ways than one, give Hedy her phallic powers. Both Sam's death and the attack against Graham (whom she stabs with a long metal rod) appear to be unpremeditated, an hysterical defence against the penetrative gaze of the male and a instinctive reaction against revealing her real identity. In practically all vampire films, the (male) vampire expert is able to recognize the vampire and reveal the

methods for destroying it. Even though Sam may realize what Hedy is, he is unable to warn Allie or save himself. Patriarchal law is ineffectual - Sam is a particularly inadequate proponent - and attempts to civilize the abject nature of women have failed.

Both attacks show Hedy to be a resourceful creature, well able to cover her tracks. Blood, it seems, is still the calling card of the vampire and Hedy's menstrual cycle is pointedly used as part of her deception. After her attack on Graham, she stays in the shower for so long that Allie becomes concerned, going into the bathroom to ask if she is alright. She glances at the basin filled with water, where Hedy is soaking her new black dress and notices that the water is bloody. Hedy explains that she has started her period. Barbara Creed points out that there was a belief that women become vampires in order to replace blood lost during menstruation.⁹⁴ The separation between life-blood and death-blood is a particular feature of both the vampire and the menstruating woman: she has an affinity with the life-giving properties of blood, but simultaneously produces blood that is particularly abject in its possible 'undead' fecundity. As Julia Kristeva writes, the menstruating woman becomes:

The propitious place for abjection, where *death* and *femininity*, *murder* and *procreation*, *cessation of life* and *vitality* all come together.⁹⁵
(author's emphases)

As in Brian de Palma's *Carrie* (1976), the menstruating woman possesses supernatural and horrific powers. Creed notes that only the genre of horror deals with menstruation: other genres that deal with emotional or psychological aspects of women's lives, such as the maternal melodrama or the woman's film, ignore the subject entirely.⁹⁶ Finally, in *Single White Female*'s overblown and drawn-out final battle between the two women, reveals itself to be a horror film.

When Allie discovers that Hedy is responsible for Sam's death, Hedy drags her, at gunpoint, into Graham's apartment. Leaving Allie tied to a chair, with the television for company, she leaves to pick up the last instalment of her father's allowance. Allie manages to turn up the volume on the television in order to attract the attention of other residents. Hedy returns in the nick of time to prevent the caretaker from entering the apartment. Angered by Allie's near-escape, Hedy takes a breadknife from the kitchen and begins to cut her throat. There is a lingering close-up of the serrated blade of the knife penetrating the skin of Allie's neck. As the cut begins to bleed, Allie kisses Hedy on the lips, begging, "don't leave me". The fetishistic nature of this shot is enhanced by the whiteness of the neck, emphasizing Allie's vulnerability. In the classic mould of the vampire reproductive mythology, the victims are preferably young, virginal women whose seduction by the vampire, whether male or female, is seen as a sexual awakening, the spilt blood representing the breaking of the hymen. It is in the instance of the throat-cutting, the 'moment of transubstantiation'⁹⁷, the bite into the neck, that another vampire is born. In vampire mythology, the new vampire awakes from her sleep to become like the vampire who spawned her. At this moment, Allie becomes as devious and as violent as Hedy.

She persuades Hedy to release her, saying that they can leave New York together. She then asks Hedy to search for Graham's wallet so that they can use his credit card to book plane tickets. Like *Thelma and Louise*, this film reiterates that women cannot depend on the male economy but can manipulate certain factors within it in order to cause maximum disruption. Allie has already kicked Graham's wallet away, out of sight, when she was tied to the chair, showing her to be a woman who still recognizes the value of the patriarchal economy. As the

climax of the film is to be a fight between the two women, all male participants must be shown to be ineffectual or dead. Graham is now lying unconscious in the bath. Mitch Myerson arrives to confront Allie about his disappearing computer records. Pushing past Hedy at the front door, Myerson, who previously sexually assaulted Allie, finds her tied up on the floor. Hedy shoots him as he straddles Allie's prone body in order to untie her, a position that looks, from the camera angle, like a gross parody of intercourse. At this point, the masquerade of heterosexuality appears to be a relationship that Allie can still feel happy to buy into, even to the extent that Myerson now seems less threatening than Hedy. Under these desperate circumstances, Allie's willingness to be rescued reduces Hedy further to a figure who has negative value on all levels.

Allie's control extends to a new-found strength. She drags Hedy out of the apartment, saving Graham's life as she does so, and then 'plays dead' in the lift, convincing Hedy that she has suffocated her. Both women have now armed themselves with stabbing weapons: Hedy's weapon of choice is a large metal hook, while Allie takes the screwdriver from the lift. In the final struggle between the two, Hedy, while searching for Allie, throws open a cupboard door and is greeted by her mirror image. The confusion of who reflects whom in the climax of the film means that Hedy attacks the mirror in a panic - either because she believes that her reflection is really Allie, or as a final act of revenge against her own mirror image. The similarities between the two women now outweigh their differences. Only the stronger will survive, and Allie, who has shown herself to be coldly calculating throughout the film, manages to manipulate Hedy into a position where she is able to stab her once in the chest and once in the back. Hedy has now been successfully staked.

Allie does not discover Hedy's true identity for herself: the 'truth' is revealed by Allie's voice-over at the end of the film, but she is recounting first of all Graham's advice to her for coping with Sam's death, and then a conversation with Hedy's father in which he explains that Hedy always felt guilty over the death of her twin. While Hedy's story of the loss of her sister is used to explain her behaviour, it becomes implausible and over-simplistic in the light of her subsequent violent behaviour. Indeed, Hedy's mystery is still intact, even after her death, at the film's conclusion. Narrative closure is shown by Allie in her new home, where she is surrounded by packing cases. This is the apartment that she and Sam had viewed together but which Sam rejected as "half the space at twice the price". As in all gothic horror, the woman and her home are fatally and finally entwined.

The final image of the film is a photograph that shows one half of Allie's face joined to the opposite half of Hedy's face. Thus Allie has her new home, but at a terrible personal cost. If the photograph is to be taken as face value, it would appear that Allie's identity, too, is now 'half the space at twice the price'. If so, the photograph shows that Hedy is not truly dead: Allie has now acknowledged the confusion between their identities. Both women become, in the course of the narrative, 'two-faced', and both find the possibility of separation a difficult option. The image appears to show something of the dilemmas of its title: namely who of the two is the 'real' single white female, and reaching the conclusion that it is neither of them.

The use of the photograph does not so much bring about narrative closure, but points to the possibility that Hedy has become part of Allie. This image is, in itself, cause for suspicion about Allie's identity. James Donald points out that part of the fascination of vampire films is their circular, never-ending nature,

symptomatic of 'the instability of culture, the impossibility of its closure or perfection'.⁹⁸ The engendering of new vampires is part of the mythology of a recruitment process which its victims are powerless to prevent, but from which they emerge eager to take the place of their mentors.⁹⁹ The final irony of the film is that the difference between the vampire and the lesbian is finally effaced, showing that any woman, no matter how normal she appears, is a potential victim and potential predator. Narcissism, infantile sexual desires, and attempting to pass as 'normal' while concealing one's true identity are the characteristics of both groups.

While the lesbian vampire can be, for lesbian spectators, a triumphantly decadent figure, she remains a historical figure, and a product of the nineteenth century. Sue-ellen Case points out that the fears of the twentieth century have come to be located in the fragile binary opposition between nature and technology.¹⁰⁰ The pastoral is no longer an idyll, nature is contaminated, the borders of what constitutes civilization are no longer clear-cut. The threat of misrecognizing the monster becomes part of the paranoia of modern urban living. The figure of Hedy shows how the film text, in an attempt to produce an identity for Hedy reaches down into the cultural vaults of terror to produce a monster who 'stands in' so successfully for the lesbian that her representation ceases to be metaphorical. As Case points out, in modern vampire films, 'the proscription of the lesbian is literally portrayed'.¹⁰¹ That *Single White Female* is able to reach such a nightmarish conclusion reveals the historical anxieties that the values of 'single', 'white' and 'female' provoke. The problems of representing all three values simultaneously bring about such an 'over-production' of femininity that there can be little surprise that the end-product is so inherently pathological.

NOTES

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11. Francke, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
12. Joan Juliet Buck, review, *Vogue*, August 1992, repr. in *Flesh and Blood: The National Society of Film Critics on Sex, Violence* ed. by Peter Keogh (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1995), pp. 97-100 (p. 97).
13. Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 112.
14. The number of single women in any population is always seen in negative terms. In *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), Susan Faludi discusses the knock-on effect of a *Newsweek* article in 1986 which stated (metaphorically) that a single woman in her thirties had statistically more chance of getting killed by a terrorist than of getting married (Eloise Salholz, 'The Marriage Crunch: If you're a single woman, here are your chances of getting married', *Newsweek*, 2 June 1986, p. 54, cited in Susan Faludi, *Backlash*, p. 123). Faludi's list of titles of magazine articles published in the late 1980s shows that the single woman was viewed, in the aftermath of the *Newsweek* article, as suffering from a terrible, terminal illness: for example, 'The Single Woman's Lament', 'You may be Forever Single', 'The Sad Plight of Single Women', 'Single Women: Coping with a Void'. One hundred and fifty years ago, in Victorian England, the number of 'surplus women' was similarly seen as a

social problem that could only be solved by Government intervention, with the promotion of emigration (see S. Barbara Kanner, 'The Women of England in a Century of Social Change, 1815-1914: A Select Bibliography', in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. by Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 173-206 (pp. 182-185)). However, as Faludi points out, while single women these days may be blamed for the decay of the nuclear family, rising divorce rates, and falling birth rates, the number of women who have never married is only around one in twelve for the female population in both the United States and Britain, while comparative figures for Victorian England show that about one-third of women never married (Faludi, p. 32).

15. Hart, op. cit., p. 117.

16. Ibid, p. 117.

17. Ibid, p. 116.

18. Interestingly, Stephen Tobolowsky, the actor who plays the role of Max the police detective in *Thelma and Louise*, here plays Mitch Myerson, a similar role in terms of representing the unpleasant face of patriarchal authority.

19. Jackie Stacey, 'If You Don't Play, You Can't Win: *Desert Hearts* and the Lesbian Romance Film', in *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*, ed. by Tamsin Wilton (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 92-114 (p. 93).

20. Chris Holmlund, 'Cruisin' for a Bruisin': A Decade of Deadly (Lesbian) Dolls', *Cinema Journal*, 34 1 (Fall 1994), 31-51 (p. 46).

21. Barbara Creed, 'Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts', in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, ed. by Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 86-103 (p. 98).

22. Ibid, p. 99.

23. See, for example, Jackie Stacey, 'Desperately Seeking Difference', in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 365-379.

24. Chris Straayer, 'The Hypothetical Lesbian Heroine', *Jump Cut*, 35 (1990) 50-57 (p. 56).

25. Barbet Schroeder, interview in the *Independent*, 13 January 1992, cited in Jermyn, op. cit., p. 265.

26. Hart, op. cit., p. 6.

27. Valerie Traub, 'The Ambiguities of "Lesbian" Viewing Pleasure: The (Dis)articulations of *Black Widow*', in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. by Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 305-328 (p. 315).

28. Because the plot leaves so many questions unanswered, Lynda Hart concludes that the only correct interpretation of events is that both women carried out the murders together: this is a far more frightening possibility than one woman killing in isolation. See Hart, op. cit., p. 133.

29. Cherry Smyth, 'The Transgressive Sexual Subject', in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, ed. by Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 123-143.
30. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 28-40 (p. 38).
31. Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator', in Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 17-32 (p. 22).
32. Ibid, p. 23.
33. Ibid, p. 22.
34. Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', in *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, ed. by Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek (New Haven: College and UP, 1966), pp. 209-220 (p. 211).
35. Ibid, p. 213.
36. Ibid, p. 213.
37. Doane, op. cit., p. 26.
38. Mary Ann Doane, 'Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator', in Doane, *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 33-43.
39. Ilsa J. Bick, 'To Be Real: Shame, Envy and the Reflections of the Self in Masquerade', *Discourse*, 15 2 (Winter 1992/93), 80-93 (p. 83).
40. Ibid, p. 85. The correlation of 'skin' with 'hide' is the central theme of *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1990), where Jame Gumb kills women for their skins to sew his own 'girl suit'. His acquisition of femininity is a literal and therefore pathological translocation of the women's skins onto the male body. Gumb sees the possibilities of masquerade as an application of his leather-making and sewing skills (his business is called 'Mr Hide'), where masquerading becomes nothing more than a complex manufacturing process. The suit of skin becomes the external proof of Gumb's murderous impulses, rather than a revealing of Gumb's identity as a woman.
41. Riviere, op. cit., p. 213.
42. Sue-Ellen Case, 'Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic', in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 294-306 (p. 300).
43. Riviere, op. cit., p. 217.
44. Ibid, p. 216.
45. Ibid, p. 217.
46. Ibid, p. 217.

47. Vivian Sobchack, 'Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange', in *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*, ed. by Gregory Waller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 175-194 (p. 185).
48. The portrayal of lesbian youth rebelling against maternal authority is made explicit in *Heavenly Creatures* (Peter Jackson, 1994), where the mother of one of the young women is murdered. *Fun* (Rafal Zielinski, 1994), a film also based on a true story, shows two adolescent girls killing an elderly women 'for fun'.
49. Buck, op. cit., p. 99.
50. Riviere, op. cit., pp. 217-218.
51. Bick, op. cit., p. 88.
52. Mulvey, op. cit., p. 31.
53. Ibid, p. 35.
54. Jermyn, op. cit., p. 253.
55. Ibid, p. 255.
56. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 59.
57. Ibid, p. 4.
58. Hart, op. cit., p. 115.
59. The dictionary definition of 'exotic' is 'introduced from abroad', which in itself reveal some interesting connotations that the film makes about race and racial difference. Aside from this, I find disconcerting that, in a film supposedly set in New York, the only other black person seen is a man who walks past Allie in the street as she follows Hedy to the nightclub.
60. Homi Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism', cited in Hart, *Fatal Women*, op. cit., p. 109.
61. Hart, op. cit., p. 115.
62. Richard Dyer, 'White', *Screen*, 29 4 (Autumn 1988), 44-64 (p. 44).
63. For further analysis of the story of Snow White, see Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 95-110.
64. Mary Ann Doane, 'Caught and Rebecca: The Inscription of Femininity as Absence', in *Film and Feminist Theory*, ed. by Constance Penley (London: BFI, 1988), pp. 196-215 (p. 212).
65. Buck, op. cit., p. 98.

66. Maria Laplace, 'Producing and Consuming the Woman's Film: Discursive Struggle in *Now Voyager*', in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Film*, ed. by Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1987), pp. 138-166 (p. 139).
67. Mary Ann Doane, 'The "Woman's Film": Possession and Address', in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. by Christine Gledhill, op. cit., pp. 283-298 (p. 284).
68. Ibid, p. 286.
69. Ibid, p. 286.
70. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1978 [repr. 1986]), p. 107.
71. Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing: 1750-1820* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.
72. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, trans. by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990). See Chapter One, 'The Incitement to Discourse', pp. 17-35.
73. Miles, op. cit., p. 2.
74. Moers, op. cit., p. 107.
75. Ibid, p. 107.
76. Linda Williams, 'When the Woman Looks', in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy, 4th edn (Oxford: Open University Press, 1992), pp. 561-577 (p. 568).
77. Ibid, p. 564.
78. Sue-Ellen Case, 'Tracking the Vampire', *Differences*, 3 2 (1991), 1-20 (p. 4).
79. Richard Dyer, 'Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism', in *Sweet Dreams: Sexuality, Gender and Popular Fiction*, ed. by Susannah Radstone (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), pp. 47-72.
80. Ibid, p. 60. Two titles on my shelves are *Edge of Twilight* by Paula Christian and *Women in the Shadows* by Ann Bannon.
81. Case, 'Tracking the Vampire', pp. 16-17.
82. Williams, op. cit., p. 563.
83. Patricia White, 'Female Spectator, Lesbian Specter: *The Haunting*', in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories/Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 142-172.
84. Ibid, p. 153.

85. Tanya Krzywinska, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci?', in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, ed. by Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 99-110 (p. 106).
86. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor/AIDS and its Metaphors* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 156.
87. Neale, op. cit., p. 60.
88. Dyer, 'Children of the Night', op. cit., p. 64.
89. Steven Weber, cited in Jermyn, op. cit., p. 265.
90. Roger Dadoun, 'Fetishism in the Horror Film', trans. by Annwyl Williams, in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. by James Donald (London: BFI, 1989), pp. 39-61 (p. 53).
91. Ibid, p. 57.
92. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 72.
93. Krzywinska, op. cit., p. 105.
94. Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, op. cit., p. 63.
95. Kristeva, op. cit., p. 96.
96. Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, op. cit., p. 77.
97. Dadoun, op. cit., p. 41.
98. James Donald, 'The Fantastic, the Sublime and the Popular, or What's at Stake in Vampire Films?', in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. by James Donald (London: BFI, 1989), pp. 233-251 (p. 247).
99. The ironic slogan, 'We Recruit', of the activist group Lesbian Avengers, is a similar message of the possibilities of lesbian activity.
100. Case, 'Tracking the Vampire', op. cit., p. 15-16.
101. Ibid, p. 15.

CHAPTER FOUR

"BLOW-JOBS AND HOMEMADE LASAGNE":

THE ROLE OF THE WIFE IN

THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE

There is no such thing as society: there are only individuals, and their families.

(Attributed to Margaret Thatcher)

Both *Single White Female* and *Thelma and Louise* explore the notion of female identity and both privilege female subjectivity over male subjectivity. Such readings could, on the one hand, suggest that Hollywood, as a system of film production, is indeed becoming more 'feminist', as the options of roles for women expand; the other side of the coin is that films that appear to question gender roles may claim attention by controversy alone. However, both films I have discussed so far highlight the specific problems of women's relationships to one another and to men. They both show the difficulties of female representation in a consumer culture that strives to maintain heterosexual, familial relationships in spite of female defiance. While *Thelma and Louise* reveals the interplay of generic convention with gender, *Single White Female* exposes the impossibilities of stable female representation. Thus, in both films, representation comes at a price for both sets of women, who have all become removed from the normalizing effects of the marital economy. In moving away from the disquieting nature of the single woman, I want to discuss, in this chapter, the impossible position of the wife in Hollywood films, a figure whose representation has a direct bearing on cultural and social values of women.

Gayle Rubin's useful analysis of the political economy of sex shows how the interaction between social, economic, biological and psychological factors develops the specifically female role into a sexual division of labour. However, as she points out, such a division is based less on the realities of biology than the need to enhance certain biological traits over others in order to perpetuate the current sex/gender system. Rubin argues that the interactive dependencies of the system produce the means by which 'society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity'.¹ The sexual division of labour is therefore made meaningful by an ideology that stresses physical differences between the sexes and ignores the contradictory social and cultural factors that may mitigate these differences. The primary sexual division of labour is motherhood, a relationship apparently forged out of instinctive, biological drives inherent in women, and the pervasive belief that the bond between mother and child is a natural, unique, and universal phenomenon.²

The ideologies surrounding the idealized vision of biological motherhood are now set against the realities of the difficulties of childcare provision, working mothers and absent fathers. One priority for State control in both Britain and the United States is the management of the financial burden caused by the increasing number of women having children outside marriage: out of over half a million births in England and Wales in 1990, 200,000 children were born to parents who were not married.³ In 1996, 1.5 million lone parents (of whom 90 per cent were women) were caring for 2 million children.⁴ The debate over cutting state benefits for single mothers who stay at home with their pre-school children appears to be one that focuses solely on women choosing to have children outside marriage. That single mothers may lay claim to state benefits implies that women might actually gain financially from having children: such a scenario appears unacceptable even

within an economy of welfare for all. Peter Lilley, the Conservative Social Security Secretary said in his speech at the Tory Party conference in 1992 that he had a list of 'young ladies' who had become pregnant in order to receive state benefits and council accommodation. His remarks were greeted by Tory members with rapturous applause, implying that they supported the fact that these women were known to the authorities, and would be censured. Traditional right-wing rhetoric finds intolerable the idea that women may equate children with income. The marital economy remains under patriarchal control.⁵

Equally, the traditional Marxist view of women as isolated and separated from the workplace ignores the validity of domestic labour. Encouraging housewives and mothers to enter the workforce confirms the idea that the home is a space of non-production. Such a view of the home can only exist in a capitalist economy and it effectively disguises the home's historical position in relation to the market place, and the mother's position as a producer for the labour force. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English observe that in the nineteenth century, most particularly for the inherently mobile populations of immigrants in America, homes were set up and abandoned with little nostalgia or feeling for maternal ties.⁶ As American society became increasingly settled and urbanized, Ehrenreich and English show how attitudes towards the stability of home life became increasingly important in an industrial world where the worker 'could no longer control either the work processes or the conditions of his employment'.⁷ While divisions were increasingly being drawn up on gender lines, differences were also being determined by class. Domesticated workers (and increasingly, domestication implied home ownership) could be relied upon to work regularly:

The home was an ideal 'container' for aspirations which could not be met in an increasingly stratified society: from a middle-class point of view it was a wholesome target for working-class ambitions and from a male point of view it was a safe focus for women's energies.⁸

The result has been, over the last two hundred years, a shift away from the view of the family home as a miniaturized production unit, independent and self-sufficient, to one that relied increasingly on mechanized and mass production. The effect of industrialization was to turn the home into a centre of consumption rather than production. Hence the housewife is viewed only as a consumer: her labour unpaid, her work invisible and non-productive.

The disenfranchizing of women from the workplace means they are allocated a special place in the economy that isolates them: they become unpaid workers for a system that cannot function without them. Both industrial capitalism and patriarchal culture depend on such free labour: as Hilda Scott cynically points out,

If it were not for the free ride these two mutually supportive, interlocking systems are receiving it would not have been necessary to disguise the economic value of women's work in the 'private' sphere with so much mythology.⁹

The British Government recently commissioned the Office for National Statistics to assess the economic value of housework. The ONS put the figure between £341 billion and £739 billion, with even the most conservative estimate being worth more than Britain's entire manufacturing sector.¹⁰ But Scott's reasoning is still correct: placing a financial value on childcare and running a home does not actually mean that women are to be paid for such tasks. This work is disguised by assessing it as 'non-work', as the Labour Government is seeking to do by cutting state benefits to lone parents in order to encourage them to enter the workforce.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (written in 1965) provides a sociological and economic critique for the changing attitudes towards the roles of women.

Friedan's description of post-war America's re-establishment of traditional female roles was, she argues, an orchestrated response guided by anxiety about rising male unemployment and falling birthrates. The celebration of the role of housewife in the 1950s was a means to show America as a major world power:

The mystique of feminine fulfilment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture.¹¹

After the Second World War, the need to preserve the traditional familial gender roles with the male as the bread-winner seemed an essential part of preserving the social fabric, a recalling of values that appeared to have historical veracity: 'and so men re-created their own childhood in suburbia'.¹² As part of this re-creation, Friedan shows that films and magazines became populist endorsements of a subtle message being filtered through American culture, from such disparate sources as Freudian psychoanalysis, the liberal child-rearing advice of Dr Spock and the anthropological research of Margaret Mead. The popularization of science on the one hand and the medicalization of maternity and childcare on the other further complicated the relationship between mother, child and society.

Hence, throughout the 1950s, the successful woman was defined not as the career woman, but as the suburban mother of four children. This echoes a similar social movement in eighteenth-century Europe when the rising middle classes sought to affirm their wealth and status by removing 'their' women from the workforce and establishing them as home-makers. Michel Foucault describes this social movement as the time when the notion of the bourgeois family was invented.¹³ The movement carried a number of sanctions designed to disenfranchise women and children while claiming a notional advance in their worth and status: for example, the promotion of the innocence of childhood, and the mythologizing of motherhood. At the same time, research by the child psychologist John Bowlby in

the 1950s concluded that young children were irrevocably harmed by the absence of their mothers. His oft-quoted remark about mother love has been used as ammunition by adherents of traditional gender roles:

Mother love in infancy and childhood is as important for mental health as are vitamins and proteins for physical health.¹⁴

A number of experts continue to claim that children of mothers who work outside the home show signs of disturbance. The darker side to the increased number of potentially disturbed children is their perceived connection to crime and violence. Joan Smith cites numerous recent newspaper articles that entreat mothers to leave their full-time jobs and return to the home: for example, 'Spare the job, mother, and save the child'.¹⁵ Many of these articles came in the wake of the James Bulger murder case, which inspired in the British media reactive moralizing debates over current standards of parenting skills. However, these debates appeared only to be addressed to one particular gender. Juvenile crime, rising divorce rates and the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family, it would appear, can be directly attributed to women neglecting their duties. As Smith points out,

It is a strange fact that when the collapse of the nuclear family is under discussion, the spotlight falls not on the *couples* who are supposed to be its bedrock but exclusively on the female partner.¹⁶ (author's emphasis)

The continuing emphasis on the most socially responsible and biologically valid role for women takes place within a number of representations which highlight the necessity of women's reproductivity while simultaneously disguising the value of women's productivity. The wife's primary role is viewed as caring for and maintaining the family, and this role has important economic, social and ideological functions. But in Western society, the depiction of the family with the husband as sole breadwinner and the wife as primarily a mother and home-maker is a fantasy. For example, only 6% of the American population now live in such

a family structure.¹⁷ Likewise the description 'housewife and mother' refers not simply to the status of particular women, but also encompasses social and cultural attitudes towards all women, whether married or not. Paradoxically, as the housewife's workload in practical terms has lessened - women are no longer responsible for educating their own children, for example - the ideological importance of women remaining in the home has increased in value to be heralded as a role that provides moral stability to the rest of society. Increased choices for women, whether in controlling their fertility, paying someone else to care for their children, or foregoing marriage and motherhood for other concerns, become a matter not of individual choice, but of social and cultural consequence.

Hollywood Wives and Mothers

The continuing popularity of genres for female audiences, specifically family melodrama and television soap opera, can be read as symptomatic of cultural ambivalence over the proper roles of motherhood and the state of the nuclear family. The emergence of the soap opera as a method for selling soap and inducing brand loyalty fostered links between the realm of the domestic and its associations with emotion and guilt. This form of entertainment, geared towards the working day and the working pattern of the housewife, is a never-ending source of dramatic conflict and emotive storylines. Rather than climactic endings and narrative closure, the story remains open: similarly, Molly Haskell describes the woman's film as 'the day-to-day struggle to keep the best of oneself afloat'.¹⁸ Haskell's analysis of the historical development of women's roles in Hollywood films argues that the majority of Hollywood films 'promoted a romantic fantasy of marital roles and conjugal euphoria'.¹⁹ In spite of the importance of female stars (who were often given top billing), films made in the post-war period merely

reflected 'absolute' roles for women that denied them little active choice, other than domesticity or death:

As women represented real threats to male economic supremacy, movie heroines had to be brought down to fictional size, domesticated or defanged.²⁰

Haskell sees the popularity of such genres as the woman's film as offering a 'sense of martyrdom and self-pity'²¹; in other words, the films initiate a masochistic emotional release that is linked specifically with female spectatorial pleasure. The popularity of such genres with female audiences (similar to the popularity of literary genres such as romance) reveals, for Haskell, that this consumption does involve a particular complicity.

The relationship between the portrayal of wives and mothers in Hollywood films, and the experiences of the audiences that recognize the films' values and, in turn, give them meaning has wide-ranging consequences for the institution of motherhood, which itself is dependent on a vast, idealized, system of representation. Lizzie Francke refers to two images in 1991 that were seen as highly controversial: the heavily pregnant naked Demi Moore pictured on the front cover of *Vanity Fair*, and the Benetton advertisement featuring a new-born baby, still attached to its umbilical cord.²² Francke suggests that the fact that complaints were received show a cultural need to ignore the realities of childbirth and maternity: 'the bare and visceral facts of life'.²³ Both images are presented without the benefits of maternal idealization; both, perhaps more controversially, reveal the fundamental relationship between childbirth and commerce. The Benetton advertisement presents a naked, unidentified baby as the epicentral figure of an industry where clothing and fashion effectively produce identity. The naked figure of Demi Moore suggests a pregnant woman 'cashing in' on her status by posing

for the front cover of a glossy magazine. After all, the naked Demi Moore is nothing new to a cinema-going public, but a naked, heavily pregnant woman could be viewed as sexual. The image is provocative precisely because it works both ways - is it an image of a naked filmstar who happens to be pregnant, or a pregnant woman who is also a filmstar? This image is a supremely visual example of the dilemma posed by the 'working mother', an identity that always imposes sanctions on the woman.

Mary Beth Haralovich's analysis of the career of Joan Crawford shows her to be a victim of the system that is threatened by the figure of the working mother.²⁴

Haralovich makes the comparison between Crawford's performance in *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945) and her representation in *Mommie Dearest* (Frank Perry, 1981). Crawford as Mildred Pierce is the triumphant embodiment of self-sacrificing mother-love. She is also made responsible for her daughter Veda's actions. Haralovich cites Juliet Mitchell's observation that child-rearing is a 'sad mimicry of production'²⁵: undoubtedly the wayward mother must be held responsible for producing sub-standard goods. But Mildred is doubly punished as a working mother, and as a businesswoman. Haralovich argues that Mildred's eventual failure in the restaurant business is directly linked to her ambition to provide Veda with all her material desires:

Now, because Mildred is an indulgent mother, she is a poor businesswoman. The effect of this is to restore the men to the sphere of production and to merge the woman's failure in production with her failure in reproduction.²⁶

Mildred is blamed for a murder that she did not commit: though the murderer is eventually captured and Mildred is set free, the real drama is the portrayal of the woman who fails to attend to her daughter's emotional needs, and who tries to join, through income alone, a higher social class.²⁷ The fantasy of Mildred as the

ultimate self-sacrificing mother is made ironic in the light of the later *Mommie Dearest*. This film is based on the autobiography by Crawford's daughter, Christine. Revealing a childhood that oscillated between the two extremes of the Hollywood publicity machine and the hidden world of Crawford's abusive and uncaring nature, *Mommie Dearest* was a high-camp horror film, purporting to show the 'true' face of Crawford as a disturbed and deranged woman. Haralovich sees the public fascination with the film (in spite of reviews that dismissed it as sensationalist and lurid) as evidence of the social pressures on all women who work outside the home: 'actresses represent work conditions and ways of being women, on screen and off'.²⁸ Indeed, Crawford's high profile as a working mother conflates three negative aspects of womanhood: the fading film star, the abusive mother, and the actress into one spectacular package.

Such interactions between the realities of women's lives and the representations of their roles in cinema pave the way for the subject of dysfunctioning motherhood to be a rich source of cultural and social disquiet. As E. Ann Kaplan points out, the cultural assimilation of psychoanalysis provided a rich and inexhaustible source of specifically female neuroses: 'a convenient conduit'²⁹ for allaying male fears about women moving into the workforce. In a comparison between *Now Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942) and *Marnie* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964), Kaplan reveals how both films express anxieties about mother-daughter relationships, but points out that in the earlier film the dilemma is revealed and resolved by a psychiatrist who embodies psychoanalytical knowledge. The later *Marnie* reveals an assimilation of the values of psychoanalysis by an interested lay-person. As Kaplan points out, the desire to place the role of motherhood within a psychoanalytic discourse was 'a symptom of the mother's increasing cultural threat in the post-war period'.³⁰

Hollywood films from the early 1980s have displayed a re-emergence of interest in the family melodrama in films such as *Kramer vs Kramer* (Robert Benton, 1979), and *Ordinary People* (Robert Redford, 1980). Both films won Oscars for 'Best Picture' in their respective years. Vivian Sobchack argues that such films can be seen collectively as attempts to reinstate the presence of paternal authority while simultaneously negating the modern social pressures that may undermine it.³¹ The family becomes not so much a refuge from social pressures as a microcosm of social ills. In *Ordinary People* the role of mothering is taken over by the father, while the role of paternal authority is provided by the psychiatrist. The mother removes herself from the family home when she has proved herself unable to perform her maternal duties. Richard Maltby points out that *Ordinary People* with *Kramer vs Kramer* and *On Golden Pond* (Mark Rydell, 1981) heralded Hollywood's return to middle-class family values:

With their evident concerns with the home, family, and community, domestic melodramas became as prominent a feature of the Hollywood landscape in the first half of the 1980s as they had been in the 1950s.³²

As *Ordinary People* was Robert Redford's directorial debut, the film received much critical and public attention. However, as Maltby notes, it is an extreme example of how Hollywood films in the 1980s moved away from the urban, working-class settings of the 1970s to the problems associated with suburban, affluent, middle-class families. In Maltby's analysis, the film establishes its characters within a classical framework reminiscent of 1950s melodrama. However, the emphasis put on *paternal care* in place of either patriarchal authority and maternal sacrifice reveals the film's contemporary anxieties. The silent and uncommunicative mother, Beth, becomes both victim and villain in the narrative:

She is consistently denied that space, and hence offered no opportunity to speak, in a movie that places the greatest value on the curative power of the act of speech.³³

The mother becomes the embodiment of modern family strife while the presence of the psychiatrist reveals *Ordinary People*'s legacy in relation to the melodramas of the 1940s and 1950s. The film also highlights the position of the child as a figure torn between loyalty to family values and increasing independence. The drama is intensified by the suicide of a teenage girl, and resolved by the wife vacating the family. With the erasing of possibly obstreperous female figures, the son Conrad, his father and the male psychiatrist are then free to develop the homosocially-bonded new family.

Three Men and a Baby (Leonard Nimoy, 1987), *Look Who's Talking* (Amy Heckerling, 1989), and *Home Alone* (Chris Columbus, 1990) are more recent films that forefront the figure of the child, its position in the family and the learning of parenting skills for those who would wish to avoid such issues. As Lizzie Francke describes in *Sight and Sound*, 'Hollywood seems determined to rediscover a lost innocence'.³⁴ Francke argues that Hollywood is reflecting the anxieties and interests of the contemporary baby-boom post-war generation by regressing to an earlier era, the 1930s, when Shirley Temple was the top box attraction. Charles Eckert's analysis of the appeal of Shirley Temple shows that it is intimately bound up with the economic crisis of the mid-Depression years of 1934-1938. Temple's roles align her not with the workers but with the wealthy:

Her principal functions in virtually all of [her] films are to soften hard hearts (especially of the wealthy), to intercede on behalf of others, to effect liaisons between members of opposed social classes and occasionally to regenerate.³⁵

Eckert describes Temple's screen persona as an 'unstructured reification of the libido'³⁶, an embodiment of unwavering love for the adults surrounding her. This was at a time when twenty million adults were destitute and when the Roosevelt administration introduced not only welfare-for-work schemes but also reduced taxes

on the incomes of the rich. Eckert argues that the iconography of Shirley Temple shows her persona to be a replacement for money: the giving of love is always to those who need it most. In effect, she is the material possession to be adopted and exchanged between adults. In line with all other sections of the capitalist system that disguise the demands of the work force that produce the goods, classic Hollywood films attempt to disguise their own productions as 'work': they become pure entertainment. The marrying of the 'bankable' female child star and capitalism could appear to be the point where the value of patriarchy is most threatened, where the child replaces the father as the primary worker and breadwinner. But Shirley Temple as filmstar was not seen as a child worker whose talents were exploited by the needs of the studio, but rather as a child prodigy who allowed others to profit from her own play-making.³⁷ Temple's films show her as the ultimate embodiment of individualism, where personal talent will triumph over the most difficult circumstances.

The relationship between the Depression and the popularity of Shirley Temple may be an extreme precursor of the contemporary discourses about social, cultural and economic relations but her film appearances do foreshadow some of the anxieties that appear in many films made in the 1980s. Each of the three films mentioned above was a surprise hit at the box-office, showing a public interest in issues such as acknowledgement of paternity, the difficulties of maternity, and the foregrounding of the child star over adult actors. Often, the children are portrayed as more knowing and aware than their adult carers. In *Home Alone* the child, played by Macauley Culkin (another eminently bankable child star), is accidentally left alone over Christmas but nevertheless prevents the family home being ransacked by burglars. In *Look Who's Talking*, the knowing voice-over (supplied by Bruce Willis) of the supposedly pre-verbal child provides a streetwise

and ironic commentary on the behaviour of the adults around him. Mikey the baby selects his own father while disrupting his mother's attempts to find a suitable and financially viable mate. The child becomes synonymous with family values, income and paternity. The baby girl in *Three Men and a Baby*, initially mistaken for a delivery of drugs, disrupts the three men's lifestyles but becomes an important lesson for them in teaching them the value of child-rearing. Needless to say, the success of all three films has given birth to sequels.

The family is a source of economic prosperity whose future lies in the reification of its own intrinsic value. During times of economic difficulties, the family is often hailed as the saviour of the economic system, while those who appear to be undermining the structure of the nuclear family - single mothers, lesbian and gay parents - are seen to be a threat. Sarah Harwood, in her discussion of the representation of families in Hollywood films, points out that during the 1980s both the ideology of the family and the leisure pursuit of going to the cinema were re-popularized.³⁸ The consequence of the resurgence of interest in the family in Hollywood films has been to re-invent the figure of the wife while restoring patriarchal values and establishing the socially acceptable nature of benign paternal influences. Notably, the relationship between children and income is forefronted. *Baby Boom* (Charles Shyer, 1987) is one of the few Hollywood films to show a woman successfully combining mothering and running a business. However, the protagonist J.C. is, at the start of the film, a high-powered executive who inherits, rather than gives birth to, a thirteen-month old baby girl. The setting of this relationship implies that babies will arrive (via the stork?) whether or not women want them, and that the relationship will be permanent.³⁹ *Baby Boom* shows J.C. re-assessing her lifestyle and moving out of the city: her career change places her at the centre of a baby food-making industry which successfully returns her to the

kitchen. While the film does attempt to offer the mother an alternative to total removal from the world of productive work, it is not without cloying sentimentality. Rural motherhood is re-discovered, the baby is used as a miniaturized quality control unit, and motherhood becomes simply a new lifestyle choice. As Pauline Kael remarks, 'If there were justice in the world of entertainment, *Baby Boom* would be unwatchable'.⁴⁰

This film's most important element, signalling contemporary post-Reaganomics and post-feminist values, is the establishment of what Mary Desjardins describes as 'commodified feminism'⁴¹. As the film is one of the few comedies based on female rather than male surrogacy, it is an important contemporary comment on the possibilities open to women. But the political choices of feminism are transmuted into a 'post-feminist lifestyle' based on consumer choice and income. As Desjardins points out, the film's portrayal of good motherhood is that it 'favors the primacy of money and class over any essentialist link'.⁴² Tania Modleski, writing about *Three Men and a Baby*, points out that female, rather than male, babies are to be found in surrogacy films. Modleski sees the choice of gender as a means of disrupting the mother-daughter bond: 'these daughters are being seduced away from feminism'(her emphasis).⁴³ The possibilities of female relationships are reduced to provide a situation for male-to-child bonding as well as male-to-male bonding. The problematic subject of motherhood is circumvented by the placing of a man in the role. The logical outcome of the Hollywood interest in both maternity and paternity is the figure of the pregnant Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Junior* (Ivan Reitman, 1994) where the female role in pregnancy can be reduced to the unwitting donation of an egg.

The Hand that Rocks the Cradle and Maternal Melodrama

Melodrama, and its sister genre, the woman's film, are often viewed as the most accurate reflection of social anxieties: as Steve Neale points out, melodrama in its widest sense is 'a series of discourses about class, sexuality, property and the family'.⁴⁴ The subjects of wifeness and motherhood (roles that only denote one's relationship to others) become the driving force behind narratives that value emotional and moral motivations above all others. Linda Williams sees the maternal melodrama as a re-affirmation of the impossible position of the mother. While the position of motherhood is sanctified, the actual figure of the mother must go through a process of devaluation.⁴⁵ The mother must sacrifice herself in order to protect the family, and, more explicitly, must devalue the relationship between mother and daughter in order to restore patriarchal control of the family. The maternal melodrama is a narrative that accentuates the ideological functions of motherhood and wifeness, while simultaneously negating those areas that might conflict with paternal values. But the contemporary family is shown not to be the exclusive domain of women. Many films of the 1990s stress the importance of recuperating the figure of the woman into a recognisably stable family unit, while at the same time, increasing the opportunities for men and children to disrupt and take over more traditional female roles. *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (Curtis Hanson, 1991) appears to take the issue of the marital economy to the point where children become synonymous with income, where the maternal instinct is seen as a potentially anti-social and destructive force, and where paternal values save the day. More importantly, the film emphasizes the problems caused by placing an economic value on women's time and labour, while at the same time showing the humanitarian side of male labour when freely given.

The Hand tells the story of a married couple, Claire and Michael Bartel, who have a daughter, Emma. During her second pregnancy, Claire accuses a gynaecologist, Dr Mott, of sexual misconduct. On hearing the news of an impending police investigation, Dr Mott commits suicide. His pregnant widow, learning of the lawsuits against her husband, and her own penury, has a miscarriage and an emergency hysterectomy. While in hospital, Mrs Mott learns that Claire initiated the police investigation of her husband, and she therefore holds Claire responsible for the deaths of her unborn son and her husband. Calling herself Peyton Flanders, she enters the Bartel household disguised as a nanny. She is thus able to carry out acts of revenge against Claire, secretly breastfeeding the baby and sabotaging Claire's relationships with Michael and Emma. Her vengeful actions lead to the death of a family friend, Marlene, and the sacking of the handyman, Solomon, a black man with learning difficulties, after she accuses him of sexually molesting Emma. By visiting the Motts' old house, Claire finally discovers that Peyton is Mrs Mott and tells her to leave. Peyton returns to the Bartels' home to steal the children and attacks both Claire and Michael. The children are rescued by Solomon while Peyton is pushed out of the attic window by Claire and dies, impaled on the white picket fence in the garden.

In *The Hand* the representation of the Hollywood nuclear family as a fixed and stable unit is questioned and destabilized, eventually to be bought back from the brink of disaster. The film reassesses and finally reaffirms the identity of the family as a unit that is middle-class, white, affluent and living in suburban bliss. Its themes, of course, echo those of the earlier *Fatal Attraction*, to the extent that Elayne Rapping reviews *The Hand* by saying: 'It thinks it's *Fatal Attraction* for the 90s'.⁴⁶ Lizzie Francke's review of the film in *Sight and Sound* argues that it is a 'vamped up version of *The Nanny* crossed with *Fatal Attraction*'.⁴⁷

Any single white woman may be threatening, but *The Hand* re-identifies the threat of unregulated female sexual desire on patriarchy as a rampant maternal desire that threatens paternity. Therefore, unlike *Fatal Attraction* where patriarchal crisis is foregrounded and where the role of the husband is placed under threat, *The Hand* bypasses sexual desire to remodel the figure of crisis as a sterile, widowed woman. Peyton becomes a pathological wife, and the focus of her desire is the children she now cannot bear. The figure of the dead husband and father, Dr Mott, represents a paternal identity crisis: Peyton continues to see her dead husband as a symbolic figure who at one time provided security, identity and income. However, the flipside to this deification is that the male role, even in fertilization, is marginalized, and so too is the maternal role. When a woman in the park admires baby Joe, telling Peyton, "He has your eyes", Peyton's facial expression is both poignant and triumphant: she is already breast-feeding the baby (who is about the same age as her dead son) so the leap from substitute-mother to recognizable biological mother has been achieved. Claire is now made redundant. But Peyton's own maternal desires must be realized socially rather than biologically and while the children are necessary to give credence to her identity, the 'husband' is an extra. As such, Peyton's desire for children is made, in the context of the film, anti-paternal and therefore illegitimate. Her methods of revenge are to jeopardize both the biological and the economic sanctity of the family, and in so doing, she reveals the complexities of the ideology that maintains Claire's position as wife.

Feminist readings of *Fatal Attraction* have sought to place Alex within a context of 'patriarchy in crisis' where Alex embodies many of the threats that could destabilize the nuclear family.⁴⁸ However, with Dan as the main protagonist, the narrative concentrates solely on Dan's predicament. The demonization of Alex is

the narrative back-drop to Dan's angst-ridden guilt, and her death the catharsis that frees him from responsibility. *The Hand*, by contrast, concentrates on the combined anxieties and suspected failings of the wife and mother. Amanda Silver, the screenwriter, cites as her inspiration for Peyton the character of Iago in *Othello*, but saw the only way to develop the closeness of the primary female characters was to place them in a domestic setting. She asks, 'How could I get one woman close enough to another to prey upon her fears?'⁴⁹ It is, of course, within the arena of domesticity that women can be portrayed as being at their most vulnerable and, conversely, at their most powerful. While the shifting from the masculine public space in *Othello* to the feminine domestic space of the home in *The Hand* confirms the practical solution to Silver's dilemma, her question reveals that the representation of domestic space is typified as both isolating for women, *and* universal.

Like Iago, Peyton has her own agenda. She is revealed to the audience to be undermining parental influence and the privacy of the domestic space while simultaneously appearing to be absolutely loyal to the family. Her masquerade successfully convinces Michael, who says to Claire, "Peyton's come through for this family", when she suggests leaving Peyton behind on a family holiday. However, Shakespeare's *Othello* is a complex heroic figure whose potential weakness is a marriage based on a tripartition of race, age and class. In *The Hand*, Claire is a character with no apparent flaws other than terminal 'niceness'. She is portrayed as a white, middle-class 'everywoman', financially secure, and happy in her marriage and domestic life. Thus Peyton's machinations expose the frailties of a *normal* marriage in Hollywood films. The film becomes not so much a tragedy, but a melodrama based on the possible inadequacies of the female characters.

As a 'Fatal Attraction for the 90s', the emotional content of *The Hand* appears to place it within the genre of melodrama, though it was billed as a thriller.⁵⁰ Peyton is 'a name resonant with melodramatic excess'⁵¹, with its associations with the novel and later film, *Peyton Place* (Mark Robson, 1957). Her surname also recalls Daniel Defoe's novel *Moll Flanders* where the narrator of the novel uses the name as a pseudonym in order to write about her life of prostitution, bigamy, incest and thieving. Therefore, 'Peyton's place' in the family is already marked as a place of deceit. The melodramatic moments of the film are in effect directed by Peyton herself, who succeeds in re-writing her past history in order to carve out a role for herself within the Bartel household. The cornerstone of Peyton's fantasy is her belief that she will prove to be the more successful wife and mother. Her belief in her abilities undermines some of the repressive nature of the film: while Peyton is the most transgressive female figure, she could also be seen as the woman who most willingly takes on the traditional role of the wife. Compared to the serenely complacent Claire on the one hand, and Marlene the successful businesswoman on the other, Peyton's loyalty to her husband, her desire for children, her unstinting domestic labour, and her compulsion for family life can all be read as necessary wifely character traits. Though *The Hand* appears to impart a reactionary message of the dangers of allowing strange women to care for your children, it also does introduce contradictions, as Deborah Jermyn points out:

Rather than confirming that women are happiest at home, the film shows that now, as in Victorian times, women's immersion in the domestic can be unsatisfying and dangerous.⁵²

Peyton's obsessions mark her as a woman who cannot do anything other than immerse herself in the domestic. Claire, on the other hand, offers a view of a

woman stretched beyond the domestic, who extends her role beyond her natural capabilities.

Claire's asthma attacks represent another aspect of the melodramatic excess of the film. At moments where she struggles for breath, she is unable to cry out for help or even to express her anger. Mary Ann Doane points out that the mute woman is a figure often found in the woman's film: 'it is ultimately the symptoms of the female body which "speak"'.⁵³ At moments of extreme stress, Claire's body takes over. Deborah Jermyn sees this choking and failure of speech as a symptom of hysteria, placing Claire specifically in a historical construction of women as weak and unable.⁵⁴ Claire's physical weakness and loss of speech can be contrasted with Peyton's articulate and manipulative use of language: verbally, she is never at a loss. According to Elayne Rapping, one of the most important differences between the two women is that Claire continues to act as a passive victim. Rapping argues that Dr Mott's abuse of Claire highlights:

Claire's almost nightmarish inability to move or act, her dreamlike oblivion to the true nature of her situation.⁵⁵

Claire remains throughout most of the film an unaware and unknowing figure: Peyton, on the other hand, always feels threatened, and is consequently always on the attack. Given that the film makes strenuous efforts to undermine any sympathies that the audience may feel for Peyton, the relationship between victim, aggressor and avenger in *The Hand* is radically redefined.

Three of the films I discuss - *Thelma and Louise*, *Single White Female* and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* - contain an incident of sexual assault: these incidents are an important part of a process of victimization in which female characters, however active, can be reabsorbed, though briefly, into traditional gender roles. As

such, the sexual assaults play an important part in re-negotiating the representation of the women. The sexual assault also allows for spectatorial identification and sympathy with Thelma, Allie and Claire. In the first two films, however, both Louise and Hedy deal with the abuse through 'improper' channels: either through the barrel of a gun, or through verbal threats. However transgressively Hedy is portrayed in *Single White Female*, her abusive telephone call to Mitch Myerson shows her wish to protect Allie. Thus, the aftermath of reaction to abuse also allows for female spectatorial identification, through the portrayal of anger and the possibility of retribution. By contrast, *The Hand* shows the results of pursuing sexual misconduct through proper, official channels. While in *Thelma and Louise* and *Single White Female* the abuse takes place in areas where traditionally women are outsiders - the bar and the workplace - *The Hand* introduces the possibility of sexual abuse taking place in a medical environment where women might be expected to feel protected. Worse still, the abuse takes place in a gynaecological clinic, where mothers are expected to submit to medical procedures for the good of their unborn children.

Claire has a pre-natal appointment with Dr Mott, whom she is meeting for the first time as her previous gynaecologist has now retired. The nurse assures her that Dr Mott is "one of the best". Rather pointedly, Mott's examination room is decorated with medical diagrams of cross-sections of pregnant women, explicitly placing the women who visit his clinic as potentially all 'open' to him. Dr Mott's work highlights the female body as a possible source of dirt and pollution, but not as a source of mystery as the displays on his surgery walls bear witness. Rather, the representations of the female bodies are simultaneously medical and sexual, and their function, rather than their value, graphically emphasized. Mott tells Claire that she must be "kind of a pro" as she is expecting her second child, but insists

on an internal examination even though Claire points out that this is an unusual practice so late in pregnancy. After examining her breasts, Mott moves to stand between her legs. Out of Claire's view, his motives are revealed to the audience as sexual, rather than medical, by showing him removing his rubber glove. The molestation, therefore, is made secret, taking place inside the body of a woman who has submitted to the procedure, and, as such, it is primarily her body that analyses what has happened as abuse. Her nakedness and complete submission remove all possibilities that she may have invited or co-operated in such an assault: on the other hand, Claire is not completely certain that she knows what actually happened. As at other points of stress in the film, Claire cannot voice her objection but has a spontaneous asthma attack as she leaves the clinic. Later, while feeling that she has been sexually assaulted, she appears unable to decide, without her husband's support, whether she can pursue the matter. Claire does not take the matter to court, unlike Dr Mott's other victims: thus, she remains the catalyst of events, rather than the instigator.

In *Thelma and Louise* and *Single White Female*, the avenger of abuse is linked to the victim by a relationship undefinable in patriarchy. Both films therefore see sexual assault as a possible occasion for female bonding and autonomy. In *The Hand* the institution of marriage holds together in order to keep Peyton, the wife, in her place: in the context of the film, she is simultaneously victim, aggressor and avenger. By hinting to Claire that Solomon may be abusing Emma, or that Michael and Marlene may be having an affair, she in turn negates the validity of Claire's story of abuse by inventing stories of her own. In Peyton's hands, sexuality becomes a weapon by which she can undermine parental and marital relationships. As she has failed to recognize that her own husband was an abuser,

it follows that Peyton holds Claire responsible not only for her husband's death but for the assault that preceded it.

As Deborah Jermyn points out, *The Hand*, unlike *Fatal Attraction*, appears to be geared towards a female audience.⁵⁶ Beth, as the wife, was merely called upon in the closing moments of *Fatal Attraction* to finish the task of killing Alex, who has become so transgressive a figure that death is the only punishment. The tension in the film is based upon Dan's growing realization that Alex is capable of carrying out her threats, while he still hopes to maintain his wife's ignorance of his relationship with her. *Fatal Attraction* provides ample opportunities for a male masochistic position with Dan portrayed as the victim, but this position provides a minimal emotional content based on guilt and fear. Dan's feelings that he might be caught out for having a brief affair are based on pragmatic, rather than emotional, consequences. By contrast, in *The Hand*, Claire's ignorance actively works to displace tension: in order for Peyton's acts of vengeance to take place, Claire has to misread all the signs. Claire's position in the narrative, therefore, is similar to that of Susan Wheeler in *Coma*, who cannot recognize the conspiracy around her and who is 'never in command of more knowledge than the viewer'.⁵⁷ Not only does Claire not see the conspiracy - the possible abuse of her child, her husband's suspected affair - she fails to understand why her position in the family is slowly being undermined. Meanwhile, Peyton's motives and descent into madness are revealed to the audience at every turn of the plot. Thus, identification lies not so much with the character of Claire, but with the possible disintegration of her role within the family: without her, the family will fall apart. The tension is set around the home, the 'paradigmatic woman's space'⁵⁸, and begins and ends with the search for the identity of the real wife. Which woman will be prepared to suffer for her family? Female subjectivity is reduced: both female protagonists

can be identified as victims of a specifically female paranoia about the instability of their position, linked to their roles as wives and mothers.

"I Didn't Have a Mommy": Generational Discord and Family Strife

The final image of *Fatal Attraction* is the family photograph, showing Dan, Beth and Ellen together, obviously taken before the events of the film. It is an iconographic reference to the unity of the Gallagher family, reminding the audience that it can, when necessary, present a cohesive identity to the outside world. Sarah Harwood, in her discussion of the representation of the family in Hollywood films, suggests that the implications of this final image are as if 'time can be stopped, even reversed'.⁵⁹ For Harwood, this image undermines narrative closure: the photograph represents a utopian point of reference forever destroyed by the spectre of Alex. To take Harwood's analogy one step further, this final image becomes a fixed ideal, taking on a role similar to Laura Mulvey's idea of the spectacle of woman: frozen in the film narrative, she neither performs actions or takes control. As an image, the family group refers back to the past and suggests possible futures, but can be a reference to the present by confirming the victim-status of the Gallagher family. The Gallagher photograph also serves as an ironic reference to the apparent cohesion of the family unit. After all, as Deborah Jermyn points out, the first view of the Gallagher family is as a dysfunctional family, each member intent on their own interests, and seemingly unable to communicate with each other:

Underneath the superficial veneer of material success and bourgeois accomplishment lies a resounding air of emptiness.⁶⁰

Revealingly, the only instance in *The Hand* where Dr and Mrs Mott are shown together is a brief shot of a photograph of the couple on Dr Mott's desk before he

commits suicide. Like the photograph of the Gallaghers, the Motts pictured together serves as a reminder of a past event, and a suggestion of the future. As there are no children, the photograph has an air of sterility, as if there is a gap waiting to be filled. As evidence of the present, next to the television where a newsreader is giving details of the charges against Dr Mott, the marriage becomes nothing more than a carefully-staged studio photograph, hiding Mott's sexual proclivities behind a facade of respectability.

Unlike the suggestion of perversity and sterility that the Mott photograph suggests, *The Hand* shows the Bartels as a family at peace: the husband, Michael is singing in the bathroom with Emma while shaving; Claire is in the kitchen, preparing the family's breakfast. This morning scene, with its connotations of safety and security, routine and family tradition (and its firm establishment of gender roles), has been further strengthened by the first view of the Bartels' home, a large white house surrounded by a beautifully maintained garden. Nevertheless, Elayne Rapping describes the film as having 'a dark sense of dread and self-loathing' and 'a quality of foreboding and guilt that is tangible'.⁶¹ The guilt seems to be directly linked to the privileges held by the white family and is alluded to in the title sequence. As the camera moves from room to room showing the peaceful interior of the Bartel household while the family sleeps, these shots are cross-cut with shots of a hooded figure on a bicycle who appears to be heading for the house. This anonymous figure becomes, aided by the non-diegetic soundtrack, a source of tension and disquiet. On arriving at the house, he walks around its grounds, obviously hoping to gain entry. Alone in the kitchen, Claire gasps in terror as she catches sight of him at the window. The potential threat of the figure of a hooded black man is resolved by Michael revealing that Solomon is the household's new handyman. The opening moments of the narrative show that potentially this house

and its occupants are at risk, but not from the obvious figure of the young black male.

The position of Solomon in the narrative is as a secondary paternal figure who, by his loyalty to the white family, and his suspicions of Peyton, ascends to a more elevated role of primary paternal carer. The figure of the black man, normally a sexualized and threatening presence, is made more socially acceptable by his learning difficulties. Solomon is a child-like figure who is de-sexualized: his presence is a reassuring reminder that the white family is, at heart, socially responsible and colour-blind. While Solomon's child-like qualities are seen as proof of his innocence, Peyton's relationship with Emma appears as negative and regressive. Her late night chats with Emma, where the two share Peyton's bed and exchange secrets, and Peyton's dealings with a playground bully - she threatens to "rip his fucking head off" - are reminiscent of an elder child rather than the actions of a responsible adult. Such regression reveals Peyton's potential as monstrous: while Solomon, though child-like, shows a capacity for adult responsibility, Peyton threatens the nature of the child-adult relationship.

In one scene, when Claire and Michael go out for the evening, this aspect of Peyton's role is further developed. In a brief reprise of the title sequence, the camera moves slowly through the house to the basement, where Peyton's room is situated. In contrast to the warm earthy tones of the rest of the house, the basement is painted a chilly white and its stairs are lit by a single naked light bulb, revealing shadowy recesses. The only sound to be heard is of a man screaming, then the words, "Zombies - the living dead", reassuring the audience that we are hearing the soundtrack to a horror film. The next shot is taken over Emma's shoulder at the television screen. Emma says, "Mom never lets me watch

these movies". A close-up of a man's face with wild, staring eyes appears on the television, and in the foreground, we see Peyton's hand stroking Emma's hair in an affectionate, and even intimate way.

The image of the little girl watching a film that is unsuitable conjures up a forceful warning of the dangers of violent and disturbing films on young children: the negation of maternal authority underlies Peyton's own relationship with Emma. Peyton's lack of womb denies her any normal reproductive capabilities: the hysterectomy appears to have removed any normal nurturing capabilities as well. Her presence in the lower regions of the house (like *Psycho's* Mrs Bates in the fruit cellar) inverts the home's normal living arrangements. Peyton's maternal instinct is one closely aligned with death and decay. Emma's lack of emotional response to the frightening images on the television mirrors Peyton's own lack of concern. In effect, this brief scene is a forewarning of Peyton's possible unsavoury influence over Emma. The trust that the little girl begins to place in her becomes an inversion of the proper mother-child relationship; while Claire stresses openness and honesty as the basis for family relationships, Peyton and Emma form a 'secret club' together, a club that excludes all others. The occasion of the zombie film also hints at Peyton's 'living-dead' relationship with her own family: like Hedy's continuing obsession with her dead twin sister, both women are marked by their wish to regenerate dead relatives. Regeneration rather than reproduction, as a force outside patriarchal constraints, is always a source of horror. Peyton, by her denial of the generative powers of family life, and her appropriation of Claire's baby as her own - "I'll just get my baby" she says, when the Bartels ask her to leave their home - hints at a possible horrific parthenogenesis.

The comparison between Claire, the 'good' mother, and Peyton, the 'bad' mother, begin with comparable shots of their hands, complete with wedding rings. In both instances, the women's hands are shown before their faces. Claire's hands are shown first, in the kitchen as she prepares fresh fruit juice for her family, and Peyton's hands are shown being wrung anxiously as the lawyer tells her that she will receive nothing from her late husband's estate due to the lawsuits against him. Thus the differences between the two are further polarized by the spaces they inhabit: one woman in a kitchen preparing food, the other in a lawyer's office. The differences are made more apparent when the haemorrhaging Peyton is rushed to hospital: the scene is cross-cut with shots of Claire gardening, resting on her bed, and placing Emma's hand on her stomach to feel the baby kicking. The later image of Claire in the rocking chair with the baby also suggests a reference to the icon of Whistler's mother, a portrait suggesting the 'ideal revered mother'.⁶² When Peyton is covered in blood and hysterical, Claire is, by comparison, presented as an almost Madonna-like figure. In this context, Peyton's feelings of violation and grief are understandable: her baby son is still-born and she will never be able to have another child. Robin Blaetz, analyzing Hollywood birth scenes, describes how childbirth has become something to be feared, a state in which women are shown as having no control over their bodies:

The pregnant and birthing female is the unruly woman; she takes up space, her body is visibly stretched and working, she leaks, she makes loud noises, she is clearly sexual; ultimately, she makes a spectacle of herself.⁶³

In deliberate contrast to the dramatic labour scene of Peyton as she is surrounded by masked and gowned figures, Claire's labour is not shown at all. Instead it is merely intimated to the audience that she has given birth by showing her holding a newborn baby. Claire, as the representative of perfect motherhood, cannot be shown to sweat and shriek. Even the shot of her breast-feeding is a long shot

taken from a distant corner of the house. The implications of establishing this distance between Claire and the audience can be read in two ways: it would seem as if the camera, standing in for the audience at this point, does not want to disturb the pair, and the distancing effect has the added advantage of showing how motherhood can be shown as an idyllic and peaceful time. Conversely, the shot has the effect of removing Claire from any experience in which she might have resembled Peyton. By making Peyton a gross caricature of the rapaciously maternal, the film cannot show Claire as a maternal figure other making her a desexualized and distant figure.⁶⁴

The demarcation of female bodily functions maps out the line between the mother-as-monster and the mother-as-nurturer. Perhaps Claire's only fault is to undermine her primary task of motherhood by her voluntary work at the Botanical Gardens, and in the building of a new greenhouse in her back garden. The conflation of the term 'nursery' as a place where both plants and children are nurtured is deliberate. The merging of the two areas is an important aspect of Claire's character: she epitomizes the nurturing, gentle and passive side of motherhood, but her lack of insight into the possible negative aspects of motherhood means that Claire, like Allie choosing her flatmate, expects to get what she thinks she sees. Peyton's physical appearance, of course, belies the monstrous woman beneath: with an Aryan combination of blonde hair and baby-blue eyes, she looks guileless and chaste. Peyton's attractiveness is noted by Marty, Marlene's husband, who suggests when he sees her that perhaps he and Marlene ought to start planning to have children. Later, when Peyton visits Michael at his workplace, a colleague looks on in envy, as an embarrassed Michael explains "she's the nanny." In spite of her appearance, Peyton's position within the family is constantly referred to as an economic one. While in *Single White Female* Hedy's impersonation of Allie is

at its most successful when she steals her sexual identity and seduces Sam, Peyton's attempted seduction of Michael stems solely from a wish to take over Claire's role, rather than as sexual revenge. Michael says to Peyton, referring to Claire, "There's only one woman for me", to which Peyton replies, "That's all you need". The implication is that Peyton believes that she can fulfil Michael's needs, rather than Michael's desires, more successfully than Claire. Obviously, the role of 'wife and mother' does not bestow a sexual identity on its bearer.

The Hand, while portraying many of the anxieties of *Single White Female* - that another woman may enter your home, steal your partner, and assume your identity - ignores the potentially sexually threatening nature of such an action by showing the victims collectively as the 'family' and establishing a revenge based on reproduction rather than sexuality. In fact, the film bypasses Peyton's potential sexual threat by playing down all sexual encounters. Peyton's potential for sexual activity becomes a subject for discussion rather than a physical activity. When men admire Peyton, they do so from a distance, discussing her amongst themselves. All possible sexual encounters in the film seem to reflect the abusive activities of Dr Mott, for whom sex is a matter of power, submission, and deception. Marty's casual remark about having children in order to employ a nanny also calls to mind the potentially abusive master-servant relationship. Perhaps even more significant to the negation of maternity is Peyton's questioning of Solomon when he sees her breast-feeding the baby. She ignores the practical function of the breast and turns the question into one of forbidden, voyeuristic, sexual pleasure - turning Solomon's chance look into the sexualized gaze of the black male at a white woman. For Peyton, sex appears to be nothing to do with desire, and everything to do with power and control. On the other hand,

Solomon's disability usefully circumvents the threat for the audience that his gaze is anything other than completely innocent.

In one scene, when Claire talks to Peyton about the changes she has noticed in Emma since Solomon's suspected abuse, Peyton's touching of Claire, first on her thigh and then on her bare back, is an echo of Dr Mott's sexual assault: Peyton's facial expression, frozen into an understanding smile, and her vocal assurances that Emma will be "fine", are at odds with her hand movements. This is the only time when Peyton's actions towards Claire could be construed as sexual, and in the context of the original sexual assault and the ensuing conversation about Emma's welfare, these actions look abusive rather than compassionate. Peyton's attempts at intimacy are always shown to be threatening rather than seductive.

While Peyton is the woman who attracts male attention, Claire, by contrast, keeps sex in its proper place, within the family home. "When we first moved to this house, we christened every room", she says, in answer to Peyton's question about her married sex life. Claire's sexual identity is one of passivity and domesticity. While 'christening' a room is a colloquial expression for sex, Claire's use of the term also implies the correct application of marital relations between husband and wife, behind closed doors and in the family home. Claire's complacency is soon to be destroyed: Peyton discovers that Michael and Marlene had a relationship before he met Claire. The details of this relationship are not made clear. Emma tells Peyton that the two were "boyfriend and girlfriend": Claire describes Marlene as Michael's first love. Whatever the past details, Peyton is now able to recast Marlene in her family melodrama as a potential vamp and seductress.

The differences between each of the three adult women in the film seems to bear witness to Freud's idea that, for girls, there are three possible exits from the Oedipus complex: neurosis, masculinity and femininity.⁶⁵ Peyton's obsessions, Marlene's business acumen and Claire's passivity serve to differentiate between the women. The family remains the site of female disorder, a complex web of relations that, true to the traditions of the melodrama, affects only the women characters. And the three women remain archetypes of femininity, connecting with each other only through their relationships with men. The gulf that separates the women from each other is made clear when Claire, in spite of her apparently close friendship with Marlene, accuses Michael of having an affair with her on the strength of finding her cigarette lighter in his jacket pocket. Peyton's ability in encouraging members of the family to lie to Claire undermines Claire's words to Emma, "Secrets between people who love each other aren't good". Claire's hidden anxieties about her position in the family are matched by the ease at which Peyton undermines that position. Peyton reveals the obsessions and fears with which all wives must be subject in a patriarchal institution that demands that their position be a self-sacrificing one. Thus Peyton is able to prey on Claire's fears, exposing the negative aspects of motherhood that are strangely akin to Peyton's own paranoia and suspicion.

Barbara Creed notes that while horror films show repressed sons who commit violent acts while blaming 'the embrace of a suffocating mother', the mainstay of melodrama is the relationship between the repressed daughters of neurotic mothers.⁶⁶ Peyton perhaps offers a break from all such generational responsibility. She tells Emma that she never had a mother and that as a child she, Peyton, had to learn to take care of herself. Therefore, Peyton does take full responsibility for her own madness, and the absence of a mother-figure in Peyton's life may go

some way to explain her pathological determination to re-create the role in its most idealized state. She assures Emma that should anything happen to Claire, she will take care of the family: "your daddy, too". Peyton's assumption that wives and mothers are replaceable and interchangeable points to the possibilities in the film, in spite of itself, for a more progressive reading. Peyton separates, for brief moments, the woman from the role. Her real pathology is to apply the same elements of submission and power from the realm of the sexual to that of the mother-child relationship. While explaining to Emma that Claire sent Solomon away because she "didn't like him very much", Peyton also says that she could do nothing to help as she might be sent away as well. Peyton is thus placing herself into the position of a child, beholden to the mother and unable to sway parental decisions.

Home Economics

Peyton represents the fate that befalls women who are left outside the family to fend for themselves. Within the marital economy, the threat of loss of income for women is directly related to the health of their marriage. This would also suggest that Peyton was, in fact, a 'normal' woman until her husband's suicide, with her class, status, and indeed her mental health, being entirely dependent on her husband's presence as breadwinner. But further to this, the film shows the link between women's reproductivity and their financial status. Peyton's acts of vengeance are not simply retribution for the loss of her son and her husband. Her collapse and premature labour occur during discussions with her husband's lawyers, who tell her that, due to court proceedings against her husband, his estate has been frozen.⁶⁷ She is assured, however, that the court will allow her to stay in the family home until the birth of her child. Thus only her status as a pregnant

woman provides her with a home. Her collapse, and subsequent rush to hospital, reduces her to a woman without a womb. Because of the emergency hysterectomy, Barbara Creed sees the figure of Peyton as the 'femme castratrice':

Transformed into a psychotic monster because she has been symbolically castrated [...] she feels she has been robbed unjustly of her rightful destiny.⁶⁸

This destiny, both biological and social, would involve a family and home. But this is not a 'symbolic castration', as Creed describes. The womb encompasses more than the sum of its parts. The penis may 'stand in' for the phallus, but in the system of exchange shown in the film, the womb represents all material forms of the productivity of women, not only the production of children. The womb is synonymous with a particular female income. Peyton has had removed that part of her body that gave her status and meaning: a 'role' in life. Creed states that the femme castratrice 'seeks revenge on society, particularly the heterosexual nuclear family, because of her lack'.⁶⁹ This revenge is an act of social unfulfillment, rather than as a consequence of sexual repression. Therefore female fulfilment involves not only the sexual act itself but a number of other functions involving status, marriage, children, security and love. Within the marital economy, Peyton is now worthless.

Joining the Bartel family as a nanny is the first part of Peyton's revenge. Again, highlighting the difference between Claire's passivity and Peyton's manic obsessions, it is Peyton who actively seeks a job with the Bartels, persuading Claire that she wishes to work for them. As Claire has rejected a number of other potential nannies, we can only assume that, like Allie in *Single White Female*, she was hoping to find a woman similar to herself. Peyton's application is one that affirms her class position: she presents herself for a job in the hope that Claire

will recognize their shared middle-class values. But while Peyton upholds many of these values, her position in the family brings to the fore the film's depiction of the marital economy. It signifies the importance of the feminine, nurturing role but also heralds the dangers of allowing anyone in this role to rise unchecked into a position of power and authority. Marlene's warning to Claire, "You never ever let an attractive woman take a power position in your home", shows that, even if Claire is unable to see the consequences, Marlene is aware that the home, like the workplace, can be a battle-ground for women. The brief scene of Marlene at work shows her dismissing her male assistant from her office by saying, "What are you waiting for, a tip?". Such a complete role reversal is a logical outcome of the dangers of the 'career woman', who will eventually reduce all social transactions to their economic origins. Marlene's comment on the role of the wife ("blow jobs and home-made lasagne") reveals her to be, of the three women, the one who is least likely to idealize wifedom, seeing the role in terms of its unappetising composite functions.

Peyton as an employee of the family reiterates the fact that the domestic space has an economic component. The film's portrayal of a servant class, who function as an extension to the family proper, emphasizes the extent to which the responsibilities of the white middle classes have become so heavy that they cannot possibly carry them out by themselves. Work within the home becomes fraught with the tensions of its ideological function, separated from the marketplace by its lack of real economic value, but made utopian by a regime of impossibly high standards. Thus the reign of the multi-tasked function of the family that attempts to provide everything under one roof is gradually becoming under seige.

As a recent example, the trial of Louise Woodward, the nanny accused of killing a baby in her care, focused to a marked degree on the conduct of the mother, Deborah Eappen, who chose to return to work while leaving her two young children with an unqualified au pair. Deborah Eappen complained that her lifestyle was put on trial; certainly, the economic aspects of the case were closely interlinked with the moral issues of child care.⁷⁰ A *Guardian* leader column, written after Woodward's conviction for manslaughter, asks whether the trial was really a reflection of 'society's enduring discomfort with the professional woman', forced to make economic choices in a system that idealizes free childcare but condemns cheap alternatives.⁷¹ *The Hand*, while appearing aware of the lifestyle choices that face women in the 1990s, still portrays the family as a closed social unit, threatened by single people who, without families of their own, may disrupt its fragile economy. Peyton's employment as the family's nanny destabilizes the relationship between mother and child, *and* husband and wife. Peyton, in effect, is paid and housed to carry out the tasks that Claire should be doing. Therefore, Peyton's entry into the marital home cannot simply be considered a plot device to bring the two women into conflict: her revenge, in order to be successful, must damage the family in its dual role as both a biological and economic unit.

Peyton does manage, to a certain degree, to disrupt the established marital economy of the family. Michael has been working on a research proposal, and Claire offers to post the letter for him. Michael stresses the importance of the proposal, mentioning that it must be posted that day. Claire's offer to help emphasizes the differences between their roles: she has free time, in between her voluntary work at the Botanical Gardens and supervizing the nanny, while Michael is too busy at work. The two women first visit the Botanical Gardens and sit together with the baby in the large Victorian greenhouse. Surrounded by plants,

and Claire's workmates, they talk about family life. The link between Claire's role in the Gardens - "we're a big botanist family", she tells Peyton - and her homelife is made more explicit by Claire's plans to build her own greenhouse in the garden. The contrast between Claire's multitude of families and Peyton's barrenness is made apparent. In fact, Peyton says, as a bleak description of her marriage, "My husband was my only family - he took care of me".

After telling Claire that her husband was murdered, she excuses herself to go to the bathroom. Peyton pushes her way through the vegetation, and marches into the toilet that, compared to the sunny, peaceful greenhouse, is dark and damp. She pulls Michael's research proposal, which she has removed from Claire's handbag, out of her pocket and begins to tear it up into tiny pieces. There is an overhead shot of Peyton as her anger takes over; she seizes a toilet plunger and beats it savagely against the walls. Destroying Michael's research proposal shows the real purpose of Peyton's anger. While the kicking of the cubicle door is merely a way of letting off steam in the light of Claire's ineffectual concern, the destruction of Michael's work brings Peyton directly against the family for whom she works. The setting of this scene in a space that traditionally calls for privacy is also significant in that it is also the site of bodily waste and pollution. As Julia Kristeva writes:

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death.⁷²

Peyton is already placed as a figure of pollution. Her bloody labour scene, her secret breast-feeding of Joe every night, her association with death and sterility place her as a monstrous figure that continues to remain outside the proper nuclear family. By placing her behind the correct (Lacanian) door, with the label

WOMEN to show her correct place in the schema of gender, the film also re-emphasizes that she is a grossly over-feminized figure: the connotations with maternal toilet-training are obvious. Deborah Jermyn argues that this is the point in the film when the masquerade of the nanny slips, and the true picture of Peyton - as Mrs Mott - is revealed.⁷³ But Peyton has been shown throughout the film as a manipulative and devious woman. This is not the moment when the true Peyton is revealed, but rather her frustration at her continued exclusion from the marital economy. In perhaps the absolute inverse of the bathroom scene in *Psycho* where Marion recognizes the financial damage she has done and tries to calculate a solution, Peyton's actions show her as having the means of disrupting both the family income, and Claire's and Michael's relationship.

But her anger seems to stem from Claire's lack of recognition of her as a major threat to the marital economy. It is this lack of recognition that shows Peyton at her most manic. She is a vengeful and destructive woman who is masquerading as a caring nanny, yet expects Claire to acknowledge responsibility for her situation: "What goes around, comes around." As Joan Riviere says of one of her most successfully masquerading patients:

If gratitude and recognition were withheld, her sadism broke out in full force and she would be subject (in private) to paroxysms of oral-sadistic fury, exactly like a raging infant.⁷⁴

Peyton's rages, while kept hidden from Claire and the rest of the family, *are* revealed to Solomon, who, in turn, is manifested as a potential threat to Peyton. Their future struggle for the safety of the family is briefly set up in their first meeting where Solomon shakes hands with Peyton. Peyton notices a black mark on the sleeve of her white blouse, for which she blames Solomon. Quite where this dirt comes from is not clear, as Solomon is wearing clean overalls and has

been using white, not black, paint. When Solomon attempts to rub the mark away with a rag, Peyton brushes him aside, saying menacingly, "Anybody can have an accident." It is as if Peyton sees the black mark as Solomon's colour rubbing off on her, reducing her to his position as a menial worker. In spite of their similar domestic positions in the family, this incident shows that Peyton is unlikely to ally herself with Solomon. She is not likely to define him, as Claire does, as a 'special person'. Rather pointedly, this scene shows that Peyton has a black mark against her, which does not originate from Solomon. Indeed, as Peyton goes on to manufacture more melodrama in the family, her role for Solomon is an abuser of little girls. Though the employment of Solomon is a signal that this white middle-class family has 'liberal' values, the ease with which Peyton is able to raise doubts in Claire's mind about Solomon's sexuality reveals the extent to which any stranger, especially one so marked by race, class and gender, provokes fear. Solomon, unlike Peyton, remains outside certain recognised moral and cultural values.

"Don't Fuck with Me, Retard!"

How to Nurture and Maintain a Family Culture When You Work All Day, Your Mother Lives in Omaha, and Your Housekeeper Comes from Ethiopia.⁷⁵

In Ruth Sidel's book, *On Her Own* on women in America, she cites the above as the title of a recent workshop for female executives. The title concentrates all possible anxieties about working mothers, racial identity and white family values. Not only are female executives away from the family home every day, they are removed from their own mothers, and, worst of all, the figure of the housekeeper is a constant reminder that the family culture of white people is under siege and

isolated. The title of the workshop also presumes that only white, middle-class people actually have families: the Ethiopian housekeeper, of course, has no family to speak of. Hence the workshop debates the limits of the family as if it can be defined by race without mentioning the whiteness of the families involved. The complex issues raised by the existence of black servitude and 'family culture' is the subject of an earlier melodrama, Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959).

Annie Johnson, a black woman, persuades Lora Meredith, a white woman, that she is what Lora needs: a loyal black maid, who is willing to work for nothing in exchange for accommodation: "You wouldn't have to pay no wage". Lora and Annie practise what could be called a masquerade of affluence: while Lora, an aspiring actress, struggles to find work, the presence of Annie at work in her apartment immediately places her several notches up the social scale. Annie therefore knows her place: racial tensions in the white family are caused by the figure of Sara Jane, Annie's daughter who can pass for white, and who refuses either to recognise her true class or to acknowledge Annie as her mother.

Ultimately *Imitation of Life* presents a warning to those who would forget their biological origins. As a black woman, Sara Jane must either accept her position as an adjunct to the white family, or reject it: she cannot aspire to be part of it.

The white family's appropriation of black labour is made more palatable in *The Hand*. As he is sent by a charitable organization, Solomon's work for the Bartel household appears to be a privilege for him rather than a means of paid employment. The Bartels' welcome of him into their home effectively shows their charitable side rather than Solomon's skills or efficiency. The black handyman is continually employed to keep the white house as white as possible, literally as well as metaphorically. When Emma asks her father what will happen to Solomon when he finishes painting the house, Michael replies, "I guess we'll have to find

something else for him to do". More than a display of the white family's social responsibilities, the narrative reaffirms its supposed liberal tendencies by showing Solomon to be the eventual representative of a benign, yet omniscient, paternal male authority, who reiterates humanitarian values in the face of female violence. But as a heroic figure, his role is most successful (in terms of saving the family) when he is presented as passive, non-threatening and marginalized. Solomon's lack of intellect is the key to his success. When Marlene solves the mystery of Peyton by using logical detection, she is killed in spite of her knowledge. By contrast, Solomon's fear of Peyton, and his realization that she poses a danger to the family, appears to be entirely instinctive, and in the end, entirely justified.

Solomon's name is an obvious reference to the biblical King whose most well-known act was to identify the real mother of a baby. Not normally a task that men would be called on to perform, King Solomon arbitrates and decides on the maternal origins of the child.⁷⁶ Likewise, in *The Hand*, Solomon decides on the identity of the correct mother, but without the benefits of Claire's revelation in the nursery of the Motts' house or Marlene's deductive reasoning. Solomon sees through Peyton's masquerade on a level that removes any need to rationalize his decision, in what seems to be an oblique reference to King Solomon's famed wisdom. Somehow, Solomon manages to be wise before, not after, the event. His presence serves as a historic validation of the family and its origins. He also defines the borders of the family: like King Solomon's construction programme to repair the breaches in the city walls around Jerusalem⁷⁷, Solomon's first task in the film is equally symbolically important. Claire and Michael initially employ him to build a white picket fence around their property. Solomon asks them if the purpose of the fence is to keep people in or keep people out, to which Claire replies, "mostly to keep people out." This boundary, therefore, executed by the

willing labour of the black male, encloses and defines the family and maintains the white, middle-class preserve.

After Solomon has been accused of sexually molesting Emma and is taken away by the Better Day Charity, he continues to watch over the family. We catch a glimpse of his bicycle briefly, near the Bartels' home, and later he is seen, standing in the rain, gazing up at Claire's hospital window. The picture of the loyal black servant who continues to serve the family in spite of its rejection of him, reveals Solomon's story to be in effect a slave narrative, the secondary narrative of the film. Almost as an updated version of *Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915), where black characters show their integrity and humanity by retaining their affiliations to the white family even when they can no longer be paid, Solomon's loyalty to the family reiterates his lowly position. Because his work is disguised as a charitable rather than economic resource for the family, it appears to impose upon him a moral duty to protect them. The beating he receives from Peyton at the climax of the film shows him bowing his head and taking the blows on his back. Solomon takes a whipping on behalf of the white family and still refuses to hand the baby over to Peyton. His ability to receive punishment without rancour or revenge places him as a direct counterpart to Peyton: he is, like her, far removed from the marital economy but retains his precarious position by aligning himself wholeheartedly as a servant of the white family. This is never more evident than in the final struggle between Peyton and Claire.

This struggle takes place in the attic (filled with the unused and discarded trappings of the family) where Solomon is about to rescue the children. His methods for defeating Peyton are to circumvent her abduction of the children, and,

as such, he remains a passive and beleaguered figure. By contrast, Claire's and Peyton's fight is a classically masculine battle. Peyton holds a poker with which she beats both Claire and Solomon: Claire's weapon is the more intimately dangerous carving knife. Ultimately, these weapons are both discarded as the women struggle, and the fight then relies on brute strength alone. Claire's asthma is a device which emphasizes her weakness and increases the tension: Peyton taunts her by saying, "When push comes to shove, you can't even breathe". The women's fight, though on the surface appears to be over ownership of the children ("This is *my* family, Peyton") becomes a contest between their respective sexual and maternal prowess. Peyton claims that Michael fantasizes about her while making love to Claire, and that Joe the baby wants her breast, rather than his mother's, when he is hungry. Both of these functions stress the fundamentally biological role of the wife and mother, ultimately reducing both women to mere providers of fulfilment to specifically male desires. As such, their success as women, as defined by Peyton, becomes not an ideological struggle for control of the family, but a re-establishment of traditional values. Claire's position in the film, therefore, is not to question the patriarchal and paternal forces that bind the family, but merely to re-establish her position as wife. Certainly, the violence displayed in this final scene - Claire smashing Peyton's head several times against the floor and then pushing her out of the window - is a jarring, cathartic endnote that vindicates Claire's actions and finally allows Peyton's terrible presence to be exorcized.

Both wives are ultimately placed in extreme positions that test loyalty to the *biological* family. The generational discord and biological disruption that Peyton attempts to perpetuate is resolved. Ultimately, the fertile woman who is part of a living family defeats the sterile woman whose family is dead. Thus, it would appear that under extreme conditions - those that threaten the existence of the

biological family - wives and mothers possess both motivation and justification in committing murder. Furthermore, both Alex in *Fatal Attraction* and Peyton in *The Hand* affirm sexual difference by revealing the dangers inherent in destabilizing the system. By actively seeking a sexual partner or a child, both women undermine the notion of passive femininity. By comparison, in both films, the wives by their action of murder reaffirm the importance of the nuclear family. However, as they are women, they also run the risk of destabilizing traditional values. Do the murders, by those women safely enclosed within the nuclear family, represent a radical departure from traditional passive female roles? Narrative closure in *The Hand* implies that it is the figure of the caring, passive male that counteracts the possible disruptive influences of all female transgression. While Michael lies down in the basement with his legs broken and thus is unable to help, this role is filled by Solomon, leaving a space available for Claire to commit murder with impunity. These same roles can also apply to Beth and Dan in *Fatal Attraction*. The 'real' wife has been vindicated and the false wife is now impaled on the white picket fence that continues to keep people out.

The dangers to the stability of the family are posed by those women who attempt to re-define the limits of the nuclear family: both Claire, in her employing of a nanny, and Peyton in her usurping of another woman's family, are punished. But the other figure of possible disruption to the marital economy, Marlene, is killed far earlier than Peyton, and in a manner that suggests that her active, aggressive manner causes her own death: threatening to expose Peyton's real identity, Marlene rushes into the greenhouse, and unwittingly gets caught in the trap set for Claire. There are, thus, two characters that are in a position to help the family: the 'New Man' and the 'Career Woman'. But Marlene's actions are only helpful posthumously, in leading Claire to the Motts' old house where she recognises the

significance of both the nursery frieze and the breast pump. Therefore the career woman is expendable, and her death an example of the fact that the women remain isolated from each other within this marital economy. Marlene's business sense, initiative and cynicism - all qualities that set her apart from the other wives - are still not enough to protect her or Claire, who must rely on Solomon's help to defeat Peyton.

The Hand shows how easily the boundaries of the nuclear family can be penetrated, and most significantly, penetrated by those belonging to the same race and class who historically should not present a threat. The white picket fence reveals the family's fear of what could be lurking outside to attack, and of what threatens to displace it, and it remains an important symbol of the apparent fragility of the boundaries of the family. Peyton's impaling on it at the end of the film, of course, confirms that the proper family boundaries are still intact. The ideal family unit remains one in which members are related either by marriage or by blood. Thus individual members of a family can be attacked, removed, or destroyed: the structure to which they all aspire remains intact. The bird-house that the Bartels traditionally erect for the nesting house martins attests to the natural order of the biological family. Not only are the martins the same nesting pair that return to the site each year - showing that monogamy, fidelity and loyalty are natural family values - but the bird-house is a miniature copy of the Bartels' own home. The family's success lies in its ability to pass as natural: *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* reaffirms, in spite of Peyton's best efforts, the efficacy of the biological over the economic.

NOTES

1. Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna Rapp Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210 (p. 159).
2. For a fuller discussion of the social construction of this relationship, see Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), and Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1976; repr. 1991).
3. Mary Kenny, 'It is still better for baby to be born in wedlock', *Daily Telegraph*, 19 September 1991 [n.p.].
4. Figures from Yvonne Roberts, 'Holding the Baby', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 28 July 1996, p. 20.
5. Even the differences between sperm and egg donation uphold the notion that women should not gain financially from their fertility. While men are paid for sperm donation (a regular advertisement in the University of Sheffield student newspaper offers £15), egg donation is always viewed as an altruistic gesture, despite the fact that it is a complex, time-consuming and uncomfortable medical procedure.
6. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), pp. 145-47.
7. *Ibid*, p. 148.
8. *Ibid*, p. 149.
9. Hilda Scott, *Working your Way to the Bottom: The Feminization of Poverty* (London: Pandora, 1984), p. 57.
10. 'How Housework would clean up', *Guardian*, 7 October 1997, p. 1. The high figure is given as a calculation of average earnings: the lower figure would be the comparable rate paid for the separate tasks of housework. As the article points out, cooks, cleaners and nannies belong to the lowest paid sectors of the economy.
11. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 16.
12. *Ibid*, p. 179.
13. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, trans Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), especially Part Four: 'The Deployment of Sexuality', pp. 75-132.
14. John Bowlby (1951), cited in *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, Richard D. Gross (London: Edward Arnold, 1987) p. 448. Bowlby's influential work on mother-child attachment was based on research carried out in

the 1950s and 60s, and collectively published as *Attachment and Loss, Volume 1* (1971) and *Separation-Anxiety and Anger (Attachment and Loss, Volume 2)* (1975).

15. 'Spare the job', *Sunday Telegraph*, 27 October 1996, cited in Joan Smith, *Different for Girls: How Culture creates Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p. 106.

16. Smith, *ibid*, p. 107.

17. Figure given in Ruth Sidel, *On Her Own: Growing up in the Shadow of the American Dream* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 100.

18. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 157.

19. *Ibid*, p. 2.

20. *Ibid*, p. 8.

21. *Ibid*, p. 14.

22. Lizzie Francke, 'Men, Women, Children and the Baby Boom movies', *Sight and Sound*, 1 12 (April 1992), repr. in *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. by Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (London: Scarlet Press, [n.d.]), pp. 148-155 (p. 149).

23. *Ibid*, p. 149.

24. Mary Beth Haralovich, 'Too Much Guilt is never Enough for Working Mothers: Joan Crawford, *Mildred Pierce* and *Mommie Dearest*', *Velvet Light Trap*, 29 (Spring 1992), 43-52.

25. *Ibid*, p. 44.

26. *Ibid*, p. 46.

27. Hence, *Mildred Pierce* crosses generic boundaries: 'Crawford's performance is valued for its ability to maintain the emotional register of the woman's film in the face of film noir's aggressive punishment of women.' *Ibid*, p. 48.

28. *Ibid*, p. 51.

29. E. Ann Kaplan, 'Motherhood and Representation: From Postwar Freudian Figurations to Postmodernism', in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: AFI/Routledge, 1990), pp. 128-142 (p. 129).

30. *Ibid*, p. 128.

31. Vivian Sobchack, 'Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange', in *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*, ed. by Gregory Waller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 175-194, p. 185.

32. Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1995), p. 222.

33. Ibid, p 228.
34. Francke, op. cit., p. 148.
35. Charles Eckert, 'Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller', in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. by Christine Gledhill (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 60-73 (p. 67).
36. Ibid, p. 68.
37. Not only was Temple's value reported to be ten million dollars, Eckert mentions that as a consequence of his daughter's success Temple's father rose from his job as a bank clerk to become a bank manager. Ibid, p. 69.
38. Sarah Harwood, *Family Fictions: Representations of the Family in 1980s Hollywood Cinema* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 3.
39. As Freud says in his lecture on Femininity, 'the aim of biology has been entrusted to the aggressiveness of men and has been made to some extent independent of women's consent.' Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Vol II, trans. by James Strachey and Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 166.
40. Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, cited in *Halliwel's Film Guide*, ed. by John Walker, 11th edn (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 71.
41. Mary Desjardins, 'Baby Boom: The Comedy of Surrogacy in Film and Television', *Velvet Light Trap*, 29 (Spring 1992), 21-30 (p. 23).
42. Ibid, p. 23.
43. Tania Modleski, 'Three Men and Baby M', *Camera Obscura*, 17 (1988), 68-81 (p. 80).
44. Stephen Neale, *Genre*, 3rd edn (London: BFI, 1987), p. 29.
45. Linda Williams, '"Something Else Besides a Mother": *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama', in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Erens (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), pp. 137-162 (p. 138).
46. Elayne Rapping, review of *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, *Cineaste*, 19 2/3 (1992), 65-66 (p. 65).
47. Lizzie Francke, review of *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, *Sight and Sound*, 1 8 (January 1992), p. 51.
48. See, for example, Liahna Babener, 'Patriarchal Politics in *Fatal Attraction*', and Susan Bromley and Patricia Hewitt, '*Fatal Attraction*: The Sinister Side of Women's Conflict about Career and Family', both in *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26 3 (1992), pp. 25-34 and pp. 17-23.
49. Amanda Silver quoted in Lizzie Francke, *Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood* (London: BFI, 1994), p. 134.

50. 'Get ready for edge-of-your-seat suspense with the year's most exciting and talked about thriller!' From the cover of the video, distributed by Buena Vista Pictures.
51. Franke, review, op. cit., p. 51.
52. Deborah Jermyn, 'Re-reading the Bitches from Hell: A Feminist Appropriation of the Female Psychopath', *Screen* 37 3 (Autumn 1996), 251-267 (p. 260).
53. Mary Ann Doane, 'The "Woman's Film": Possession and Address', in *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. by Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1987), pp. 283-298 (p. 292).
54. Jermyn, op. cit., p. 260.
55. Rapping, op. cit., p. 65.
56. Jermyn, op. cit., pp. 252-253.
57. Elizabeth Cowie, 'The Popular Film as a Progressive Text - A Discussion of *Coma*', in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. by Constance Penley (London: BFI, 1988), pp. 104-140, (p. 119).
58. Doane, op. cit., p. 286.
59. Harwood, op. cit., p. 1.
60. Jermyn, op. cit., p. 256.
61. Rapping, op. cit., p. 65.
62. Such a connection is suggested by Maureen Turim, in her reading of Martha Rosler's feminist videotape work on the contestation of the 'Baby M' surrogacy case in the United States. The surrogate mother, Mary Beth Whitehead, is shown reading 'feminist discourses on phallic power as she sits in a lace-collared dress on a rocking chair in a baby's room.' The point is, can there ever be a way of representing motherhood without representing the ideological discourse surrounding it? See Maureen Turim, 'Viewing/Reading *Born to Be Sold: Martha Rosler Reads the Strange Case of Baby S/M* or Motherhood in the Age of Technological Reproduction', *Discourse*, 13 2 (Spring/Summer 1991), 21-38 (pp. 26-27).
63. Robin Blaetz, 'In Search of the Mother Tongue: Childbirth and the Cinema', *Velvet Light Trap*, 29 (1992), 15-20 (p. 18).
64. While the film maintains the differences between the women in terms of their bodily functions, the husbands are differentiated by their work. As Peyton's husband works as a gynaecologist, and Claire's husband works as a geneticist for a company that deals in bio-engineering, both men are ultimately concerned with reproduction. However, there is only one who has 'hands-on' experience, as the film shows.
65. Freud, 'Femininity', op. cit., p. 160.
66. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 124.

67. In the *Sight and Sound* synopsis of this film, Peyton is described as collapsing when she hears about her husband's suicide: '[...] Mott is struck off and subsequently commits suicide. The shock causes his wife, who is expecting her first child, to have a miscarriage and then a hysterectomy'. *Sight and Sound*, 18 (January 1992), p. 51.
68. Creed, op. cit., p. 122.
69. Ibid, p. 122.
70. Joanna Coles, 'Baby's parents rail at "lifestyle trial"', *Guardian*, 31 October 1997, p. 5; Nick Pryer, 'How OJ-style trial gripped America', *London Evening Standard*, 31 October 1997, p. 4.
71. 'A verdict of wisdom', *Guardian*, Leader column, 11 November 1997, p. 16.
72. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 71.
73. Jermyn, op. cit., p. 261.
74. Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', in *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, ed. by Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek (New Haven: College and University Press, 1966), pp. 209-220 (p. 217).
75. Title of a workshop for female executives, quoted in Sidel, op. cit., p. 199.
76. I Kings 3. 16-28.
77. I Kings 3. 1.

CHAPTER FIVE

"... AND WOMAN INHERITS THE EARTH!":

SEX, GENDER AND REPRODUCTION IN *JURASSIC PARK*

If you roll back the frontiers of family life and let science take over, you break down the whole concept of the family of a father, mother and children.

Geoffrey Dickens, Tory MP¹

The change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at all. Many people, taking this into account, and holding that such a change of sex is against nature, have been at great pains to prove (1) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man. Let biologists and psychologists determine.

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*²

For my final chapter, *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1992), with its themes of artificial reproduction, the re-discovery of family values, and the threatening presence of man-eating female dinosaurs seems an appropriate film with which to end my discussion of women who kill. As science fiction, a genre associated with the multiple cultural meanings of science and technology, the film highlights the possible power of reproductive technology and reaches a conclusive evaluation of its potential to be exploited. By consuming the family, both literally and metaphorically, *Jurassic Park* raises profound questions about birth, maternity and origins. The film's emphasis on the family as a possible source of disruption and destruction as well as a site of potential growth casts the family in the role of both victim and aggressor. Its interpretation of family values is centred around the possible dangers of male creative powers, set in a context in which the dismissal

of the moral and ethical issues of artificial reproduction can be traced directly to patriarchal control over women's reproductivity. Natalie Rosinsky suggests that modern feminist science fiction writing 'subvert[s] both the nuclear family and the capitalist work ethic'.³ *Jurassic Park's* twin themes of reproductive technology and capitalist endeavour set within the genre of science fiction allow for a radical vision of transgressive womanhood.

As a film that was specifically marketed towards a family audience and as science fiction, *Jurassic Park* contains a number of elements that run counter to the themes of the 'family film'. Its concentration on the instability of the family, procreation, birth and reproduction, and the terrors of children when pitted against large, abusing, hungry monsters also places the film, at some points, into the category of horror. The convergence of science fiction and horror, Vivian Sobchack argues, comes about as a result of a breakdown between the twin spheres of the social order and the natural order.⁴ The two genres express cultural anxieties about the fact that there can no longer be an absolute demarcation between the natural and the technological, and, for the family, between the public and the private. Sobchack sees the convergence of the two as an attempt to resolve contradictions between the 'mythology of family relations and their actual social practices'.⁵

Social and cultural ambivalence towards the family has led to a number of horror and science fiction films made in the 1980s and early 1990s that view the family as a place of disruption, change, and even potential danger. Sobchack points out that the cohesion of the family group does not necessarily provide sanctuary for its members:

Rather than serving bourgeois patriarchy as a place of refuge from the social upheavals of the last two decades (many of which have been initiated by the young and by women), the family has become the site of them - and now serves as a sign of their representation.⁶

In films such as *The Amityville Horror* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1979) and *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982), family inclusion may even be the catalyst for danger. In *Poltergeist*, the young girl, Carol Ann, who disappears into the television becomes a disembodied presence that disrupts the other members of the family; simultaneously, she is the victim of the family's instability and, more implicitly, her father's involvement in a shady real estate business. The little girl's displaced voice appears to act as the conscience of the family, eventually nudging it towards a more enlightened and harmonious state. In *The Stepfather* (Joseph Ruben, 1986), the stepfather's appropriation of family life is achieved as a direct return on his real estate transactions. As the children in each adopted family reach adolescence and refuse to accept paternal authority, the family is killed and the next victim-family is sought. Jerry Blake, while psychotic, is also an extreme embodiment of patriarchy, a figure who demands loyalty and obedience to the extent that he is willing to destroy those who fail to match up to his ideal. In *The Amityville Horror* and *Poltergeist*, the father is the twinned figure of impotency and authority, a figure who cannot cope with change and is helpless against the forces that threaten his family.

In science fiction films, to an even greater degree, anxieties about gender, sexuality and sexual difference can be played out to infinity: the family has no biological border. The function of sexual difference can be played in another arena, between the spheres of the human and alien, or human and replicant. Constance Penley argues that as the traditional gender roles appear to have less validity in the modern world, science fiction provides an outlet into which anxieties about the establishment of difference and the recognition of the self can be replayed in

endless variations.⁷ These anxieties often have a regressive and repressed element to them: as Penley puts it, 'these films reactivate infantile sexual difference'.⁸

Such are the possibilities for reactivation that science fiction films often sublimate the potential for adult sexuality. Vivian Sobchack points out that American science fiction films, in particular, present a dichotomy between what is perceived to be the masculine world of technology and the feminine world of biology:

Biological sexual functions - intercourse and reproduction - are avoided in their human manifestations and, instead, displaced onto mutant and alien life forms and into technological activity.⁹

The use of technology foregrounds the difference between the mechanical and the organic, while the reproduction of alien life stresses the differences between 'normal' reproduction and reproductive abilities that appear to ignore human/male agency. The alien, especially the breeding alien, becomes the true point of reference with which to compare humanity, as represented by the human male. To introduce the human female would be to destabilize the relationship between the inherently normal masculinity of science fiction heroes and the unnaturalness of the alien life form. The articulation of difference is posited upon the alien rather than the female body.

The possibilities of human sexual activity and human sexual difference, therefore, are made peripheral to the narrative. It is possible that the figure of the woman in the inherently masculine worlds that science fiction presents can not help but establish a radical alternative to the conventions of the genre. For example, the figure of Ripley, removing her clothes in the final scene of *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), can be read as either an affirmation of femininity, or of humanity. Judith

Newton argues that Ripley is 'robbed of radical thrust' at the end of the film, with the film revealing its true colours:

This attenuated fantasy content evokes anxieties, and especially white, middle-class male anxieties about feminism as a collective and potentially radical force, a force which opposes traditional gender roles, the sexual division of labour, and [...] the oppression of minorities and late capitalism itself.¹⁰

During the film, 'Ripley as worker' is always forefronted at the cost of exposing 'Ripley as woman'. Finally, at the end, when the two roles are conjoined, 'Ripley as victim' appears to defeat the Alien in true 'final girl' style. Whether Ripley's role opposes or upholds the values of the Company, her presence at the end of the film gives her status as a representative of humanity, not simply of femininity, though her body reassures the spectator that the film's disavowal of gender has come to an end. However, rather than seeking to see Ripley as a progressive figure, her usefulness in terms of multiple representation should not be ignored. She does seem an excessively pliable figure, and, with each film in turn, a figure that reveals current obsessions with the representation of reproduction, sexual difference and maternity. Michael Eaton points out that in order to reproduce itself, each film in the *Alien* series, 'must itself embark on a process of hybridisation'.¹¹

In *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) the nuclear family, made redundant in the first film, is reborn in the form of Ripley's relationship with Newt, the young girl she finds in the colony. Ripley's maternal instinct now to the fore, she saves Newt from impregnation, and threatens the mother alien's eggs with a flame thrower. The maternal instinct, whether manifested in Ripley's concern for Newt, or alternatively the mother alien's concern for her eggs, is obviously universal,

instinctive and operates under a biological imperative to maintain and protect the species. Constance Penley confirms:

Aliens reintroduces the issue of sexual difference, but not in order to offer a new, more modern configuration of that difference [...] What we get finally is a conservative moral lesson about maternity, futuristic or otherwise: mothers will be mothers and they will always be women.¹²

The domestic may be transferred to a besieged off-world colony (which is, in itself, an embryo of a society), but the pairing of the two mothers, as in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* is still the same. The potential reinstatement of the nuclear family at the end of *Aliens* is a direct contrast to the supposedly anti-nuclear, perversely maternal alien family, in spite of the fact that on this planet, both groups could be considered as alien, and Ripley's new family could be described as 'pseudo-nuclear'. Taubin describes *Aliens* as a 'Pentagon-inspired family-values picture for the Reagan 80s'¹³, a accurate summation of a film that reveals Ripley's subconscious maternal desires in the face of alien maternity gone mad. For Taubin, the alien mother evokes the imaginary 'black welfare mother', a parasitic, rapacious beast with an uncontrollable reproductivity, 'a favourite scapegoat of the Reagan/Bush era'.¹⁴

In Amy Taubin's reading of *Alien³* (David Fincher, 1992), she describes the film as 'Ripley's nightmare'.¹⁵ Stranded on a convict planet where she is the only woman, the film's narrative, unlike the two earlier *Alien* films, is from Ripley's point of view. After discovering that she is carrying a alien inside her, she searches through the dark tunnels of the prison for the adult alien who she knows to be terrorizing the convicts, and presents herself, ostensibly to be killed. At every turn, she sees a shape that could be alien: in the nightmare world of Fury 161, technology and biology have fused to create an environment in which the alien is entirely at home. Ripley sees a large curved object hidden within some piping,

which she believes to be the alien's head. As she reaches forward, she whispers, "Don't be afraid: I'm part of the family". As a confirmation of Ripley's position as 'part of the family' in the alien scheme of maternity, she is a peculiarly helpless victim of the worst excesses of alien reproduction. In alien biology, the process from egg to face-hugger to impregnated victim denies paternity: while the egg-layer in *Aliens* is effectively female, the father in the process is truly unrecognizable. But in *Alien*³ paternity appears to be a method of rigorously enforcing maternity in the face of female denial. Ripley is forced to recognize her pregnancy and acknowledge her part in the family. Ripley's final acceptance of her role, and her self-sacrifice - which, unlike Kane's death, is made part of the maternal role - is set within a context of the consequences of male isolation from the family. The baby is an illegitimate and unwanted pregnancy and Ripley's biology seals her fate: the twin forces of the aliens and the Company place her in the same position. She is forced to choose between either a fatal back street abortion or giving the baby up for adoption.

Ripley's metaphorical journey from worker to clone in the four *Alien* films is a progression from the figure of the female worker in the late-capitalist economy to soldier, mother, convict and finally to a man-made woman (the eighth in the series) whose very existence redefines the borders of the family and life itself. However, at the end of *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997), Ripley is no longer a stand-in for anyone: she can only represent herself. As a body that conflates the alien and human, she appears as a tribute to the on-going relationship between the two. As an 'alien-woman', she also has the potential for sexuality, as witnessed by her come-on line, "Who do I have to fuck to get off this ship?". Finally, she becomes the 'irrational, potent, sexual object'¹⁶ that has been alluded to in the first three films but never achieved. The scene in *Alien: Resurrection*,

where Ripley returns to the nest of the queen to wallow in alien slime could be read as a sexual and infantilized wish to return to the womb, the scene of one's birth and the place of origin. Ripley's presence, no longer as a victim of alien biology but forever married to it, disrupts the process of a live alien birth that heralds the human influence on alien biology. The baby, immediately after its birth, destroys the alien mother and chooses Ripley as its parent. Ripley, therefore, undermines parental control, and finally abdicates parental responsibility by destroying the child. The maternal, and the woman's body as the expression of the maternal, has finally been rejected. In confirmation of this, the pregnant figure in *Alien: Resurrection* has come full circle and is, again, a man.

The *Alien* series, when used as a measure of cultural anxiety, accurately shows the place of women in the current ethos of reproduction, reproductive technology, and the troubled relationship between sex and gender. As films for adults, they are remarkably revealing. However, even more interesting are those themes in *Jurassic Park* that parallel issues raised in the *Alien* series. As a film for the family market, it adheres to the conventions of science fiction by displacing sexual difference and sexual activity elsewhere: however, its concentration on the issues of sex, birth, maternal origins, and paternal responsibilities seem odd topics for what is ostensibly a children's film (it was released in the UK with a PG certificate). *Jurassic Park* also stresses, to a marked degree, the relationship between 'Man as creator' and what he creates. As an updated *Frankenstein*, the film concentrates on the futuristic aspect of reproductive technology, but sets it within a milieu of contemporary concerns about reproduction and the demise of the nuclear family. Even more explicit is its setting of these concerns within a context of economic exploitation.

Women's Reproduction and the Family

I discussed in the previous chapter how ideological models of the family - the biological and economic - work together to produce a coherent unit. Before discussing the issues of reproductive technology in *Jurassic Park*, I first want to look at the family as a site of potential reproduction. The dilemmas that surround women's reproductive capabilities, in particular, have to be discussed in terms of their role in preserving and maintaining the patriarchal family. Not only are women made responsible for the continuation of the family, any female body can be seen as the marker for family values. A recent article in *New Scientist* on *Tyrannosaurus Rex* reports that a T. Rex skeleton, the most complete ever found, is soon to go on display at the Denver Museum of Natural History. This skeleton is thought to be female (its name is 'Sue') and was found in 'what looks like a family group, with a male and two juveniles'.¹⁷ This apparent physical evidence of a family group seems to uphold the current view that T. Rex was family-orientated, nurtured its young and even mated for life. As the female T. Rex is larger than the male, scientists have compared the dinosaurs to existing systems of animal behaviour: 'outsized females and monogamy go hand-in-hand'.¹⁸ T. Rex has now reborn as a caring, child-friendly carnivore: the front cover of *New Scientist* is decorated with a picture of a plastic model of the dinosaur, with the legend 'Killer with a Heart'. The article even asks whether the adults hunted together, or participated in a division of labour. As specimens of T. Rex have only ever been found in the American Mid-West, it seems an strangely appropriate ancestor for traditional family values.

Even stranger, there is no difference between the Bartel family of *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* and the T. Rex family. Both are made up of two pair-

bonded adults and two juveniles. The fact that 'Sue' appears to have succumbed to fatal bite wounds that can only have been inflicted by another T. Rex completes the family scenario. However, coincidences aside, the search for the family in the Mesozoic Era attempts to make family identity appear as natural and meaningful as it does today. The re-evaluation of T. Rex takes place within a desperate rush to find models for the nuclear family. In spite of the apparent destabilization of the family and the degeneration of family values, the ideal of the family, however elusive, remains a reference point to which all 'families' can be compared. The ideal family unit is one in which members are related either by marriage or by blood: the union is sanctioned by both Church and State. Its efficacy results in it being able to pass itself off as 'natural', as a system in which responsibilities are apportioned as a result of instinct (the father who works, the mother who cares) and as a collusion of gender roles in order to make the most efficient use of these biological resources. As heterosexuality manages to equate itself with 'normal' sexuality, so too does the family present itself as a natural, self-sustaining unit. Such is the importance of the family that its terms of reference appear fixed over time: its longevity and stability are also aided by its use as a point of origin and outcome.

Andrew Ross, in his discussion of families and film genres, argues that the 1980s 'ideology of familialism' has been extended to all groups, whether biologically related or not, with the 'Manson Family' being a particularly grim example.¹⁹ This does not mean that society is becoming more liberal but that alternative groups can be re-classified by their supposed adherence to the values of the family:

The reinforced familialism of the 1980s proves how efficiently it has absorbed and contained the powerful countercultural challenge to traditional family structures in the late 1960s and early 1970s.²⁰

The cult of the family ensures that even T. Rex has a chance to be absorbed into 'familiar' territory.²¹ To avoid the fate of the dinosaurs, however, the family must prove itself as infinitely adaptable and capable of change. While disparate groups may define themselves as 'family', the original model as a 'natural' biological unit now appears defunct.

In the 1990s, advances in reproductive technology have now re-defined parenthood. Hence women and men who may have once been considered infertile can now become parents, bearing in mind that techniques such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF) have a success rate of 13%.²² Still, the implications of change to the ideological status of both motherhood and fatherhood are vast. Thus, in theory at least, a child could have three mothers: a genetic mother who supplies an egg, a surrogate biological mother who carries the foetus, and a social mother who adopts the child after birth. Likewise, a child may be fathered by sperm donor, and parented by another man. When modern technology opens up opportunities for reproduction, the historical patriarchal family, based on monogamy (so that a man may know his children to be his own), primogeniture (the passing of wealth to the first-born son), and the subjugation of women, is threatened. As Engels says,

The overthrow of mother right was the *world-historic defeat of the female sex*. The man seized the reins in the house also, the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children.²³

Engels' discussion of the family shows that the shift of emphasis from the maternal line to the paternal line was linked to the acquiring of capital. Patriarchy bestowed on the paternal line the means of passing wealth and property down through the generations. Though Engels hypothesizes that such a change took place in prehistory, he argues that 'how and when this revolution was effected among civilized people we know nothing'.²⁴

Julia Stonehouse, on the other hand, suggests an approximate date of 3,000 BC and argues that certain beliefs involving the role of men and women in reproduction may account for the disavowal of matrilinear family lines.²⁵ The belief that semen was the life-producing generative force that creates children within the passive nurturing female body had many ramifications for women, not least men's control over woman's sexuality and progeny. Women were reduced to incubators of children: they 'had no future, no road into eternity through their genes'.²⁶ Having no genetic future, argues Stonehouse, has implications for holding political, financial and social power. If women are a genetic dead-end, how would they beget power and on whom would they bestow it? Engels and Stonehouse appear to contradict each other in terms of cause and effect, but the end result is the same. Whether the accumulation of wealth affects the status of paternity or *vice versa*, women's status in reproduction remains problematic. To what extent do women have reproductive rights?

The ideological dilemmas surrounding women's reproductive rights reveal the fractures between the idealized state of motherhood and the social and legal restrictions on women. For example, Mandy Allwood's situation raised grave doubts over the accessibility of fertility drugs and the suitability of certain women using them. Allwood became pregnant in May 1996 after taking fertility drugs, and was found to be carrying eight embryos. She consequently sold her story to the *News of the World* for £350,000. The media attention on Allwood polarized between the 'miracle' of her multiple pregnancy and cynicism that part of the deal would be dependent on her bringing as many healthy babies as possible to full-term.²⁷ This was a prospect that was biologically impossible and finally, after ignoring medical advice, Allwood miscarried all eight fetuses. Joan Smith likens

the newspaper pictures of Allwood to that of the Madonna, another passive vessel waiting to be filled:

Her blind acceptance of the unsustainable pregnancy she had created, and her refusal to take an active role in trying to avert the inevitable consequence, make sense only in a climate in which motherhood has acquired more mystique than ever.²⁸

Allwood's support from anti-abortionists who believed that 'nature should take its course' struck at the heart of the dilemma over this pregnancy. Both medical intervention and non-intervention would mean death: therefore, in this instance, could selective reduction be justified? On the other hand, there was nothing 'natural' about this pregnancy. Allwood's irresponsible use of the fertility drug was the cause, and the presence of so many fertilized eggs in her womb became proof of her unfettered and promiscuous ways with a man who was not her husband.

By contrast, the case of Diane Blood, who wanted to be inseminated with the sperm of her dead husband, highlighted the legal restrictions on the donation of sperm, which prevent artificial insemination without the man's written permission. Legally, however, Blood would have been entitled to use any other man's sperm, and indeed, use any other part of her husband's body for donation purposes. It would appear that sperm is inherently valuable as a commodity but access to its regenerative powers must be strictly curtailed.²⁹ The irony was that the Bloods had been married for five years and were planning a family. As a recently bereaved widow, the highly respectable Diane Blood was no Mandy Allwood: Lord Winston describes her as 'a Christian woman with high moral standards'.³⁰ Public sympathy for her played some part in overturning this restriction, in her particular case, on appeal. Blood's situation can be contrasted to cases of brain-dead pregnant women who are kept alive on life-support machines in order that the foetuses they are carrying reach full-term. The issue of the woman's consent to this practice is

never raised, though Joan Smith cites a case in which the boyfriend (and father of the child) told doctors that his girlfriend would not have wanted the pregnancy to continue under such conditions. His wish to have her life-support machine switched off was overruled by the woman's parents. Smith describes the attitude of the doctors in these cases as working under the assumption that 'every woman would want a child', even if brain-dead.³¹

The overwhelming maternal urge of women is balanced by the opposing force of sperm control. As Gena Corea's analysis of reproductive technology shows, the restrictive practices surrounding the use of sperm stem from concerns raised in the 1930s and 1940s over artificial insemination (AID).³² The idea of a woman using another man's sperm was viewed as adultery by some courts in both Britain and America, with the last court case on the 'legitimacy' of the child being held in 1963.³³ AID threatens the paternal line, and thus the patriarchal structure of the family: worse, it gives women the ability to conceive without men. Corea cites one AID researcher as saying, 'One of the hazards of the procedure is the ease of its performance'.³⁴ As Corea points out, the only hazard is to paternity. Access to sperm must be controlled, pre-ordained and kept firmly in male hands. A story in the *Daily Telegraph* on 'Science's first virgin birth' makes explicit the dangers of women bypassing men in order to have babies.³⁵ A heterosexual woman had been accepted for treatment by a fertility clinic, despite never having had a sexual relationship with a man. The article states that doctors see this case as evidence of a worrying trend ('the tip of the iceberg'), as women bypass the 'middle-man' and seek what can be described as total control over their pregnancy. But the ideological position of the woman in reproductive technology does not stem from their wish to have a child, but from their relations with men. A woman who chooses not to have sex with men but wants a child would seem, from a logical

perspective, to be the perfect candidate for AID. In a later article, a spokeswoman from the British Pregnancy Advisory Service suggested that women who wanted children may seek AID as a method of reducing risk from unsafe sexual practices.³⁶ However, Tory MPs, Christian lobbying groups and anti-abortionists called for a ban on healthy, single women getting reproductive help. This ban, though the connection is not made, would also preclude lesbians seeking help with pregnancy.

The arguments against women's outright control over AID appear to be manifold, encompassing reactions against single motherhood, the idea of babies being born outside marital relations, and the implications of rejecting heterosexual relations. In the light of these arguments, Yvonne Roberts asks why Diane Blood's right to use her husband's sperm was viewed as an upholding of family values, when she was a woman insisting on single motherhood.³⁷ Blood, however, wishes to reproduce her husband. Any other reason for women wanting AID implies that the children are planned, rather than given (by men). Planned pregnancy - which means giving women control over their bodies - strips the ideal of the natural, biological maternal urge from its ideological structure. Women are not supposed to want children for their own sake, but to reproduce the men in their lives. Hence the technology does not exist as a means to help women become pregnant. It exists in order to uphold an orthodox form of heterosexual relations.

Jurassic Park and Family Values

Reproductive technology therefore is a method of preserving patriarchy rather than a means of increasing female fertility. Control over reproductive rights, especially women's control over pregnancy, appears at the moment to be countermanded by

an ideological need to represent reproductive technology as a mimicking of natural reproduction. Issues such as conception without men, legal abortion on demand, and planned pregnancy upset the possibilities of hiding the technology. Gena Corea suggests that the anonymity of sperm donors and the medicalization of AID is an attempt to deny the possibility of faulty sperm destroying the paternal line. Any representation of reproductive technology that refuses to mimic natural reproduction is dangerous and radical: *Jurassic Park* is one such representation. While reviews of the film have tended to stress the conventional aspects of the film - the monsters in the jungle, the emergence of the father-figure, the ecological warnings and the metaphorical nature of the theme park - its more unconventional aspects have been ignored. The film is explicit in portraying the damaging relationship between an all-powerful patriarchal economy and reproductive rights.

In *Jurassic Park*, the entrepreneur, John Hammond, has funded a project to extract prehistoric DNA from blood from mosquitos preserved in amber. This DNA has been used to clone dinosaurs, which Hammond and his team of scientists have been reproducing in secret. He is planning to open an expensive and exclusive theme park on an island off the coast of Costa Rica in order to exhibit the dinosaurs. After being told by his investors to have the Park endorsed by a team of scientists on safety grounds, he invites two palaeontologists, Ellie Sattler and Alan Grant, and a mathematician, Ian Malcolm, to spend the weekend with him on the island. The scientists are initially amazed by the sight of the dinosaurs and the cloning work being done in the laboratories, but express concern over the moral, ethical and ecological issues that Hammond's project seems to ignore. They set off, with Hammond's grandchildren, Lex and Tim, on a trip around the Park. However, a tropical storm breaking over the island, and technical problems, caused by an unscrupulous computer programmer, Nedry, put the party in jeopardy. The

T. Rex escapes from its enclosure, killing the lawyer, Gennaro, and attacking the children's car. Malcolm is seriously injured, and Grant and the children have to spend the night in the Park. The next day while travelling back to the Visitors Centre on foot, Grant discovers that the dinosaurs have been breeding independently of the biological safeguards of the Park. Sattler, meanwhile, has managed to turn the computer system back on. After battles with the *Velociraptors* in the Visitors Centre, Grant, Sattler, and the children escape with Hammond and the injured Malcolm by helicopter. Hammond now admits that the Park was a mistake.

Reactions to *Jurassic Park*, apart from the attention given to its technical achievements have tended to concentrate on the allegorical nature of the narrative: 'the fear of the organic'³⁸, as Vanessa Place describes its tensions. The film is also seen as no more than a sophisticated version of the popular and populist monster films from *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper & Ernest Schoedsack, 1933) onwards. It is also seen as derivative: 'a rather obvious hybrid of *Jaws* and writer Michael Crichton's earlier theme-park fantasy *Westworld*'.³⁹ Attention has also been devoted to the theme of the family, the re-discovery of the place of the father and the re-institution of paternal values into the empty space between child and mother. Judith Halberstam suggests that the film ultimately heralds the extinction of the nuclear family:

Jurassic Park resists the family only long enough to constitute its own flawed and imperfect versions of family life.⁴⁰

Steven Spielberg's interest in the figure of the father is an important aspect of his film-making.⁴¹ As I pointed out in Chapter Two, his early *Duel* (1971) is an exploration of masculinity on the road that questions the role of the husband and father within the family and finally shows the hero as an ordinary 'everyman' who triumphs over the driver of the truck that has been trying to run him off the road.

Spielberg's later films show similar themes. *Jaws* (1975) can be seen as an early prototype of *Jurassic Park*: not only in the shape of its monster, but also in the figure of the police chief, a surrogate father who wishes to protect his townspeople against the all-devouring shark. Here, as in *Jurassic Park*, the figure of responsible and benign paternity, aided by scientific knowledge, triumphs over both the monster in the water, and the irresponsible patriarchal economy of the seaside resort. Andrew Ross, discussing Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun* (1987), describes the director's central themes as:

Valorization of the infantile presexual male and the restored nuclear family, with or without a *real* father.⁴² (author's emphasis)

Jurassic Park, as expression of the director's interest in paternal values appears to made explicit when one of the main protagonists, Grant, discovers, for the first time, the pleasures of fatherhood. However, Grant's position is similar to that of Ripley in *Aliens*. When there is no biological link between adult and child, the child represents a sublimated wish on the part of the adult to experience adulthood and take on adult responsibilities. Hence, both Grant and Ripley experience parenthood rather than a paternal or maternal relationship. The film's emphasis on the relationships between the patriarchal and the maternal, and the maternal and the phallic, actually open up the possibilities of fatherhood to anyone, and in so doing, actually destabilize paternity as an exclusively all-male activity. Meanwhile it explores two modes of patriarchal control: the biological control of reproduction, and the economic control of production. The theme park, as an artificial and isolated space becomes, in the film, an arena in which loss of patriarchal control can be explored as a fictive allegory. As such, the Park remains a safe enclosure for the terrors that such loss of control may bring. Alternatively, the genre of science fiction provides the context in which such allegory can be applied elsewhere.

Jurassic Park appears to represent part of the cultural and economic shift away from the monolithic, all-powerful companies of the 1980s (the Company in the *Alien* quartet), and shows a shift to a more environmentally aware, people-friendly organisation of the 1990s. The traumas of late capitalism have, in *Jurassic Park*, evolved into a system controlled by a kindly paternal figure, who refers to his employees by their first names. The emphasis here is on company loyalty, rather than fear of unemployment or loss of profit. Therefore, within the world of the Park, the patriarchal authority of John Hammond is relatively benign. The Park appears as a late-capitalist utopia, where the forces of commerce, scientific knowledge and entertainment can collectively assemble the ultimate consumer package. Therefore, unlike other science fiction films, *Jurassic Park* shows an economic world recognizably like our own, in which consumer demand apparently defines the parameters of the marketplace. The power and authority of private enterprise, coupled with consumer demand, and increasingly sophisticated developments in the areas of reproductive technology, has finally allowed scientific endeavour to be market-led, rather than as a socially responsible means of acquiring knowledge. Thus the film stresses the dangers of allowing private finance to develop too quickly within a consumer-driven economy. λ°

At the same time, *Jurassic Park* is less of a cautionary tale about the creation of 'real' monsters than it is about the potentially dangerous appetites of consumer demand. Thus, in the film, the potential appetite of the 'ideal consumer' dominates the screen. The film's attitude to its own commercialism shows sophisticated awareness of its commercial viability. Hence the film manages to advertise its own merchandising, above and beyond the more usual 'product placement'. In fact, at one point, the camera slowly tracks along the bursting

shelves of the Park's own shop showing bags, mugs, clothes and toys all displaying the *Jurassic Park* logo.⁴³ This awareness of the role of the consumer, both within the artificial environment of the film itself, and the knowledge of the spectators of the film as potential consumers of *Jurassic Park* products highlights a capitalist marketplace dominated by a demanding and discerning consumer. Like a film director, Hammond does not see himself as a scientist but as a showman, who, in the time-honoured style of all supposed consumer-led economies, is merely giving the public what they want to see.

But even before problems arise in the Park, the concept of it as a consumers' paradise is undermined. The first scene of the film shows a team of armed workers, manoeuvring a cage, obviously containing something large and vicious, into place beside an enclosure. It is night-time, the beast in the cage cannot be seen at all, and the scene has an air of fearful urgency. Muldoon, the Park Ranger, asks for the 'gate-keeper' to step forward and open the door of the enclosure. As the animal lunges forward, the man loses his footing and is dragged into the cage. After a protracted struggle, in which Muldoon screams at the men to 'shoot her', this anonymous worker is dragged into the beast's cage. This man's death is brought up briefly by Gennaro, the lawyer, when he mentions that the dead man's family are demanding compensation. Already the potentially disturbing links in the Park between life, death and money are made apparent. The workplace is still potentially harmful, however unthreatening the new style of capitalism has become. Moreover, even in the high-tech world of the Park, teams of men must still be used to carry out the heavy and dangerous tasks.

John Hammond's reproduction of dinosaurs is set within a Third World country where the forces of nature appear to conspire together to protect dinosaurs and

attack humans. However well-managed the Park is professed to be, the jungle remains a foreign space where Man is continually under threat of being engulfed. The jungle's connotations of femininity - the 'dark continent' - is made even more apparent with the collusion of the force of the weather. The tropical storm that rages throughout the Park reiterates the strength of natural forces against puny humanity. Here, the white man's burden is shouldered by native and black workers who sacrifice their bodies to protect, ultimately, the white man's preserve. Perhaps the most jarring physical reminder of the First World exploitation of Third World resources is the figure of Muldoon, the game warden from Kenya, who manages the Park. Dressed in a safari suit, he gives the appearance of being transported from a colonialist Africa where the white man is still seen as both hunter and protector of big game. His dress also has connotations of *Tarzan* films where black 'extras' fall prey to lions, crocodiles, snakes and quicksand but where Tarzan, as the powerful representative of white supremacy, remains untouched. The black deaths remain anonymous and unseen. As well as the black gatekeeper, killed at the beginning, Arnold, the computer technician, is attacked and eaten by Raptors when he is sent by Hammond to switch power back on to the Park. His death is unseen and anonymous, to be established later by Sattler when she finds his severed arm.

The black male bodies become easy and disposable meat, ensuring that white people survive longer. This is an inversion of the situation in *Alien*, where the minority figures of the two women and the black man survive the longest. But *Jurassic Park* attempts to move beyond the conservative capitalism of the 1980s by posing a new egalitarian order. In the brave new world of 1990s capitalism, there are no distinctions made. It cannot be said that Hammond sees his workforce as expendable - on the contrary, he is concerned for their safety -

but the end result is the same. At the end of *Jurassic Park*, the black workers have been sacrificed to protect the 'new family' (that also happens to be white). The contrast between *Jurassic Park* and science fiction films of the 1980s is in its insistence that the patriarchal figure of authority, Hammond, is a victim of the system. By attempting to establish such a high level of control over the Park, Hammond cannot help but instigate a system that is exploitative, dangerous, uncaring and oppressive towards all minority groups. Hammond, as the benign figure of authority is contrasted with Nedry, the unscrupulous computer programmer who has been bribed by a rival company to steal embryos from the Park. As an employee, Nedry refuses to endorse Hammond's idiosyncratic system of paternity. His attitude is shown in a brief scene with Hammond when Nedry brings up the question of money: that his contract pays him too little for the work he has done. Hammond tells him that he does not want to hear about Nedry's money problems: 'I don't blame people for their mistakes: I merely ask that they pay for them'. Nedry's reply to this is a sarcastic 'Gee, thanks, Dad'. Nedry's refusal to enter Hammond's system of paternity, where the true measure of a man is one who will take financial responsibility, casts him as the figure who is responsible for the collapse of the Park: he undermines both the economic potential of the Park as a unique theme park, and disregards the potential biological dangers of introducing dinosaurs to the outside world.

As a film of the 1980s *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), shows the economic force of a Corporation effectively under the control of one single individual, Tyrell. As a builder of replicants, Tyrell (whose motto is "more human than human") sees himself as above the laws of the land that state that replicants must be easily identified to distinguish them from humans. Tyrell sees this as a challenge to his technical skills rather than a justifiable restriction on productivity. For Tyrell, the

pursuit of the technically perfect unit of production is of greater value than the issues of difference with which the rest of society must struggle. The identification of replicants is pursued by another individual, Deckard. The delimitations between the sphere of commerce and the State, which has invested Deckard with the authority to retire replicants, also hamper Deckard's attempts to reconcile his own conscience with the actions he has to take, by 'retiring' what appear to be human beings. He appears to be the only link between the three areas of conflict of private enterprise, the workers and the State. The misgivings of the individual about the meaning of his work form part of the economic world of *Blade Runner*, where the most productive workers are not human at all, and where issues of exploitation can only be made explicit where they feature as a part of replicant and not human economics. However closely he aligns himself with the replicants, Deckard does not view himself as an exploited worker, but as someone with the potential to exploit.

In *Alien*, the role of the Company is also one of absolute patriarchal control, where the crew's lives are 'expendable'. As Thomas B. Byers points out, the alien becomes a manifestation of extreme exploitation: 'an embodiment of nature as perceived by corporate capitalism'.⁴⁴ By extension, nature becomes another resource to be exploited, as indeed are all human workers. But the Company is never made accountable: indeed, while Ripley is shown in the first three films to be gradually moving towards a political analysis of the power of the Company, her memory has been all but wiped in *Alien: Resurrection*. I do not see this as a deliberately repressive move on the part of the film, but it is a reminder that, in the 1990s, confrontational politics, with Ripley as an articulate speaker on workers' rights, has been exorcised.

Jurassic Park's conclusion that Hammond will be able to learn from his mistakes (as echoed in Hammond's remark to Nedry) shows his wish for total economic and biological control as an expression of patriarchy, but one that arises from the system of patriarchy itself. Hammond is not its author, merely its agent. Therefore, unlike Michael Crichton's novel, Hammond is allowed to escape at the end. This ending reiterates the values of the 1990s as a time in which traditional male values are being reassessed, and made more palatable. Susan Jeffords, in her comparison of Hollywood masculinity and American politics, shows how the hard, masculine law-enforcing male characters of the 1980s have evolved to become caring, family men of the 1990s.⁴⁵ She sees one of the most explicit films of this trend is Arnold Schwarzenegger's role as John Kimball in *Kindergarten Cop* (Leonard Reitman, 1990). Kimball, over the course of the film is transformed from a brutal police officer to a kind and caring kindergarten teacher who chooses to remain in teaching once his cover is blown. As Jeffords points out,

One of the clearest messages to come out of *Kindergarten Cop* is that the tough, hard-driving, violent, and individualistic man of the eighties was not that way by choice.⁴⁶

Thus, the men of the 1980s are made humane, *retrospectively*; Jeffords suggests that this change in direction is allowed in the light of their previous heroic roles in saving society. Masculine values were previously imposed on men, who now only wish, in the 1990s, to return to the family. There is, deliberately, no real masculine hero in *Jurassic Park*, as patriarchal values need to be rejected rather than upheld. Hammond's paternal rather than autocratic attitudes towards his employees and his acceptance of family responsibilities go some way in alleviating the guilt of excessive patriarchal control. But Hammond is also shown to be at the mercy of potential sources of disruption to his autocratic control. His investors send Gennaro, "the blood-sucking lawyer", to examine the Park for potential flaws;

his computer programmer is selling the company's reproductive technology to a rival. Meanwhile the experts he invites to the Park also refuse to endorse his system. As a patriarchal figure, Hammond is simultaneously held accountable, but also exonerated. In effect, the film separates the man from the system.

The Living Dead

Jurassic Park presents a conundrum at the heart of its narrative in that future technology is used to reactivate the prehistoric, and therefore unknowable, past. Reproductive technology is used perversely as a means of raising the dead, as Peter Wollen points out:

Jurassic Park is like a paleo-zoological version of *Night of the Living Dead*, in which fearsome creatures exhumed from their fossil graves converge on the terrified humans.⁴⁷

Many science fiction films depict the dangers of re-awakening sleeping life-forms. In *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (Eugene Lourie, 1953), a nuclear explosion revives the *Rhedosaurus* (an early precursor to T. Rex), who not only has the power to crush cars and destroy buildings, but also contains a mystery virus within its blood that kills everything with which it comes into contact. In *The Thing from Another World* (Christian Nyby, 1951) the alien life-form in the ice is thawed by a group of scientists anxious to discover its origins. In both cases, human interference aided by technology is to blame. The analogy of the dinosaur as zombie is an interesting one, but Wollen disregards the use of technology, the unmistakable stamp of science fiction, as the means by which the dinosaurs are brought to life. The cloned animals are entirely brand new life-forms: it is only human imagination that places them back in the past, and sees them as resurrected. Therefore dinosaur reconstruction takes place within a reality that recognises these

creatures to be extinct. The reconstruction of the dinosaur, from fragments of fossilized bone, similar to the work of the forensic scientist in the reconstruction of a body, is made more spectacular by the fact of its death. The Visitors Centre in the Park, decorated with fossilized remains, and with its lobby dominated by two *Tyrannosaurus Rex* skeletons is a reminder of this regeneration. The direction signs in the Park, and the signs at each enclosure, are decorated not by pictures of the living animals but by their skeletal representations. Hence one of its many contradictions is the blurring between the two states of life and death. Extinction, it would appear, is all in the mind.

Thus the film highlights the increasing demarcation between the natural and the artificial. The dangers of man-eating monsters serve to highlight the dangers of a reproductive technology that one day may be capable of rendering the natural, and therefore Man, obsolete. The artificial act of re-creation impinges heavily on the natural act of procreation. The improvement on nature by Man is nothing new, but Scott Bukatman argues that *Jurassic Park* is 'uniquely disturbing' in that the film, far from separating nature from technology, reveals nature to be a computerized construct of technology. As Bukatman concludes, the relationship of the two shows that 'having procured the data, nature is no longer necessary'.⁴⁸ Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, on the other hand, argue that the separation of technology from nature is a construction of 'conservative ideology'.⁴⁹ This separation seeks to undermine the potential egalitarian aspects of technology in order to re-impose the supposed natural order - a hierarchical order based on the rights of the individual that take precedence over social responsibilities, and the re-introduction of family values. Nature, on the one hand, is pure, unadulterated, uncompromised but represents the real: technology, on the other hand, 'represents the possibility that nature might be reconstructable'.⁵⁰ Thus, technology reveals the

potential for re-constructing, or even deconstructing the strictest of binary oppositions.

Ryan and Kellner point to films of the 1970s as the most blatant examples of techno-conservatism but see *Blade Runner* as a film that opens up opportunities, in a very literal sense, for the marriage of human and machine. As the replicant Rachel struggles to prove her human identity to the policeman Deckard, feelings and emotions cease to be the sole preserve of the human. As a film of the 1990s, *Jurassic Park* appears to travel even further in the breaking down of even the most oppositional of binary constructions: life/death, male/female, artificial/real, child/adult, mother/father. The clone, of course, and similar to the replicant, already stands apart from the usual construction of the family, and within that, sexual difference. Neither the clone nor the replicant should have a need to know its parents, siblings, or even its own sex. The final shot of *Jurassic Park*, as the helicopter flies over the ocean with the surviving members of the weekend trip is reminiscent of the original ending of *Blade Runner*, where Rachel and Deckard escape together in the hovercar, not knowing what the future, if there is to be any, may hold. Ryan and Kellner suggest that this ending of *Blade Runner* can be read in two ways: either as an escape from the hellish world of 21st Century Los Angeles, or, more positively, as a reaffirmation of humanist values.⁵¹ The final flight in *Jurassic Park* can also be seen in two ways: as a reaffirmation of human family values, or as an escape from the nightmare patriarchal world created solely by male reproductive and economic power.

Aside from the technology within the film, *Jurassic Park* is a contemporary showcase of what is now possible to achieve in terms of special effects. The film's enormous appeal is the measure to which it makes the dinosaurs as lifelike

as possible. Along with Grant, Sattler and the other visitors, the audience appear to see living, breathing dinosaurs for the first time, and they are compellingly real: 'The stars of *Jurassic Park* are the dinosaurs'.⁵² The visibility of the dinosaurs also foregrounds the development of new computer technology that make these images possible. While suspension of disbelief allows us to recognise the impossible as visible, the images reaffirm the importance of special effects. *Jurassic Park* therefore upholds one of the conventions of the science fiction film in that it should produce an image, however outlandish, that looks compelling real. The irony of science fiction as a film genre is that the unfamiliar and the impossible must be featured through 'familiar sets of codes'.⁵³ The film is therefore more bound up in the complexities of representation than any of the films I have so far discussed. As Annette Kuhn points out, science fiction is the genre where 'spectacle can become an end in itself'.⁵⁴

The film's technological advances of special effects go hand-in-hand with Crichton's vision of the technological leap necessary for cloning extinct animals. The differences between the visualization of a text like *Single White Female* and the visualization of *Jurassic Park* go hand-in-hand with their generic legacies. For one, the visual presence of women is an unsettling site of visualization; for the other, the sight of dinosaurs is a reminder of film technology now so advanced that the animals are the least troubling and most entertaining aspect of representation. In fact, the visibility of the dinosaurs is the *raison d'être* of the film, as indeed they are of the Park. Furthermore the relationship of the idea of the theme park to the institution of cinema appears to be so close as to conjoin the two into one spectacular yet illusionary package. As Peter Wollen says,

It's all as if *Jurassic Park*, the film, was really designed to end up as *Jurassic Park*, the ride.⁵⁵

As Sattler says to Hammond, "it's still a flea circus - it's all an illusion". But the problems of spectatorship are made clear in the first outing in the Park. The first enclosure, supposedly full of an early type of dinosaur, *Dilophosaurus*, reveals nothing: there are sounds, occasional rustlings in the bushes, but no visible animals.

The problems of making the Park visible also impinge on the surveillance system that keeps the spectators safe, and the animals under control. The chaos once the animals escape shows that the underlying balance in the Park between surveillance, visibility and control is forever broken. Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, makes the point that power and observation go hand-in-hand. The Park, like Foucault's description of the military camp, is an institution in which the hierarchy of power is strictly enforced: 'all power would be exercised solely through exact observation'.⁵⁶ At all times, the Park can be made visible through the computer screen. Arnold, the technician, can flick through any number of images at the flick of a switch. Within this surveillance system, the computer operator watches the Park visitors watching the dinosaurs. This system of 'compulsory visibility', as Foucault calls it, means that the dinosaurs' absence, their unwillingness to be looked at from inside the touring cars, also denotes foreboding for the future viability of the theme park. Whatever the dinosaurs represent in the context of the film, it is not simply as exhibits. They have become the real workers in the Park: it is their potential visibility that is the real money-spinner. The dinosaurs might echo Rachel's words to Deckard in *Blade Runner*, "I'm not *in* the business: I *am* the business". And, ominously, Gennaro's words when he sees his first dinosaur, the enormous *Brachiosaurus* casually munching leaves from the top of a tree, are "We are going to make a fortune".

The money-making potential of the Park, as a potent sign of male reproduction and male control, poses a unique insight into the perverse assumption that control could ever be viewed as valid or natural. Hence, the dinosaurs' rejection of their role as exhibits/workers is an affirmation of their potential disruption of patriarchal control, that fetishizes visibility above all. This places the dinosaurs in a feminized position from which their refusal to be seen also herald their reluctance to engage in a system of spectatorship that will be oppressive. The polarization of the gaze between spectator and spectacle also poses a gendered difference between dinosaur and human. But this possibility is expressed openly in terms of worker exploitation: as truly exotic specimens, their difference can also be expressed in terms of racial difference. Donna Haraway points out that it is Third World women who are the most exploited labour force: the low employment costs they require mean that they are 'the preferred labour force for the science-based multinationals'.⁵⁷ *Jurassic Park*, therefore, offers a radical overview of the patriarchal economy in an allegorical form; however, its acknowledgment of female sexual identity as a constructed artifice in the male economy of the Park is perhaps its most radical element.

"I thought all the dinosaurs were girls"

The artificial construction of sex and the imperative of male reproduction is shown by the birth scene of the baby *veloceraaptor*. This birth is attended by Hammond, Grant, Sattler and Dr Wu, the geneticist, in the laboratory. Immediately prior to the birth, everyone has seen the cartoon where 'Mr DNA', has explained the process by which the Park scientists have been able to clone dinosaurs. This birth scene introduces a number of contradictions surrounding the development of new life in the Park. It is, on the one hand, shown as a miraculous leap forward in the

generation of new life, but after Wu identifies its species to Grant, the birth also shows an irresponsible breeding of an animal so dangerous that normal Park security measures are not enough to confine it. The appearance of the baby, with large jaws, sharp teeth and high-pitched cries, shows it to be almost a reincarnation of the *Alien* baby. When the infamous 'little-dick-with-teeth' bursts brutally from Kane's chest, the scene is one that Andrew Ross describes as 'the full embodiment of the dream of womanless reproduction'.⁵⁸ But unlike Kane's fatal and bloody labour, the birth process in *Jurassic Park* is remarkably clean and painless. One reason is that the process of biological parenthood is completely bypassed: the clones are placed in ostrich eggs, where they will hatch themselves at the proper time. In fact, no human touch is necessary: the eggs are guarded by a mechanical arm that turns them to prevent uneven heating. The incubator contains, rather incongruously, a soft bed of moss and ferns as if to capture the biological concept of 'nest' but this appears to be for aesthetic purposes only, for the Park visitors rather than for the eggs themselves.

The effort of labour and birth is experienced by the baby Raptor as it breaks its way out of the egg, encouraged by Hammond who tells it to 'push'. This scene strikes me as the ultimate male fantasy of 'womanless reproduction'. The mother is written out of the picture: there is no longer any need even for a womb which might only serve to hinder the birth process. Hammond performs the role of both doctor and father as he supervises and encourages the baby to be born, at one point, gently removing a piece of shell that has stuck to the baby's head. Hammond tells Sattler and Grant that he has been present at the birth of every dinosaur in the Park. In order that the babies become imprinted with his image, he is the first figure that they see.⁵⁹ As Grant peers into the now-empty shell, the mechanical arm takes it firmly out of his hand and places it back in the nest.

Technology appears to be firmly in control at this point as a counterpoint to Hammond's fantasies of fatherhood, and Grant's wish to see more of the process. Thus a further contradiction is set up: while Hammond, Sattler and Grant appear to be responding emotionally to the birth and the baby, the workers in the laboratory continue to carry out their tasks. The birth therefore becomes an every-day event, and Hammond's excitement over the prospects of a new mouth to feed (literally) seems out-of-place.

Hammond's obvious paternal pride provokes Malcolm, who has been standing apart from the incubator during the birth scene, to ask about the possibilities of the dinosaurs breeding in the Park. Wu explains that there is "no unauthorized breeding in Jurassic Park". When Malcolm asks how this is possible, Wu explains that all the dinosaurs are born female. As part of the cloning process, they are able to control the dinosaurs' sex. Wu explains that they deny the foetuses the right hormone at the critical stage. Sattler, at this point, tries to question his use of the word 'deny'. Peter Wollen suggests that Wu is exposed at this point as the 'blandly sadistic father who fertilizes the eggs and then castrates the offspring'.⁶⁰ Certainly, the concept of denial to the right to sport a penis places the men standing around the incubator in a position of absolute patriarchal authority, and Sattler's attempt to highlight this is ignored. On the other hand, Malcolm's suggestion that the denial of the penis is no real guarantee to prevent dinosaur breeding is seen as amusing by Wu, who asks if he is suggesting that an all-female group of dinosaurs will breed. Malcolm's final words to Wu are prophetic: "Life finds a way".

This birth scene, and the conversation around the possibility of all-female breeding, serve to position the dinosaur family as artificial, a new concept that is displaced

from the natural world. But at the same time, the traditional nuclear human family is also under threat. Hammond's grandchildren are staying with him while his daughter settles her divorce: Malcolm mentions casually to Grant when he is attempting to establish whether Sattler is available that he is "always on the look-out for a future ex-Mrs Malcolm". However, as a way of re-establishing family values, both Grant and Hammond have to begin to take responsibility for childcare before the end of the film. Malcolm's assertion that he 'loves kids' absolves him: the only men that survive the Park are those that acknowledge and love their children, even adoptive ones. Hammond's insistence that he is always present at the hatching of the eggs also reveals that he does believe himself to be the father. Whether the dinosaurs recognise Hammond is never put to the test. Out of all the characters in the film, Hammond is the only one who does not come face-to-face with any dinosaurs, in spite of the fact that they are his creations. By attempting to direct operations from, initially, the control centre and, later, the underground bunker, Hammond is, in a very real sense, the absent Father of the Park. He remains a figure of patriarchal authority, but an impotent one who seeks to impose his Law on the pre-Oedipal chaos of the Park from a distance. He is also shown as an irresponsible father: happy to breed a maximum number of offspring, but unable to see the dangers of his actions. In Hammond's empire, production simply for the sake of production has already taken over. So another of the film's apparent contradictions comes into play. Uncontrolled breeding has already begun, and has been instigated, not by the dinosaurs, but by the scientists themselves.

This later discovery that the dinosaurs, contrary to all of the Park's controls, have been breeding, is made by Grant as he and the children are travelling through the Park on foot. As Grant follows the children through the woods, he calls them back to look at some fresh dinosaur eggs. Grant realizes their significance, and

attempts to explain the presence of the eggs to the children. The eggs are empty and it is possible to see footprints leading away from them, showing that the eggs were viable. Once again, Grant lifts the empty egg, as he did in earlier in the laboratory, to peer inside, and he repeats Malcolm's words that 'life did find a way'. Life at this moment can only mean motherhood. Motherhood also implies a knowledge that men cannot know: hence Grant's recurring interest in the empty shells. When the birth process ceases to be controlled, and becomes something outside male agency, then its implications are to be feared.

The assumption that female dinosaurs cannot breed together has now been proved wrong. Until this point, the dinosaurs had been divided into two groups by the children, not along gender lines, but by eating habits: 'vegi-saurus' and 'meata-saurus'. Sexual differences, which were meaningless in a single sex community, must now be recognized as possible. And if a single-sex group of dinosaurs can breed, then scientific explanations have to be found. Grant puts forward the most reasonable explanation he can, 'amphibian DNA', that fluid and slippery genetic material that offers the ability to change sex. However, in the Park, a place in which dinosaurs are born without mothers or fathers, and somehow have found a way to breed, the question of sexual difference as a means of conferring identity now seems redundant. As Grant believes that the dinosaurs cannot breed without males to impregnate females, he attempts to rationalize the situation. But whether there are males or not - and we don't ever see what purports to be a male dinosaur - the eggs are hatched without *human male* control. This scene could be read as Grant's primal scene where he fantasizes about dinosaur copulation, origin and birth. He cannot prove or deny the paternal role: in fact, he now realizes, in an inverted twist of logic, that 'the family' cannot exist without it. As Donna Haraway says, 'Motherhood is known on sight; fatherhood is inferred'.⁶¹ The

strictures of sexual difference are adhered to in Grant's definition. However, by re-defining the role of the male, he ignores the central issue. Proof of the male sex exists only in relation to pregnant females, fertile eggs or young. It remains a relational construction, rather than a biological fact.

Judith Halberstam sees this adoption of paternal values as a rearguard action that attempts to save the nuclear family before it is too late. The acquisition of parenting roles, and parenting models, she argues, is a sceptical move on the part of the film, that undermines family values rather than strengthens them.

[Sattler and Grant] learn how to be family by watching what happens when humans create artificial, unnatural environments.⁶²

This is one of the central paradoxes of the film: the apparent appropriation of paternal values by Grant happens in an environment where the dinosaurs are rebelling against the patriarchal strictures that seek control over their bodies, their lifestyle and their environment. Halberstam suggests that the film is a literal portrayal of the queer family: the Park of *Jurassic Park* becomes a 'same-sex environment of man-killing creatures'.⁶³ The traditional family is the real dinosaur of the film: the artificially-created lesbian family of the butch, the femme and their babies could be the family of the future.

While I do not wish to undermine the vision of *Jurassic Park* as lesbian utopia, the film's shift from patriarchal control to man-eating monstrous chaos is based upon the activities of those animals who *do not* breed: T. Rex (of which there is only one) and the trio of Raptors, who remain defiantly and aggressively childless. The disturbing glimpses of a possible archaic mother, the figure that Barbara Creed describes as 'the generative, parthenogenetic mother - that ancient archaic figure

who gives birth to all living things'⁶⁴, are purely imaginary. Vanessa Place argues that the film genders 'Nature' as female:

To man, nature is ever creation, creation is reproduction, and reproduction is ever female.⁶⁵

And as Creed points out, when a woman is represented as monstrous, it is usually in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions. However, these functions appear to be ignored by both T. Rex and the Raptors. As for reproduction, Place's statement is actually inverted in the film: reproduction, when discovered in the wild, is actually the signifier for masculinity.

It would appear, therefore, that the true figures of female transgression are those animals who not only refuse to breed, in spite of an implied reproductive capability, but also show a disregard for any aspect of the natural world. The Raptors are revealed to be artificial, man-made constructions as indicated by their eagerness for human flesh and their exploration of the Visitors Centre. Such behaviour places them as alien to the newly formed eco-system of the Park. One brief shot of a Raptor confirms its identity as man-made rather than natural: when Grant, Sattler and the children climb into the concealed ceiling of the computer centre, the Raptor climbs on a desk to follow them. The lines of code being processed on the computer screen are reflected back, in the darkness, straight onto the Raptor: for a moment, codes of DNA are superimposed on the Raptor's body. This creature, unlike any other in the Park, is a man-made construction, a product of computer-aided reproductive technology. It has been specifically constructed as a patriarchal whim: Raptor breeding does not stem from biological need or economic necessity. In fact, they could be said to be a drain on the Park's resource: being so dangerous, it is unlikely that they could ever safely be shown to Park visitors. It would appear that the breeding of the Raptors arises out of a

specific need to make manifest female transgression, in order to admire its lethal ferocity.

The first glimpse of the Raptor alpha-female is when she attacks and kills the gatekeeper. Later, after witnessing the birth of the baby Raptor, the party of scientists are taken to see the adults' enclosure. Muldoon explains to Grant that the Raptors are so intelligent that they have been seen testing the electrified fence at feeding times in order to find a way out. The Raptors are not breeding but fighting: Muldoon mentions that the large female has killed all but two of the other Raptors (which explains Hammond's eagerness to build up stocks). The rapacious appetites and blood-lust of the Raptors is brought home by the winching of a large cow into their enclosure: while the animals cannot be seen, the ferocious sounds of feeding and the twisted metal bars seen as the winch's harness is pulled out bear witness to Muldoon's ominous words that "they're lethal at eight months". By contrast, when T. Rex is hunting, it is shown to be following an instinctive drive. As Grant says, when the goat is left in the T. Rex enclosure to lure the creature within sight, "T. Rex doesn't want to be fed: it wants to hunt". Grant demonstrates the fact that it is a victim of its biological make-up by showing that T. Rex can only see movement: by standing still, its potential victim can outwit it.⁶⁶ The Raptors, on the other hand, have the ability to stalk and hunt as a team, trick their prey (as they do to Muldoon, who is supposedly an experienced hunter) and they also in the course of the film learn to open doors. Therefore *Jurassic Park* begins to reveal alternatives to gender identity as patriarchal control begins to break down.

If the Raptors can be seen as the Park's constructed vision of the transgressive women, what of the sick *Triceratops* that the group find during their unsuccessful

visit around the Park's enclosures? Vanessa Place suggests that the creature represents the arbitrary nature of life and death: in spite of Malcolm's assertion that "life finds a way", the *Triceratops* is a reminder that patriarchal control over birth does not extend to preventing death.⁶⁷ The sick animal bears testament to the failure of the Park as spectacle. In attempting to provide the ultimate entertainment, Hammond's vision fails to include either the possibility of animals remaining hidden from the spectators, or dying in full sight of them. The *Triceratops* passively undermines the system of spectacle that Hammond had hoped to achieve. Rather than a monument to Hammond's control over nature, the *Triceratops* becomes a plaything for the visitors. Grant and Sattler, displaying the same emotions as they did at the Raptor birth, touch, stroke, and fondle the body almost in a sexual way.

This scene, more than any other, establishes the differences between Grant and Sattler. While he continues to play with the dinosaur, she begins to investigate the cause of the dinosaur's sickness. As a figurative reminder of death and decay, the *Triceratops* is an abject figure, her tongue filled with weeping pustules, her eyes bloodshot. Sattler inspects her mouth, squeezing a pustule to inspect its contents, and then asks the vet standing nearby if she can examine the animal's faeces. Sattler's professionalism is contrasted to Grant's playfulness and Malcolm's revulsion: "That is one big pile of shit". Her actions serve to remove the *Triceratops* from Hammond's fantasy world of perfect specimens who will conform to the strict parameters mapped out in the Park's ideology. In the world of the theme park, the dinosaurs are the performers of a human-orientated dinosaur fantasy. However, within the reality of life in the Park, grazing animals habitually eat poisonous berries. Sattler performs a pragmatic role that is contrasted to

Grant's emotional response. After all, it is he who faints on seeing a dinosaur for the first time.

Sattler's willingness to forego her gender identity is part of the film's generic legacy. Her sexual identity is pushed to the margins of the narrative, and the fact that she and Grant are having a relationship (which they were not in the original novel) seems to place them in the unlikely yet radical position of the 'token' heterosexual couple. Having told Grant once that she wants to have children, the film never refers again to her wish. In fact, the film reiterates, through Sattler, that gender roles are socially constructed and outmoded. Hammond's voiced resistance to Sattler going to switch the power back on is a partial recognition of her sex, rather than her gender: he thinks he should go because "I'm a ... and you're a ...". As part of the film's reluctance to acknowledge sexual difference as a means to establish human identity, Hammond cannot even say the words. Sattler tells him briskly, "We'll discuss sexism in survival situations some other time". As Sattler is the character who restores power back to the Park while Grant takes care of the children, the question of who plays which role in this newly-constructed family is not clear. Perhaps the comparable figure to Sattler is Ripley, whose professionalism is the main factor in her survival. Gender roles are discarded, for both women, in order to survive. Indeed, James Kavanagh argues that the qualities that Ash admires in the Alien ("no remorse, conscience, morality") are those same qualities that Ripley must possess in order to survive.⁶⁸ This could be potentially dehumanizing or liberating, but it does make sexual difference all but redundant. In *Jurassic Park*, the emphasis is placed on knowledge and skills, rather than physical strength or physical confrontation, as a means to escape. The same is true for all human visitors, whether male, female, adult or child.

Primal Screams

Near the beginning of *Jurassic Park*, in the desert where he is digging for dinosaur remains, Grant's knowledge of Raptors is set out in terms that we can all understand. Hearing a young child's dismissive complaint that Raptors are nothing more than 'six-foot turkeys', Grant describes in detail to him exactly how Raptors would stalk and eat their prey. Holding a Raptor claw in his hand, he draws a diagonal line across the boy's belly, and, at one point, slashes at the boy's genitals. As the child flinches, Grant seems satisfied that he has impressed upon him the dangers of Raptors. Henry Sheehan sees this scene as a precursor for the T. Rex attack, as well as a means of establishing Grant's 'child-murder fantasies'.⁶⁹ The Raptor claw seems to be some sort of phallic talisman for Grant, a fetish-object that links death and violence with his own brand of scientific knowledge. It appears, too, that Grant carries this claw everywhere as it appears again when he spends the night in the Park with Lex and Tim. When he pulls the claw out of his pocket, Lex asks him what he and Dr Sattler will do now that dinosaurs are no longer extinct. The implication is that he will be redundant in a world where dinosaurs bones will no longer have to be slowly pieced together by palaeontologists, and can be made efficiently in a laboratory. Grant, like other workers before him, has been rendered obsolete by new technology. There is a shot of the claw dropping to the ground as he falls asleep. As Grant's hand is out of sight, there are two ways to read this loss of the Raptor claw. It can be read as a capitulation by Grant, that he has lost the means to make a living, and the fossilized claw is as redundant as he is. On the other hand, it could be a signal that the children replace the claw as Grant's talisman, his constant reminder of danger, and proof of his intellectual superiority. Does he need to terrify children

any longer, especially within the confines of the Park? Peter Wollen suggests that Spielberg's motto is an updated version of Hitchcock's 'Torture the women!'; in *Jurassic Park* the phrase is now 'Terrify the children'.⁷⁰

Henry Sheehan points out that the film continually associates children with death and this association appears to be an underlying assumption of the film.⁷¹ In a film that reveals the efficacy of cloning, it is not surprising that the children are represented in a way that undermines their usual narrative position as the next generation and the implicit hope for the future. If the future is merely a gathering of the genetic material of the past, then children really are simply "small versions of adults", as Sattler explains the concept of children to Grant. The hint of generational upset in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* is given full rein in *Jurassic Park*, a place where the existence of clones obviates the need for adults to give birth to children. The film keeps returning to the child's viewpoint, almost to reassure the spectator that generational and sexual reproduction is still an option. Given that one of Andrew Ross's complaints about the Lucas/Spielberg school is that their films share the 'phenomenon of the infantilization of the spectator'⁷², the film's emphasis on the child's eye view is made explicit by a retreat into a childlike world where the body, especially the dinosaur body, is potentially uncivilized and unclean.

From Lex getting sprayed with snot from a *Brachiosaurus* with a heavy cold, to the mountains of dinosaur shit, the film shows the animals as an archaic and primeval life-force, unfettered by civilization. Images of mud, blood and guts also abound, normally shown from the child's view: the dropping of the goat's severed leg onto the roof of the children's car is one obvious example. The black humour inspired by the appearance of severed limbs, rapacious monstrous appetites and

human fear is manifested in Gennaro's death. Set up as an unlikeable character, and made explicitly so when he abandons the children's to their fate during the T. Rex attack, he is to be eaten while sitting on the toilet, screaming in fear. Later, on examining the remains of the toilet block, both Sattler and Muldoon finds bits of Gennaro scattered in amongst the debris. In another visual pun, the green jelly on Lex's spoon begins to quiver violently as she spots the shadow of a Raptor on the wall behind Tim's head. Finally, as an ultimate irony, the children are stalked by a pair of Raptors in the kitchen of the Visitors Centre. As they crawl around the kitchen units, knocking utensils and pans, this appears to be the literal expression of Grant's fantasy of child-killing: "You're still alive when they start to eat you". It also refers back to Hammond's line that he knows his way around a kitchen: an inherently domestic and supposedly unthreatening space, which has been potentially, in terms of the film, re-classified as a 'male space', is revisited again as a site of terror. Peter Wollen argues that the film 'appears to represent displaced, stylised child molesting' in that the dinosaurs attack 'the most vulnerable victims - children who loved and trusted them'.⁷³ It also reduces the children to a mere function of dino-fodder. But the children attempt to identify the risks, dividing the dinosaurs by their eating habits, a necessary survival mechanism where they themselves could be eaten at any point. They are therefore well aware of the risks, fleeing from a herd of stampeding dinosaurs while Grant is still pointing out the interesting flock formation.

In the Park the men, rather than the children, appear to regress into an infantilized state. From Nedry's excitement over the gadget designed to carry the stolen embryos, Grant's practical joke on the children when he pretends to be electrocuted by the high-voltage electric fence, to Malcolm's playful pinching of Hammond's knees in the helicopter, the adult men appear childlike and unwilling to take

responsibility. The most exaggerated instance of their regression is when the children are attacked in the car. Grant tells Malcolm not to move from their own car as the T. Rex will see them: so the two men sit, immobile and safe, watching the scene. Eventually, the two men emerge in a belated and muddled rescue attempt. Henry Sheehan suggests that the rest of the film is 'a ritualistic enactment of Grant's penance' for allowing the children to be put through such an ordeal.⁷⁴ However, Sheehan's comments about Grant ignore the other side of the equation, Sattler.

Julia Stonehouse, in her discussion of the history of reproductive theory, argues that in the nineteenth century, the placing of men in a certain position of power within creation was the most important aspect of research:

The white men of science were concerned to know where they stood in relation to (a) God, (b) animals, particularly monkeys, (c) white women and (d) black men and women.⁷⁵

The construction of white male identity is a theme that runs through *Jurassic Park*, and also through the critical responses to it. The enactment of the father's role, whether social or biological, appears to be an important element of the film, but it is only one facet in the issue of reproduction. In the film, the most obvious feature of the reproductive technology used is that it provides men with the ability to procreate. The mother is written out of the equation. Sattler's comment, "...and Woman inherits the Earth", after Grant and Malcolm discuss Man's destruction of God and creation of dinosaurs, could be a dig at their use of the word 'Man' to encompass the entire human race. But her comment also highlights the patriarchal constructions inherent in their analysis. By dismissing the woman from the scheme of things, the dangers of the Park are for men only. For the real story of

the Park, rather than a manifestation of Grant's 'child-killing fantasies', is its enactment of Sattler's fantasies about having children.

Sattler's wish for children is mentioned at the start of the film, and Grant's reluctance is made clear: children, to him, are "smelly" and "expensive". Grant's trip across the Park with Lex and Tim is one method of assessing his fatherhood potential, but simultaneously the Park has already shown Sattler some other possible options. As the only heterosexual couple in the film, Grant and Sattler must work within the constraints that patriarchal ideology allows: that the woman has the babies that the man gives to her. To refer back to the beginning of this chapter, sperm control appears to be a concrete method of controlling women's reproductive capability while assuming male control. It is within this scenario of 'sperm denial' that the Park begins to represent the fantasy of a heterosexual woman who wants children but whose male partner is reluctant. The fantasy of total control over reproduction is also played out against another fantasy of destroying the very patriarchal economy that presents children as the ultimate consumers. The film's advertising of its own products is a reminder of children's appetites for dinosaurs, even though the narrative shows the very opposite.

Thus the original vision of the Park as an enclosed order for single-sex dinosaurs is refuted by the dinosaurs themselves. The value of paternity is a fallacy: the breeding dinosaurs have proved that gender in *Jurassic Park* is adrift, floating freely from the biological facts of the body. On the one hand, the physical evidence of the eggs confirms the realm of the maternal to be a natural, pervasive force that will continue when unfettered by patriarchal control. On the other hand, the breeding shows that, within the Park, sex is easily constructed as gender. Furthermore, rather than confirming the importance of fatherhood as an ideological

state that confers special powers, or the penis as an organ of such importance that only men can own it, the film shows that female dinosaurs can manufacture the penis very easily for themselves. The dinosaurs reveal, in the course of their breeding, that patriarchal authority is not omnipotent, that the penis is easily acquired, and that the phallogocentric obsessions of the scientists have been in vain.

In this instance, while the acquisition of the penis could be read as a transgressive act, it is reworked, in the course of the film, into a natural, procreative force. Fathers can be made from the most unlikely of material. The dual system of biology and economy that characterizes the family in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* is made explicit in *Jurassic Park*. Here, in the Park, both biology and economics are shown to be constructions of patriarchal ideology rather than naturally evolved systems. Transgression in *Jurassic Park* is therefore inverted in the favour of the dinosaurs. If transgression implies a movement away from the ideological position of the family, it is human males that are the transgressors here. The end result is to humanize the dinosaurs at the expense of the humans.

Set within the disintegration of a patriarchal economy, the idea of the film as a *woman's* reproductive fantasy flies in the face of the accepted view of the film. *Jurassic Park* shows that transgression is a complex system of economic, biological and social controls but it manages to secrete this element of its narrative. The direct assault on the controls placed on the woman's body show, in the Park, that there are only two ways to proceed: either to disrupt by gaining biological control - a prehistorical version of 'A woman's right to choose'- or by causing as much disruption as possible to whatever is left of patriarchal control. The Raptors therefore, in the manner of *Thelma and Louise*, seek to wrestle control away from the biological material of their bodies, and seek fulfilment elsewhere. The

attaining of full reproductive rights for women is shown to come at a very high price for the patriarchal system that hoped to contain and control it. As a result male reproductivity, in the inverted world of *Jurassic Park*, can only be perceived as an addition to the agenda of procreation, an afterthought rather than an important half of a process. As the system of 'sperm denial' breaks down, the true victims are those men who assumed that they played an important part in the scheme of things. As a celebration of paternal values, *Jurassic Park* vigorously and visibly deconstructs the concept of the father forever.

NOTES

1. Geoffrey Dickens, quoted in David Fletcher, 'Virgin mothers ban ruled out as furore grows', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 March 1991 [n.p.].
2. Virginia Woolf, *Orlando, A Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928; repr. 1970), p. 127-128.
3. Natalie Rosinsky, *Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984), p. 105.
4. Vivian Sobchack, 'Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange', in *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*, ed. by Gregory Waller (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 175-194.
5. *Ibid*, p. 179.
6. *Ibid*, p. 178.
7. Constance Penley, 'Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia', in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 116-127.
8. *Ibid*, p. 123.
9. Vivian Sobchack, 'The Virginity of Astronauts: Sex and the Science Fiction Film', in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 103-115 (p. 105).
10. Judith Newton, 'Feminism and Anxiety in *Alien*', in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn, (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 82-87 (p. 87).

11. Michael Eaton, 'Born Again', *Sight and Sound*, 7 12 (December 1997), 6-9 (p. 9).
12. Penley, op. cit., p. 125.
13. Amy Taubin, 'The *Alien* Trilogy: From feminism to AIDS', *Sight and Sound*, 2 3 (July 1992), repr. in *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. by Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (London: Scarlet Press [n.d.]), 93-100 (p. 94).
14. Ibid, p. 95.
15. Ibid, p. 94.
16. Sobchack, 'Virginity of Astronauts', p. 107.
17. 'The Dinosaur Detectives', Kate Douglas and Stephen Young, *New Scientist*, 158, 18 April 1998, 24-29 (p. 29).
18. Ibid, p. 29.
19. Andrew Ross, 'Cowboys, Cadillacs and Cosmonauts: Families, Film Genres and Technocultures', in *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Joseph A Boone and Michael Cadden (London: Routledge, 1990), pp 87-101 (p. 90).
20. Ibid, p. 90.
21. In *The Lost World* (Steven Spielberg, 1997), the sequel to *Jurassic Park*, the *T. Rex* mother is shown to be extremely protective of her child, and her maternal instincts form an important part of the narrative.
22. This is the figure given by the regulating body for fertility clinics, the Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority (HFEA), cited in Laura Quinton and Jennifer Hunt, *Making Babies: Infertility and assisted conception: your questions answered*, (London: BBC Education, 1996), p. 27.
23. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* [translator's name omitted] (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1948; repr. 1977), p. 57.
24. Ibid, p. 56.
25. Julia Stonehouse, *From Idols to Incubators: Reproductive Theory through the Ages* (London: Scarlett Press, 1994).
26. Ibid, p. 190.
27. Glenda Cooper, 'How to sell your babies in 8 easy steps', *Independent*, 12 August 1996, p. 3.
28. Joan Smith, *Different for Girls: How Culture Creates Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p. 57.
29. For an excellent discussion of gender stereotyping in sperm and eggs, see Emily Martin, 'The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles', *Signs*, 16 3 (1991), pp. 485-501.

30. Lord Winston, quoted in Patricia Wynn Davies, 'We planned a baby before he died. I want that baby', *Independent*, 18 October 1996 [n.p.].
31. Smith, op. cit. p. 61.
32. Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs* (London: The Women's Press, 1988).
33. Ibid, p. 39.
34. Dr Wildred Finegold, cited in Corea, op. cit., p. 41.
35. Peter Pallot, 'Woman on course to claim science's first virgin birth', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 March 1991, [n.p.].
36. Fletcher, op. cit.
37. Yvonne Roberts, 'Life isn't blood simple', *Guardian*, Second section, 22 October 1996, p. 9.
38. Vanessa Place, 'Supernatural Thing', *Film Comment*, 29 5 (1993) 8-10 (p. 8).
39. Peter Wollen, 'Theme Park and Variations', *Sight and Sound*, 2 3 (July 1992), 7-9 (p. 7).
40. Judith Halberstam, 'Is *Jurassic Park* a Lesbian Zoo?', *On Our Backs*, (November/December 1993), 10-11 (p. 10).
41. Spielberg's *Hook* (1991) explores the figure of Peter Pan as an adult father reclaiming his childhood; in *E.T.* (1982), the alien becomes the stand-in for the absent father. Alternatively, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) shows the father abandoning his family in order to make contact with aliens, while helping a woman retrieve her lost son.
42. Ross, op. cit., p. 96.
43. The screenwriter, David Koepp, saw this connection while writing the script, and later spoke candidly about his feelings: "It was really getting into a pretty weird area. Here I was writing about these greedy people who are creating a fabulous theme park just so they can exploit all these dinosaurs and make silly little films and sell stupid plastic plates and things. And I'm writing it for a company that's eventually going to put this in their theme parks and make these silly little films and sell stupid plastic plates." Koepp quoted in Don Shay and Jody Duncan, *The Making of Jurassic Park* (London: Bantam, 1993), p. 56.
44. Thomas B. Byers, 'Commodity Futures', in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 39-52 (p. 40).
45. Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
46. Ibid, p. 144.
47. Wollen, op. cit., p. 8.

48. Scott Bukatman, 'Dinosaur Bytes', *Artforum International*, 32 2 (1993), 14-15 (p. 15).
49. Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, 'Technophobia', in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990).
50. Ibid, p. 58.
51. Ibid, p 64.
52. Shay and Duncan, op. cit., p. 45.
53. Annette Kuhn, Introduction, *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 1-12 (p. 7).
54. Ibid, p. 7.
55. Wollen, op. cit. p. 8.
56. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 171.
57. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p. 166.
58. Ross, op. cit., p. 100.
59. I was reminded, while watching this scene in the film, of the description of the Caesarian birth of Louise Brown, the world's first 'test-tube' baby: 'After delivering the baby, [Patrick] Steptoe lifted the womb out of the body to demonstrate to the cameras that Lesley [Brown] had no oviducts and so could not have conceived naturally.' R. G. Edwards and Patrick Steptoe, *A Matter of Life* (1980), cited in Corea, op. cit., p. 182. Here, the mother is also erased from the birth scene, with only a glimpse of a malfunctioning womb to remind the reader of her part in the operation. The hero of the narrative is the doctor who performs both conception and birth.
60. Wollen, op. cit., p. 9.
61. Haraway, op. cit., p. 135.
62. Halberstam, op. cit., p. 10.
63. Ibid, p. 10.
64. Barbara Creed, 'Alien and the Monstrous-Feminine', in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 128-141 (p. 131).
65. Place, op. cit., p. 9.
66. Ignoring the impossibilities of the text and concentrating on the specifics, the notes on *Jurassic Park* in *Halliwell's Film Guide* point out that Grant could not

have prior knowledge of the workings of T. Rex vision. *Halliwel's Film Guide*, ed. by John Walker, 11th edn (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 617.

67. Place, op. cit., p. 10.

68. James H. Kavanagh, 'Feminism, Humanism and Science in *Alien*', in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 73-81, (p. 80).

69. Henry Sheehan, 'The fears of children', *Sight and Sound*, 2 3 (July 1992), 10 (p. 10).

70. Wollen, op. cit., p. 9.

71. Sheehan, op. cit., p. 10.

72. Ross, op. cit., p. 96.

73. Wollen, op. cit., p. 9.

74. Sheehan, op. cit., p 10.

75. Stonehouse, op. cit., p. 74.

CONCLUSION

TRANSGRESSION: A SIGN OF THE TIMES

"My husband wasn't sweet to me and look how I turned out."

Thelma in *Thelma and Louise*

In my Introduction, I asked the question 'what makes the representation of the transgressive woman so meaningful in contemporary culture?'. While writing this thesis, I became aware that this question had proved impossible to answer, in spite of its simplicity. The transgressive woman is now so much a part of contemporary culture that it is difficult to trace her origins, or recognise the full extent of her influence. It is clear that the recognition of the transgressive woman is often an automatic response to the context in which she is placed. The police photograph of Myra Hindley that I discussed in Chapter One is an example of the importance of context. To have the image endlessly recycled in newspapers, often with the words 'Evil Myra' beside it, fixes her reputation firmly as a child-killer, and establishes her as newsworthy. To place the same image in an art gallery has the opposite effect. Removing the transgressive woman from her context renders her meaningless.

My thesis is based on a desire to breakdown the process of recognition, to remove the headline in order to see the real picture beneath. My choice of film has been guided by the wish to see the transgressive woman as a product of genre, a victim of the constraints of representation that fix her all too firmly within the Hollywood film making tradition. Rather than wishing to address the issue of whether or not these films are progressive, the placing of the film within its generic tradition

seems an approach that allows for a re-vision of the film as a process of representation.

Certainly, the road movie is a genre that allows for subversive and criminal behaviour. This means that its protagonists, whether male or female, may indulge in law-breaking. However, its generic conventions also show that such activity is doomed. In a genre where the protagonists are likely to die in a blaze of gunfire, *Thelma and Louise* shows that the two women's drive off the cliff, like Ripley's dive into the vat of molten metal, is simultaneously an upholding of the generic tradition and a re-writing of its rules. In a genre where transgression is the norm, the two women cannot help but be subversive. However, much of its radical content appears to have been missed by even the most rabid of its critics: as a mainstream film, *Thelma and Louise* successfully disguises much of its political potential. Like the 'Trojan Horse', the film as spectacle hides the warriors within.

The threatening nature of the single woman, as personified in *Single White Female*, shows to what extent the genre defines the nature of the woman. The film, set in a domestic space and showing women's obsessions as based on their identities, is an obvious and introverted contrast to *Thelma and Louise*. My wish to reveal Hedy as a vampire is a strategy to destabilize the film, to reveal Hedy as something more than a neurotic woman with a tragic family history and bad dress-sense. By revealing her as truly dangerous, she takes control. The film shows a growing urgency to reveal her true identity, while simultaneously Hedy's identity reveals the true nature of the film. The repressive qualities of the film, which appear to control and restrain both women, are also present to a degree in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* which, unlike *Single White Female*, presents the domestic as a literal, not allegorical space. All single women always present a

threat to patriarchal authority, but *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* identifies the problem as strictly attached to marital status and lack of reproductive organs. In contrast to *Single White Female*, Peyton's madness is part of her husband's perverse sexual appetites: the two appear perfectly matched as a couple, and Peyton can, in the end, become the representation of Dr Mott's transgression as well as her own.

The introduction of positive, benign, male characters in each of the films - Hal, the policeman in *Thelma and Louise*, Graham the neighbour in *Single White Female*, Solomon the handyman in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* and (even) the male survivors of *Jurassic Park* - is an obvious reminder of the positive aspects of male-female relations that do not have to be based on oppressive patriarchal practices. However, this again seems a deliberate move to isolate the woman - the effects of patriarchy can be negated if Mr Right is found in time. It also upholds the view that female characters, as part of the consumer culture, are in some way to blame for their poor choice of husband/lover. This is not a breakdown in patriarchal relations, but in customer relations. Thus, the isolation of Peyton outside the marital economy is partly her own fault.

The Hand that Rocks the Cradle is, out of all the four films, the one that strikes me as the most regressive in its view of the marital economy, yet it is the one film closest, it seems, to the realities of the situation of the wife and mother. The film does not address the issues of childcare or working mothers to any significant level; it does, especially in the light of the Louise Woodward trial, reiterate the impossibly utopian ideals of the wife's position. The responsibilities for childcare remain firmly with the wife. The family remains tightly cemented together as a consequence of the wife's paranoia and the mother's guilt. Anger at the family

can be safely diverted away by the presence of another woman, to whom the anger can be safely addressed. The isolation *from* the family is shown as more dangerous than isolation *within*.

In spite of the possible alternatives to the traditional family unit, it continues to be the benchmark of social stability. *Jurassic Park*, as a film that appears on the surface to uphold the idea of the family as the basic biological unit, invites a reading that destabilizes such a view. The Raptors, the man-eating monsters who refuse to join the eco-system of the Park and who would rather be killing men than making babies, represent an exaggerated form of transgression that does eventually reduce the men of the Park to more feminized states. However, as constructions based on an economy that excludes them, their disruptive actions are similar to the actions of Thelma and Louise. Killed in the end by T. Rex, whose reproductive appetite seems to have been sublimated into a positive, policing role within the Park, the Raptors can no more be absorbed into family life than can Peyton or Hedy. The patriarchal economy of the Park, as a space representing all manner of male desires for control and power, does collapse in the face of multiple female transgression. As the most obvious of all the films linking the economic and the biological, *Jurassic Park* has been useful in identifying the more overt fears that transgressive women inspire.

This thesis does, I hope, reveal some of the contradictions behind the representation of the woman who kills, but the films I have studied have shown more of the paranoia associated with white masculine identity, rather than revealing anything particularly new about Hollywood's portrayal of women. However, I believe that Ann Jones' assertion that 'the story of women who kill is the story of all women', is an especially valid assessment of the system of representation of

women in films. The concurrent, and contemporary, themes of female transgression and male return to family values are inherently linked together in a number of films in an attempt to re-establish the family as the correct place for all women. My reading of these films, I hope, reveals the ideological messages behind each film, and identifies the continuing existence of the sex/gender system that controls both women's biology and women's access to the economy.

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Primary Films

The Hand that Rocks the Cradle 1991

Director: Curtis Hanson *Screenwriter:* Amanda Silver
Director of Photography: Robert Elswit *Music:* Graeme Revell
Editor: John F. Link

Starring: Annabella Sciorra (Claire), Rebecca De Mornay (Peyton), Matt McCoy (Michael), Ernie Hudson (Solomon), Julianne Moore (Marlene), John de Lancie (Dr Mott), Madeleine Zima (Emma)

Jurassic Park 1993

Director: Stephen Spielberg *Screenwriters:* Michael Crichton, David Koepp
Director of Photography: Dean Cundy *Music:* John Williams *Editor:* Michael Kahn
Special Effects: Dennis Muren, Stan Winston, Phil Tippett, Pamela Easley

Starring: Sam Neill (Grant), Laura Dern (Sattler), Richard Attenborough (Hammond), Jeff Goldblum (Malcolm), Ariana Richards (Lex), Joseph Mazello (Tim), Bob Peck (Muldoon), Martin Ferraro (Gennaro), Samuel L. Jackson (Arnold), Wayne Knight (Nedry), B. D. Wong (Wu)

Single White Female 1992

Director: Barbet Schroeder *Screenwriter:* Don Roos *Director of Photography:* Luciano Tovoli
Music: Howard Shore *Editor:* Lee Parcey

Starring: Bridget Fonda (Allie), Jennifer Jason Lee (Hedy), Steven Weber (Sam), Peter Friedman (Graham), Stephen Tobolsky (Mitch)

Thelma and Louise 1991

Director: Ridley Scott *Screenwriter:* Callie Khouri *Director of Photography:* Adrian Biddle
Music: Hans Zimmer *Editor:* Thom Noble

Starring: Susan Sarandon (Louise), Geena Davis (Thelma), Harvey Keitel (Hal), Michael Madsen (Jimmy), Christopher Macdonald (Darryl), Brad Pitt (JD), Stephen Tobolowsky (Max)

Secondary Films

- Addams Family Values* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1993)
Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer (Nick Broomfield, 1993, UK)
Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More (Martin Scorsese, 1974)
Alien (Ridley Scott, 1979)
Alien³ (David Fincher, 1992)
Aliens (James Cameron, 1986)
Alien Resurrection (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997)
The Amityville Horror (Stuart Rosenberg, 1979)
Baby Boom (Charles Shyer, 1987)
Badlands (Terence Malick, 1973)
Basic Instinct (Paul Verhoeven, 1992)
The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms (Eugene Lourie, 1953)
The Beguiled (Don Siegel, 1971)
Birth of a Nation (D. W. Griffiths, 1915)
Black Widow (Bob Rafelson, 1987)
Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982)
Blue Steel (Kathryn Bigelow, 1990)
Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn, 1967)
- Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976)
Child's Play III (Jack Bender, 1991)
Coma (Michael Crichton, 1978)
A Cry in the Dark (Fred Schepisi, 1988, Australia)
Dark Victory (Edmund Goulding, 1939)
Detour (Edgar Ulmer, 1945)
Duel (Stephen Spielberg, 1972)
Easy Rider (Dennis Hopper, 1969)
Empire of the Sun (Stephen Spielberg, 1987)
Fatal Attraction (Adrian Lyne, 1987)
Fun (Rafal Zielinski, 1994)
Gun Crazy (Joseph Lewis, 1949)
The Haunting (Robert Wise, 1963)
Heavenly Creatures (Peter Jackson, 1994, New Zealand)
Home Alone (Chris Columbus, 1990)
Imitation of Life (Douglas Sirk, 1959)
- Jaws* (Stephen Spielberg, 1975)
Junior (Ivan Reitman, 1994)
Kindergarten Cop (Leonard Reitman, 1990)
Kramer vs Kramer (Robert Benton, 1979)
King Kong (Merian C. Cooper & Ernest Schoedsack, 1933)
Look Who's Talking (Amy Heckerling, 1989)
Marnie (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964)
Mildred Pierce (Michael Curtiz, 1945)
Misery (Rob Reiner, 1990)
Mommie Dearest (Frank Perry, 1981)
My Own Private Idaho (Gus Van Sant, 1991)
The Nanny (Seth Holt, 1965, UK)
Nathalie Granger (Marguerite Duras, 1972, France)
Night of the Living Dead (George Romero, 1969)
Now Voyager (Irving Rapper, 1942)

On Golden Pond (Mark Rydell, 1981)
Ordinary People (Robert Redford, 1980)
Overkill (Peter Levin, 1992)

Peyton Place (Mark Robson, 1957)
Play Misty for Me (Clint Eastwood, 1971)
Poltergeist (Tobe Hooper, 1982)
Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)
A Question of Silence (Marleen Gorris, 1982, Netherlands)
Rebecca (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940)
Samson and Delilah (Cecil B. De Mille, 1949)
Serial Mom (John Waters, 1994)
Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991)
So I Married an Axe Murderer (Thomas Schlamme, 1993)
The Stepfather (Joseph Ruben, 1986)
Terminator II: Judgement Day (James Cameron, 1991)
The Thing from Another World (Christian Nyby, 1951)
Three Men and a Baby (Leonard Nimoy, 1987)
You Only Live Once (Fritz Lang, 1937)